

The Predominancy of Elite Class in College of United States of America

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Abstract. In the United States of America nowadays, when higher education become essential and irreplaceable as a way for people to achieve any kind of success, the universities and colleges which position in the heading ranks select their students relating to the family background: beside the wealth, students are concerned about the social status inheriting from their family, which brings them the advantages to use in the future success extending to the social components. How does the postsecondary education system, especially the most recognizable and reputable schools have the impact over students' social background? By analyzing the component of student bodies in the current top institution in the United States combining with relevant explanation from Max Weber's theory about social status, it is clear to see the stratification of social component has already existed in the education system of the United States, as the method for certain social groups to retain their privilege over the generals, maintain a stagnation of social groups. With what has been uncovered in this passage, the inspiration of relatively fair educational system is possible to draw in the future.

Keywords: College education, Student resource, Merit, Social status, College admission, Max Weber.

1. Introduction

It has become common sense for most Americans for a long time, even for people who live in most of the continents on earth that receiving an education from an academic institution by dedication is one legitimate possibility to promote socioeconomic status. Excluding exceptions who indulge their whole career researching in the institution, many have accepted the idea that "if I work hard to get a diploma from the college by solid performance, then I deserve to take the equivalent position in the workplace providing fair wages". However, this universally believed quote has been testified to be false over time. Above all the aftermath of the global pandemic stroked the current economic market in the United States, and educational resources for students have changed drastically: remote technology has been used more often whereas the physical classroom method depleted. According to recent research and news media, the indication from them is that the admission office from universities in the United States is likely to accept a considerable amount the students from prestigious families: Besides spending hundreds of hours in school lectures and libraries, a better social status that students inherit from their families also attributes to the success achieved by an individual: being accepted by world-famous institutions and then receiving offers from well-known firms. It seems like there is another set of rules that has been played by the groups with certain socioeconomic status to retain their position in a stratified society. Many sociologists have attributed the cause and effect of unfairness within university system in the United States to the mere economic status; there are various topics relating to SES (socioeconomic status) such as academic performances and overall health conditions especially under the interval of 2019 to 2022: the period when COVID-19 strikes the society all over the world including most forms of governmental establishment [1]. Many cases of these research topics, in the United States of America, with no exception and have been testified that the income of any social interactions received by an individual is closely linked by his/her social economic status. The idea which is from the most common background becomes so prevalent that it is rare to perceive the sociological concerns with the explanation detaching from properties and wealth, but the status of one is often judged in complexity; wealth becomes no sole measurement of

successful figure. Instead, social economic status is referred to inform a certain society that the one who held compliment is not only because of his/her money, but has to do with social economic status, the term previously mentioned. According to American Psychological Association, “socioeconomic status” is described as a combination measured of education, income, and career. Sociologists hint that sometimes the economic status and social status, which is profoundly indicated by Max Weber, are somehow interrelated; suggesting it is impossible to separate two factors of material and social status apart to explain one’s social position. On some occasions in the past, social status had been proven to be as valuable as pure wealth since the divine power from kings and aristocracy still existed, thus them and their kin had the privilege of elite education. However, since there is limited impact from the blue blood which substantially change social order, the rest of human society believes a relatively equal creed and present it to others when the evaluation of social position has been made: the mixture of wealth and social connection, and at the very beginning of them, the education. There are much research indicating the correlation between SCE and education and career preference. In this paper, the functionality of SCE in which college admission process in the United States shall be discussed; but to emphasize the importance of social status within SCE by analyzing data gathered from outside resources and recall some classical principles back to history: it is worthy to pull out the concept of social status alone from the topic of biased education system, trying to discover the aspect of social resources aside of money by using Max Weber’s 3 fundamental capstones about society: social status is considered to impact one’s material state and enhance the accessibility of privilege that is only served for certain social status. It will be meaningful to check whether there is stratification resembling Max Weber’s social status theory in one’s final terminal before stepping into society: education in Schools and Colleges.

2. Theoretical Foundation

Social status exerts a force on one’s choice and interrelationship when it intertwines with affluent characteristics behind what a person physically possesses and certain careers which grant one unique social honour to its occupier. Existing within socioeconomic status by occupation, which is long deprived from one’s education experience. In one stratified society with all possible functions done by its followers, people’s behavior and lifestyle are not only under the influence of social class, relating to social economic factors, but they are also determined by a floating social identity that takes the advantage of ancestry sorts such as reputations on educations or work, family traditions. Weber constructed whole society by 3 major components: class, social group, and political party. In a very superstitious way presume, social status, which Weber had said to be essential for one to be a component in the capitalist society, is determined even before officially entering the society: meaning the process of nurturing and educating individuals by the family has already been stained by social status factors left by his/her kins or relatives before participating any form of job and voluntary performance reflecting social characteristics.

3. Case Study

3.1. Case Description

Table 1, a set of data collected from a report from CNBC in 2019, refers to a study concentrating on the increasing rate of college admission scandals, revealing the data about the proportion of family background of students who are accepted by Ivy League Universities and others including UChicago, MIT, Stanford, and Duke University [2]. Parents. incoming stands for the economic position that family across the country; percent of students represent the groups defined by family income from the research sample (universities list above). Among relating statistics, about 14.5% student population comes from a family holding the top 1% income, and less than 4% of students are originally from the bottom 20 % income family. (CNBC) To compare these two outliers, it is clear to say the percentage of student admissions based on parent incoming is outnumbered: the majority in

United States' society becomes the minority on the campus of top universities, whereas students coming from the family with affluent resources are pervasively seen. The fact provided here seems to contradict what Americans usually believe: pursuing American Dreams, meaning to earn socioeconomic resources, reputation, by pure dedication; and a premise of the original social class does not impact one's destiny of becoming successful is also denied. Going back to the beginning, is there any accountable reason explaining the higher acceptance of elite family students is more advantageous than other students? The argument from Max Weber about social status.

Table 1. Distribution of parent income for students at colleges in the Ivy League, plus Chicago, Stanford, MIT, and Duke [3]

Parents' income (Total 100%)	Percent of Student with background of matched income (Total 100%)
>99%	14.5%
<50%	13.5%
<20%	3.8%

In addition to the information given from easily accessed media site, gaining resources from another study which is conducted to examine the effect of rurality and socioeconomic status on university option in the United States gives a rather profoundly academic point of view to dig into the topic. Table. 2 comes from a research paper focusing discover the relationship of rurality and socioeconomic status, to the college attendance in the United States [4]. The research contains other relevant factors impacting choices of college from different groups which are mainly come from rural and urban regions such as sex, gender, and races. To ensure the validity of the conclusion, the author of the original paper set rurality and socioeconomic status as two isolated, independent variables, and examine the relative risk ratio and Pseudo R square that reflect the distribution of the result of what this paper want to anchor down: targeting on the relationship of college and socioeconomic status, helping us understand the component of less and more selective institutions behind the data.

Table 2. Odds Ratios and Relative Risk Ratios of Postsecondary outcomes for the Rural Indicator (Full Sample, weighted)

Postsecondary Outcome	Rural	Pseudo R2	N
Attendance	0.846(0.066)	0.356	12020
Two-year College	1.195(0.096)	0.248	8780
Inclusive, 4-yea	0.851(0.100)	0.208	8780
Moderately Selective, 4-year	0.859+(0.078)	0.208	
Highly Selective, 4-year	0.726**(0.084)	0.208	
Baccalaureate College-General	0.966(0.144)	0.167	8780
Liberal Arts College	1.033(0.169)	0.167	
Master's Institutions	0.763**(0.073)	0.167	
Doctoral/Research University	0.694***(0.070)	0.167	

The value under Rural column represents odd ratio (relative risk ratio in the parenthesis), pseudo-R square under Pseudo R2 column, and sample accounted in the N column [4].

3.2. Case Analysis

Indicated by table 1. there is still considerable proportion of students in sample who come from neither the top nor the bottom of the society; but it is interesting to make a comparison between the sample from the 14.5% who come from that 1% locating on the top of the pyramid, with those of 3.8 % who only earn the income in the bottom 20 percent in the United States in these selective institutions: they are obviously outnumbered considering there are much more people suffering from insufficient income outside of the university. According to the data from a passage by Kimberly Amadeo, president of the economic website World Money Watch, posted on The Balance, there are 20% of the U.S population earned 52.2% of total income in the United States [5]. By combining this

useful information, we can conclude that the distribution of students in the top-ranked university is skewing to higher income.

On the other hand, Table 2, combining with the explanation by where it is coming from, claims that most of students from rural region in the United States, which has lower socioeconomic status than their urban counterpart chooses two-year colleges, and only 72.6% of rural student in the sample choose to attend those of the selective institution. The overall trend of college attendance decreases as the year of colleges increases, accompany by the selectivity of the university increases. The assumption is, if the component of lower-socioeconomic-background students is outnumbered, does the institution has the inclination, unintentionally or purposely being inserted to stratify the social status of student taking postsecondary education? Explained by Weber's theory built around social identity, the answer shall be provided.

The status situation or social status, differing from the social class which is mainly ascribed to historical materialism based on means of production, is described as aggregating community features with prestige and reputations, usually, these characteristics from a social status derived from commonly recognized social moralities and customs. An example of social status which is prevalently known in the western society in the past 300 years and nowadays is English Gentlemen, they do not consist mainly by sole class, rather the courtesy and lifestyle this community are obeyed between various classes. As Weber explained the formation of social status, the origin of "social status" is also identified as a unique sense of honor processed by a certain community that is independent of the social order enclosing all members in the society [6]. Weber points out that the vital point in this history when to decide whether social class movement or social status is taking the lead, is determined by conditional stability of wealth gaining and distribution: "the social stratification featured by status identity is threatened by any form of ongoing technological boom and economic reformation." When the society is on the verge of the Industrial revolution in 18th century Europe, the intensity of class struggle was introduced and gradually levitated to the top, and the identity of social status is disguised by urgent, violent class conflict; whereas in a stable capitalist society that social class has been fortified, it is vital to revive public honor to stagnate and classify each status community. As the attribute of English gentlemen has been mentioned in the previous part, it is the tool to isolate one group from the rest of others and to close any possible path to prevent the promotion from lower status in the stratified society. Bloodline and family were regarded as the two most efficient methods to lock the gate of the social status community; such methods are identified as merit or elite family, in nowadays' America. From a discussion of defining merits or elite class from Pidegree: How Elite Students Get Elite Jobs by Lauren A. Rivera, here is how she describes the nature of merit status in the recent United States which eagerly wants to send their children into elite universities: "(merit) it is a social construction embedded in social-level cultural beliefs about what constitutes worth in a given time and place [7]." In the following section, the internal mechanism behind the scenes of merit class children applying for top universities will be explained in depth.

Instead of becoming a single option chosen from two components, affluent families in the United States sending their children to the top institution have both social group identification and socioeconomic position leading on board. According to Weber, nevertheless, sufficient social resources such as fame and wealth is the result of group closure performed by status community: groups try to confine rewards and prestige favored by them in an enclosure to enhance their destiny; for this purpose, they select any kind of natural or social characters belonged by themselves as a qualified standard to join the social group. These characters are shown to the public with a sort of indication reflecting one social status community: social activities such as tea parties, playing golf in the country golf, and sailing suggest the individual's social position by performing them; in the elite family, children are encouraged to join varsity sports, doing voluntary social works in underdeveloped regions, or take an internship in firms like Morgan Stanley or Google. These experiences including the test preparation which will be discussed in the next section could be regarded as a helpful tool to impress college admissions, showing students outstanding personal achievements [7]. The personal effort exercised by the individual shall not be neglected, but it only can facilitate ones'

accomplishment by building off from family background and other social connections, letter of recommendation for example. In another degree, these records of extracurricular activities hint at the university admission tactfully, interpreting them as the symbol of certain social status which can bring potential reputation and donation to the institution. Besides prominent personal profiles, social connections held by students and their parents are essentially examined. The social network from the family is not only showing off the parents' social status group but it can be inherited by their offspring to seek a better opportunity, other community at the bottom has no chance to be benefited by such privilege. This gap between social status has already been decided by students' original families before they get into school.

Before students taking the action on college enrolment in the United States, they are facing a challenge to prove whether their academic skills have reached college level or not: the alleged standardization test (SAT and ACT). While the standardization test for college application is operated within a transparent open system: every high school student can take either SAT or ACT for their college application, there is a form of test preparation that enables students to get higher scores. Not surprisingly, this test service is set up targeting elite families as its main customers. In research done by Julie J. Parks and Anne H. Becks, it claims test prep for SAT and Act has become a prestige that is widely available to affluent families with solid social economic background and social status: "more elite forms of SAT prep as a relatively scarce resource that is enabled by privileged forms of capital at the individual and organizational level, such as higher levels of parental education, higher socioeconomic status, and attending a high school with greater resources... [8]" This quote has suggested that the test prep, which is affordable by most elite families is not widely available to the student who lives in a relatively lower-status community. By consuming part of their capital, merits can assist their child in getting into top-ranked universities by higher test scores, retaining their positions in their status community by providing the platform of their prestige to the next generation. Once a fair apparatus to filter the student with abilities suitable to attend college, the test prep services monopolies the test score outcome, setting up an invisible roof for students whose parents have regular backgrounds. The functionality of SAT and ACT here has been serving the elite class as an enclosure allowing the individual with certain social characteristics to enter the realm only elites can take advantage of. Weber believes the foundation of tests and diplomas serve the purpose for people with positions: the tool which prevents lower status into merits share of interest including the opportunity of gathering wealth and social recognition, instead of setting up the path for students who have "sheer desire to education" Without possessing a neutral position which ensures each student are having the same opportunity to attend prominent institution, the test itself gradually becomes a platform solely for students whose family owns respectable social position and intricate social connection to prepare for their upcoming college enrolment which reveals the social status inherited from the last generation even more absurd: being a part of extracurricular activities, discussing the detail of relevant patronship with school administration.

4. Implication

Collected data implies the rate distribution of students group components may not be wholly representative of all institutions in the United States of America especially from table 1: it does not enclosure the institution including community colleges and the university which only enrolls 2-years program for its students, useful suggestion within it showing a general trend of mutual relationship of school social classes is prevalently observed within the range of Top-ranked colleges. The overlap on socioeconomic status and college attendance in the selective institution is not a coincidence; quality education is more likely to be chosen by the family with higher SES with the premise of affluent economic support that assist the student to achieve better academic certification than the family under middle class. Students who have inherited social connection from their origin share the resources with other with similar background and like-minded to retain the advantage they brought from their family. As Max Weber said, elites turn university and test into tool in their own use. On the other hand, the

likelihood of students from rural region have been clarified by Table 2, showing that their preference of attending selective colleges is less obvious than the urban counterpart; claims that even though the pattern of college application is openly accessed, different status will be choosing very different institution according to the economic expense and reward after finishing school years [9]. This finding indicates that in the lower ranking colleges, outstanding academic performance shall be still used to achieve for a better way out for students standing on any social status, but such institution can never provide what the grand institution confers to its students in terms of social connections. In addition to the actual influences of SES on students, another research also points out that even though students who come from lower SES and have solid capability are able to be accepted by the top universities, they are likely to face mental depletion and social marginalization within the system, which does not help too much in this essay since the focus is mainly heading to social factors derived by Weber [10]. Further research is possible to combine psychological and social attributes together, thus the conclusion can be more enclosed.

5. Conclusion

Combining practical data gathered from reliable sources with theories interrupted by other sociologists, pre-existing social stratification within higher educational system in the United States has been proven to be as similar as how society operate: family connection held by merit class enables the next generation keeps their advantage upon the rest of social classes in institutions, thus the merit class retains any necessary resources needed for future usage. The able merit class family shall utilize any tactic which is still legal under the current legislature frame in the U.S to facilitate their children get into the top institution including providing outstanding profiles which may be costly economically and socially, and donation to the campus. Guarding their current prestige and resources can be the reason explaining why the merit families are so dominantly taken place in the top-ranked universities. It is not reasonable to assume that individuals from different classes have drastically huge academic gap, but the one comes from lower class is less likely to compete with his counterpart from higher status class in terms of college application, which suggests that social status are solidified and the current education system in the United States no longer soothe the need of status promotion from the lower level.

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