

On the Mechanisms of Social Inequality

Studies of young people's educational outcomes,
social participation, and well-being

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Abstract

The present thesis seeks to explore the bases of social inequality, particularly how it is reproduced and can potentially be counteracted. The aim is to describe and explain how structural factors – first and foremost class and young people’s various practices – give rise to a process of creation, distribution and acquisition of resources of importance to different outcomes in young people’s lives. In the thesis it is argued that by studying young people’s different practices and by relating them to the characteristics of the family of origin, we can obtain a more comprehensive picture of how resources that are related to the varying outcomes among young people of different social origins are acquired, distributed and created. The aim of the thesis is investigated through four empirical studies.

Study 1, investigates the relationship between class origin, educational attainment, and two features of social participation: agency and voice. In Study 2, adolescents’ subjective well-being is in focus and investigated in relation to school performance, gender and class origin. Study 3 explores whether, and to what degree, young people’s activities are important links between class origin and school grades in upper secondary school. The final study builds on Study 3 and focuses on the importance of young people’s class origin, school grades and activities for entering higher education.

The aim of the thesis calls for extensive information on the life of young people. With a unique combination of survey data, both from the young themselves and from their parents together with registry data, this thesis can answer to these high demands on data. Study 1 uses data from the Survey of Living Conditions (ULF) collected by Statistics Sweden. The remaining studies (2-4) make use of a several data sources, but are mainly focused on ULF and the annual child supplement of the Survey of Living Conditions (Child-ULF) conducted between 2001 and 2005. In addition to ULF and Child-ULF, the data in Study 2-4 have been complemented with registry data comprising grades and entry to higher education. The data as a whole, also allow a longitudinal focus, as the survey data were collected between 2001 and 2005 and the registry data contain information up to 2009.

The conclusions of the thesis can be summarized in one important point: If we are to understand the mechanisms underlying different life outcomes among young people, it is of great importance that we take into consideration young people's different conditions and practices. It has been made clear that young people's different practices and life outcomes are closely related to their class origin. Yet it should be noted that this does not always have to be the case. The present thesis has shown that young people, through different actions, can break the pattern of social reproduction. In order to support this, and to counteract social inequality, it is therefore important to increase opportunities for young people to take part in resource-generating practices.

Key words: Young people, conditions, practices, resources, life outcomes.

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Study 1

Nordlander, E., Strandh, M., & Brännlund, A. (2015). What does class origin and education mean for the capabilities of agency and voice?. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 36(2), 291-312.

Study 2

Nordlander, E., & Stensöta, H. O. (2014). Grades—for Better or Worse? The Interplay of School Performance and Subjective Well-Being Among Boys and Girls. *Child Indicators Research*, 7(4), 861-879.

Study 3

Nordlander, E (2015) Are Young People's Activities an Important Link between Class Origin and Educational Attainment? *European Sociological Review* . doi: 10.1093/esr/jcv087

Study 4

Nordlander, E (2015) Nordlander, E. The importance of young people's activities and class origin for entering higher education (Manuscript submitted to British Journal of Sociology of Education)

Förord

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Introduction

The present thesis seeks to explore the bases of social inequality, particularly how it is reproduced and can potentially be counteracted. In its basic form, social inequality refers to a phenomenon where individuals, due to their different social positions, come to have various resources and life outcomes. Beyond this basic notion lies the fundamental sociological question of how these mechanisms of social inequality are formed. The ambition of the thesis is to explore this question by focusing on young people's different conditions and practices, and to learn how important resources are created, distributed and related to various life outcomes. This overall objective is investigated through four empirical studies. Before presenting these studies, I will first discuss the importance of studying young people. Concluding this introductory part is a presentation of the specific aim and research questions of the thesis.

Why young people should be in focus

Previous research has certainly looked at how young people's various life outcomes can be influenced by the various resources they have at hand. It is well-established, for example, that young people's educational choices, school grades (e.g., Erikson and Jonsson, 1996; Reay et al., 2001; Jackson, 2013, labour market related outcomes (e.g. Erikson and Jonsson, 1998: Bihagen, Neramo and Stern, 2013) and future health status (Starfield et al., 2002) are associated with their parents' social class. This strand of research has provided important insights into how different resources in the family of origin can influence young people's opportunities. However, the main part of this knowledge is based on studies in which data on parents are linked to their children. Basing an analysis of young people's life outcomes on parental characteristics is of great significance, but this approach also has two major problems: (i) other factors, such as young people's own practices, may play a crucial role; (ii) young people's own understanding of their reality is not taken into account. What is argued here is that it is vital to include both young people's structural conditions and their own account of their daily lives if we are to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of how the distribution of resources is related to various life outcomes. This focus is especially important to acquiring knowledge about how social inequality is reproduced and can be counteracted.

During their up-bringing, and in their daily life, young people experience different conditions and engage in various practices. Both of these factors can be essential to young people's diverse outcomes. For example, young people's different structural conditions may be of importance to the kinds of practices they engage in. Furthermore, this variation in practices may come to be of central importance, because young people, through their social practices, acquire different abilities and skills, which in turn may serve as important resources for various life outcomes. For instance, different kinds of activities such as reading or engaging in sports give young people certain abilities and skills that may be important resources in school. By studying these different practices and by relating them to the characteristics of the family of origin, we can obtain a more comprehensive picture of how resources that are related to the varying outcomes among young people of different social origins are acquired, distributed and created.

In the present thesis the contextual information in focus is social class. Using this emphasis, we can get a better understanding of how social inequality operates, i.e. uncover some of the mechanisms that link class origin and the unequal variation in young people's life outcomes. In this context, it is important to underline that young people's acquisition of resources should be regarded as a process. For example, at one point in time, young people's class origin and practices may be important resources in school and be related to their school grades. At this point in time, school grades are thus the outcome that is under study. But at a later stage in life, school grades may also serve as an important resource, for example in terms of entering higher education. Thus, a given set of resources at one point may lead to the realization of certain life outcomes or conditions, which in turn may transform into resources at another point in time.

If young people's conditions and practices are not included in our analyses, then their resources will not only be ignored, but our understanding of how different resources can influence their lives will also be less comprehensive – an argument that will be further exemplified below. But this is not the only reason it is important to explore young people's different conditions and resources. I first wish to emphasize that it is of great importance to use information provided by young people themselves, as they are also the main informants concerning their own lives and their own subjective understanding of their reality. Furthermore, it is also important to use information from the

young people themselves to obtain valid information (Ben-Arieh, 2005). It should be underlined, however, that it is sometimes not clear whether it is the children or the parents who report the most accurate information. Regarding living conditions such as economic resources within the family, or the parents' educational level, children may provide unreliable information (Andersen and Kjarulff, 2003). Nevertheless, when it comes to conditions of a more subjective character, such as well-being, we can reasonably assume that it is the individual concerned who has the best knowledge (Låftman, 2009). Jonsson and Östberg (2010) show that children and their parents report different levels of well-being, and that parents seem to over-estimate the well-being of their children. Thus, to obtain comprehensive and reliable information, it is crucial to collect information from the source that is closest to the information being collected.

As discussed above, young people's different resources may affect their opportunities in life. But as Ben-Arieh (2005) points out: young people's circumstances should not only be studied in terms of future opportunities, or their well-becoming. Rather, studying young people's conditions is of value per se, as the welfare of individuals during this life stage is just as important as in other phases of life (Jonsson and Östberg, 2010). One general assumption of the present thesis is that young people's different conditions and practices are of great importance, both in terms of their welfare here and now and in terms of their future opportunities.

Four empirical studies on social inequality

The four empirical studies in the thesis all focus on young people's different conditions and resources and relate in particular to three areas in which social inequality can arise: social participation, well-being and education. Of these areas, education receives the most attention, and all four studies, in different ways, relate to some aspects of education. In relation to young people, focusing on education is important for three reasons: First, education is an important resource, but educational opportunities and educational attainment are unequally distributed among young people of different social origins (e.g., Jackson, 2013; Bukodi and Goldthorpe, 2014). Second, both young people's performance in school and their educational attainment are of great importance to various conditions in their lives, such as health and well-being (Costance, 2002; Eide et al., 2010) and labour market chances (Shavit and Muller, 1998; Biagi and Lucifora, 2008). Third, being in school, earning credits,

making educational choices and so forth are important parts of young people's lives, and as such constitute an important factor for investigation.

In Study 3 and 4, it is emphasized that if we wish to learn more about the variability of educational outcomes, we need to take into account the practices of young people of different social origins. Study 3 focuses on differences in school grades and explores whether, and to what degree, young people's activities constitute significant links between class origin and school grades in upper secondary school. Study 4 extends these findings by investigating the importance of young people's school grades and activities during upper secondary school for entrance to higher education, and whether these factors have different meanings for young people of different class origin.

In addition to education, social participation and well-being are two key conditions that may serve as important resources for other life outcomes. In Study 1, two aspects of social participation are investigated: agency and voice. The focus on these two capabilities is key, as the contemporary society that young people encounter is complex and characterized by restructuring of the labour market, increasing educational demands, flexible employment practices and so forth (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Gillberg and Bergman, 2015). To face these challenges and participate in political and social life, the ability to stand up for one's own rights, to express oneself and to act upon one's beliefs may be important resources. The objective of the Study 1 is to explore these features of social participation and how any structural inequalities in these aspects may be reproduced or counteracted by education. The study thus examines how class origin and education interact with regard to agency and voice, and explores whether education reduces or reinforces structural differences between young people of different class origins.

Young people's well-being is also related to the sets of risks described above (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). In an international comparative perspective, with regard to objective indicators, overall well-being tends to be high in Sweden. However, when it comes to young people's subjective well-being, the same positive result is not reported. Instead, low levels of subjective well-being have been documented (UNICEF, 2007; The National Board of Health and Welfare, 2009; OECD, 2009). One popular understanding is that low subjective well-being among young people is related to different gendered demands and

expectations regarding achievement (Landstedt et al., 2009; West and Sweeting, 2003). However, achievement expectations may not only be related to different gender ideals, but also to different class-based expectations. Study 2 therefore investigates the problem of young people's subjective well-being by exploring possible relationships between well-being, school performance, gender and class origin.

Aim and research questions

The aim of the present thesis is to explore young people's various conditions and practices. Through this focus, I wish to describe and explain how structural factors – first and foremost class and young people's various practices – give rise to a process of creation, distribution and acquisition of resources of importance to different outcomes in young people's lives. Following this line of inquiry is a focus on the mechanisms of social inequality and how unequal opportunities are reproduced or counteracted by the practices of young people from different structural conditions.

The main research questions addressed are:

Do young people's conditions and own practices give rise to the creation, distribution, and acquisition of resources? If so, how are these factors related to the reproduction or counteraction of unequal opportunities in terms of educational outcomes, social participation, and well-being?

Disposition

In this first part of the introduction, the background, aim and research questions of the thesis have been presented. This is followed by a section dedicated to the question of who constitutes the group of young people. The next part focuses on the theoretical perspective of resources as it is employed in the thesis. The following section discusses previous research on and different theoretical considerations of social inequality. A summary of these points of departure is presented before the case of Sweden as well as the data and methods are discussed. The penultimate section contains a summary of the four empirical studies included in the thesis. Finally, a concluding discussion and a Swedish summary end this introduction to the thesis.

Who are the young?

This question does not have a clear-cut answer because youth is, besides describing a biological phase in life, a socially constructed category, and as such its definition is not absolute (Furlong, 2013). One description often used in various official definitions is that young people are in a transitional phase, in between a dependent childhood and an independent adulthood (Eurostat, 2009; UNDESA, 2015). This rather vague description is related to changes in modern Western societies, making it difficult to identify a clear youth stage. Over time, young people have come to spend more time in education, entered the labour market at a later stage, and may be dependent on their parents for longer periods of time (Furlong, 2013). Being young can therefore be regarded as a process of acquiring the resources that pave the way towards an independent adult life. For that reason, youth is regarded as a fluid category, which means that age-specific definitions vary. For example, the United Nations bases all statistics on young people on persons between 15 and 24 years of age (UNDESA, 2015), while the age definition varies among the different EU policy initiatives. For example, in one EU policy on employment, young people are identified as being between 15-30 years of age (European Commission, 2010), while in another initiative on young people's employment, it is suggested that various labour market measures should apply to individuals up to the age of 25 (European Commission, 2012).

The definition of who is young thus varies depending on which outcome is under study. For this reason, no age-specific definition will be used here, but the youngest participants in the empirical analyses are in Study 2, where the respondents are between 12-16 years of age and attending secondary school. In Study 1, the importance of higher education is highlighted and the oldest surveyed respondents are 24-27 years of age in the second wave of interviews. Here, being young is also regarded as involving the process of growing up – a process during which the dependent child evolves into an independent adult. It is furthermore important to not ignore the fact that young people, besides being influenced by and dependent on their family of origin, are also on the brink of finding their place in the world and taking steps towards self-sufficiency and greater independence. Thus, young people are involved in a process through which they, by performing different actions, can accumulate resources and increasingly influence their own conditions.

On young people's resources

In the present thesis, young people's different resources are in focus and these resources will be investigated primarily by looking at their living conditions. Young people's living conditions are the actual conditions that young people have in their daily life; they are related to both material and immaterial conditions such as income, living arrangements, social support, leisure activities, health and so forth (Jonsson and Östberg, 2010). Some aspects of these living conditions are focused on in particular here, such as different kinds of activities, education and well-being. The Swedish welfare research tradition has generated extensive knowledge on the living conditions of the population (see, e.g., Fritzell and Lundberg, 1994; Evertsson and Magnusson, 2014). The resource perspective that is often employed within this tradition will also be applied here. The basis of this approach is that individuals are regarded as actors that possess and benefit from different sets of resources that they can use to shape their living conditions (see Johansson, 1970; Erikson and Åberg, 1984). The different sets of resources that a young person has are thus of importance to various outcomes, such as their educational attainment or their well-being. Individuals are perceived as conscious actors who: 'will, given the resources he or she commands and the context in which he or she operates, pursue whatever he or she regards as a good life' (Fritzell and Lundberg, 2007:5). What constitutes a good life, however, is not defined, but rather left to the individual to determine. However, the different types of resources an individual possesses are essential to enhancing his/her opportunities to act, as the scope of action becomes greater the more resources he/she has (Fritzell and Lundberg, 2007).

This resource perspective relates to the work of Amartya Sen, as previously pointed out by Fritzell and Lundberg (1994). Sen (1999) argues that the success of a society should be evaluated in terms of the actual freedom that members of that society enjoy. Therefore, we should focus our attention on what people are able to do, i.e. their capabilities, and by doing so we focus on the means of achieving freedom. Thus, of primary importance here is individuals' ability to 'lead the kind of lives they value- and have reason to value' (Sen, 1999:18). The focus of Sen's capability approach is thus not only on what individuals' end up doing or having, i.e. how they are functioning as regards health or income, but also on what they are *able* to do, i.e. their capabilities (Sen, 2009:231-235). The resource perspective employed in the Swedish welfare research tradition re-

sembles Sen's capability approach in that it focuses on the resources, and constraints, that an individual has and can use to pursue the life he or she values (Fritzell and Lundberg, 1994). Thus, in both the 'traditional Scandinavian welfare perspective' (see Johanson, 1979) and in the works of Sen (1999; 2009), emphasis is put on actors' ability to act and shape their living conditions (Fritzell and Lundberg, 1994). For young people, just as for adults, the kinds and amount of resources will influence each individual's courses of action and life outcomes. Therefore, if we are to better understand how social inequality is reproduced and counteracted, it is of key importance that we explore the acquisition, distribution and creation of young people's resources.

Young people can acquire different kinds of resources – for example, cognitive, social or cultural resources – from various sources, but two particular sources are emphasized in the present thesis: class origin and the various practices in which the young engage. Young people's structural conditions and practices may thus be of great importance to their acquisition of resources, which in turn may influence their life outcomes. The notion that different practices and parental characteristics are of key importance is exemplified in Mayer's (1999) comprehensive study of the life chances of children in the United States. She reveals that the primary mechanism for children's unequal opportunities is not income inequality per se, but factors closely related to other parental characteristics, such as engagement in activities, possessions or residential environment, which are, in turn, important factors in determining children's various life outcomes. It should furthermore be stressed that the activities and possessions that are included in her investigation are fairly inexpensive, such as trips to museums and books, and therefore they do not indicate wealth but instead parental tastes and preferences. Thus, the characteristics and practices of parents may be of importance in determining the kinds of activities young people engage in during their up-bringing. For example, if a young child is read to, it is more likely this child will later have a greater interest in reading than a child who has not been introduced to books at home. Reading, in turn, may be of further importance in a young person's life and become an important resource for developing other interests, and it may be related to other life outcomes, such as school grades and educational choices.

The notion that young people's different practices can result in different resources is supported by research showing the significance of youth activities for various educational outcomes (see, e.g., Eccles et al., 2003; Kaufman and

Gabler, 2004; Covay and Carbonaro, 2010). As such, by participating in activities, young people can develop knowledge and skills that are of importance to later educational outcomes. For example, previous research has related educational attainment to activities such as sports (Snyder and Spritzer, 1990; Barron et al., 2000; Pfeifer and Cornelißen, 2010) and cultural activities (Sullivan, 2001; Tramonte and Willms, 2009). Furthermore, young people's activities may entail the creation of social networks, which in turn may promote various educational outcomes, as these social networks can be a source of transmission of human capital (Coleman, 1988). Thus, by relating information on young people's structural conditions, such as their class origin, to what they engage in, i.e. their different practices, we can improve our understanding of how resources are distributed and created. These resources can furthermore be related to the theoretical perspectives of Bourdieu and Breen and Goldthorpe (1997), which will be discussed below.

Considerations on how social inequality arises

Social class

The concept of social inequality concerns the uneven distribution of resources, constraints and opportunities (e.g., Svallfors, 2005). This means that the resources young people have are unequally distributed and influence their different life outcomes. One structural condition in particular that has been shown to be related to this unequal distribution is class origin (e.g., Devine, 2004; Goldthorpe, 2007; Lareau and Conley, 2008). Thus, when studying how various conditions and practices give rise to the creation, distribution and acquisition of resources of importance to young people's life outcomes, their class origin should be taken into consideration. Social class is a principal concept that has been given a great deal of theoretical and empirical consideration within sociology, and there are a number of theories of what class is and how it should be measured (Wright, 2005). In the present thesis, young people's class origin is understood on the basis of a neo-Weberian tradition. Thus, young people's different opportunities in life, or their life chances, are regarded as being associated with their parents' positions on the labour market.

For Weber (1978 [1922]), the concept of life chances is closely related to class. Life chances refer to individuals' possibilities to acquire economic goods, pow-

er, and social position (Dahrendorf, 1979) or “the chances an individual has for sharing in the socially created economic or cultural ‘goods’ that typically exist in any given society” (Giddens, 1973: 130-131). Or, as more simply put by Breen (2005), an individual’s life chances can be understood as his/her chances of having access to various valued outcomes. This follows the same line of argument as the previously presented capability approach (Sen, 2009) and the resource perspective employed in the present thesis (Johansson, 1979). The distribution of life chances is thus due to the fact that individuals who share similar structural positions tend to have similar resources and therefore share similar obstacles and opportunities in life (Weber, 1978). Translated to the focus of the present thesis, this perspective means that young people’s various life outcomes are closely related to the variation in resources that their parents have due to their class position. Thus, in order to understand the mechanisms of social inequality, it is essential to consider young people’s class origin. Yet ideas about how social class should be empirically captured vary across studies. In the thesis, young people’s class origin is indicated by the Swedish standard SEI classification, which resembles the commonly used definition elaborated by Erikson and Goldthorpe (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992; Goldthorpe, 2007). Although disputed by Goldthorpe, this schema is widely recognized as a neo-Weberian framework (Breen, 2005). This kind of class schema, in its most basic form, amounts to a set of principles designed to capture the main differences in the labour market and production units that have a bearing on individuals’ life chances (Breen, 2005). In the methods section I will further elaborate on how this class schema is defined.

Although class is a well-theorized and researched topic, it has also been a contested concept and voices have been raised claiming that the importance of class in post-industrial or postmodern societies is declining (see, e.g., Lee and Turner, 1996; Clark and Lipset, 2001). Yet there is no clear empirical evidence of such a decline; rather class continues to be an important basis of social inequality (Bihagen, 2000; Breen, 2005; Goldthorpe, 2007). For example, in an edited volume based on Swedish survey data, Oskarson, Bengtsson and Berglund (2010) show the relevance of class in contemporary Sweden across a range of social fields. It has, furthermore, been made evident that educational opportunities are unequally distributed among young people with different class backgrounds (Erikson and Jonsson, 1996, 2002; Erikson et al., 2005). This unequal distribution may be a basis for inequality in several different aspects of young people’s lives, as educational attainment is a crucial factor for social mobility (Goldthorpe, 2007).

Gender

Regarding educational attainment, it is well known that girls generally have higher grades and continue to higher education to a greater extent than boys do (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, 2008). This is one example of how gender can serve as an important structural condition, in addition to class origin, and thus as a factor that affects young people's different practices and life outcomes. Socially, gender should be perceived not as something that we have, but rather as something we do in social practice (West and Zimmerman, 1987). As such, gender is socially constructed and continuously reproduced (Connell, 2002). In young people's lives there are many different representations of feminine and masculine behaviours, but by social agreement girls and boys are encouraged to adapt to the dominant constructions (Paechter, 2006). Striving for high grades and placing greater value on education are thus factors that are more strongly related to girls than to boys. These different dominant perceptions of what constitutes feminine and masculine behaviours can thus have a great impact on young people's different life outcomes. It has been well established, for example, that gender is an important factor relating to different life outcomes such as wages (Magnusson, 2010), positions on the labour market (e.g. Charles and Grusky, 2004; Bihagen, Neramo and Stern, 2014), civic engagement (Hooghe, 2004) and life expectancy (Raleigh and Kiri, 1997).

Gender can thus serve as a basis for social inequality, and when it comes to health and well-being there are clear differences, such that girls fare worse than boys do (e.g., Haugland et al., 2001; Sweeting and West, 2003; Statistics Sweden 2007). During recent decades, girls' subjective well-being has been shown to be decreasing and girls report lower levels of subjective well-being compared to boys (Gillander Gådin and Hammarström 2003; Sweeting and West, 2003; Statistics Sweden, 2007). The fact that girls report higher levels of psychological distress has been related to an increase in stress over educational expectations (West and Sweeting, 2003). This explanation for the differences in demands and expectations between girls and boys needs to be understood from a gender perspective. This is especially important because health and well-being are important resources throughout life, and gendered differences in health seem to persist throughout adult life and into old age (cf. Halleröd and Seldén, 2013). However, besides different gendered ideals, young people's subjective well-being can also be related to other expectations and demands, some of which may be class dependent. In Study 2, it is argued that differences in subjective well-being are gendered, but that boys and girls also have to adapt

to different sets of expectations and demands based on different class origins, which in turn may be related to their well-being. In this particular study, two outcomes in young people's lives are in focus: school grades and subjective well-being. Both of these outcomes may turn out to be important resources in young people's lives and influence their opportunities in terms of social mobility.

Social mobility

Social mobility refers to individuals' or families' transitions from one class to another (Breen and Rottman, 1995). Accordingly, research on social mobility looks at how and why changes in class positions occur. During recent decades, social mobility has been the topic of extensive research (for a review on trends in social mobility research, see Breen and Jonsson, 2005). The focus of this dissertation is on young people, thus owing to the age and stage of life of the respondents any actual social mobility is not possible to determine. Yet by focusing on how young people, given their different conditions and practices, create and acquire resources of importance to different life outcomes, we can begin to understand the mechanisms underlying social mobility. Furthermore, when it comes to young people's social mobility, educational opportunities are of particular importance.

During the past decades, a great educational expansion has occurred in the Western world that has stimulated social mobility (Breen, 2010), and Sweden has experienced an increase in social fluidity (Breen and Jonsson, 2007) and a decrease in social selection in education during the second part of the 20th century (Erikson and Jonsson, 1993). The extent of the outcomes of this educational expansion, however, has been a subject of discussion. Especially within a British context, scholars have challenged the view that greater access to higher education has progressed un-problematically. Instead, qualitative studies have shown that experiences of higher education are different among young people of different social origins and that inequalities are reproduced within the institutions of higher education (Reay, 1998; Reay et al., 2001). It should also be emphasized that higher education may not be the best alternative in life for all people, or the only route to a good life. I would not argue against these claims, but in line with Goldthorpe (2007), I will argue that educational attainment may be one of the most crucial factors in young people's ability to achieve upward mobility. Furthermore, as is found in Study 1, education can

contribute to equalizing structural differences in capabilities that are central to social participation. Thus, it is reasonable to claim that education is an important resource and, consequently, that inequality in education is a main source of disparity.

Inequality in education

Primary and secondary effects

As illustrated in previous sections, inequality in education is a well-researched area, and the social origin of children is often in focus. A common distinction in this field of research is that between primary and secondary effects (Boudon, 1974). Primary effects refers to a process in which children from an advantaged social background are more likely to perform better in school and receive higher grades, while the fact that these children, given their grades, also tend to pursue more ambitious educational routes and stay longer in education is referred to as a secondary effect. Although these two processes were recognized early on by Boalt (1947) and Hännqvist (1958), it was Boudon (1974) who popularized the distinction between primary and secondary effects (Rudolphi, 2011). One explanation of primary effects sometimes referred to is that differences in educational achievement are dependent on genetic factors. However, only a small degree of the association between social origin and ability can be considered to depend on genetic factors (Erikson and Jonsson, 1993). This assumption is, furthermore, supported by Bukodi et al. (2014), who have shown that cognitive ability only moderately reduced the association between social origin and educational attainment. Primary and secondary effects must then largely depend on non-genetic factors and differences in cognitive abilities between children of different social origins.

The empirical studies in the present thesis all relate, in different ways, to inequality in education, and Study 3 and 4 in particular explore the mechanisms of primary and secondary effects. In both of these studies, it is emphasized that if we wish to learn more about the mechanisms of primary and secondary effects, we need to take into account the practices of young people of different social origins. Study 3 focuses on primary effects by exploring whether, and to what degree, young people's activities serve as important links between class origin and school grades in upper secondary school. This focus enables a better understanding of what it is that connects young people's school grades and their class origin. Study 4 makes use of and extends these findings by exploring the mechanisms that make some young people more likely to continue to higher

education, i.e. secondary effects. This study investigates the importance of young people's school grades and activities during upper secondary school for entrance to higher education, and whether these factors have different meanings for young people of different class origins. Besides shedding some light on the mechanisms underlying inequality in education, these studies also generate knowledge on key factors for young people's acquisition of the kinds of resources that education may create.

Two main theoretical approaches

In sociological explanations of inequality of education, there are primarily two sets of theoretical points of departure: cultural reproduction theory based on the theoretical contributions of Bourdieu and rational action approaches foremost represented in the works of Breen and Goldthorpe (1997). The focus and contributions of rational action approaches and cultural reproduction theories differ. But as discussed in Study 4 and also pointed out by van de Werfhorst, Sullivan and Cheung (2003), these two approaches should not only be regarded as opposing, but as both offering important insights into how different conditions in young people's lives can be related to different opportunities in life. Below, these two approaches will first be briefly presented. This will be followed by a discussion on how they both can be of importance to understanding the mechanisms that underlie educational inequality.

Cultural reproduction explanations

Cultural reproduction theory stresses that different kinds of capital, such as economic, social and cultural capital, are transferred over generations and unequally distributed among the various social classes (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990 [1977]). Cultural capital is regarded as one of the most important resources for success in the educational system. It refers to having familiarity with the dominant culture in society, which also entails an ability to understand and use the language of the "educated" (Sullivan, 2001). It has been put forward as one of the main mechanisms of educational inequality (Reay, 2010). According to Bourdieu (1984), cultural capital is something that forms an individual's life chances and maintains the hierarchical order between the social classes (Yaish and Katz-Gerro, 2012). Children of an advantaged class origin are, according to Bourdieu (1977), more likely to be inculcated with cultural capital, which increases these children's chance of succeeding in school. Well-educated parents are believed to transfer linguistic and cultural competence by involving their children in and introducing them to different sort of cultural

activities. The competences and skills learned through these different kinds of activities are then important to school success. For example, a child who is being read to or a young person who reads books on her own can develop an understanding of language and linguistic competencies (Sullivan, 2001). Furthermore, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990 [1977]) argue that young people who possess cultural capital are not only rewarded in school. According to Bourdieu (1977), familiarity with the dominant culture influences young people's values, predispositions and motivations (i.e. *habitus*), and this, in turn, is rewarded in school because the educational system corresponds to the dominant culture. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990 [1977]) stress that young people from an advantaged class origin, through their inculcation into greater cultural capital, have norms and values that are in keeping with the dominant culture. They therefore value education in a different way than do young people of a less advantaged class origin, who have less cultural capital.

The notion of cultural capital has been subjected to extensive scientific inquiry, and it has been established that various indicators of cultural capital can be related to differences in school performance (see, e.g., Dumais, 2002; Tramone and Willms, 2010; Andersen, Hansen, 2012), educational attainment (De Graaf, De Graaf and Kraaykamp, 2000; Sullivan, 2001; Kaufman and Gabler, 2004) and health-related behaviours (Missine et al., 2014). For example, Lareau (2011) discusses her insights into how class inequalities are reproduced in contemporary American society. In her studies, she shows that middle-class parents engage in what she calls 'concerted cultivation', meaning that these parents make certain that their children engage in activities and gain experiences that give rise to a sense of entitlement. Children with advantaged class backgrounds spend more time in organized leisure activities than do their peers with less advantaged class origins, who in turn have greater freedom in how they use their leisure time (Lareau, 2011). Children of advantaged origins generally have more books and visit museums more often than do children of poorer origins (Mayer, 1997). Previous research has thus emphasized how children with different class backgrounds, during their upbringing, are exposed to different kinds of experiences and encouragement, which may be related to different educational outcomes. I follow this tradition by focusing on the practices of young people of different class origins and how these practices may influence their opportunities in life. Cultural reproduction theory focuses on the existence of different norms, resources and values within families and is, thus, a valuable tool in understanding the mechanisms at work between young people's class origin, practices and life outcomes.

Rational action explanations

Rational action explanations of educational inequality emphasize how young people make rational calculations based on the different costs and benefits of educational choices given their different class origins (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997). For instance, for young people with a less advantaged class background previous school performance is more important to their educational transitions than it is for their peers with a more advantaged background. Thus, compared to young people of advantaged class origins, those of blue-collar origin tend to need higher grades if they are to advance to the next level of education (Study 4 and, e.g., Erikson and Jonsson, 1996; Jackson et al., 2007). From a rational action perspective, the theoretical explanation for this phenomenon is that in order for young people with less advantaged class backgrounds to regard, for example, higher education as a viable option, they need greater assurance of success (Goldthorpe, 2007). Different educational outcomes can, thus, become a resource that influences the decision calculus regarding making educational transitions by altering the perceived costs and benefits of a particular choice.

Rational action explanations have been given a great deal of attention in sociology and have been subjected to empirical investigation, which broadly supports the claims made by Breen and Goldthorpe (1997) (see, e.g., Davies et al., 2002; Need and de Jong, 2001; Becker, 2003; Holm and Jaeger, 2008). The explanatory focus of this perspective is foremost on how educational choices differ depending on young people's social origins and how young people, given their different class origins and sets of resources, evaluate continued education differently. According to Breen and Goldthorpe (1997:283), the desire to avoid downward social mobility is crucial to young people who, in their educational transitions, make choices that lead to at least the same position as their parents. In that sense, the desire to avoid downward social mobility is at the centre of all educational choices. Therefore, in order to avoid downward social mobility, children with more advantaged class backgrounds are more likely to take up more ambitious educational routes than are their peers with less advantaged class backgrounds. Children of working-class origin, however, are instead more likely to pursue vocational education to secure a position on the labour market that is at least on the same level as their parents (Goldthorpe, 2007). According to Goldthorpe (2007), the cost-benefit analyses made by young people of different class origins are related to the different resources that typically exist across the social classes. Thus, the resources available for parents to support their children's endeavours vary in both amount and kind, which has led Goldthorpe to argue: "the class structure not only creates more or less favourable ground for mobility stakes, it also plays a major part in determining the

runner's handicaps" (Goldthorpe, 2007:164). For children with advantaged class backgrounds, every kind of family resource available, including economic, social and cultural resources, will be used to support their children in their educational endeavours. As such, Goldthorpe (2007) recognizes that cultural resources, too, are important educational resources and may be a factor in educational inequality. It thus seems that cultural reproduction explanations and rational action explanations have some common ground and can both be fruitful in helping us understand educational inequality.

Cultural Reproduction or Rational Action explanations

In both cultural reproduction and rational action explanations, claims are made as to why young people of advantaged class origins tend to perform better in school and receive higher grades (primary effects) and why these children also tend to stay in education longer than young people of less advantaged class origins (secondary effects). However, the explanations given in these two perspectives differ. On the one hand, the rational action approach focuses on a process of rational evaluation that is thought to differ depending on class origin (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997; Goldthorpe, 2007). On the other hand, cultural reproduction explanations focus on how inequality is reproduced through differences in cultural competencies among young people of different class origins, and that these kinds of competencies are rewarded in the educational system (Bourdieu, 1977). The question is: Which of these two explanations should be applied in an attempt to account for the mechanisms underlying educational inequality?

The argument that I wish to make is that both of these perspectives offer important insights into how young people's different conditions and practices can be related to various educational outcomes, and that they therefore should be regarded as complementary. This is especially important because it is empirically difficult to separate cultural and rational explanations for why young people of a particular class origin are more likely to receive higher grades and pursue more ambitious educational routes. For example, it is difficult to determine empirically whether an activity, such as reading, makes a person more familiar with the dominant culture (knowledge that may be rewarded in school) and more likely to place greater value on education. This account is associated with Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital and with cultural reproduction explanations. However, from a rational action perspective, an activity like reading may also be a resource that provides a young person with particular skills and pro-

motes educational confidence. If this is the case, this kind of activity may thus alter the young individual's evaluation of different educational endeavours. The most likely scenario is, however, that an activity such as reading influences young people's educational aspirations in both ways, making it empirically difficult to separate the causal explanations. As such, my argument is that young people's different class origins and practices give rise to various resources that are of importance to their life outcomes. I also argue that, with the available data, it is not possible to determine whether a particular practice has provided a young person with resources linked to cultural capital or altered their cost-benefits analysis of, for example, a particular educational route. What we can do with the available data is to empirically investigate whether, and to what degree, young people's structural conditions and practices influence their educational choices and achievements.

Summary and points of departure

Before discussing the Swedish case and the empirical data, there are a few points of departure that are worth summarizing. The present thesis seeks to explore the mechanisms underlying social inequality by focusing on young people's different conditions and practices, and trying to understand how important resources are created, distributed and related to various life outcomes. Thus, one starting point of the thesis is that in order to acquire further knowledge about young people's opportunities and constraints, it is essential to explore their living conditions as well as their practices and resources. The importance of studying young people's life circumstances can be summarized by the following points:

- During their up-bringing, and in their daily life, young people come to have different conditions and engage in various practices and these factors may be essential to the distribution, creation and acquisition of resources of importance to young people's diverse life outcomes.
- Young people are actors who possess resources of their own (Jonsson and Östberg, 2010), and the different types and amounts of resources an individual has are essential to enhancing his/her opportunities for action (Fritzell and Lundberg, 2007).

- Young people are the main informants on their own life, and to obtain valid information it is important to use information provided by the young people themselves (Ben-Arieh, 2005).
- Young people's living conditions are of value per se, and as Jonsson and Östberg (2010) point out, young people's welfare is just as important to study as the welfare of other parts of the population.

The importance of studying young people's conditions and practices is thus being stressed here. This focus does not mean, however, that parental resources are not of significance as an explanatory factor regarding young people's opportunities and constraints. Rather young people's different circumstances are closely intertwined with the resources of their parents. In the empirical analyses, young people's practices and life outcomes will therefore be studied in relation to their class origin. With this focus, we can better understand how class operates, i.e. uncover some of the mechanisms that link class origin and young people's unequal opportunities in terms of educational outcomes, social participation and well-being. These outcomes all relate to the different areas in which social inequality can arise. Of these different areas, inequality in education is focused on in particular here. As discussed above, in sociological explanations of inequality in education, two main theoretical points of departure exist: cultural reproduction theory, based on the theoretical contributions of Bourdieu, and rational action approaches, foremost represented in the works of Breen and Goldthorpe (1997). Although the focus and contributions of these two perspectives differ, it is argued here that they both offer important insights into how young people's various conditions may be related to different opportunities in life (Werfhorst et al., 2003; Study 4).

Regarding young people's structural conditions, it is foremost their class origin that is in focus here. However, other circumstances within the family of origin may also be of importance to young people's different outcomes, though these will not be covered to any great extent by the empirical studies included in the present thesis. Among these factors are whether the parents or the young themselves have migrated (see, e.g., Stevens, 2007; Spera et al., 2009), whether they live in an urban or rural area, near or far away from different educational institutions, employment opportunities or various kinds of activities (see, e.g., Blackwell et al., 1999; Widigson, 2013), or whether or not their parents live together (Gähler and Palmtag, 2014). In that sense, the present thesis does not take into account all of the possible mechanisms that may influence young people's practices, resources and life outcomes.

The case of Sweden

In terms of social stratification, Sweden is often presented as an exceptional case in terms of its equalizing forces (see, e.g., Esping-Andersen, 2014). Among other things, Sweden has been associated with comprehensive and universal social policies and benefits (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Educational reforms in particular have been on the political agenda. Such reforms are intended to reduce social inequalities in educational attainment (Erikson and Jonsson, 1996). Empirical studies have verified a decline in inequality of educational attainment and an increase in social fluidity (Erikson and Jonsson, 1993; 1996; Gustafsson, Andersson and Hansen, 2000; Breen and Jonsson, 2007).

The political goal of “the social democratic welfare state” to remove social barriers to education has been enforced through three main measures: establishment of a comprehensive educational system and abolishment of tracking and financial barriers (Esping-Andersen, 2014). During recent decades, these three measures have to a great extent had real effects given that the Swedish educational system is free of charge at all educational levels and that tracking does not take place until students are about 16 years old, when the first educational transition occurs (Rudolphi, 2013). Up until upper secondary school, school attendance is mandatory. At this point, students can decide whether they wish to continue, which about 90 per cent of all students choose to do (Skolverket, 2014). If they do enter upper secondary school, they must also choose which educational programme to follow. There are many educational programmes of various kinds, but broadly speaking, all of the programmes fall into two main tracks: academic or vocational. Academic programmes are intended to prepare students for higher education, while vocational programmes to a higher extent train students for the labour market. Until 2011, all educational programmes offered basic qualifications for tertiary studies, but not thereafter.

As we can see, Sweden has long had a goal of reducing inequality in education. However, over past twenty years, the Swedish educational system has experienced a great transformation. In the early 1990s, the goal of offering children and parents school choice was introduced (a so-called school voucher system), which included the ability to choose private independent schools, local municipal schools, or schools in other municipalities. Furthermore, the educational

system changed from being characterized by centralization, to a more decentralized system in which the local municipalities came to assume the main responsibilities (Björklund et al., 2005). Since the beginning of the 1990s, an increased segregation owing to social background has been observed in Swedish schools (Gustafsson, 2006). Differences in performance related to schools attended have also increased, largely due to greater differences in the socioeconomic composition of students (Böhlmark and Holmlund, 2011). This is also true for younger children (Yang Hansen, Rosén and Gustafsson, 2011), and as such there are signs showing that educational inequality has increased over time in Sweden.

Another characteristic feature of Sweden of importance to young people's various opportunities and constraints is that Sweden has been among the top countries in the world as regards class mobilization. Sweden stands out in terms of high levels of mobilization in various political parties, trade unions, agricultural, religious organizations and so forth (Goul Andersen et al., 2001). These different popular mass movements have been characterized by a high degree of membership and participation and have constituted a foundation for democratic and organizational training (Grassman and Svedberg, 1996; Lundström and Wijkström, 1997). Traditionally, education was primarily reserved for the advantaged classes, but it was the labour movement in particular that came to embrace education as an emancipatory project and as a means to achieve a more democratic society (Burman, 2014).

As a consequence of the high degree of class mobilization and association membership in Sweden (Grassman and Svedberg, 1996; Lundström and Wijkström, 1997; Goul Andersen et al., 2001), it is possible that some young people from less advantaged class positions have parents who are actively engaged in civil society movements and organizations and have thereby acquired specific resources. Thus, some parents may not engage in the practices of their class position, but rather in practices that are common within the more advantaged classes, such as various cultural activities. If this is the case, then the practices of parents will most likely be transmitted to their children, and this, in turn, may influence these young people's creation and acquisition of resources of importance to various life outcomes. It is therefore vital that we take into account not only young people's class origin, but also what these young people actually do, i.e., their various practices.

Data and Methods

In line with the discussion so far, it would seem reasonable to conclude that inclusion of young people's own accounts of their conditions and practices is important if we are to acquire a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of young people's resources. Until recently, however, there are few empirical studies on young people's living conditions that are based on accounts provided by the subjects themselves and that make use of sample data that allow for statistical generalizations (Låftman, 2009). Jonsson and Östberg (2010) point out that much of the research on young people has been conducted on small and non-representative samples. Furthermore, when young people are studied it is common for only one aspect of their lives, such as their health or educational attainment, to be in focus (Jonsson and Östberg, 2010). Thus, comprehensive, generalizable research on young people's living conditions has long been lacking. However, in 2000 a survey targeting children's and young people's living conditions was introduced in Sweden (Child-LNU, and Child-ULF).

The history of Child-ULF began in 2000, when The Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI) launched Child-LNU – a comprehensive survey of living conditions among children and youth. This survey provided good data and was continued in the context of a collaboration between SOFI and Statistics Sweden and incorporated into Statistics Sweden's Survey of Living Conditions (ULF) (Jonsson and Östberg, 2010). Therefore, from 2001 onwards the survey of living conditions among children and youth has been called Child-ULF. The 2001 Child-ULF survey was the same version as that used in the 2000 Child-LNU. However, the survey of 2002-2006 was further elaborated and a few alterations were made. These surveys have yielded comprehensive data on young people's living conditions (see Jonsson et al., 2001) and have grown to come a basis for research (see, e.g., Låftman, 2009; Lagerlöf, 2012).

The present thesis includes four empirical studies that make use not only of these comprehensive surveys based on a representative sample of young people in Sweden, but that also combine survey data including information from the young respondents' parents with registry data. Study 1 uses data from the Survey of Living Conditions (ULF) collected by Statistics Sweden. The remaining studies (2-4) make use of a several data sources, but are mainly focused on ULF and the annual child supplement of the Survey of Living Conditions (Child-ULF) conducted between 2001 and 2005. Child-ULF is an extension of

ULF. ULF is based on a representative sample of the adult population in Sweden, and each year 6000–7000 respondents are interviewed, the response rate being approximately 75 per cent. The children included in Child-ULF are between 10-18 years of age and selected because one of their parents in the household participated in ULF. Approximately 1100 households (i.e., comprising parent/s and child/ren) are interviewed each year. The parents were personally interviewed in their homes and the children were interviewed at the same time. Pre-recorded questions played on an audio-recorder were used to interview the children, who marked their answers on a pre-printed questionnaire.

In Child-ULF, the respondents are asked about their living conditions, including among other things: their well-being, education, economy, leisure activities, how often they spend time with friends and their relationship to parents, teachers and other adults. This survey thus offers extensive information on young people's conditions and practices in Sweden. From the data, the present empirical studies have made use of information related to young people's subjective well-being and the different kinds of activities young people engage in during their leisure time. One limitation of the data is that most information concerned the frequency of a given activity and not more qualitative questions. Hence, the data contain information on whether the respondents read books or are engaged in sport activities, but not on what kinds of books they read, or what kinds of sports they engage in. There are, furthermore, other practices that would have been interesting to explore in relation to young people's life outcomes. One area of interest is social relations and especially the influence of friends (see, e.g., Olsson, 2011, on Social Relations in Youth). Unfortunately, only information on how often young people spent time with friends was available, and therefore this variable has been omitted from the analyses.

In addition to ULF and Child-ULF, the data in Study 2-4 have been complemented with registry data comprising grades and entry to higher education. These data were collected from national registries, comprising all registered grades in secondary and upper secondary school, and entry to higher education up to 2009. This combination of data is rather unique, and the studies have made use of both reliable and extensive information. Moreover, the data as a whole allow a longitudinal focus, as the survey data were collected between

2001 and 2005 and the registry data contain information up to 2009. Thus, thanks to these data, it is possible to connect, for example, a respondent's survey responses at 16 years of age to information on his/her entry to higher education a few years later.

The studies have used different statistical measures, e.g. explorative and confirmative factor analysis, to capture underlying conditions that are difficult to measure directly. In this way, the number of analyses can be minimized, the validity increased because the information is summarized, and the effect of the way items are worded reduced (Black, 1999). Different regression techniques – ordinary least square regression, logistic regression, and structural equation modelling – have been used in the present studies.

Young people's class origin

One of the main stratification factors investigated here is class. Because the respondents have not yet entered the labour market on a full-time basis, basing any analysis on their own class position would be problematic. Instead, because young people are closely tied to their parents' resources, the focus here is on their class origin, i.e. the social class of their parents. Parental social class is indicated using the Swedish standard SEI classification (socio-ekonomisk indelning) (Statistics Sweden, 1982), which resembles the internationally used EGP schema (Eriksson and Goldthorpe, 1992). According to the defining characteristics of the EGP schema, a basic distinction is first made between employers, employees and the self-employed. Employees are furthermore differentiated based on their relationship with their employer, and the schema differentiates between those who have a 'labour contract' (typically manual and non-manual workers) and those with a 'service relationship' (Goldthorpe, 2007). This distinction highlights the different levels of qualification and supervision that characterize different types of employment contracts. Different employment relations are, thus, the foundation of social class (Goldthorpe, 2007), because people who are in similar positions on the labour market are assumed to have similar living conditions and life chances, as compared to people who are situated in other positions. Thus, in the present studies, the parents' position on the labour market is taken to indicate their social class, to which their children also belong. If there are two adults (parents or parents' partner), the most dominant position in the family is the position assigned to

the young person (Erikson, 1984). This assignment is in accordance with Statistics Sweden's (1982) classification, which uses the "higher" class. The exception is farmers and the self-employed, which dominate all classes except upper white-collar professions.

Summary of the four studies

Study 1

Nordlander, E., Strandh, M., & Brännlund, A. (2013). What does class origin and education mean for the capabilities of agency and voice? *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 36 (2): 1-22.

Authors: Erica Nordlander, Mattias Strandh and Annica Brännlund. EN and AB conceived the paper topic and the study design. EN performed the data analyses and drafted the manuscript. EN, AB and MS revised the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

This study investigates the relationship between class origin, educational attainment, and two capabilities: agency and voice. The objective is to explore how class origin and education interact in shaping young people's chances in life, and to consider whether higher education reduces or reinforces any structural inequalities in the social aspects of life. We argue that agency and voice are two central capabilities for the individual's ability to be integrated in a social order and act as a full citizen in a democratic society.

Four main research questions are addressed: 1) Are there differences in the capabilities agency and voice between young adults of different class origins? 2) Does educational attainment affect the capabilities agency and voice? 3) Can possible differences in these capabilities between young people of different class origins be related to differences in educational attainment? 4) Are there any differences between young people of different class origins in the importance of educational attainment in realizing the capabilities agency and voice?

The investigation of agency and voice is empirically driven, and hence these capabilities are considered using two indicators: the ability to appeal against a decision made by authorities (agency) and the ability to articulate one's opin-

ions, views, and thoughts (voice). The analyses are based on data from Statistics Sweden's annual Swedish Survey of Living Conditions. The selection was based on all respondents who were teenagers and in secondary education at the time of the first interview (16–19 years of age) and who had participated in one of the surveys during the period 1988–1995 and were subsequently re-interviewed in the next wave eight years later, 1996–2003. These data thus allow for a longitudinal approach and investigation of the dependent variables of agency and voice at two points in time.

The empirical analyses demonstrate that class origins do indeed matter for the capabilities of agency and voice. A clear class gradient was displayed and young people of blue-collar origin did fall short on these capabilities as compared to young people with other class backgrounds. Educational attainment, particularly a university education, proved to be important to the capabilities agency and voice. When education was taken into account, the effect of class origin was removed, suggesting that educational attainment and class origin interact in facilitating these capabilities. The analyses of both agency and voice show that university-level education matters more for young people with a blue-collar background and less for those with an upper white-collar background. The results indicate that higher education has an equalizing effect and is crucial in promoting equal participation in society.

Study 2

Nordlander, E., & Stensöta, H. O. (2014). Grades—for Better or Worse? The Interplay of School Performance and Subjective Well-Being Among Boys and Girls. *Child Indicators Research*, 7(4), 861-879.

Authors: Erica Nordlander (EN) and Helena Olofsdotter Stensöta (HOS). The idea of the paper was initiated by HOS. HOS and EN conceived the paper topic and the study design. EN performed the data analyses. EN and HOS drafted the manuscript, for which EN was responsible for two thirds and HOS for one third. EN and HOS revised and approved the manuscript.

In Study 2, adolescents' subjective well-being is in focus and investigated in relation to school performance, gender and class origin. As regards young people's subjective well-being, there are clear gender differences, such that girls report lower levels of well-being than boys do (Haugland et al., 2001; Sweeting et al., 2003; Statistics Sweden, 2007). In this study, it is argued that subjective well-being is related to different gender discourses, where girls in particular are subjected to high demands and expectations regarding school performance. It is proposed that school achievement, as indicated by grades, influences subjective well-being in a gendered and class-dependent way.

Four hypotheses are specified: H1) Subjective well-being will be positively associated with higher school grades. H2) The relationship between subjective well-being and academic achievement will be gendered, such that grades will be of greater importance to girls. H3) Because aspirations and demands may vary with different class origins, we hypothesize that the relationships between well-being will be associated with class origin, such that especially girls from higher strata will be less inclined to feel better about higher grades, because the pressure they put on themselves to perform well academically, or the pressure put on them by the people around them, is higher. H4) The positive effect of grades may be negated for certain groups, thus an interaction effect between grades and class origin is expected.

The data used were collected from a variety of sources. The great advantage of the resulting dataset is that information about the children's health and well-

being comes from the children themselves (Child-ULF), while information about class origin derives from the parents (ULF) and data on grades are collected from a national registry (School Board of Education). Subjective well-being is indicated using two indexes: “general subjective well-being” and “lack of psychosomatic symptoms”. The former index refers to positive well-being and confidence and the latter relates to negative well-being in terms of psychosomatic symptoms.

Taken together, our analysis of the two indexes of subjective well-being reveal a positive association between school grades and well-being, and the empirical results confirmed previous research on gender differences in subjective well-being among young people, such that girls have lower subjective well-being than boys do. The results also reveal a positive association between school grades and “general subjective well-being” – for both boys and girls. The results on “lack of psychosomatic symptoms” show no association with grades for boys, while for girls this association is related to class origin. Regarding general subjective well-being and the association between school achievements and well-being, we find that it is boys of upper-white-collar origin and girls of lower-white-collar origin who are most vulnerable. The findings emphasize the importance of taking gender into account when studying the association between subjective well-being and class origin among young people.

Study 3

Nordlander, E (2015) Are Young People's Activities an Important Link between Class Origin and Educational Attainment? *European Sociological Review* . doi: 10.1093/esr/jcv087

Study 3 explores whether, and to what degree, young people's activities are important links between class origin and school grades in upper secondary school in Sweden. It is suggested that, in order to learn more about the relationship between educational opportunity and class origin, we need to delve deeper into the lives of those concerned by, for example, examining the activities of the young people themselves. The study highlights activities, hypothesizing that they are influenced by class origin and that they entail opportunities or limitations that are associated with young people's school grades. As such, young people's activities are regarded as mediating some of the effect of class origin on school grades.

Young people's various activities are investigated. These include: cultural activities, civic engagement, sports, television viewing and homework. It is argued that these kinds of activities are related to class origin and that these different activities can be resources of importance in relation to school grades. Some activities may entail cognitive resources because different types of activities can serve as learning contexts, in which young people learn new things, acquire skills and come into contact with different ways of thinking. Activities can serve as a social resource, in that they may be associated with the possibility of joining social networks, thus constituting a social resource of importance to school grades.

The analyses are based on the annual child supplement of the Survey of Living Conditions (Child-ULF) conducted in 2002–2005, combined with the Survey of Living Conditions (ULF) and registry data from the Swedish National Agency for Education. The activities investigated are indicated by responses to survey questions, while the dependent variable – school grades in upper secondary school – is indicated by data from a national registry. The empirical analysis is based on structural equation modelling (SEM) and is conducted in

two steps: estimation of a measurement model and a structural equation model.

The results indicate that inequality in educational outcomes is partly reproduced by the practices of young people of different class origins. All of the investigated activities prove to be associated with school grades, but is foremost cultural activities that stand out as being both strongly associated with young people of upper-white-collar origin and school grades, indicating that cultural activities mediate parts of the effect of class origin on school grades. However, although civic engagement was associated with young people of middle- and upper-white-collar origin, these kinds of activities were negatively associated with school grades. This finding is rather puzzling and calls for further research. As for sports, no clear class gradient was found. Sports also display the weakest relation to school grades. Television viewing, however, was found to be related to class origin and negatively associated with school grades. This indicates that an inactive or passive leisure time has negative implications for school grades. The final activity investigated was homework; this activity was not found to mediate any effect of class origin on school grades. The analysis also reveals that class origin continues to have a significant bearing on school grades even when various activities have been taken into account.

Study 4

Nordlander, E. The importance of young people's activities and class origin for entering higher education (*Manuscript submitted to British Journal of Sociology of Education*)

The final study builds on Study 3 and focuses on the importance of young people's activities for entering higher education in Sweden. The aim of this study is to explore the significance of class origin, school grades and young people's activities during upper secondary school for entering higher education. It is well established that an important predictor of any educational transition is previous school performance. Yet previous school performance is even more important for educational transitions among young people with less advantaged class backgrounds, who tend to need higher school grades than their peers of more advantaged class origin if they are to advance to the next level of education (e.g., Erikson and Jonsson, 1996; Jackson et al., 2007).

Besides previous school performance, other factors in young people's lives can also contribute to making higher education a more viable option. Based on the findings from Study 3, it is likely that various kinds of activities during adolescence also can be related to unequal entrance to higher education. The activities investigated in this study are: cultural activities, civic engagement and participation in organized sports. The empirical analysis aims at clarifying the importance of these activities for young people's entrance to higher education. Furthermore, the analysis aims to investigate whether the importance of these activities varies between young people with resource-rich as opposed to less resource-rich class origins, i.e. blue-collar versus upper-white-collar backgrounds.

The analyses are based on the annual child supplement of the Survey of Living Conditions (Child-ULF) conducted in 2002-2005, combined with the Survey of Living Conditions (ULF) and registry data from the Swedish National Agency for Education (school grades) and the Higher Education Registry (entry to higher education). The dataset has been elaborated by selecting all respondents who were of age to apply to higher education in 2009 (when the information

on entry to higher education was collected) and those who were in upper secondary school at the time of the interview and received final grades.

The notion that previous school performance, i.e. grades, is especially important to educational transitions among young people with less resource-rich class origins was supported in this study. Out of the investigated activities, the empirical analysis reveals that it is foremost cultural activities, reading and following the news on a regular basis that are positively associated with entry to higher education. These associations were clear among young people of blue-collar origin, but not so clear among young people of upper-white-collar origin. Furthermore, cultural activities such as visiting libraries and museums as well as going to the theatre were not clearly associated with higher education among young people with upper-white-collar background, but only among young people of blue-collar origin. The results indicate that reading, following the news and engaging in cultural activities are of importance to the transition into higher education, particularly for young people with less advantaged class origins. The results demonstrate the importance of studying young people's own conditions if we are to better understand what constraints and opportunities influence young people's transitions into higher education.

Concluding discussion

The aim of the present thesis is to explore the mechanisms underlying social inequality by focusing on young people's different conditions and practices, and learning how these factors give rise to a process of creation, distribution and acquisition of resources of importance to various outcomes in young people's lives. The outcomes studied are primarily related to education, social participation and well-being. Based on the results of the four studies in the present thesis, it can be concluded that young people's structural conditions, such as their class origins, have great bearing on these different outcomes. The findings thus support the results found in previous research (e.g. Devine, 2004; Goldthorpe, 2007; Lareau, 2011). What the thesis adds to this area of research is a focus on young people's practices and, given this emphasis, increased knowledge on how social inequality is reproduced and counteracted. The present results show that young people's practices are not only related to class origin, but also crucial to the acquisition and creation of resources of importance for young people's educational outcomes, social participation and well-being. Thus, some of the mechanisms of social inequality originate from how young people, owing to their different class backgrounds, come to engage in different practices and, given these factors, possess different resources and experience different life outcomes. These factors lead to the reproduction of an unequal distribution of opportunities. However, a number of the practices studied were also of particular importance to some young people with less resource-rich class origins (compared with most young people of their class origin), who were found to counteract social reproduction by engaging in practices that support the acquisition and creation of resources of importance to facing other life outcomes. Below I will further discuss and exemplify these results in relation to each study.

In the present thesis education is especially focused. It should also be emphasized, however, that earning certain educational credentials may not be the primary goal in life for all young people. Nevertheless, the emphasis on educational inequality is important because educational opportunities are unequally distributed (e.g., Jackson, 2013; Bukodi et al., 2014), and previous research has clearly shown that educational attainment is of particular importance in determining life outcomes. It has been shown, for example, that education is related to labour market chances (Åberg, 2003), wages (Strandh, 1999; Danizinger and Ratner, 2010) and health (Ross and Wu, 1995; Michalos, 2008). Yet education

is not only important in relation to these outcomes, but also other aspects of life. For instance, it has been shown that education is associated with ideological orientation (Bengtsson et al., 2013).

The notion that education can influence the social aspects of life is emphasized in Study 1. In this study, young people's social participation is in focus, and the relationship between class origin, the capabilities agency and voice and higher education is investigated. For young people of a less advantaged class origin, higher education is crucial to acquiring the capabilities agency and voice, but it is less crucial for young people with advantaged class backgrounds. These results thus indicate that studying at a higher educational level is a practice that can generate resources among young people of a less advantaged class origin, i.e., it can increase their agency and voice and, by extension, their social participation. Thus, to increase the possibility for young people with less resourceful class backgrounds to acquire these important resources, equal educational opportunities are crucial.

One clear effect of inequality in education is that children of advantaged class origin are more likely to perform better in school and to receive higher grades, i.e. primary effects (Boudon, 1974). In Study 2, this mechanism is further explored by looking at what different class- and gender-based expectations regarding school grades may mean for young people's subjective well-being. In this regard, striving for good grades in school is regarded as a practice that is influenced by structural conditions such as class origin and gender. Broadly speaking, the results of this study indicate that young girls' psychosomatic symptoms are related to their school grades and are also class dependent. It was especially girls with advantaged class backgrounds who seemed to be most vulnerable to symptoms such as stomach aches and other stress-related symptoms. These results thus suggest that striving for good grades can be a resource-generating practice, but that it may not be positive in all respects. Some groups of young people may be especially vulnerable and may feel pressured to live up to certain expectations regarding acquiring this kind of resource. This finding seems to have some value, as previous research has indicated that girls, to a greater extent than boys, seem to act on their own and others' expectations that they should achieve good school results (Landstedt, et al., 2009). However, the empirical results of Study 2 also suggests that, for some girls, this aspiration to get good grades, when it is fulfilled, may have a positive impact on their subjective well-being. This result was seen among girls of lower-white-

collar origin. One possible explanation for why these results are found among these girls is that they feel they are about to acquire a resource that will increase their chances of experiencing upward social mobility.

The mechanism of primary effects is further investigated in Study 3, which focuses on the question of what it is about social class that produces this relationship. This is explored by investigating whether young people's practices constitute a link between class origin and school grades. In this study, young people's practices are explored in terms of their different leisure activities. Cultural activities, such as reading and visiting cultural institutions, stand out as being both more common among young people with advantaged class background and an important practice in relation to school grades. This indicates that class origins are related to young people's practices, and that these in turn can be important resources in terms of school grades. This is in line with Bourdieu's (1977) notion of cultural reproduction and is supported by previous research on cultural capital (see, e.g., Lareau, 1987; de Graaf et al., 2000; Sullivan, 2001; Tramonte and Willms, 2010). Thus, young people of advantaged class origin, to a higher extent than their less advantaged peers, come into contact with cultural artefacts and activities that may generate valuable knowledge as well as skills, which, in turn, may be useful resources in school. In that sense, are important resources for school grades unequally distributed, and foremost primarily acquired by young people with advantaged class background. The significance of this acquisition of resources for future educational endeavours is investigated in Study 4.

In Study 4, the significance of class origin, school grades and young people's activities during upper secondary school is explored in terms of entry into higher education. The outcome studied in Study 3 – school grades – is perceived here as a resource for the transition into higher education. The results of this study indicate that young people of advantaged class origin will enter higher education to a greater extent and that, in order to do so, they do not need to acquire the same amount of resources as their peers with less advantaged class backgrounds. However, for the latter group, the creation and acquisition of resources during upper secondary school are crucial to transitioning into higher education. These results can be understood from both a cultural reproduction theory and a rational action perspective. From the latter perspective, earning good grades in upper secondary school, engaging in various cultural activities and following the news can be regarded as practices that may

boost self-esteem and enhance cognitive abilities. Among young people of less advantaged class origin, these practices may thus alter the cost-benefit calculus of entering higher education, making the risks seem smaller and the benefits greater. These findings, however, also support Bourdieu's (1977) claim that cultural capital is an important resource that may be related to putting higher value on education. As discussed in the previous sections, it is likely that the practices investigated influence young people's entry into higher education in both ways.

In conclusion, this thesis has shown that it is of great value to include young people's practices in our analyses if we wish to understand the mechanisms of social inequality. It has been made clear that young people's different life outcomes are closely related to their class origin. The results also stress, however, that young people are in a process of forming and acquiring, through different practices, resources of importance to their different life outcomes. Given this conclusion, there is a potential to counteract unequal opportunities. For example, Mayer (1999) has found that parental practices and characteristics are vital to the life chances of their children. This is in line with the present findings. Young people who are encouraged and supported in their reading – for example by being read to as a child or by frequently visiting the library – who are encouraged to follow the news, or who have parents who are themselves interested in civic issues have more opportunities to engage in these activities themselves. However, young people may have unequal opportunities to take part in these important practices. The present thesis has, in line with previous research, shown that young people's different practices are closely related to their class origin. In that sense, young people's structural conditions and practices reproduce unequal opportunities. Yet it should be noted that this does not always have to be the case. The present thesis has shown that young people, through different actions, can break the pattern of social reproduction. In order to support this, and to counteract social inequality, it is therefore important to increase opportunities for young people to take part in resource-generating practices. Different societal measures, such as open access to libraries, museums, practicing different kinds of art in school, et cetera, may be ways of accomplishing this.

This concluding part can be summarized in one important point: If we are to understand the mechanisms underlying different life outcomes among young people, it is of great importance that we take into consideration young people's

different conditions and practices. Regarding directions for future research, I would therefore argue that it is vital to include young people's living conditions in our analyses if we are to obtain a more comprehensive picture of their opportunities. Furthermore, since the data for the empirical studies were collected, the changes that started in the 1990s in the Swedish educational system, such as the introduction of free school choice and a decentralized school system, have continued and become even more evident. The consequence of these changes has been an increased difference in the socioeconomic composition of students between school types (Böhlmark and Holmlund, 2011). It is therefore likely that the patterns of social stratification investigated here have become even more pronounced during recent years. For example, owing to these changes, more responsibilities have been placed on the individual, and thus the family of origin may now play an even greater role. One possible way forward is to further investigate young people's different conditions and practices and relate them to changes within the Swedish school system, such as the kinds of schools young people of different social origins attend, and what these different experiences of schooling may mean in terms of the distribution, creation and acquisition of resources of importance to future life outcomes. Furthermore, the present research has only focused on educational level and not on what type of track (academic vs. vocational) or programme is studied in upper secondary school. Regarding young people's future life outcomes, it would be of great interest to explore what is being studied at different educational levels among young people of various social origins, and how this may be related to the different distribution, creation and acquisition of resources during their up-bringing.

Svensk sammanfattning

Syftet med föreliggande avhandling är att studera unga människors olika villkor och praktiker. Avsikten med detta fokus är att beskriva och förklara hur strukturella villkor och ungas egna praktiker kan ge upphov till processer där resurser bildas, distribueras och förvärvas, samt hur dessa i sin tur kan vara av betydelse för unga människors olika utkomster i livet. Detta syfte fokuserar således på mekanismer för social ojämlikhet och hur ojämlika möjligheter reproduceras eller motverkas genom unga människors olika strukturella villkor och praktiker. Avhandlingen berör följande frågeställningar:

Ger ungas villkor och egna praktiker upphov till processer av bildning, fördelning och förvärvande av resurser? Om så är fallet, hur är dessa faktorer relaterade till reproduktionen eller motverkandet av ojämlika möjligheter i termer av utbildningsresultat, samhällsengagemang och välmående?

Genom att fokusera på ungas egna villkor och praktiker kan vi nå en närmare förståelse för unga människors olika möjligheter i livet. Vikten av att fokusera på unga kan summeras under följande punkter:

- Unga människor möter under sin uppväxt och i sitt dagliga liv olika villkor och deltar i olika praktiker och dessa faktorer kan vara av betydelse när det kommer till fördelningen, skapandet och förvärvandet av resurser som är av vikt för olika livsutkomster.
- Unga människor är aktörer med egna resurser (Jonsson and Östberg, 2010) och vilken andel eller typ av resurser som en individ har är av betydelse för dennes handlingsmöjligheter (Fritzell and Lundberg, 2007).
- Unga människor är de som har bäst kunskap om sina egna liv. För att nå en god kunskap om unga människor är det därför av stor vikt att utgå från information hämtad från ungdomarna själva.
- Unga människors villkor och situation har ett värde i sig och precis som Jonsson och Östberg (2010) framhåller så är det av lika stor vikt att studera ungas välfärd som andra delar av befolkningen.

I avhandlingen betonas vikten av att studera ungas villkor och praktiker. Denna inriktning innebär dock inte att föräldrarnas resurser är obetydliga för ungas olika möjligheter och begränsningar i livet. Snarare är det så att ungas olika omständigheter är nära sammankopplade med föräldrarnas resurser. Detta är en anledning till att studera ungas olika praktiker och utkomster i livet i relation till deras klassbakgrund. Med denna inriktning kan vi nå en större förståelse för hur social klass verkar. På detta sätt belyses de mekanismer som kopplar samman klassbakgrund och ungas ojämlika möjligheter. I denna avhandling ligger fokus på tre områden var social ojämlikhet kan uppstå: utbildning, socialt deltagande och välmående. Av dessa områden uppmärksammas framför allt utbildning och samtliga delstudier relaterar till olika aspekter av detta område.

Sammantaget består avhandlingen av en engelskspråkig introduktion samt fyra delstudier. I introduktionen presenteras först avhandlingens bakgrund, syfte och frågeställningar. Därefter följer en diskussion kring studieobjektet - unga människor och vilka som utgör denna grupp. Efterföljande delar i introduktionen fokuserar på tidigare forskning och teoretiska utgångspunkter kring unga människors resurser och social ojämlikhet. I introduktionen ges också en beskrivning av exemplet Sverige samt data och metodbeskrivning. I denna svenska sammanfattning avser jag här efter att ge en översiktlig redogörelse av avhandlingens fyra engelskspråkiga delstudier och övergripande slutsatser.

Studie 1.

I denna studie undersöks hur ungas klassbakgrund och utbildningsnivå samverkar för att forma deras möjligheter till socialt deltagande. När det gäller socialt deltagande studeras särskilt två former: Förmågan att överklaga ett myndighetsbeslut samt benägenheten att formulera åsikter, synpunkter och tankar i en diskussion kring politik. Dessa två indikatorer på socialt deltagande framhålls i studien som centrala för en individs förmåga att inordna sig i en social ordning och fungera som fullvärdiga medborgare i ett demokratiskt samhälle. Analyserna baseras på data från SCB:s årliga undersökning av levnadsförhållanden. Urvalet baseras på alla respondenter som var tonåringar och gick i gymnasieskolan vid tidpunkten för den första intervjun (16-19 år) och som deltagit i en av undersökningarna under perioden 1988 till 1995 och därefter åter intervjuats i nästa våg åtta år senare, 1996-2003.

Resultaten av denna studie visar att klassbakgrund är av betydelse för indikatorerna för socialt deltagande. En tydlig klassgradient synliggjordes och det blev tydligt att unga från en arbetarklassbakgrund gav uttryck för dessa former av socialt deltagande i mindre utsträckning än unga med annan klassbakgrund. Dock visade det sig att utbildning, och då särskilt högre utbildning, var av stor betydelse för förmågan att överklaga myndighetsbeslut och artikulera sin åsikt i politiska diskussioner. Betydelsen av högre utbildning var särskilt framträdande för unga med arbetarklassbakgrund, och inte alls lika tydlig bland unga från en högre tjänstemannabakgrund. Dessa resultat tyder alltså på att högre utbildning kan ha en utjämnande roll och kan främja ett jämlikt deltagande i samhället.

Studie 2.

Den andra studien handlar om unga människors subjektiva välmående. Detta studeras i relation till skolbetyg, kön och klassbakgrund. Ungas subjektiva välmående präglas av tydliga könsskillnader och flickor uppvisar generellt sett ett lägre välmående än pojkar (Haugland et al., 2001; Sweeting et al., 2003; Statistics Sweden, 2007). I studie 2 argumenteras det för att ungas subjektiva välmående kan relateras till både könsrelaterade och klassbaserade krav och förväntningar. För att nå en närmare förståelse för skillnaderna i subjektivt välmående hos unga människor undersöks därför relationen mellan subjektivt välmående, skolbetyg i högstadiet, kön samt klassbakgrund.

Subjektivt välmående studeras utifrån två index som berör *generellt subjektivt välmående* och *avsaknad av psykosomatiska symptom*. Det första indexet berör positivt välmående medan det andra relaterar till negativt välmående i termer av psykosomatiska symptom. Både enkät- och registerdata används för de statistiska analyserna. Enkätdata kommer ifrån SCB:s Undersökning av Levnadsförhållanden (ULF) och är insamlat både från de unga (Barn-ULF) och från föräldrarna.

Analysen visar att det finns ett positivt samband mellan skolbetyg och subjektivt välmående. Resultaten bekräftar också vad tidigare forskning kommit fram till om könsskillnader i subjektivt välmående bland unga. Resultaten visar också på ett positivt samband mellan skolbetyg och *allmänt subjektivt välmående* - både för pojkar och för flickor. Vad gäller *avsaknad av psykosomatiska symptom* synliggjordes inget samband mellan detta och betyg för pojkar, medan det för

flickor finns ett samband med skolbetyg. Det ska dock tilläggas att även klassbakgrund är relaterat till detta samband. När det gäller det *allmänna subjektiva välbefinnandet* och kopplingen mellan skolprestationer och välmående, finner vi att det är pojkar från högre tjänstemannabakgrund och flickor från en lägre tjänstemannabakgrund som är mest utsatta. I denna studie understryks också vikten av att ta hänsyn till kön när sambandet mellan subjektivt välbefinnande och klassbakgrund studeras.

Studie 3

Den tredje studien undersöker huruvida och i vilken utsträckning unga människors aktiviteter är viktiga som länkar mellan klassbakgrund och skolbetyg i gymnasieskolan i Sverige. Jag argumenterar i denna studie för att ett sätt att nå en närmare förståelse för relationen mellan ojämlikhet i utbildning och klassbakgrund är att utforska betydelsen av ungas egna aktiviteter. I denna studie undersöks en hypotes om att ungas olika aktiviteter är relaterade till deras klassbakgrund och att dessa praktiker, i sin tur, medför resurser som kan vara av betydelse för skolbetyg. De aktiviteter som undersöks är: kulturella aktiviteter, samhällsengagemang, sport, tv-tittande och läsläsning. Även denna studie baseras på enkät- och registerdata.

Resultaten av studien tyder på att ojämlikhet i utbildningsresultat delvis reproduceras genom de olika praktiker unga från olika klassbakgrund utövar. Alla de undersökta aktiviteterna uppvisar ett samband med slutbetyg på gymnasiet. Det är dock främst kulturella aktiviteter som sticker ut och som visar sig vara nära förknippade med både unga från högre tjänstemannahem och högre betyg. Detta tyder på att kulturella aktiviteter, såsom läsning, att besöka bibliotek eller muséum, är praktiker som förmedlar en del av den effekt som klass har på betyg. Tv-tittande är också en aktivitet som visar sig vara nära sammanlänkad med klassbakgrund. Denna aktivitet är vanligare bland unga med arbetarklassbakgrund och har ett negativt samband med skolbetyg. Något som tyder att en inaktiv eller passiv fritid har negativa konsekvenser för skolbetyg. Analysen visar dock även att när alla dessa aktiviteter har beaktats, så fortsätter klassbakgrund att ha en betydande inverkan på skolbetyg.

Studie 4

Den fjärde studien tar sin utgångspunkt i studie nummer 3 och fokuserar på betydelsen av ungas aktiviteter när det gäller inträde till högre utbildning. I studien undersöks sambandet mellan klassbakgrund, slutbetyg i gymnasiet och ungas aktiviteter under gymnasieåren för inträde till högre utbildning. Tidigare forskning har tydligt kunnat visa att betyg i gymnasiet är en viktig del för övergången till högre studier. Det har också visat sig att tidigare skolresultat är än mer avgörande för unga från mindre gynnade bakgrunder. Dessa unga brukar, generellt sett, behöva ha högre betyg för att påbörja högskolestudier än unga från resursstarka hem (e.g., Erikson and Jonsson, 1996; Jackson et al., 2007). En utgångspunkt för denna studie är att också andra faktorer i ungas liv vara av betydelse för en eventuell övergång till högskola eller universitet. Utifrån studie nummer 3 är det troligt att också andra aktiviteter under gymnasieåren är av betydelse. I denna studie undersöks aktiviteter såsom kulturella aktiviteter, samhällsengagemang och delaktighet i organiserade sportaktiviteter.

Även resultaten i den fjärde studien visar att tidigare skolresultat är av stor betydelse för inträdet till högre studier. Detta är särskilt tydligt bland unga från resurssvaga hem. Vidare pekar resultaten på att praktiker i form av kulturella aktiviteter, läsning och en benägenhet att följa med i nyheter, har ett positivt samband med högskoleinträde. Detta samband var särskilt tydligt bland unga från en arbetarklassbakgrund och inte alls lika framträdande bland unga från en högre tjänstemannabakgrund. Dessa resultat tyder därför på att praktiker såsom läsning, att följa nyheter och delta i kulturella aktiviteter är betydande för högskoleinträde och då särskilt för unga med resurssvag klassbakgrund. Sammantaget visar detta på vikten av att studera vad unga faktiskt gör under sin fritid för att nå en närmare förståelse för vad som kan begränsa eller öka möjligheterna till en framtida övergång till högre utbildning.

Slutsatser

I denna avhandling har jag visat på betydelsen av att inkludera ungas egna praktiker för att förstå mekanismerna för social ojämlikhet. Det har klargjorts att unga människors olika utkomster vad gäller utbildning, socialt deltagande och välmående är nära relaterade till deras klassbakgrund. Resultaten understryker emellertid också att unga människor är mitt i en process i vilken de håller på att forma och förvärva resurser som är av vikt för deras olika utfall senare i livet. I denna slutsats vilar en potential för att kunna motverka unga

människors ojämlika möjligheter i livet. Tidigare forskning har bland annat kunnat påvisa att karaktäristik och praktiker hos föräldrar är av avgörande betydelse för barnens livschanser (Mayer 1999). Detta är i linje med resultaten som presenteras i denna avhandling. Exempelvis unga vars föräldrar brukade läsa dem som barn, som ofta tog med dem till bibliotek, som uppmuntrade dem att följa med i nyhetsflödet, eller de vars föräldrar själva är intresserade av samhällsfrågor har i sin tur större möjligheter att själva delta i dessa praktiker. Det kan således finnas ojämlika möjligheter att delta i dessa viktiga praktiker. Denna avhandling har i linje med tidigare forskning visat att ungas praktiker är nära relaterade till deras klassbakgrund och att detta har betydelse för deras olika möjligheter i livet. På så sätt är ungas olika strukturella villkor och praktiker en grund för reproduktion av ojämlika möjligheter. Så är dock inte alltid fallet. Unga människor kan genom olika handlingar bryta mönstret av social reproduktion. För att stödja en sådan utveckling och för att motverka social ojämlikhet är det därför viktigt att öka möjligheterna för unga människor att delta i resursgenererande praktiker. Olika samhälleliga åtgärder såsom exempelvis god tillgång till kulturella institutioner, kulturskola, fritidsaktiviteter et cetera kan vara olika sätt att främja detta på.

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