**Introduction to Sociology**

Chapter 10 “Resources”: Assignments with answers

**10.1 Human Capital**

**Q1.**

Sociologists are interested in the role of social capital and discrimination in understanding inequality in the labor market. Why is it, when studying the role of social capital and discrimination, important to consider the role of human capital?

Answer:

When studying the impact of social capital and discrimination, it is important to take into account the differences between individuals in their human capital. If one would ignore differences in human capital (i.e., productivity and skills –as indicated by education, work experiences, and health), then one could draw wrong conclusions about the impact of social capital and discrimination. For example, one may conclude that people’s friends are key for getting a (good) job, whereas in fact people who have influential friends may simply be high educated (and for that reason find good jobs more easily). Or one may observe that ethnic minority members are more often unemployed than ethnic majority members, infer from this finding that it is caused by discrimination, whereas in reality the difference is due to ethnic minority members being lower educated than ethnic majority members. Hence, it is important to consider human capital when studying the potential impact of social capital and discrimination.

**10.2 Social Capital**

**Q1**

Suppose a student just graduated from her education to become carpenter. According to sociologists, social resources are important for her in finding a job. But what kind of social resources help her best finding a job as a carpenter? Can you decide which of the following three type of connections in her personal network may be most helpful to her for the purpose of finding a job as carpenter: (a) lawyers and CEO’s, (b) carpenters, (c) having a highly occupational diverse network.

Answer:

Open to discussion. One could argue that connections to carpenters are most useful, because they have the most relevant job-information, and most-relevant connections. People with a similar social status are more likely to know about jobs that you are interested in than people with a higher or lower status. If you want to become a carpenter, you don’t need to be connected to a lawyer or CEO. However, you may also argue that people with a higher position have more power and influence than lower status people, and that they are more connected to other people who may help you finding jobs.

**10.3 Group affiliation and discrimination**

**Q1**

Suppose that employers systematically discriminate job candidates who have tattoos. This is because, after having been exposed to media messages and stories about criminal gangs in which people with tattoos played a prominent role, employers acquired the belief that people with tattoos are less likely to work hard at their job, and more often involved in criminal activities. Which type of discrimination is this?

Answer:

This is a case of statistical discrimination, since it is based on the beliefs employers have about one group that a person is a ‘member’ of. Beliefs about group averages (in productivity, skills, talents, crime) are used to make inferences about the quality of an individual who belongs to that group.

**Q2.**

Suppose that an employer has a lot of tattoos and prefers to hire people who have tattoos as well. Which type of discrimination is this?

Answer:

This is a case of taste-based discrimination, because the employer prefers to hire in-group members (those who have a tattoo). Beliefs about the productivity of groups do not play for the employer (which would imply statistical discrimination).

**10.4 Inequality of outcomes, opportunities and returns**

**Q1**

Family structure is part of people’s social background. Explain how differences in the labor market may emerge between on the one hand children of divorced parents, and on the other hand children whose parents are together. Use the concepts ‘inequality of opportunity’ and ‘inequality of returns’ in answering this question.

Answer:

1. Divorced parents often see a reduction of financial resources (Inequality of opportunity). Having fewer financial resources limits the career of their children (returns).
2. Having divorced parents may lead to stress and emotional problems-which can be seen as reduced human capital (opportunity). Having stress, emotional problems will then reduce labor market outcomes (returns).

**Q2**

Suppose we study a certain authoritarian society, in which the power is in the hands of a single political party (‘Party’). It appears that members of the Party have privileged positions in the labor market –higher earnings, more authority and higher status jobs. Children born in families who are Party members inherit the privileged positions of their parents.

Q2a. Can we speak of ‘inequality of outcomes’ in this case? If so, in which way?

Answer:

In this case, there is inequality of outcomes in labor market positions between children whose parents are Party members, and children born in families not affiliated to the Party.

Q2b. Can we speak of ‘inequality of opportunities’ and ‘inequality of returns’ in this case? If so, in which way? You may speculate about how the processes in this imaginary society in answering this question.

Answer:

The inequalities in outcomes are generated by the interplay between inequalities in opportunities (in getting access to resources), and inequalities of returns (in the impact of these resources on labor market outcomes). Possibly, children of Party members get access to prestigious schools and elite universities (human capital), they may have access to influential people (social resources), and employers may perceive them as being member of the Party (group affiliation and discrimination). The inequalities in the resources they have acquired may then translate into labor market inequalities. Possibly, their human capital advantage is not so important: the ‘returns’ to human capital in this authoritarian society may actually be very low. What truly matters is their superior social network and their membership of the Party: it is via these two resources that they get the best jobs.

Q2c. Suppose someone challenges the claim that in this authoritarian taste-based discrimination based on Party membership is so important. Rather, this person argues, it is human capital that causes the inequality to arise between children whose parents are Party members and children whose parents are not Party members. How would you go about testing whether children whose parents are Party members are treated favorably in the labor market?

Answer:

You might decide to use correspondence/audit-testing (see paragraph 10.5 – *discrimination*). In this kind of field experiments on discrimination, you keep skills and attributes of a fake applicant constant, only varying whether they are member of the Party or not (and supposing this is something that can be signaled in the experiment to employers). If discrimination based on Party membership plays a role, you expect to see that Party members are treated more favorably by employers –they are more often invited for job interviews, for example- even though Party members and non-Party members in the experiment are equally qualified for the job (e.g., same education, gender, age, work experience).

**10.5 Gender Inequality**

**Q1**

A key stylized finding is that, generally speaking, men have better labor market positions than women in contemporary societies. Suppose that you discuss this fact, and the underlying sociological causes, with a friend of yours. Your friend, however, disagrees with your sociological perspective, and instead favors an individual perspective. Your friend argues that these gender difference are due to biological factors instead of social conditions. Specifically, your friend claims that boys are born with more talents for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics –and that these STEM talents give them an advantage in the labor market. In order to find out what the empirics say about this, please visit the website <https://ourworldindata.org/biology-pay-gap> . Scroll to the part on “boys are better at maths.” After reading the report, answer the following questions:

Q1a. What evidence can your friend find in the article for the claim that boys are born with more talents for mathematics?

Answer:

It appears that generally speaking, boys do (slightly) better in getting very high math scores: “The chart below shows the share of male and female test-takers scoring at the highest level on the PISA test (that's level 6). As we can see, most countries lie above the diagonal line marking gender parity; so yes, achieving high scores in maths tends to be more common among boys than girls.”

Q1b. What evidence can you provide in favor of the sociological perspective on gender differences in math scores? Give two arguments.

Answer:

The report mentions that the gender gap in math scores varies strongly: (1) cross-nationally and (2) within countries over time (e.g., in the US, the gap declined strongly over time). If only biological differences would matter, then one would not expect to see such strong variations across social conditions. This supports the sociological perspective that gender differences in math scores are driven by social contextual conditions.