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Abstract

This paper compares two different perspectives and methods applied to the analysis of equality of opportunity. One perspective is found in studies of societal elites, the other in status attainment research. It is shown that conflicting statements about the degree of equality of opportunity found in the two types of studies cannot be resolved on empirical grounds. Results are incomparable and the findings of both research traditions are open to conflicting interpretations. A theoretical perspective on the status attainment process that could integrate both approaches is advocated. The emphasis in this perspective is on the process by which individuals obtain access to various positions in the social structure. Equality of opportunity then becomes a question of the importance of ascribed characteristics for getting access to various types of positions (occupations, elites, etc.), and not a global characteristic of society, as in existing research.

ELITE AND STATUS ATTAINMENT MODELS OF INEQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Introduction

The legitimation of advanced capitalist societies has been predicated on their professed ability to eliminate inequality of opportunity rather than inequality of rewards. It is not surprising, then, that a central concern in empirical research on social stratification has been on the process of mobility and occupational achievement, especially on the importance of a person's family background, for future occupational achievement. The fact that different social positions have differential access to rewards is by and large taken as given in empirical research, and attention is turned to the process by which persons come to occupy these positions.

This emphasis on the transmission of inequality from one generation to another is shared by sociologists who differ considerably in their conception of the structure of inequality. Two traditions of research which arrive at apparently contradictory conclusions can be distinguished. The first of these finds its roots in the study of occupational mobility and has found its most recent expression in the "status attainment" model of Duncan and his colleagues.[1] The second flows from the concern for societal elites and is exemplified in American sociology by the work of Mills (1956) and Domhoff (1967) and in Canadian sociology by the work of Porter (1965) and his students. This latter tradition, while failing to develop the methodological sophistication of the former, has been most successfully developed within Canadian sociology where, largely through the work of Porter, it has attained a position of preeminence. Within American sociology, in contrast, largely through the work of Duncan and others, the former model has tended to dominate. It is our contention that this pattern reflects less about the actual process of attainment in the

two societies than it does about the alternative methodologies and perspectives employed.

I. Elite Analysis: Findings and Interpretations

While both traditions are primarily concerned with the process of attainment and the role of ascription in this process, they make conflicting assumptions with respect to the structure of inequality. The elite paradigm, as the name suggests, assumes a discrete dichotomy between those who do and do not have power, between the elites and the nonelites. The task then is to identify the extent to which access to the various elites (economic, political, ideological, etc.) is a function of class of origin, religion, ethnicity, etc. To the extent that access to the elite is influenced by such ascriptive characteristics, the society is considered to be nonmeritocratic.

On the basis of his analysis, Porter (1965) concluded that class of origin, kinship ties and ethnicity remain crucial determinants for entry into the elites of Canadian society although the various elites vary with respect to the extent to which this is true. He also found (1965:293) ". . . slight evidence to suggest that mobility into the elite without the initial advantage that comes from a higher class position is becoming more difficult."

Porter's study, based on 1951 data, was replicated for the corporate elite on 1971 data by Clement who, in support of Porter's prognosis, found that indeed ", . . access to the corporate elite has become more exclusively the preserve of the upper class over the past twenty years." (1973:280) Upper-class recruitment to the corporate elite had increased from 37.8 percent to 46.8 percent. (Clement, 1973:281)

Though there are no comparable diachronic studies of American elites, the work of Mills (1956) and Domhoff (1967) reaches similar conclusions despite

the different interpretive frameworks applied to data of varying quality. In brief, application of the elite paradigm to the process of attainment in advanced capitalist societies suggests the continued importance of ascription and gives some indication of increasing rigidification of class boundaries. Far from developing into meritocracies, capitalist societies are becoming more closed with the passage of time. Clement writes (1973:1): "As Canadian society matures, its class structure becomes more crystalized, stifling mobility and equality of opportunity."

II. The Status Attainment Model: Findings and Interpretations

With the publication of The American Occupational Structure in 1967, Blau and Duncan made a major contribution in overcoming the methodological problems inherent in the analysis of mobility tables which had been the predominant mode of analyzing the process of attainment up until that time. With great ingenuity, Duncan and his colleagues have continued to extend their analysis, and resolve a host of thorny methodological issues in the study of attainment.

In contrast to the elite paradigm, the status attainment model conceptualizes the structure of inequality as one of continuous gradation along such dimensions as income and prestige. The Duncan SEI scale (Duncan, 1961) has become a standard measure of socioeconomic status.

The object of analysis is, however, similar to that of the elite paradigm; namely, the distribution of sons across the occupational hierarchy is examined in order to determine the extent to which "success" or "failure" is a function of achieved qualities rather than class, ethnic origin, etc. The familiarity of the reader with the work of Duncan and his students will be assumed and only the general conclusions of their analyses will be outlined here.

Through the use of multivariate analysis and simultaneous equations, Blau and Duncan are able not only to find associations between a person's occupational achievement and his prior achieved and ascribed characteristics but are able to assign relative weights to each. Thus they are able to assert (1967: 402), "A man's social origins exert a considerable influence on his chances of occupational success but his own training and early experience exert a more profound influence . . ." Within American society the ". . . achieved status of a man, what he has accomplished in terms of some objective criteria, becomes more important than his ascribed status, who he is in the sense of what family he comes from." (Blau and Duncan, 1967:430)

With respect to trends in social mobility, Blau and Duncan find no reason to dissent from the conclusions of earlier studies which indicated no change in the amount of intergenerational mobility and indeed found some indication that mobility may have increased slightly (Blau and Duncan, 1967:97-113). Featherman and Hauser (1973) come to similar conclusions for the period up to 1970. Hence a quite different image of the trend in inequality of opportunity is presented with this model.

As was suggested earlier in this paper, the contradictory images of society presented by these two perspectives are not based on firm evidence and may therefore be more apparent than real. In the remainder of the paper, it is our intention to document this argument in more detail on empirical grounds and, in addition, to provide an alternative interpretation of the attainment process in advanced capitalist societies.

III. Open or Closed Societies: Methodologies and Findings

The most obvious limitation in contrasting these two perspectives on empirical grounds is the lack of methodological comparability. Though both deal

with the process of attainment, radically different assumptions are made about the structure of inequality. These assumptions lead in turn to quite different methodologies.

(a) The Methodology of Elite Analysis

Since the fundamental distinction in elite studies is between the elite and the nonelite, the question of equality of opportunity -- or the importance of ascription -- in these studies becomes a question of access to the elite. Since the elite constitutes a small minority of any society, the use of random sampling of a population to study access to the elite is obviously an inefficient method of data collection on this group. Rather, the elites are identified and data gathered on them so that an analysis of their composition can be made. An initial consequence of this methodology is that the analyst is constrained by his data to the use of inflow or recruitment tables rather than outflow or inheritance tables (for example, see Porter, 1965:292, Table 28). Accordingly, the unit of analysis is the elite or particular occupational group under consideration rather than the population of individuals who do and do not gain access to it. Usually the requisite data for the construction of the appropriate outflow tables is unavailable. Rather, the role of ascription is studied in terms of recruitment -- the manner in which the elite as a whole reproduces itself across generations. Recruitment rather than inheritance is the object of analysis, although statements are made on the amount of equality of opportunity.

Recruitment data are inappropriate for reaching conclusions about equality opportunity. It is instructive to give the relation between the two concepts a mathematical formulation. Denote by $P(X/Y)$ the probability that a son from origin Y obtains position X, say an elite position; and by $P(Y/X)$ the probability that a person is from origin Y given that he is in the elite. $P(X/Y)$ serves to estimate equality of opportunity, ($P(Y/X)$ is a measure of

recruitment. It is the latter rather than the former which is estimated by the elite analysts. Although recruitment probabilities are formally inappropriate for making inferences with respect to equality of opportunity, it is easy to show (Sørensen, 1971) that the two quantities will be related as:

$$P(Y/X) = \frac{P(X/Y) \cdot P(Y)}{P(X)} \qquad (1)$$

where $P(Y)$ is the probability of being from origin Y (estimated by the corresponding proportion), and $P(X)$ similarly is the overall probability of a person being a member of the elite. Data collected on a particular group, say an elite, will yield information on $P(Y/X)$; $P(X)$ can be estimated using census or labor force data. Usually, there will be no information on $P(Y)$ and hence one cannot directly estimate $P(X/Y)$, the measure of equality of opportunity.

Given the interdependency of the two probabilities however, it is easily shown that with the addition of a rather weak assumption some inferences about equality of opportunity can be made. If we define complete equality of opportunity as the situation where $P(X/Y) = P(X)$, then from equation (1) it follows that complete equality of opportunity exists when $P(Y/X) = P(Y)$. Despite the fact that $P(Y)$ cannot be estimated directly, it would be a timid analyst indeed who would hesitate to make some inferences about equality of opportunity upon learning that 22 percent of the corporate elite are sons of the corporate elite (Porter, 1965:295). Given the small size of the corporate elite and barring a truly extraordinary fertility rate, it is reasonably safe to assume that $P(Y/X) \gg P(Y)$, where Y denotes origin in the corporate elite. Therefore, a considerable inequality of opportunity exists.

The inferences that can be drawn from intertemporal comparisons of recruitment probabilities are somewhat more problematic however. It is clear

that $P(Y/X)$ can change as a result of changes in $P(X)$ and/or $P(Y)$ without a change in $P(X/Y)$. Since the researcher lacks data on $P(Y)$, he is unable to identify the source of change. The elite may indeed be increasingly "an upper class preserve"; it does not follow, however, that this is due to greater rigidity in the class structure.

Statements about the amount of equality of opportunity for gaining access to the elite, that is, whether an obtained value of $P(X/Y)$ is high or low, must rely on a standard of comparison. This might be done by making comparisons across places or over time while controlling for the effects of changes in $P(X)$ and $P(Y)$. The appropriate method for such comparisons has been outlined by Duncan (1966) and involves progressive standardization of rows and columns (Deming adjustment). However, such comparisons would only illustrate change in equality of opportunity. The appropriate method for evaluating the amount of equality of opportunity at a point in time would be to evaluate the difference $P(X/Y) - P(Z/W)$, where Z and W stand for nonelite origin and destination positions of the same type (say occupation). In this way the analyst can compare the effect of origins on elite attainment with the effect of origins on access to other occupational groups. If the effect of origin on access to the elite is much larger than the effect of origin for access to other positions in the social structure, then inequality of opportunity may indeed be held to be high. However, recruitment studies usually lack the requisite data to make such comparisons, and their findings are not subject to unambiguous interpretation.

(b) Status Attainment Research

The image of the closed society provided by elite studies contradicts the image derived from status attainment research. The question is whether

this contradiction is supported by the results of the two types of studies. The answer to this question is no, and this answer results not only from the problems of interpreting the evidence from elite studies. For a number of reasons, results of the status attainment studies may be wholly consistent with the results of elite studies, the problem being one of comparability and not of inconsistent findings. It is instructive to outline these reasons.

There are some obvious reasons for the lack of comparability. Although studies like Blau and Duncan's use large national samples, these samples clearly are nowhere near the size that would be needed to compare access to the elite to access to other groups. Second, the dependent variable in status attainment research is not the probability of gaining access to a given group but is the occupational status of a respondent, as measured by the SEI score. Corporate and other elites, which are subsets of occupational groups, will not be detected by the measures used in status attainment research. These are the obvious reasons, but there are also more subtle reasons for the lack of comparability, reasons that have to do with how inequality of opportunity is measured in status attainment research.

In status attainment research the measure of equality of opportunity used is the effect of origin variables on current status obtained as the regression coefficient to father's status (and other measures of origin) in a linear model of the status attainment process. This gives one measure for the whole population under investigation, a measure that can be compared to other populations or to the same population at earlier points in time. In contrast the measures we suggested as the most reasonable for elite studies were ones that relied on the probability of getting access to elites and to other positions in the social structure, i.e., to subsets of positions rather than the entire population of positions. The two measures are clearly not comparable, and the measure

used in status attainment research cannot be used to analyze the importance of a person's origin for access to specific sets of positions, such as an elite.

Since only one measure of the importance of origin variables in a population is available in status attainment research, how is it possible to make statements about the amount of equality of opportunity? The standard of comparison is not other populations, nor the population at earlier points in time, and comparisons among subsets of occupations are not made. Rather, the comparisons are made between the importance of achieved characteristics for social status.

The inferences made in Blau and Duncan (1967) about the nature of society are based on evaluations of the amounts of variance in current status explained by ascribed and achieved characteristics. This is not an unproblematic comparison, for the main achieved characteristic, that is education, is partly a function of the ascribed characteristics that are used in the comparison. The path-models used in status attainment research mirror this interplay, but cannot solve the problem of how to divide the joint variance explained by origin and education. In addition, an implicit standard becomes the amount of variance not explained by either group of variables that includes both unmeasured variables that could be both ascribed and achieved, and error. Recent controversies (Bowles, 1972; Jencks et al., 1972) over the interpretation of status attainment research testifys to the ambiguities the methods for evaluating equality of opportunity this research contains. Ultimately such controversies must be settled on the basis of theoretical considerations concerning the mechanisms through which ascribed and achieved characteristics determine status, but existing status attainment research contains precious little such theory.

The empirical evidence for the various claims made regarding the role of ascription in industrial society is then highly inconclusive. The claims made by elite studies are not supported by adequate measures, and even if they were it would be perfectly conceivable that the role of ascription was large for getting access to the elite, while it would be more modest for the society at large, as the status attainment research claims. In addition, although considerably more sophisticated methodologically, the results of status attainment research are still open to conflicting interpretations.

New research following the two traditions would not settle this issue: measures of equality of opportunity would not be comparable and the analysis used to support various claims would not deal with the same phenomena. Elite studies would compare the role of ascription for access to different sets of positions in the social structure; status attainment research would compare the relative importance of ascribed and achieved characteristics for access to all positions. What is needed is a more comprehensive theoretical framework for the analysis of the status attainment process, a framework that would dictate comparable problems of analysis and measures of the amount of equality of opportunity. The possibilities for providing such a framework are discussed next.

IV. Open or Closed Societies: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis

We shall begin our discussion with a review and critique of the interpretations presented by the major authors discussed above.

(a) A Values Perspective

Though Blau and Duncan initially disavow any intention of presenting a theory of inequality (1967:1-2) they are led in their concluding chapter to make some interpretations of their findings. Close reading of this chapter

reveals two alternative modes of explanation with no overt attempt to integrate them. One suspects that these two accounts reflect the differing intellectual traditions of the two authors.

The first of these represents a Durkheimian view of the social order. In brief, the argument is that ". . . social differentiation weakens the particularistic ingroup values that unite men in bonds of mechanical solidarity." (Blau and Duncan, 1967:429) The reason given for this phenomenon reflects the priority given to culture and a common value system characteristic of the functionalist-pluralist paradigm. Since ". . . society cannot any longer afford the waste of human resources . . ." implied by ". . . a rigid social system . . ." it applies "universalistic principles . . ." of recruitment which ". . . have penetrated deep into the fabric of modern society and give rise to high rates of occupational mobility in response to this need." (Blau and Duncan, 1967:431)

The explanation of high rates of intergenerational mobility and a relatively open class system in terms of a common value system which places great emphasis on achievement and universalistic criteria of evaluation is in keeping with the priority given to culture in the analytical schema of functionalism.

The agile theorist might well be able to reconcile the cultural argument with the finding that universalistic modes of evaluation do not apply with equal rigor at different points in the status hierarchy -- e.g., there are "cultural lags" in the system. He stands in danger, however, of formulating a theory for which the negative case could not be found and hence not open to the rules of falsification. Moreover, within the functionalist theory of stratification, the claims of elite studies that ascription is more prevalent in the more "functionally important" sectors of the occupational hierarchy, namely the elites, must be particularly embarrassing.

(b) A Population Dynamics Perspective

The second explanation is found earlier in the chapter and represents what we shall call the "population dynamics" explanation, namely, that the high degree of mobility in American society can be accounted for by the changing shape of the occupational structure and the differential fertility of the various occupational groups.

> Men are much more likely to experience upward than downward mobility inasmuch as the rapidly expanding salaried professions with low fertility and the contracting farm occupations with high fertility create a vacuum in the form of occupational demand near the top and a pressure of manpower supply at the bottom that have repercussions throughout the occupational structure. (Blau and Duncan, 1967:420)

Here, the "openness" of the system is attributed not to the penetration of universalistic values but rather to the population dynamics of the occupational structure and the resultant patterns of supply and demand.[2]

Within this model, however, is an implied assumption which is never formally stated or accounted for. The model assumes a natural tendency toward inertia, i.e., in the absence of change in the occupational structure and/or fertility rates of different occupational groups, sons tend to inherit the occupations of their fathers. Why this should be so is not discussed and indeed would appear to stand in contradiction to their statements on the value systems of industrial societies. This perspective, as we shall see, does however provide an entrée for a synthesis with the elite perspective.

(c) The Power Perspective

The major feature of elite analysis is an emphasis on power. Porter, like the functionalists, views power as a societal response to the need for coordination in a differentiated social system (Porter, 1965:202). Unlike the functionalists however, he rejects the notion that "collective goals and values always exist for the total society . . ." (Porter, 1965:205), i.e., a common value system is not the prime mover in the chain of social causation.

Rather, "the iron law of oligarchy" means that the majority of the population will inevitably leave the organization of society to the small group which holds power, thereby enabling the elites to fashion society in a manner suitable to their interests. Among the prerogatives of power is control over recruitment and as a result elites ". . . can be exclusive and most of them are." (Porter, 1965:218) The logical priority of power in the elite paradigm provides a perspective from which the prospect of meritocracy remains largely illusory. While such an interpretation is attractive, it too is incapable of providing an adequate explanation of the findings.

In the first instance, it does not account for the variation in the amount of self-recruitment found among the different elites nor does it account for variations over time. In brief, it does not specify the conditions under which an elite is likely to use its power to exclude nonelite sons. Nor is the explanation entirely satisfactory in that high rates of intergenerational inheritance and self-recruitment can be found among the nonelites (farmers, proprietors, etc.). A more complex approach to the process of attainment is required.

(d) A Weberian Perspective on the Stratification Process

Weber never fulfilled his intention of analyzing the relation of occupational groups to the class structure (cf., Economy and Society, Vol. I, 1968: 141 and footnote 45 on page 210). He did, however, outline the basic dimensions along which such an analysis might be developed.

First of all, social relationships can be characterized by whether they are open or closed.

> A social relationship will be spoken of as "open" to outsiders if and insofar as its system of order does not deny participation to anyone who wishes to join and is actually in a position to do so. A relationship will, on the other hand, be called "closed against

> outsiders so far as . . . participation of certain persons is excluded, limited or subjected to conditions. (Weber, Vol. I, 1968:43)

Whether a group remains open or closed will depend on the extent to which its material or ideal interests will be enhanced by either strategy. Initially a group may seek to increase its numbers in order to secure a position of power by adequate numbers. Closure, however, will begin to occur as the number of contenders increases relative to available opportunities. At this point, in order to curb competition, it is usually the case that ". . . one group of competitors takes some externally identifiable characteristic of another group of (actual or potential) competitors -- race, language, religion, local or social origin, descent, residence, etc. -- as a pretext for attempting their exclusion." (Weber, Vol. I, 1968:342)[3]

Weber's account of the process of group closure provides a framework for understanding the continued importance of ascription in the labor market. As in the elite paradigm, a key feature of the analysis is the capacity of the occupational group to exercise power. Group closure presupposes the exercise of such power, as one group excludes the other from competition. The exercise of power, however, is not assumed <u>a priori</u> to be the exclusive prerogative of the elites. Closure can be attained by collectivities at various points in the stratification hierarchy (Neuwirth, 1969:750). This is not to say that different occupational groups are equally capable of exercising closure, a question to which we shall return.

Weber takes the power explanation further, however, and suggests a set of conditions under which an occupational group will actually exercise its power. Specifically, he invokes the population dynamics of the labor force, namely, the situation where the number of contenders exceeds the number of positions. This synthesis of the two perspectives overcomes the limitations of either one taken in isolation. On the one hand, the "tendency towards inertia"

implied by the population dynamics explanation is accounted for by the exercise of power. The extent to which this power is exercised is in turn explained by the tensions set up by the interplay of supply and demand on the labor market.

Such a perspective, for example, readily accounts for the varying degree of closure found among the different elites studied by Porter. Under conditions of advanced capitalism, the corporate elite which exhibited the greatest degree of self-recruitment, has been marked by a growing concentration of control (cf., Porter, 1965:Chapter VIII; Zeitlin, 1970:Part One) whereas the bureaucratic, ideological and labor elites have been marked by expansion. Clement (1973) found that the number of positions in the corporate elite increased from 1304 to 1454 between 1951 and 1972, which, relative to growth in other occupational sectors represents a substantial relative decline. Under these circumstances there is little need for the corporate elite to go beyond its own generation of sons for its recruits.

The matter is still more complex, however, for given the same initial conditions, not all occupational groups will give incumbents the same capacity to exercise the same degree of power over the recruitment of new members. Here we must examine more closely the political structure of the labor market.

Weber outlines four possible ways in which access to jobs is controlled (Vol. I, 1968:125-130). The first of these is a residual case that has largely disappeared in advanced capitalist societies, namely where access to the job is appropriated to the owner of the workers (i.e., the case of unfree labor or slavery). The second possibility, also in decline, is where access to the job is appropriated by the individual worker (e.g., the master craftsman who takes on an apprentice). Such control over access is still found where the worker owns the means of production as among farmers, proprietors, self-employed professionals, etc. The third possibility is that ". . . opportunities for

disposal of labor services may be appropriated by an organization of workers . . ." (Weber, Vol. I, 1968:126, emphasis added). Though the potential for closure is less than under the previous form, the appropriation of jobs by workers always ". . , involves limitations on the free recruitment of the labor force. This means that workers cannot be selected solely on the grounds of technical efficiency . . . ." (Weber, Vol. I, 1968:128) The history of unionism and the "closed shop" among blue collar workers and the striving for "professionalization" among white collar workers is indicative of this third mechanism by which access to jobs is controlled on the labor market. Finally, we find the situation where the potential for closure is weakest, namely on the formally free labor market, where a job is acquired directly through a contractual relationship between employer and employee as is the case among lower white collar workers and nonunionized blue collar workers. If Weber is correct in his assumption that access to jobs is differentially structured on the same labor market, then the global measures of the attainment process used in status attainment research are obviously inadequate to reflect this.

Eliminating the residual case of unfree labor (slavery), the remaining three mechanisms by which access to jobs is controlled describe a hierarchy of occupational group control over the recruitment process. Self-recruitment and occupational inheritance is most likely where the individual worker controls access to jobs, followed by occupational groups in which access is controlled by an organization of workers and the least likely on a formally free labor market.

An examination of the relevant data would seem to support such an interpretation. Mobility data from Blau and Duncan (1967:39) indicate that occupational inheritance is greatest among the self-employed (farmers, proprietors, self-employed professionals) followed by occupations in which there is a high

degree of unionization (craftsmen, construction, manufacturing) and professionalization (salaried professions). The lowest level is found among clerical and sales workers, service workers, and farm laborers.

(e) Ascription in the Formally Free Labor Market

In the formally free labor market the role of ascription might be argued to be minimal, for employers' interest is to maximize efficiency in production, and workers' interest is to obtain the highest possible return on their productive skills. This suggests that the model for access would be wage competition based on universalistic criteria. This is indeed the model for access suggested by neo-classical economics. However this model has recently been questioned by Thurow (Thurow, 1969; Thurow and Lucas, 1972). He suggests that the dominant mode of access, at least in the American labor market, is what he calls job competition, rather than wage competition. In job competition the concern of employers is to minimize training costs, as most skills necessary for a job can only be acquired on the job. Employers therefore rank prospective employees in terms of the presumed costs of training them for the job. Education will be an important criterion, but not the only one for a person's position in this "labor queue." It is not the actual skills acquired in schools or on previous jobs that matter, it is the information education and other characteristics of the individual provide on his "ability to learn." Characteristics other than education that can symbolize trainability will also be relevant; these include ascriptive characteristics such as social origin.

As prospective employees are ranked in a labor queue so can jobs be ranked according to their desirability in a job queue. The highest ranked individual in the labor queue will then obtain the highest ranked available job in the job queue. The job has to be available since in job competition most training

takes place on the job; therefore there is an incentive to keep a person who already has obtained the required skills. This is in contrast to wage competition where a person not in a job would be hired into the job if his productivity is higher than the incumbent's productivity.

In wage competition it is the actual skills that count regardless of origin and other ascriptive characteristics. In job competition, on the other hand, employers may use ascriptive characteristics as criteria to rank prospective employees in terms of trainability, in addition to education and general training. It is likely that origin, among other ascriptive characteristics, is perceived relevant for the cost of training a person to do a certain job. (Thurow and Lucas, 1972)

Education itself, in job competition, may be said to serve an ascriptive function. While in wage competition it would be unlikely that a college graduate would be hired into a job for which a high school graduate is qualified, in job competition, a college graduate would always be ranked higher than a high school graduate because of his presumed lower training costs, even though his actual skills may be inferior.

The mode of access to jobs or positions in the social structure is then crucial for how characteristics of the individual determine the status he obtains, in particular for the relative importance of ascribed versus achieved characteristics. For certain positions, among them elite positions, incumbents exercise direct control over who is to get access. The higher status such positions have, and the greater the control incumbents exercise, the more likely it is that they will use such power to ensure the well-being of their own offspring. It is therefore plausible that for such positions, there will be less equality of oppportunity for access than in the society at large. In the

formally free labor market it is the predominance of wage versus job competition that will determine how influential ascribed versus achieved characteristics will be for access, for it will be the nature of the competition process that determines whether it is a person's presumed trainability rather than his actual skills and achievements that decide who gets access to a job.

Regardless of the mode of access, the relation between supply and demand (i.e., the population dynamics of the labor market) of individuals and positions will influence the relation between individual characteristics and the position in the occupational structure they obtain. When more vacant positions are available than can be filled by the offspring of incumbents, the importance of achievement obviously increases, even for those positions where incumbents control access. In wage competition sectors of the labor market, supply and demand wil determine a person's status and income returns on his achieved characteristics. In job competition sectors the job opportunities for persons will in a similar manner be influenced by the availability of vacant jobs. Where many jobs are vacant, employers will be forced to go lower down in the labor queue to fill jobs. In contrast where few jobs are available, persons high in the queue will be forced to take less desirable jobs. This in turn will determine the relation between those ascribed and achieved characteristics that are relevant for a person's position in the labor queue and the position he obtains.

We argue, in sum, that analysis of the mode of access and of the forces that determine the availability of a position is crucial for our understanding of the status attainment process. Only such analysis can enable us to predict and explain the relation between an individual's characteristics and the position he obtains in the social structure. The question of equality of opportunity then becomes one of how access to various positions is influenced by a person's origin, and the overall openness of a society becomes a question of the dis-

tribution of modes of access in the social structure, and the economic and demographic forces that determine the growth and decline of various sectors of society. While we can obtain a global measure of equality of opportunity, as in status attainment research, an understanding of why such a measure varies over time and between places demands an understanding of the political organization and dynamics of the labor market.

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the findings and methods of research on equality of opportunity in elite and status attainment studies. We also suggested a theoretical framework for the analysis of the status attainment process that may integrate the two research traditions. Our review of methodologies suggests that the findings of these two types of studies are not now comparable. In addition, the claims made by elite studies with respect to the amount and trend in equality of opportunity are not based on firm evidence, because these studies do not obtain the appropriate data to support these claims. However the concern of elite studies for access to a given set of positions does seem to use the more appropriate concern in analysis of the status attainment process, because only analysis which takes into account the mode of access will enable understanding of the sources of change in equality of opportunity. The global measure of equality of opportunity obtained in status attainment research as it has been carried out by Blau and Duncan (1967), and in later research in this tradition, does not permit such analysis.

Status attainment research has comtributed immensely to our ability to specify the transmission of occupational resources from one generation to the next by its use of linear (path) models for this process. However, the interplay between achieved and ascribed characteristics mirrored in these models

is still subject to conflicting interpretations. A more explicit concern for the mode of access could greatly reduce the ambiguities presented by existing research, because analysis of the mode of access to various positions would give a better basis for interpreting the importance of ascribed and achieved characteristics in determining a person's status. The analysis of the mode of access could not be carried out with exactly the same models as now are used in status attainment research. Current models have achieved status as the dependent variable, while an analysis of the mode of access would have the probability of obtaining a particular position as the dependent variable like in elite studies. With such changes in methods, analysis of the process of attainment of various occupations and subsets of occupations (such as elites) would bring about the desired comparability between elite and status attainment studies of equality of opportunity. More important, such analysis would be an important step toward our understanding of the status attainment process.

Footnotes

1. The application of this model to a national Canadian sample is forthcoming, cf., Boyd and McRoberts (1974).

2. For a brilliant discussion of the complexities involved in formulating and operationalizing an adequate model of occupational replacement under different stratification regimes, see Boudon (1970).

3. Cf., Neuwirth (1969) for an application of Weber's perspective to ethnic group relations and to whose discussion of Weber's concept of community closure we are indebted.

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