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Educational aspirations and attainments

HOW RESOURCES RELATE TO OUTCOMES
FOR CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS
IN DISADVANTAGED SWEDISH SCHOOLS

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UNIVERSITY

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How resources relate to outcomes
for children of immigrants
in disadvantaged Swedish schools

Olav Nygård

Department of Culture and Society
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Linköping 2020

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I study educational aspirations among children of immigrants in disadvantaged schools, the factors that influence them, and their relation to educational attainments. The dissertation is based on four research papers, each examining a specific research question using survey or registry data.

In Study I, I examine the relationships between pre-migration status, post-migration social capital, and educational aspirations for young people in disadvantaged Swedish schools. High pre-migration status was positively associated with access to social capital, and both factors contributed to higher educational aspirations. This suggests that pre-migration resources influence the accumulation of post-migration resources, highlighting not only what is lost but also what is retained in migration.

In Study II, I explore the extent to which social contexts influence students' aspirations differently under different institutional settings. Early tracking was associated with less optimism about realizing educational aspirations for students in disadvantaged schools, and peer-group attitudes were more strongly associated with educational aspirations when tracking was later. This suggests that educational institutions affect aspirations by structuring both outcomes and students' interactions.

In Study III, I and Alireza Behtoui examine the extent to which access to, and educational returns from, social capital vary between children of immigrants and children of non-immigrants. Students with an immigrant background had equal or better access to social capital, compared to children with at least one parent born in Sweden, and similar rates of returns from social capital. Social capital thus seems to be a partial but incomplete buffer against disadvantages.

In Study IV, I explore how migration background and family resources relate to differences in school-to-work trajectories among early school leavers. High pre-migration status was associated with a higher likelihood of education-oriented trajectories, but having an immigrant background was associated with slower labour market establishment. This suggests that children of immigrants are both affected by their families' pre-migration past and the discrimination of the local labour market in the present during their school-to-work transitions.

Taken together, the four studies indicate an interplay between resources lost, retained, and created in and after migration, but also suggest that these resources are often insufficient to compensate for disadvantages in the institutions of education and the labour market.

Keywords: Educational aspirations, Social capital, Children of immigrants, Early school leavers

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Stockholm, August 2020

Olav Nygård

List of Papers

This dissertation is based on studies detailed in four papers, referred to in the text by the following Roman numerals.

- I. Nygård, Olav. “Pre-migration status, social capital, and educational aspirations among children of immigrants in disadvantaged Swedish schools.” Submitted to *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*.
- II. Nygård, Olav. 2017. “Early tracking and immigrant optimism: A comparative study of educational aspirations among students in disadvantaged schools in Sweden and the Netherlands.” *Comparative Migration Studies* 5: 20. doi: 10.1186/s40878-017-0063-1.
- III. Nygård, Olav and Alireza Behtoui. 2020. “Access to social capital and educational returns for children of immigrants: Evidence from three Swedish studies.” *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 10(2): 50–66. doi: 10.33134/njmr.248.
- IV. Nygård, Olav. “Immigration background and differences in school-to-work trajectories of early school leavers.” Submitted to *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*.

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Introduction

In contemporary capitalist societies, education plays an important role in structuring life chances by legitimizing inequalities as differences in merit and credentials (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Persistent inequalities in education in general, and in early school leaving in particular, are therefore of key importance not only for the individual students, but for society at large (Ross and Leathwood 2013).

Children from families with low socio-economic status – with parents who have working-class jobs, short educations, and low levels of income and wealth – often start their educational trajectories at a disadvantage. Once in formal education, the different starting points are misrecognized as differences in academic talent. In addition, children from families with low socio-economic status also tend to have less access to extracurricular activities and tutoring, both because of availability and because of economic and other resource constraints (Weininger, Lareau, and Conley 2015).

As a result, disadvantages typically increase over time (Heath, Rothson, and Kilpi 2008). In this way, disadvantage accumulates in certain students, and in certain schools. In Sweden, these disadvantaged schools are characterized by low grade-point averages, and are often located in neighbourhoods with high levels of unemployment and family poverty on the outskirts of larger cities or in depopulating “rust-belt” towns.

Neglected at best, and stigmatized at worst, these schools are largely abandoned by the middle class, leaving instead a concentration of children from families with low socio-economic status who have little recourse of exit or voice (Hirschman 1970). Due to segregation, disadvantaged schools in Swedish cities often contain a disproportionate percentage of children of immigrants. As a result, they are often seen as synonymous with “immigrant schools” by students, school staff, and policy-makers alike (Bunar 2001; Bunar and Ambrose 2016; Voyer 2018). This dissertation investigates the aspirations and educational attainment of young people in these schools, and the factors influencing their aspirations and attainments.

Aspirations are traditionally defined as the cognitive aspect of goal-oriented behaviours, or more concretely: the act of setting a goal in relation to values and subjective probabilities for success in attaining the goal in question (Lewin 1951, p. 81). Aspirations therefore point to the person and their future actions, but also to their position within a field

of opportunities and constraints that make goals more or less attainable (Bourdieu 1977).

While aspirations relate to both values and the subjective probabilities of success, they are more than just expressions of individual hopes and desires. Instead, aspirations are also influenced by others, the norms and values they promote, and the help and resources they provide that increases or decreases the probabilities of success (Lewin 1939; Haller 1968). In this sense, aspirations are formed “in interaction and in the thick of social life” (Appadurai 2004, p. 67).

Because aspirations are influenced by social interactions and a person’s position within the field, individuals in similar class positions tend to have roughly similar levels of aspiration (Buchmann and Dalton 2002; Schoon and Parsons 2002; Baker et al. 2014; Goldthorpe 1996). As a result, research has taken a particular interest in situations where people’s aspirations differ from what could be expected from their class positions. This is also the impetus for research into the educational aspirations of children of immigrants.

Children of immigrants are a heterogeneous category. They include children from displaced families, and families fleeing war and persecution, but also children from highly skilled families migrating between opportunities across a transnational labour market. With a discourse on migration often focusing on hardships, it is easily missed that the majority of migrants are not from the lowest rungs of the social ladder (Van Hear 2014). Instead, it is commonly those with above-average access to resources who can and do migrate. This, however, does not mean that children of immigrants in general are an especially privileged category in Sweden. In fact, the case is rather the opposite.

Migration is often followed by downward social mobility, resulting in a less favourable class position (Engzell and Ichou 2020). Migration shifts the institutional context for valuation of resources, meaning that institutionalized cultural capital, such as educational credentials, are devalued (Weiss 2005). Another factor is discrimination. Field experiments from both Sweden and other countries have found ample evidence of ethnic discrimination in the screening of job applications, resulting in disadvantages for many immigrants and their children (Zschirnt and Ruedin 2016; Arai et al. 2020). Finally, the value of credentials and experiences depend partly on how rare they are (Hirsch 1978). Migrating from a country where post-compulsory education is less widespread to a country where it is more wide-spread can consequently result in a harsh devaluation of educational credentials. Likewise, differences in purchasing power also often lead to the devaluation of material resources (Weiss, 2018).

Children of immigrants in Sweden are therefore at higher risk of growing up in poverty (Gustafsson and Österberg 2018). In addition, they are also more likely to be adversely affected by segregation and discrimination. As a result, they often struggle more in school, and are more likely to leave youth education without an upper secondary diploma (Behtoui et al. 2019; see also Study IV).

Still, the resources available to immigrant families are not fixed at arrival. Instead, experiences of migration, diaspora formation, exclusion, or incorporation all provide specific contexts for accumulating or losing resources (Erel 2010). Because migration and inequality are connected in several, potentially conflicting, ways, the children of immigrants are far from overdetermined to downward assimilation (Portes and Zhou 1993; Alba, Kasinitz, and Waters 2011). Instead, many succeed. An important factor for such upward mobility among young people with an immigrant background in disadvantaged schools is their strong educational aspirations, which can lead to positive outcomes even in the event of early setbacks, such as early school leaving (Schoon and Duckworth 2010). Family attitudes carried over from the pre-migration context provide a possibility for generating new resources (Ichou 2014; Lee and Zhou 2015), especially when supported by extensive networks that amplify and share pre- and post-migration resources.

The support, information and resources that are available through membership in groups or networks can be understood as *social capital* (Bourdieu 1986). Social capital is especially valuable for young people who otherwise suffer from a lack of both personal and public resources to support them. For these young people, access to social capital can be the decisive factor in generating more resources. Success in education can in turn be a powerful way of compensating for the downward mobility of parents, or for overcoming labour-market discrimination (Shahrokni 2018; Urban 2012). For young people in disadvantaged schools, access to social capital consequently offers a potential for a positive spiral where better access to social capital leads to better education, which leads to a better job, which in turn leads to new contacts and even better access to social capital (Crul et al. 2017). Through this mutually reinforcing spiral, social capital might result in *counter-stratification*, or status-attainment processes that work against the dominant processes of stratification (Stanton-Salazar 2001, 2011).

As long as migrant families face downward mobility in immigration and suffer from segregation in schools and discrimination in the labour market, the presence of countervailing forces that reduce rather than adding to inequalities are key to their successful incorporation into Swedish society. Understanding these factors allows the designing of support

policies, which might stop the deterioration of neighbourhoods and schools abandoned by the middle class.

Aspirations among children of immigrants

Studying aspirations has a long history. Early studies often took the form of social-psychological experiments, designed to isolate factors that influenced a person's levels of optimism and confidence in future performance. Gradually, however, interest shifted towards the broader social context.

In the 1950s, educational segregation was formally outlawed in US public schools. This led to a surge in studies comparing educational aspirations and attainments between American minority and majority groups. Studies from this decade typically found aspirations to be similar or higher among African American students than among White students, but lower among Mexican American students (Antonovsky and Lerner 1959; Gist and Bennett 1963; Holloway and Berreman 1959; Wendling 1968). However, the results often remained cautiously inconclusive due to the small number of observations within each category (for an early overview, see Dreger and Miller 1968).

To explain the differences in educational aspirations, researchers often assumed incomplete information or cultural differences (see, for example Rosen 1959). In US-American research, it was consequently argued that African Americans overestimated their chances of success due to incomplete understanding of the realities of discrimination and labour market competition. African Americans therefore expressed aspirations that were detached from reality. Among immigrant groups, Mexican Americans were assumed to have a culture that was less focused on achievement than White American culture. Mexican ethnic affiliation was therefore hypothesized to be related to lower levels of aspirations. In contrast, US Asian Americans were seen as a "model minority" due to their educational success and seemingly smooth structural assimilation. This led to the assumption of a culture that promoted academic achievements and fostered high educational aspirations.

Meanwhile, comparative research testing the cultural hypothesis was relatively scarce and found mixed support (Kao and Tienda 1998). As an example, Kuvlesky and Patella (1971) found – if anything – higher-than-expected aspirations when studying 500 Mexican American sophomores in Texas.

In total, there was ample empirical evidence that immigrant and other minorities in the USA had high educational and occupational aspirations. However, these findings did not decisively enter the scientific mainstream. Crucially, the hugely influential Wisconsin study of status

attainment (Sewell and Shah 1968; Sewell, Haller, and Portes 1969) did not consider race, ethnicity, or migration in modelling the connections between socio-economic status, aspirations, attainment, and labour-market outcomes. As a result, these factors were never developed within the status-attainment model. The lack of alternative theoretical models made the cultural explanation so compelling that the authors of the aforementioned study on young Mexican Americans ended by stating that their findings of high aspirations among this group stood as “a provocative hypothesis until refuted by other research” (Kuvlesky and Pattella 1971, p. 234).

When large-scale research finally took off, the refutation never materialized. In European research, evidence of higher educational aspirations among children of immigrants and expectations among their parents has instead been reported at least since the 1980s (for an overview, see de Lange and Rupp 1992). In Great Britain, for example, Sally Tomlinson (1989, p. 27) noted that most “immigrant parents are, in crude socio-economic terms, ‘working class’, but in their positive views and high expectations of education, they hold what can be described as ‘middle class’ values.”

Consequently, it gradually became widely accepted among researchers that students with an immigrant background tend to exhibit high levels of educational aspirations (Feliciano and Lanuza 2018). When other factors are controlled for, students with an immigrant background are consequently more likely to make educational transitions (Jackson 2012; Jackson, Jonsson, and Rudolphi 2012), more likely to favour general over vocational education (Kilpi-Jakonen 2011), and more likely to enter tertiary education (Kristen, Reimer, and Kogan 2008) than students with a non-immigrant background. These general findings present an important corrective against earlier, stereotype-laden, ideas of failed integration and ethnicized poverty being the result of some ethnic groups being “lazy” and others more industrious (see Lewis 1969, as a central proponent of the culture of poverty thesis).

Still, there is no consensus about what causes children of immigrants to have higher educational aspirations than children of non-immigrants. Apart from the cultural explanation, research has suggested three main possibilities: motivation, selectivity relating to resources, and ethnic networks. In the following, I will outline these three perspectives and the research supporting them.

Motivation

A first alternative to the cultural explanation came from economics, emphasizing the personal traits that might be conducive to migration. Economic theory commonly assumes that migrants have more innate ability

and higher motivation than the sedentary population (Chiswick 1978). To the extent that migration is voluntary, those who think they can gain from migration will be more likely to go. This leads to self-selection on skills and abilities, but also on personality traits such as motivation, risk-tolerance or strong future orientation. Migrants are therefore argued to be exceptional individuals, with exceptional mindsets best described as “immigrant optimism” (Fernández-Reino 2016).

But, while it is widely recognized that there is selectivity in migration, a problem with the optimism hypothesis is that it appears overly individualistic. In many cases, migration is not an individual decision. People are embedded in families, networks, and communities that take part in encouraging or discouraging emigration, and who might migrate or remain sedentary together. Consequently, the individual migrants need not be extraordinarily motivated (Polavieja, Fernández-Reino, and Ramos 2018). Rather, the opposite might be true, if for example families prefer that a household member who is currently unemployed migrates over one who is currently employed.

Another counter-argument to the immigrant optimism hypothesis comes from the so-called welfare magnet hypothesis (Borjas 1999). According to this hypothesis, universal welfare regimes and relatively compressed wage distributions will not particularly appeal to the most motivated. The Swedish welfare state is therefore assumed to attract migrants who are driven by other factors than a desire to compete for the most prestigious positions in the labour market (Razin and Wahba 2015).

Empirical results have consequently found little support for positive selection on motivational factors among immigrants to Sweden (Polavieja, Fernández-Reino, and Ramos 2018). For the studies in this thesis – focusing primarily on young people in disadvantaged Swedish schools – immigrant optimism thus appears to be an unsatisfactory explanation (see also Study II).

Institutional selectivity and blocked opportunities

Sociologists have instead increasingly pointed towards selectivity arising from migration policies, and from the general system of migration infrastructure, supply chains, and dependencies. This system – broadly understandable as a logistics of migration (Krifors 2020) – institutionalizes conditions that make emigration, immigration, and integration more or less feasible depending on existing pathways and available resources. Better access to resources lead, for example, to higher probabilities of asylum application approval, and a faster process (Brücker and Kosyakova 2020). The migration and reception systems therefore produce selectivity, and increasingly so (de Haas, Natter, and Vezzoli 2018).

International research has consequently found that a majority of immigrant families are positively selected, meaning – for example – that they have higher average levels of education than families that remain sedentary (van de Werfhorst and Heath 2019; Zhou and Lee 2017; Feliciano 2005; Polavieja, Fernández-Reino, and Ramos 2018).

As mentioned above, the basis for arguing that aspirations are high or low within a group is that aspirations tend to be similar in families with similar class positions, meaning similar relations of production and consumption within the economic system. This is because parents' class position and levels of education serve as benchmarks against which families measure success and failure (Goldthorpe 1996). The transmission of advantages and disadvantages across generations is also based on the particular experiences, skills, resources, and ways of life that are associated with parents' class and status positions. Another explanation thus suggests that the high educational aspirations among children of immigrants is due to selectivity, but based on class, education, and resources rather than on motivation and risk-acceptance.

Research within this tradition has convincingly argued that parents' level of education should be understood in relation to their original contexts (Feliciano and Lanuza 2017). From this perspective, the high levels of aspiration among immigrants and their children reflect an earlier point of reference. If a lawyer is temporarily unemployed, we would not expect the attitudes and aspirations of her or her family to drastically change. Similarly, there is no reason to assume that the attitudes and aspirations of an immigrant family will change after downward mobility. In fact, aspirations might even become stronger if the family becomes focused on regaining its original social position (Urban 2012). For example, Asian parents might instil the appreciation of educational success in their children in anticipation of occupational discrimination (Sue and Okazaki 1990). This can be a powerful strategy, because evidence suggests that there is less room for discrimination in occupations where formal requirements and credentials are more important (Nekby, Vilhelmsen, and Özcan 2008; Bonoli, Wilson, and Fossati 2020).

Recent research within this tradition has also explored methods to estimate a family's socioeconomic status in the country of origin (Ichou 2014; Feliciano and Lanuza 2017). The empirical results show that traditional measures of socioeconomic status tend to underestimate immigrant families' pre-migration status. The families might therefore have access to more resources than commonly assumed – especially immaterial and embodied resources that travel more easily between contexts, which would explain their children's high levels of aspiration.

Analysing this, Polavieja, Fernández-Reino, and Ramos (2018) found that differences in motivation between immigrants and non-

immigrants were largely driven by selectivity on education. In addition, van de Werfhorst and Heath (2019) found that migrant selectivity was positively associated with the likelihood of favouring academic over vocational tracks, while Engzell (2019) found that the parents' relative level of education was much more important for the educational aspirations of children of immigrants in Sweden than their years of schooling. From this perspective, differences in levels of educational aspiration consequently reflect different access to material and cultural resources relating to the families' social positions in their countries of origin (see also Studies I and IV).

Ethnic networks and social capital

Another factor that is often highlighted when explaining educational aspirations is the resources available through membership of a group or network, known as social capital (Bourdieu 1986; Lin 1999a). For children of immigrants, this is generally discussed in relation to ethnic networks.

In the 1980s, Bonacich and Modell (1980) suggested that the educational aspirations of children of Japanese immigrants in the USA was a consequence of a successful "ethnic" economy. This gave the immigrant parents the means to invest in their children's education. It also resulted in a strong emphasis on educational success, since education was an important asset for running a successful business (see also Hirschman and Wong 1986). Since then, many studies have argued that the resources embedded in ethnic networks are a critical factor in explaining who succeeds and who does not (Modood 2004; Shah, Dwyer, and Modood 2010; Lee and Zhou 2015, 2014; Borjas 1992, 1995).

The sharing of resources among a network or community can be understood as reflecting *bounded solidarity* (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). According to Portes, strong identification with a group facing shared circumstances or adversities is what leads wealthy members of a church to donate anonymously to its schools, people to voluntarily join in military defence, and workers to arrange sympathy strikes in support of other workers. Additional examples could include people who have been granted residency arranging protests against the deportations of others, political and cultural involvement in the diaspora, and ethnic or immigrant support networks. Portes (1998, p. 8) consequently notes that "identification with one's own group, sect, or community can be a powerful motivational force." A network bounded by ethnic affiliation and/or an ethnic niche in the economy, and characterized by solidarity across social positions within the network, can thus provide valuable resources. In this sense, ethnicity could be understood as social capital (Zhou 2005).

For the most part, previous studies on ethnicity and social capital have focused on the USA or UK. Theoretical reasoning has therefore often centred on the geographical clustering of immigrant families from the same region, or country, of origin. In Sweden, immigrant families are also concentrated in certain areas – such as the suburbs of the three largest cities: Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö (Åslund, Östh, and Zenou 2010; Åslund and Skans 2010). However, these neighbourhoods tend to be multi-ethnic, rather than enclaves for a single immigrant group (Andersson 2000). This means that previous findings are not necessarily applicable to Sweden. Previous studies have also predominantly been qualitative, or focused on explaining differences between immigrants from different regions of origin.

As a result, the association between immigrant background, ethnicity, social capital and educational outcomes is still understudied, especially outside the USA and UK. The studies that exist, however, indicate a positive association between social capital and educational outcomes also for children of immigrants in Sweden (Behtoui and Neergaard 2016; Behtoui 2017). This makes it a potential factor in counterstratification for children of immigrants in disadvantaged Swedish schools (see also Study III).

Aim and research questions

In this dissertation, I study educational aspirations among children of immigrants in disadvantaged schools, the factor that influence them, and their relation to educational attainments. The aim is to better understand how educational aspirations and attainments are shaped, and how they relate to pre- and post-migration resources and circumstances.

Concretely, I answer four questions on the relationships between aspirations, pre- and post-migration resources, and attainments through four self-contained studies, addressing one question each.

- 1) What is the relationship between pre-migration status, social capital, and educational aspirations?
- 2) To what extent do social contexts influence students' aspirations differently under different institutions?
- 3) To what extent do access to, and educational returns from, social capital vary between children of immigrants and children of non-immigrants?
- 4) How do migration background and family resources relate to school-to-work trajectories among early school leavers?

Contributions

This dissertation adds to the existing body of knowledge in several ways. Firstly, I contribute empirically by focusing on a particular context that is not often the object of study. In Studies I and III, I build on previous research into aspirations, counter-stratification, and unequal access to social capital by focusing on young people in disadvantaged schools in Sweden, instead of ethnic communities or neighbourhoods in the USA or UK. Sweden is an interesting context for migration studies because its migration policies have been, or at least have been seen as, more welcoming than those of many other countries. According to the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), Sweden has among the most favourable conditions for integration (Huddleston et al. 2015). Sweden also explicitly favoured multiculturalism for a long period, even though the trend is now shifting towards assimilation (Dahlstedt and Neergaard 2019). These factors provide both similarities with and differences from the more frequently studied contexts of the USA or UK.

Sweden is also an interesting context for education studies. Swedish education is comprehensive and part of a universalistic transition regime (Walther 2006) that sets relatively few obstacles to further education or labour-market entry, and also enables young people to enjoy significant autonomy from caregivers through the absence of tuition fees and universally available student loans, allowances, and grants. As a result, the Swedish population is generally well-educated. Still, equity in education is at or below the OECD average, with a low proportion of resilient students and above-average differences in PISA test scores between children of immigrants and children of non-immigrants (OECD 2016). I explore particular aspects of Swedish education by contrasting the Swedish education system to the Dutch in Study II, and by focusing on the system of second-chance education (*Komvux*, *Folkhögskolor*) in Study IV.

Secondly, I contribute to the theoretical discussion about aspirations and attainments among children of immigrants by highlighting connections to both pre- and post-migration resources. Throughout this investigation, I emphasize the resources these young people lack, but more importantly those that they have. Study I shows that, even in disadvantaged schools, many children of immigrants have parents with high levels of education relative to their countries of origin. These high relative levels are in turn associated with stronger expectations for their children, but also better access to social capital. Study II in turn emphasizes teachers, peers, and other facets of the social setting in shaping aspirations. In Study III, I show that the children of immigrants in a wide range of Swedish settings – not just disadvantaged schools – benefit from better access to social capital than the children of non-immigrants in similar

schools, suggesting that (current) class positions are less important for structuring the networks of immigrant families. Finally, in Study IV, I show how parental resources influence the children of immigrants to be more academically oriented, even in the event of early school leaving.

Thirdly, I contribute to the policy discussions on equality in education and integration. Through a focus on young people in disadvantaged schools in general, and children of immigrants in these schools in particular, I highlight specific circumstances that are often lost when looking at country-level averages. In Study I, I show that the pre-migration status of immigrant families has consequences for both the social capital and educational aspirations of children of immigrants, suggesting the existence and importance of resources that are currently not fully recognized by the education system. In Study II, I show how earlier tracking in education is associated with less optimism about the future among young people in disadvantaged schools in the Netherlands. This emphasizes the connection between the institutions of the education system and aspirations for the future. Educational tracking, sometimes called ‘streaming’, refers to separating students into classes of different levels of academic content, commonly based on test scores, teacher forecasts of future performance, or similar assessments of ability. In Sweden, education is tracked from upper secondary education. In the Netherlands tracking instead starts in lower secondary education. Young people in disadvantaged compulsory schools in Sweden and the Netherlands consequently face different opportunities and constraints, which can affect both their levels of aspirations and their chances of realizing them.

In Study III, I show that children of immigrants benefit in many different settings from better access to social capital, but that this is not enough to fully offset other inequalities. The role of social capital in counter-stratification is therefore limited, highlighting that other forms of support are needed. In Study IV, finally, I show that second-chance education plays an important role in the school-to-work trajectories of early school leavers, especially among children of immigrants. Meanwhile, unequal establishment in the labour market still leads non-immigrants to enjoy more beneficial short-term labour-market outcomes.

Consequently, throughout the thesis, I show that children of immigrants in disadvantaged schools are consistently more academically oriented and are supported by resources that are not always recognized, but struggle to transform their aspirations into favourable outcomes within the educational system and the labour market.

In this chapter, I have described the current state of research on aspirations among immigrants and their children and how this dissertation adds to this body of knowledge. In the next chapter, I continue by describing the context for the studies.

In the third chapter, I discuss educational aspirations in more detail. I also discuss the factors that influence aspirations, including resources within the family and social networks, as well as the institutional setting. I distinguish between economic, cultural, and social capital, but also acknowledge that capital can exist in different forms (Bourdieu 1986). Importantly, cultural capital can be institutionalized as educational credentials and merits, but also embodied as dispositions. In periphery–core migration within the global system of capital accumulation and distribution, institutionalized cultural capital is often not recognized, or only partly so, in the new institutional context. Exams and other credentials are therefore routinely devalued after international migration. Embodied as dispositions, skills, and attitudes, cultural capital is more resilient to devaluation, because its value is less dependent on institutional sanctioning. Some aspects of capital, or pre-migration resources more generally, can therefore be retained even as others are lost in migration. I argue that this combination of resources lost, retained, and sometimes even gained in migration is what can explain the seeming paradox of working-class immigrant families expressing “middle-class attitudes” towards education.

In the fourth chapter, finally, I describe the four studies that make up the empirical part of this dissertation. I discuss the survey and registry data used, and the methods employed.

The Swedish Context

Educational aspirations and attainments can only be understood in their historical and institutional contexts. Education systems differ over time and between countries, as do students' lives outside school. In this chapter, I describe the Swedish education system as it was during the first two decades of the 21st century. I also outline the inequalities that result in the existence of disadvantaged schools, where social and other problems are concentrated. Combined with a lack of compensatory measures, these inequalities also result in a higher incidence of young people with insufficient qualifications for entering upper secondary education and early school leaving. Actual transitions between stages of education, and between education and the labour market, are therefore seldom as neat or linear as typically imagined – especially for young people in disadvantaged schools. I discuss this further in the section on early school leaving, together with statistics on participation and completion rates by level.

Schools, neighbourhoods, and the education system structure opportunities and constraints for all Swedish young people. However, children of immigrants are also affected by their families' history of migration and integration. They often also face a higher risk of discrimination, both inside and outside of school. After describing the education system, I therefore give a brief overview of migration to Sweden, before concluding with a discussion on the role of discrimination in social reproduction.

Education in Sweden

The Swedish education system, illustrated in Figure 1, is comprehensive. Children enter primary school at the age of seven for a first stage of education (*Grundskola*) spanning grades one through nine. A non-compulsory “pre-school year” (*Förskoleklass*) was introduced in 1998 (compulsory from 2018), effectively extending basic education to ten years. Participation in non-compulsory childcare is also high. In 1998, 77% of children aged 3 attended pre-school or similar forms of childcare, and the number has grown to 90% or more since 2009.¹ This means that, for the vast majority of children, institutionalised education begins long before formal schooling.

¹ Skolverket (2019) <https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/statistik/sok-statistik-om-forskola-skola-och-vuxenutbildning?sok=SokC&verk-form=F%C3%B6rskola&omrade=Barn%20och%20grupper&lasar=2018&run=1>

Figure 1. Schematic illustration of the structure of the Swedish education system in the first two decades of the 21st century.

When transitioning to upper secondary education (*Gymnasium*), young Swedes encounter tracking for the first time. Competition for more prestigious programmes and schools is based on the final grades from compulsory school, received in the spring term of year nine. This late tracking places the Swedish educational system in the universalistic transition regime, as opposed to – among others – the more employment-centred regimes of central Europe (Walther 2006; Helms Jørgensen, Järvinen, and Lundahl 2019). These differences are further highlighted in Study II, where I contrast the Swedish education system to the Dutch one in order to show how institutional differences and differences in aspirations are connected.

Since the early 1990s, upper secondary education (*Gymnasium*) is separated into different programmes. The majority of these are so-called national programmes (*nationella program*), that are offered throughout

the country and comply with standardized curricula.² These national programmes are in turn separated into academic programmes preparing for higher education, and vocational programmes preparing for the labour market. The separation between vocational and academic programmes is not very strict. Until 2011, all programmes gave access to higher education by default. In 2011, the separation was increased. Despite this, students can still proceed to higher education from vocational programmes via elective courses, or by changing tracks during their studies.

Entry into upper secondary education is contingent on the final grades from compulsory school. To be eligible to enter any of the national programmes, young people must have passed a certain number of courses in compulsory school. In every cohort, there is consequently a group of young people who are prevented from entering a national programme, due to insufficient grades. Most of these young people instead enter a compensatory “introductory programme”, designed to provide the qualifications needed for enrolling in a national programme and thus get a diploma from upper secondary education. However, dropout rates are high among students who enter through this introductory programme, with as many as three in four students leaving without a diploma (Skolverket, 2013).

Swedish gymnasia are open to students only until the year they turn 20 (SFS 1985:1100), and many fail to complete in time. In fact, more than 20% of Swedish young people in each cohort leave upper secondary education without completing it (Statistics Sweden 2017b), and instead have to seek recourse in second-chance education, such as municipal adult education (*Komvux*) or folk high schools (*Folkhögskola*). Much like regular education, all second-chance education is free of tuition fees and facilitated through grants and loans. Still, in reality, many early school leavers rely on their families for economic and other forms of support, increasing the importance of parental resources for school-to-work transitions (Lundahl et al. 2017).

² The word “national” in national programmes underlines this combination of standardisation and nationwide distribution. For comparison, there is also a handful of specialised programmes that are only available in one or a small number of locations. These are not called “national programmes”, but “programmes with national intake” (*program med riksintag*). Currently, there are six specialized programmes with national intake, four for transportation, one for Samí industries, and one for professional dancers. Combined, they enrol only 0.3% of upper secondary students each year (Skolverket 2016). Because of these small numbers, I will include them under the vocational programmes for the remainder of the discussion.

Disadvantaged schools

Despite the comprehensive nature of Swedish education, PISA ranks Sweden below its Nordic neighbours in both equity and test scores (OECD 2016). A central problem for Swedish education is the concentration of positive factors in and around some schools, and the concentration of risk factors in and around others. Thus, some schools are advantaged, both materially and in the public perception, with skilled teachers, active parents, motivated peers, and rich extracurricular programmes. Others are instead disadvantaged through temporary or unskilled teachers, unemployment and family poverty, youth delinquency, and lack of services or activities outside school.

In these *disadvantaged schools* – the main interest of this dissertation – children of immigrants are also typically over-represented. This affects the public perception of both the schools and of students with an immigrant background. Schools are surrounded by widely shared narratives or rumours concerning educational characteristics, but also about the ethnic and social composition of students (Lund 2015). And, while categorizations are contested and redefined among students, “Swedish” is generally associated with positive traits while “immigrant” is associated with negative traits (Wiltgren 2016). Because of these pervasive associations, disadvantaged schools are often seen as “immigrant schools” (Bunar 2001; Bunar and Ambrose 2016).

The problem of schools that are both substantially and discursively unequal is not unique to Sweden. However, over the last 25 years, the discrepancies between Swedish schools have been inflated through an extensive choice-and-voucher system (Hennerdal, Malmberg, and Andersson 2020; Östh, Andersson, and Malmberg 2013). Political reforms in the 1990s facilitated the establishment of private schools, including those run by for-profit companies, and subsequently prohibited municipalities from favouring municipal schools over private ones. This limits the scope for redistribution because municipalities cannot divert funds from private to public schools. Instead, the policy gives a strong incentive for schools to curate their student demographics, as students requiring less support are less costly (Gustafsson, Sörlin, and Vlachos 2016).

As in other countries, school choice has resulted in increased segregation (Brandén and Bygren 2018; Söderström and Uusitalo 2010). Opting in and out of particular schools is not necessarily related to differences in quality of learning. Instead, it reflects other preferences among students and their parents, such as distinctions between groups. Ethnicity often serves as an important screening criterion, due to the strong discursive association between students with an immigrant background, disadvantage, and problems (Bunar and Ambrose 2016). In light of this,

schools actively seek to recruit students from preferred demographics, such as white Swedes, in order to bolster their reputations, further perpetuating the processes of segregation (Gruber 2007; Voyer 2018).

Early school leaving in Sweden

Upper secondary education is formally optional in Sweden, but in practice it is a requirement for most jobs. Leaving school immediately after compulsory education is therefore uncommon. About 99% of those who finish compulsory education with complete grades continue to upper secondary education within one year (Statistics Sweden 2017b). However, there is also a substantial group who cannot enter upper secondary education due to insufficient grades. Since 2011, students must pass 12 subjects to be eligible for academic programmes, or eight for vocational programmes (SFS 2010:800). Those who do not meet these criteria are referred to the introductory programmes discussed above, or to the labour market.

In 2012, about 12.5% of young people finishing compulsory education had insufficient grades to enter any national programme. An additional 4% had insufficient grades for one or more type(s) of national programmes, leaving about 83.5% with full qualifications for entering upper secondary education (Skolverket 2013). The percentage of students with insufficient grades for entering upper secondary education also appears to be increasing, from an all-time low of less than 9% in 1998 (Statistics Sweden 2018).

In upper secondary education, non-completion rates are high in both the introductory and the national programmes. In 2012, about 75% of young people in introductory programmes and 15% of young people in the national programmes had not obtained an upper secondary diploma within five years of completing compulsory education (Skolverket 2013). In the Nordic context, this makes them *early school leavers* (Cederberg and Hartsmar 2013).

However, many of these early school leavers instead enter the adult education system for second-chance education (Lundahl et al. 2017). The main venues for second-chance education in Sweden are municipal adult education (*Komvux*) and folk high schools (*Folkhögskola*). Universities also sometimes provide preparatory programmes, allowing students to compensate for a lack of qualifications from upper secondary education.

Much like regular education, all forms of second-chance and compensatory education are free of tuition fees and subsidized through universally available grants and loans. Currently, subsidized student finances amount to about 2700 SEK (approximately 260 Euros) per week of full-time study, 30% of which is a grant and the remainder a low-interest loan (CSN 2020). While a shortage of affordable housing means

that many young adults feel compelled to work even while studying, these grants and loans still enable considerable de-commodification of students, as well as independence from their families.

Official statistics often fail to include adult education. Statistics on Swedish early school leaving are therefore sometimes contradictory, and potentially inflated (Bäckman et al. 2011). Eurostat (2019) reports that less than 10% of Swedish young adults have neither completed upper secondary education nor are studying to do so by the age of 24. Still, due to the differences in measurement techniques, little is known about how early school leavers navigate through youth and second-chance education and into the labour market, forming their own trajectories across the institutional landscape.

Early school leavers tend to come from poor families, have parents with low education, belong to disadvantaged ethnic groups, have migrant backgrounds, and/or be in need of special education (Cederberg and Hartsmar 2013). Early school leavers also struggle in the labour market. At age 27, more than 25% of early school leavers remain weakly or not at all established in the labour market. For those who still lack full qualifications from compulsory school, the situation is even worse, with 60% weakly or not at all established (Statistics Sweden 2018). Early school leaving thus perpetuates social inequalities (Ross and Leathwood 2013), and might even worsen them through the high concentration of young people with insufficient grades in disadvantaged schools. As an example, in 2017 all students in the *Fredrikshovs Slotts School* and *Campus Manila* completed with sufficient grades to have access to upper secondary, while less than 30% did so in some other Stockholm schools.³ Unsurprisingly, the schools with the highest proportion of young people with sufficient grades are located in affluent areas, while the opposite end of the spectrum is found in areas with high proportions of poor families, and families with an immigrant background. Disadvantaged schools are therefore an important site of exclusion, through (lack of) access to upper secondary education and early school leaving for young people with an immigrant background.

³ This data comes from public comparison sites for school choice at <http://statistik.stockholm.se/omradesfakta/> and <http://valjaskola.se/servlet/Satellite?c=Page&cid=1374097577257&pagename=skolresultat%2FPage%2FstartpageLayout#> (accessed 11 July 2018). Some of this information is no longer available.

Figure 2. The Swedish education system, participation and completion rates in 2012. Statistics for pre-school and youth education from Skolverket (2013). Statistics for second-chance education derived from Nylander and Tomas (2018) and Skolverket (2020), using demographic information from Statistics Sweden (2020).

Migration to Sweden

Approximately one in four Swedish children have two foreign-born parents (Statistics Sweden 2017a). Sweden has a long history of migration; however, it was only after World War Two that it shifted decisively from a country of emigration to a country of immigration. After World War Two, Swedish policy allowed migrants to travel to Sweden in search of employment, and migrant workers were attracted to the country to fill vacancies in the expanding labour market, especially from Finland, Greece, Turkey, and Yugoslavia (OECD and EU 2015; de los Reyes 1998).

These relatively open immigration policies lasted until 1967, when immigration became regulated except for Nordic citizens. Labour migration to Sweden became severely restricted in 1972 and remained that way until the country joined the European Union in the 1990s. At the start of

the 1980s, about 5,000 asylum seekers were coming to Sweden each year. By the end of that decade, the corresponding number had risen to about 30,000 per year. New immigration legislation was adopted in 1989 to make it more difficult for asylum seekers to get a residence permit. The civil war in former Yugoslavia, however, meant that the number of asylum seekers continued to rise despite the harsher legislation, peaking at 84,000 in 1992.

Swedish policy on integration used to be guided by the notion of multiculturalism (Dahlstedt and Neergaard 2019). Official support for the right to asylum was also strong, and the extensive welfare state also awarded substantial social and labour rights to immigrants. However, the pressures of neoliberalism and international agreements on migration have resulted in substantial changes over the last few decades (Schierup and Ålund 2011). The Nordic model has been challenged by marketisation, paired with lower redistributive ambitions. As a result, income inequalities grew dramatically in Sweden at a moment when jobs in manufacturing were increasingly moving to other countries. Through the liberalisation of labour migration legislation, transportation and construction also came under increasing competition from informal or low-cost labour (Likic-Brboric, Slavnic, and Woolfson 2013; Woolfson, Fudge, and Thörnqvist 2013). The combination of policy changes has thus created increasingly polarized lifestyles and has affected living conditions for citizens and non-citizens alike (Schierup, Krifors, and Slavnic 2015). During this process, the idea of multiculturalism has gradually been replaced by neo-assimilationist rhetoric and the dismantling of the rights of recent immigrants, especially refugees and asylum seekers (Dahlstedt and Neergaard 2019). These political trends have had a huge impact upon who is allowed to live and work in Sweden, and under what circumstances.

Migrants are often well educated relative to the sedentary population (van Tubergen, Maas, and Flap 2004; Belot and Hatton 2012; van de Werfhorst and Heath 2019). Many countries have reception systems that prioritize the well-educated, and the general trend is towards increasing selectivity (de Haas, Natter, and Vezzoli 2018). Sweden has so far given no formal priority to the well-educated, and also has a larger proportion of refugees and family reunification immigrants than most OECD countries (OECD 2017). Nonetheless, there is considerable selection in migration to Sweden (van de Werfhorst and Heath 2019; Engzell and Ichou 2020). Even though the distribution is bimodal rather than skewed, positive selection far outweighs the negative. On average, migrants to Sweden consequently have higher levels of education than their sedentary peers, suggesting better access to cultural, and possibly also economic and social, capital. Theoretically, this should facilitate their structural

incorporation into the labour market and into society, making integration swift. In practice, however, resources are often lost or devalued during migration; for example, through credentials that are not recognized or assets that have to be left behind.

Discrimination in social reproduction

Contemporary Swedish integration policy is generally ranked highly in international comparison (Huddleston et al. 2015). Still, the fact that the institutional context is comparatively conducive to integration does not mean that there are no obstacles facing immigrants and their children. In their book on the Nordic Civil Sphere, Alexander, Lund, and Voyer (2020, p. 5) note that “[the] Swedish social democratic state is not only pro-civil, but also white in color; European in ethnicity; secular in a religion-is-a-private-matter-mildly-Christian kind of way; and gender-equal in a subtly restrictive manner.”

In a 2016 survey of attitudes on diversity (Ahmadi, Palm, and Ahmadi 2016), respondents were asked if they thought it “easy and rewarding to get to know neighbours” from other parts of the world, and whether they preferred, as neighbours, people from different regions. The results clearly showed that some immigrant groups are perceived much less favourably than others. Similar to the racial categories discussed by Bonilla-Silva (2015), there seems to exist a separation between “almost-Swedes” from countries in the West and “others”, who come from the rest of the world (see also Myrberg 2010).

The consequence of such unfavourable attitudes is an increased risk of discrimination. Research has found that having a Middle-Eastern name leads to a substantially lower likelihood of being summoned to a job interview, at least for men (Arai, Bursell, and Nekby 2016; Bursell 2014). Consequently, migrants and their children often hold less favourable labour-market positions (Kesler 2010, 2015; le Grand and Szulkin 2002; Behrenz, Hammarstedt, and Månsson 2007; Eklund and Dávila 2013). Racism and discrimination is also present in schools (Schmauch 2006). This can take the form of verbal and physical harassment from peers, but also a lack of support from teachers and staff (Kalonaityté, Kawesa, and Tedros 2009; Hällgren 2005). Studies also note that the curriculum might sometimes work against students with an immigrant background, for example by positing “Swedishness” as an unreflected norm against cultural “others” (Tholin 2014; Brantefors 2015). Discrimination thus has a detrimental effect on educational outcomes for children of immigrants through both barriers to learning and disadvantages outside of school.

Despite this, research on educational outcomes among children of immigrants reveals great heterogeneity. Jonsson and Rudolphi (2011) found lower average grades among children of immigrants from Nordic countries and South America compared to children of non-immigrants, but higher grades among children of immigrants from other parts of Europe, as well as Iran, Africa, and Asia. Engzell (2019) on the other hand found that students with both parents from Nordic, Southern European, Eastern European, African, and Latin American countries had lower average grades than students with two Swedish-born parents.

However, the differences in educational outcomes between children of immigrants and those of non-immigrants are mainly generated by differences in various forms of family resources, and through neighbourhood and school segregation (Behtoui et al. 2019). In addition, inequalities are generally larger in employment than in educational attainment (Brandén, Hällsten, and Szulkin 2016). This means that disadvantages in education for children of immigrants are more due to disadvantages in the labour market – for example, due to discrimination – than the other way around. This suggests that education is used as a vehicle for counter-stratification by immigrant families, although with limited success.

Concepts

The four studies in this thesis relate to a sprawling body of research, with partly different conventions, jargon, and assumptions. While this heterogeneity is reflected in the studies, they nonetheless share a core of ideas: that aspirations are social, that individual outcomes are structured by the social and institutional field and the recognition of different forms of capital, and that ethnicities reflect a process of differentiation, rather than some innate essence.

In this chapter, I elaborate upon the key concepts used throughout the dissertation. Firstly, I discuss educational aspirations, and how they relate to the notion of fields. Secondly, I discuss family resources, the concepts I use to denote different forms of resources, and how these resources are not always recognized, which limits their use as capital. Of special interest among these resources is social capital, or the resources available through membership of networks or groups. Because of the centrality of this concept in explaining the high educational aspirations among children of immigrants and a lack of consensus on how it should be understood, I devote the third section to discussing social capital and how I operationalize it. Finally, I discuss the relationship between immigration and ethnicity in the four studies.

Educational aspirations

The current line of research on educational aspirations originated in social psychology nearly a century ago (Haller 1968; Lewin 1939). Since then, aspirations have been understood as the cognitive aspect of goal-oriented behaviour, which can be indexed by the difficulty of attaining the strived-for goal (Lewin 1951, p. 81). High aspirations consequently refer to aspirations towards a goal that typically requires more effort to attain. This means that aspirations reflect the relations between a person, her social circumstances, and her position within the social field that makes goals more or less difficult to attain. Aspirations are therefore indicative both of a person's likely future actions and of their position within a field of opportunities and constraints – or the social structure – that enables or hinders these actions (Bourdieu 1977).

Social fields, according to Bourdieu (1977), are determined by the various objects of contestation towards which people's actions are directed. When people's actions are directed towards a certain object, their actions become structured by how that goal can be obtained. Social fields are therefore best understood as organized competition over some prized

outcome (see also Martin 2003). We can therefore speak of a field of education, a field of social stratification, or a field of power, among others, and these can be further broken down into sub-fields. Since these fields have different objects of contestation – so that having the highest grades does not also mean the most social status or highest income – they are organized in separate ways, and value different things. Because of this, the aspirations of the social fields also differ.

Researching aspirations

Research on aspirations traditionally distinguishes between real or realistic aspirations, and ideal or idealistic aspirations (Lewin 1939; Haller 1968). Within this dichotomy, idealistic aspirations are perceived as representing a person's desires, such as what level of education they would like to attain, whereas realistic aspirations are seen to represent the person's prediction about the future, such as what level of education they expect to actually attain. For this reason, realistic aspirations are often referred to as *expectations*.

Against this, it has been argued that “true” aspirations are evenly held across the population (Appadurai 2004). The fact that so few children grow up to become astronauts, pop stars, or princesses is not due to lack of aspirations. Rather, it should be attributed to how personal aspirations are modified through socialization (Spenner and Featherman 1978). Socialization transmits both generalized ideals of what are currently the most desired social positions and outcomes, and ideals about what is proper. A concrete example of this is that middle-class children are more likely to pursue further education than working-class children with similar grade points (Boudon 1974). Ideals of education and meritocracy, or fair competition based only on skills and merits, thus coexist with ideals that some things are reserved for certain types of people. This makes the distinction between idealistic and realistic aspirations misleading, since all aspirations are based on the interplay between ideals and objective constraints and possibilities. All aspirations thus reflect beliefs about reality, shaped by previous experience and an evaluation of the present situation (Zipin et al. 2013).

To emphasize the socially constructed nature of both idealistic and realistic aspirations, scholars have suggested *doxic* and *habituated* aspirations as more apt descriptions (Gale and Parker 2015). In this conceptualization, *doxic* aspirations are based on *doxa* or the taken-for-granted of what is desirable. *Habituated* aspirations, on the other hand, express aspirations based on *habitus*, or an internalized understanding of the field and a person's trajectory through it (Bourdieu 1977).

Nevertheless, *habituated* and *doxic* levels of aspiration usually show a high degree of correlation (Spenner and Featherman 1978). This is

because what a person believes will happen can be understood as ideals modified by the person's capacities and present opportunities (Haller 1968). Distinguishing between different types of aspiration is therefore primarily meaningful when large systematic differences in these relations can be expected. For this reason, I differentiate between doxic and habituated aspirations in the comparative Study II, but not in the others.

Family resources

Families were recognized early on as having an influence on a person's level of aspirations. This influence comes through both social-psychological properties of the family environment – such as parents' values and expectations – and through the family's socio-economic status – meaning parents' levels of education, class position, wealth, and income (Sewell and Shah 1968).

Aspirations correlate with social stratification, so that young people from more privileged backgrounds tend to express higher levels of aspiration than those from less privileged backgrounds (Sewell, Haller, and Portes 1969; Sewell and Shah 1968). Social inequalities are therefore not just reproduced through the transmission of material resources between generations within families and the unequal exchange between social categories, but also through the unequal processes shaping aspirations. Such differences, for example, lead middle-class children to be more likely to enter further education than working-class ones, even when grades are the same (Boudon 1974). Through different outlooks on the future, different resources to realize aspirations, and an education system that often validates these differences as credentials rather than compensating for them, privilege is reproduced as merit, and working-class young people learn to be working class (Willis 1993 [1977]; Khan and Jerolmack 2012).

The reason for this correlation between social background and aspirations is the systematic differences in helpful family resources and the different experiences and life chances to which they give rise. For stratification research, a central theoretician along this line of thought has been Pierre Bourdieu (1973). Among Bourdieu's contributions are the notions of cultural, social, and symbolic capitals, which are separate from economic capital and exist as objectified in things, embedded in institutions, and embodied as manners in the person (Bourdieu 1986). By acknowledging more than one type of capital, it becomes possible to show how ownership or control over valued things have recursive relations with both the person themselves and the institutions of society.

Various forms of capital are resources that can be transformed into other forms of resources across social space because they are recognized

as valuable by others. A classic example from de Soto (2000) is a house. A house is always a resource, because of its practical use. But without the documents that certify your exclusive ownership, and a legal system that protects it, you cannot use it as security for a bank loan. A key dimension of resources is therefore the extent to which they are recognized as capital in different contexts and different fields (Weiss 2005).

Just as the value of a house depends upon its institutional recognition, so does the value of education. Upon completing compulsory school, there are sharp distinctions between young people with sufficient qualifications for upper secondary education and those without, who must enter an introductory programme. Similarly, when applying for higher education or jobs, the first screening is often in terms of educational credentials or institutionalized cultural capital. This creates a problem for many immigrant families, since international migration – especially from periphery to core – means that their resources are re-appraised within a context where they were not originally institutionalized. Because of this, immigrant families typically face more mismatches in the valuation of resources than the sedentary population (Kelly and Lusi 2006; Weiss 2018).

Different access to capital leads to different experiences, which over the life course become internalized as a set of assumptions, dispositions, and anticipations, making up a person's *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977). Habitus can be understood as a person's internalized understanding of the relevant field(s), which results in assumptions and anticipation about the future based on past experiences. At the same time, people are also embedded in a society whose dominant culture prescribes a particular set of assumptions, anticipations, and beliefs – sometimes contradictory to the person's own lived experience. These taken-for-granted beliefs of a society can be understood as its *doxa* (Bourdieu 1977). Doxa consequently sets limits on what is conceivable for society in general, whereas habitus sets limits on what is believable for individuals within that society, based on their social positions and past experiences. Both doxa and habitus are therefore important in shaping aspirations (Zipin et al. 2013).

Researching family resources

In the four studies that constitute the empirical part of this dissertation, I account for family resources in various ways. In all four studies, I use parents' level of education as a proxy for their skills, knowledge, and cultural capital. Due to the close connection between education and class, parents' education can also be understood as a proxy for the family's status position (van Noord et al. 2019). Consequently, I use parents' education as a general indicator of family resources in Studies I–III. Unlike the first three studies, however, Study IV is concerned with outcomes in both

education and the labour market. This makes it problematic to take a single indicator for family resources, since the composition of resources is likely to have consequences for whether a person has an easier time in the labour market or in education (Jonsson et al. 2009; Bourdieu 1984). Concretely, if parents are well-educated but have a weak attachment to the labour market, their resources are more conducive to academic success. If, on the other hand, they are well-established in the labour market but have little education, their resources are likely to be more helpful for labour-market success. In Study IV, therefore, I include a measure of parents' income, to better separate economic and cultural capital.

As discussed above, aspirations are not only affected by material resources, but also by ideas, knowledge, attitudes, and dispositions. Such habitus and embodied cultural capital are not necessarily related to a family's current class position, since they are accumulated gradually over a lifetime. Pre-migration status might therefore be more indicative of aspirations than the post-migration positions of immigrant families. Educational expansion is also uneven across the world, meaning that the country of birth affects how difficult any given level of education is to attain. Failure to acknowledge this tends to underestimate the education of immigrants, but also of women, who have historically been confined to shorter educations due to gender segregation. Scholars have therefore increasingly argued that parents' educational levels must be understood in their proper context, relative to others in the same birth cohort, and of the same gender, studying under the same education system (Ichou 2014; Feliciano 2005; Feliciano and Lanuza 2017).

In Studies I and IV, I account for this by also including a measure of parents' educational rank (Ichou 2014). The logic for this is that years of education is an indicator of knowledge, skills, and merits from education, but educational rank instead indicates the status or prestige associated with that level of education. For sedentary families, the two are strongly correlated. For immigrant families, however, they can differ substantially. Years of education serves as a proxy for institutionalised cultural capital because its value is measured relative to Swedish educational institutions. Educational rank is in turn a proxy for embodied cultural capital and other long-lasting dispositions, which stem from pre-migration status. Educational rank can therefore be a better indicator of subjective social status when comparing families who have had very different access to education.

Calculating educational rank is fairly straightforward, and the process has been well documented in previous research (Ichou 2014; Engzell 2019). However, there are three problems with the procedure for this dissertation. Firstly, it increases the risk of multicollinearity when combined with other measures of parents' class or education and can

therefore not always be used in combination with other relevant control variables. Secondly, the procedure relies upon matching parents' educational level with the educational structure in the same country, gender, and birth cohort. The Barro and Lee (2013) data set used in this procedure is extensive, but several countries are missing – often because of how borders have shifted over the course of the 20th century. This means that important countries or regions of origin, such as the Former Yugoslavia, have to be reconstructed by imputation from neighbouring countries. This adds uncertainty to the process. Thirdly, the matching also requires information about parents that is not available in the survey data I am using, including country of birth.

Because of these problems, I only calculate educational rank in two studies. Study IV uses more fine-grained registry data that enables the identification of 73 common countries or country-groups. This gives enough accuracy to feasibly calculate educational rank. Study I, on the other hand, relies on survey data like Studies II and III. However, unlike them, it only draws upon a single survey, which benefits from a high response rate on two free-text questions relating to which languages the respondent speaks at home. Combined with registry data on region of birth, I was able to identify 53 probable countries or country-groups of origin as the countries in that region where the indicated language is an official or dominant language. However, this procedure comes at the cost of substantially increasing the number of missing observations, and of increasing uncertainty because in some cases both the country of origin and the reference data are approximated, due to the problems discussed above.

Social capital

Throughout this dissertation, I use the concept of *social capital* to denote the resources available through membership of networks or groups (Bourdieu 1986). This includes group standards, role modelling, and values, as well as more tangible resources such as information, money, or “putting in a word”.

As discussed in Studies I and II, I take social capital to also encompass what is sometimes referred to as “ethnic capital”. Collapsing the two concepts is not a very radical idea, since Borjas (1992) noted nearly 30 years ago that the concept ethnic capital was similar to what sociologists already called social capital – albeit in the tradition of Coleman (1988). My preference for using social capital comes from the observation that boundary-making processes always contain ambiguities and never exclusively follow ethnic categorisations. The separation between “inter-ethnic” and “intra-ethnic” networks is therefore fundamentally unhelpful

for understanding the resources to which networks give access. In reality, a person is often part of several, partly overlapping social networks, which each bring separate advantages to their members and close off access to non-members through both ethnic boundaries and other mechanisms of similarity and separation (Cederberg 2012; Anthias 2007). Any given network can therefore be described in a multitude of ways, because of the simultaneous positioning of its members in intersecting relations of power and dominance. In many cases, the same group of childhood friends might alternatively be described as a school-based network, a city-based network, an ethnic network, a class-based network, or a gendered network, by simply changing the commonality being highlighted. Since social capital is a more general concept, it is more flexible in capturing these different affiliations and delineations.

According to Bourdieu, the amount of social capital to which a person has access can be described as a function of network size and the amount of economic, cultural, symbolic, or other capital the network contacts control. Because people tend to associate with others of similar status, those with better positions within a field tend to have social contacts who are also better positioned within the field. In general, therefore, social capital contributes to stratification.

However, no network is entirely homogeneous with respect to status positions. Social contacts often create links between higher and lower social positions, and relying on contacts with higher positions is usually associated with more beneficial outcomes (Lin, Dayton, and Greenwald 1978). A much-studied context for positive outcomes from social capital is the status attainment process (Lin 1999b). Concretely, better access to social capital is generally found to be associated with higher probabilities of finding a job, better income, or both (Majerski 2019; Hällsten, Edling, and Rydgren 2017; Behtoui 2016; Verhaeghe, Van der Bracht, and Van de Putte 2015; Bonoli and Turttschi 2015).

During the job-seeking process, a person can thus leverage their connections and network resources to attain a better outcome (Lin 1999b; Mouw 2003; Ioannides and Loury 2004). But in this or any similar situation, social capital works because it grants the person access to something valuable which they otherwise would not have – information about a hiring opportunity, having someone influential put in a word of recommendation for them, status that comes with the network affiliation, help in writing a CV, etc. Social capital must therefore also be understood as a balancing factor, at least within each network, because it includes a temporary transfer from someone who has control over something valuable to someone who lacks it. Similarly, better access to social capital leads to better educational outcomes when contacts with high social positions and/or who are well-educated offer information, guidance, and

aid that would otherwise not be available. This can include helping with homework, discussing plans for the future, offering money or other rewards for good grades, and helping navigate the education system. However, it can also include behaviours that are not socially sanctioned, such as using their deep familiarity with the field to bypass the waiting list for a prestigious school, or securing other “unfair” advantages. Importantly, higher-position contacts are also an important source of heterodoxy (Bourdieu 1977), or alternative viewpoints and values that demonstrate a wider range of possibilities, making them instrumental in the educational success of disadvantaged young people (Atkinson 2012).

Because social capital appears to play a dual role in stratification, unequal access to social capital has emerged as its own research field. In the context of the educational outcomes of children of immigrants, many studies have suggested that resources embedded in ethnic networks are a critical factor in explaining who succeeds and who does not (Modood 2004; Shah, Dwyer, and Modood 2010; Lee and Zhou 2015, 2014; Borjas 1992, 1995). A motivating question in much of this research has been the extent to which such resources – what I am calling social capital – can compensate for the lack of other resources, or even result in *counter-stratification* (Stanton-Salazar 2001, 2011). By counter-stratification, I am referring to any process that works against the dominant processes of stratification, effectively reducing the inequalities between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. If children of immigrants are at a disadvantage vis-à-vis children of non-immigrants in the labour market and in society at large, but benefit from better access to social capital and higher educational aspirations, these factors work against the dominant processes of stratification. In this sense, they are – or could be – forces of counter-stratification.

Researching social capital

In addition to the theoretical discussions of Pierre Bourdieu, there is also a parallel genealogy to my usage of social capital, coming from empirical research pioneered by Nan Lin. Through “small world” experiments, where participants were asked to forward a parcel to an unknown recipient, Lin and colleagues examined how information and objects travel through social networks (Lin, Dayton, and Greenwald 1978; Lin 1999a). Early results suggested systematic differences in how easily network tasks were completed, such as passing a message to a specific person outside one’s immediate circle of friends. From this grew the idea that networks could be resources in themselves, because of how they facilitated or impeded actions and gave, or hindered, access to other people and the resources they shared.

Lin originally termed his object of study *network resources*, which over time became *social resources*, before eventually relating it to social capital (Lin 1999a). Because of this dual genealogy, social capital appears in this dissertation as both a theoretical concept tracing back to Bourdieu (1986), and as a measurement construct tracing back to Lin (1999a, 1999b).

As a measurement, social capital relies on two assumptions. The first is that the amount of help, emotional support, information, and resources that a given person is willing to share with someone else relates to the amount that she herself has control over. What a person has control over relates, in turn, to her position within the relevant field. Contacts in the elite therefore provide more resources to the network than do working-class contacts, simply because they wield control over more resources. The second assumption is that different social positions also grant control over different types of resources. In other words, there is not just a quantitative difference in resources between an elite contact and a working-class contact, but also qualitative differences. Having multiple contacts with similar social positions – for example, several schoolteachers or several lawyers – therefore results in increasing redundancy. In other words, knowing four teachers is not four times as helpful as knowing one, since much of the occupation-specific information and resources shared by the fourth contact will already be available through the first three.

From these two assumptions, it follows that the most resource-rich networks are characterized by a high proportion of elite contacts – who control quantitatively more resources – and also a high degree of heterogeneity – to give access to qualitatively different resources.

In Studies I and III, I measure the resources available through family contacts using a position-generator approach (Lin and Dumin 1986). The position generator is a list of common occupations associated with different prestige, income, and educational levels such as bus driver, teacher, lawyer, and medical doctor. The respondent is then asked to indicate for each occupation if their family knows anyone in that occupation. In this way, a snapshot of the family's contact network is produced covering both the upper reaches of the network – indicated by high-prestige contacts – and its heterogeneity – indicated by the number of different occupations among contacts. In the studies, I refer to this measurement as *family contacts* (Study I) or *family social capital* (Study III).

To capture both the qualitative and quantitative dimensions, different methods have been suggested. One method is to separate the contact network into different segments – for example, a working-class segment and a middle-class segment – and simply calculate how many occupational groups are listed by the respondent among their contacts within

each segment (Kaya 2018; Andersson 2017). In this dissertation, I instead follow the practice developed by Nan Lin and others, calculating social capital as a single index.

Lin (1999a) suggests calculating four indicators from the position generator and combining them through factor analysis into a single metric. Following the suggested process, I converted all the listed occupations into their corresponding prestige scores (Treiman 1977; Ganzeboom and Treiman 1996). Swedish studies have sometimes preferred a more country-specific measurement, such as the prestige points calculated by Ylva Ulfsdotter Eriksson (Ulfsdotter Eriksson 2006; Svensson and Ulfsdotter Eriksson 2009). In practice, however, the differences in the resulting measure are small. Since these prestige points are also only available for a smaller number of occupations than SIOPS scores, I opted for the latter.

In Study II, I instead use proxies for social capital access through four indicators: expectations of parents and teachers, and peer attitudes separated into work-related attitudes and study-related attitudes. Peer socialisation is important for the development of students' educational aspirations, particularly if the context is heterogeneous enough to allow for the emergence of distinct peer milieus (Lorenz et al. 2020). Since tracking implies a more pronounced sorting on educational performance, peer groups can be expected to play a larger role in shaping aspirations in the more comprehensive Swedish schools than in the more tracked schools in the Netherlands.

In the study, I also control for proportion of female friends as an indicator of peer-group composition. Differences in physiological and social development, combined with gender norms directing girls and boys into different activities and interests, and eventually into different sectors of the labour market, result in girls having higher average grades than boys, and being more oriented towards further education in all contemporary industrialized countries (Legewie and DiPrete 2012; Breen et al. 2010). Gender is therefore a powerful proxy for both test performance and educational aspirations among young people. This is especially true in disadvantaged schools, as boys' peer groups appear to be more sensitive to school environment (Legewie and DiPrete 2012).

The measurements in Study II consequently indicate what types of resources are mobilized in students' most immediate networks, but also the dynamics of segregation between peer groups within schools. When present, such segregation limits how readily information, ideas, and resources can travel between groups; for example, between groups with strong pro-education and strong anti-education attitudes, or between all-girl and all-boy peer groups.

Immigration and ethnicity

A central question for any study of education among children of immigrants is the analytical separation and empirical overlap between ethnicity and migration. At the heart of this problematic is the distinction between the lexical and popular usage of terms such as “immigrant”. The lexical meaning constitutes a dichotomy between immigrants – defined as people who have moved to another country at least semi-permanently – and non-immigrants, or natives, defined as those who have lived in the same country their whole life. Popular usage, instead, often refers to an “implicit code based on ‘Third World’ origin, different values from the majority, ‘dark skin’, working class” (Gullestad 2002, p. 50). This posits “immigrants” and “Swedes” as diametrically opposed, mutually exclusive positions (Lundström 2006).

If we take seriously the notion of ethnicity as a social construct, lexical meanings do not suffice. Ethnicity is not only about belonging, but about sharing certain social and material conditions within a context of group-based differences (Anthias, Yuval-Davis, and Cain 1992). Concretely, if the public usage – and thus the social issue at stake – differs from the lexical meaning, it is this public notion – not the lexical one – that is used in framing conflicts and forming identities. Thus, it is the public usage that shapes ethnicization, or the process whereby things are constructed as ethnic, thus separating one’s own group from others (Ålund and Schierup 1991). In other words, it is more about “otherness” than about actual differences (such as cultural differences) or experiences (such as migration).

This process of othering results in varying degrees of stigmatization (Goffman 1963), related to factors such as socioeconomic status, skin tone, name, and country of origin (Gullestad 2002; Arai and Thoursie 2009). This in turn creates an ethnic hierarchy, whereby some categories are treated more favourably and others less favourably. Research on this hierarchization finds a consistent pattern, with Northern Europeans being ranked above other Europeans, and Middle Easterners and Africans being held in least esteem (see Myrberg, 2010, for overview). This is not to say that changes do not occur. Rather, it means that at any given moment ethnic categorization creates a hierarchy, and that this hierarchy both reflects and produces material inequalities, making it durable, albeit not permanent.

Throughout this dissertation, I differentiate between immigrant and non-immigrant families, where the former are defined as families in which the parents were born outside Sweden and the latter as families in which one or both parents were born in Sweden. In Study I, where the migration process is most relevant, I also distinguish a middling category

of families with one foreign-born parent. The reason for distinguishing between parents who were, and were not, born in Sweden, is that migration itself affects the life chances of families; for example, through devaluation or loss of resources.

I generally make no distinction between young people with foreign-born parents and those who have foreign-born parents and are themselves foreign-born. However, because of differences in the educational systems being compared, respondents in the Dutch data were often older than respondents in the Swedish data. In comparing two countries, I also run the risk of compositional differences biasing the estimates – for example, if immigrant families had been in one country longer than in the other. The separation between immigrants and children of immigrants is central to the theory of “immigrant optimism”, which is largely a theory of educational success among non-immigrant children with immigrant parents. This further motivates the separation between immigrant young people and young people with immigrant parents in Study II, where I critically engage with the theory.

In three of the four studies, I also make distinctions within the immigrant-family category to account for the fact that immigrant families are unequally affected by discrimination and stigmatisation. To reflect the varying degrees of ethnicization, or degrees of “passing” as a non-immigrant, I construct broad categories based on region of origin as proxies for the ethnic hierarchization discussed above. The exception is Study I, where country-level indicators are used to approximate parents’ pre-migration status. Adding a level of classification based on regions of origin would therefore introduce multicollinearity to the estimations for uncommon regions, while also reducing power. Because of these problems, regions of origin are only reported as a description in Study I, not used in the statistical models.

In the remaining three studies, the distinctions vary with data availability. In Study II, I separate only between families with a background in European countries and families with a background outside Europe, referred to as Third Countries in the study. In Study III, I distinguish between Southeast Europe, Asia, and Africa as regions of origin within the immigrant background category. In Study IV, where data availability is better, I separate between seven categories based on parents’ region of birth: Sweden, North-West, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Middle East and North Africa, Rest of Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. Despite varying fidelity, these classifications should all be understood as indicators of ethnicization or structural disadvantages (or advantages) within education and the labour market.

Outline of the Four Studies

The empirical basis for this thesis is four quantitative studies, focusing on young people with an immigrant background in disadvantaged schools. In this chapter, I discuss the studies, beginning with the data that I utilized in conducting them, and the methods used in the analysis. The focus on disadvantaged schools also means that conclusions cannot always be generalized from these results to the full youth population. I therefore also discuss under which circumstances knowledge from the studies can be generalized. My belief is that the results do not lend themselves to statistical extrapolation to students in other types of schools, but that the relations between pre-migration resources, post-migration resources, aspirations, and attainment probably do. Each of the four studies answers one of the research questions about the relationships between educational aspirations, pre- and post-migration resources, and attainments. Having discussed data, methods, and generalizability, I summarize the key findings of the studies in relation to the research questions in the second part. Finally, the chapter closes with a reflection on blind-spots and limitations, and by discussing new questions for future research provoked by the results.

Data

The four studies that are the basis for this dissertation draw upon quantitative data from surveys and official registries. Studies I and II draw exclusively from a survey that was conducted as part of the project Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU (van Praag et al. 2018).

The RESL.eu survey collected data from 19,586 young people in seven countries, of whom 2,048 were from Sweden (Behtoui, Björklöf, and Strömberg 2018). Due to the project's focus on understanding and preventing early school leaving, the survey targeted young people in schools located in areas of relatively high youth unemployment and/or areas with specific demographic or socioeconomic challenges. In Sweden, this meant sampling from schools with below-average GPAs. Because of this, I refer to the schools as *disadvantaged*. The data from the RESL.eu survey forms the backbone of the first three studies, in different ways.

In Study I, I use the Swedish portion of the RESL.eu data. In Study II, I also include data from the Netherlands. Doing this allowed for a comparison between two countries with very different degrees of educational tracking. I included random intercepts in the models to account

for the similarities in available opportunities and institutional resources among students attending the same school, without losing statistical power. The assumption is thus that, apart from national differences, due to each country's educational system, and local differences, due to inequalities between schools, the relations between grades, aspirations, socio-economic background, and significant others are largely the same within the two countries, but also between them. Under this assumption of a common, underlying process that causes some students to have higher, and some to have lower, aspirations, it is reasonable to include everyone in the same model. To test the validity of this assumption, I also ran models for each country separately. In the study, I consequently highlight both commonalities and differences between students in the two countries.

In Study III, my co-author and I combine the RESL.eu data with data from two other surveys to determine whether similar results replicate across the three data sets. The first was conducted in 2012, the second in 2016. In this study, we take advantage of the fact that all three surveys contained similar sections on social capital – including identical questions on friends of the family – and similar, registry-based, measures of grades. This allowed us to fit identical models across the three data sets, to assess the access and returns to social capital among children of immigrants in more than one setting. Data was analysed through OLS regressions in order to estimate predictors of access to social capital and the association between social capital and final grades. Where the surveys targeted different populations, such as students in different cities, at different types of schools, or at different stages of education, we included controls for that, but otherwise our models were as consistent as possible between the three data sets.

Two age-groups were included in the Swedish RESL.eu survey: one in compulsory education, and one in upper secondary education. Because much of youth education is compulsory, there are very strong age-norms for what a person should be doing at a given age. While it is sometimes possible to start education at an earlier age, or to be delayed a year due to grade retention or prolonged illness, most variation occurs in and after the transition from compulsory school due to sabbaticals, changing schools, or switching between programmes. However, upper secondary education is only available to young people in Sweden until they turn 20. Any delay therefore also reduces the time available for completing. The labour market is in turn organized around the same age-norms, with young people only expected to study until they are about 16, and subsequently to gradually enter the workforce. Young people are consequently expected to move across the social field at a certain pace, resulting in a shifting opportunity structure for those who do not.

In Studies I and III, I accounted for the differences in educational stages by controlling for which level of education the respondent was in, where applicable.

In Study II, however, I instead controlled for age. The reason for doing this is that educational stages are not always the same length in Sweden and the Netherlands, and transitions between them do not occur at the same age. As a consequence, the Dutch subsample contains a larger age range, and the surveyed young people are on average older. This affects the comparison of university aspirations between Swedish and Dutch young people at the transition point between compulsory and post-compulsory education, so that the Swedish are likely to be more optimistic just by virtue of having time on their side. For the older, Dutch, students, whether to enrol in university studies or not is a much more immediate question.

That said, the age-span covered in the analytical sample is limited, meaning that age and level of education largely proxy for the same two interrelated factors: selectivity, and shifting opportunity structures. However, since the key educational transitions occur at different ages in Sweden and the Netherlands, and because compulsory education is of different length, I favoured age as a more nuanced indicator in the cross-country comparison.

In Study IV, finally, I use Swedish registry data, provided by Statistics Sweden from their longitudinal LISA database. Here, I start with a sample of the full population of young people completing compulsory school in 2000 or 2001, and from it I single out those who did not complete upper secondary education within five years. The advantage of using registry data is that it contains a much higher number of observations than the surveys. This is important because the focus on early school leavers in general, and those with an immigrant background in particular, means that only a fraction of any student cohort is of interest for the analysis. To retain nuances while reducing inefficiencies, I created an analytical sample containing all early school leavers with foreign-born parents in the two graduation years, and 5% of early school leavers with parents born in Sweden, providing a total of 6,404 individuals. This allowed me to study differences among children of immigrants, while still fitting models in a reasonably efficient and timely manner. This sample was then followed for ten years, and analysed through sequence analysis and clustering. After identifying distinct trajectories, I used them as outcomes in a series of regressions to investigate which factors predicted each trajectory.

Methods

The four studies rely primarily on regression analyses, to establish robust associations while controlling for confounding factors. An inevitable consequence of this is the prioritization of the general over the particular. Concretely, this means looking for general trends, averages, and comparisons between broad categories, such as between children of immigrants and children of non-immigrants.

Like many quantitative studies, the studies presented in this dissertation cannot establish a causal association between the examined factors. Unlike policy interventions and similar abrupt changes, the associations between immigrant background, resources, and aspirations cannot be observed under the kind of laboratory-like conditions that are well suited to causal inference. This means that even when it is easy to establish temporal primacy – such as the parents' country of birth preceding any educational outcomes of their children – it is impossible to prove a causal link between their migration and the educational aspirations of their children.

Because the research topic defies causal inference, I instead rely upon robust associations to argue for the plausibility of causal connections that cannot be observed (Echambadi, Campbell, and Agarwal 2006). The value of the individual studies lies in their connections to a wider body of research, to which they lend support, add new conclusions, or challenge and contradict previous results. Alternative explanations, besides those presented in each study, are therefore possible. Unobserved factors can produce misleading interpretations when not controlled for. Overcontrolling, on the other hand, introduces bias by obscuring the relations of interest (Elwert and Winship 2014). This becomes a particular concern with factors such as ethnicity, gender, and class, which are theoretically assumed to influence a broad range of situations and outcomes. Importantly, while parents' country of birth is confined to a distinct point in time and space, this birth country becomes socially consequential through an ongoing process of ethnicization that is confined in neither time nor space. An abundance of control variables also introduce multicollinearity, which is easy to diagnose but difficult to determine when it becomes problematically high (O'Brien 2007). When possible, I have therefore opted for fewer rather than more control variables and have also tried more than one estimator – for example, both logit and LPM regressions for binary outcomes (Mood 2010).

My contribution is therefore in describing the aspirations and attainments of children of immigrants in disadvantaged schools in Sweden, proposing explanations consistent with the empirical results and

theoretical assumptions, and relating them to established knowledge from previous research.

Generalizability

The nature of the research questions and the data used means that results from the four studies are not generalizable to the full (student) population. Instead, the studies focus on young people in disadvantaged schools and early school leavers as specific cases. These cases are theoretically selected, or “critical” (Flyvbjerg 2006) in order to give insights into specific contexts, circumstances, and processes.

In Study I, the sampling from disadvantaged schools means that the children under study are likely to come from families with low socio-economic status in Sweden. Socio-economic status is generally reproduced across generations, but can shift dramatically after migration due to discrimination and the changing context for valuation of resources (Zschirnt and Ruedin 2016; Weiss 2005). The particularities of the sample thus mean that the data set contrasts children of sedentary Swedish-born parents with a presumably stable socio-economic status, and children of immigrant parents who have experienced downward mobility. This makes it feasible to separate between current and past socio-economic status for the immigrant families – or “who they were” (Ichou 2014) – to examine which is more strongly associated with their access to family contacts. The results indicate that past social positions are more important than current ones for the contact networks of immigrant families, highlighting that different forms of capital are transformed rather than lost in migration (see also Erel 2010; Erel and Ryan 2019).

For Study II, the earlier tracking within the Dutch education system means that those who are in disadvantaged schools are likely to have their educational opportunities more constrained than their Swedish counterparts, even though selection is cast as choice (Crul 2018). The argument is therefore not about whether tracking in general makes young people less optimistic about their futures – by the same logic, being in a higher track should if anything make a student *more* confident about reaching their aspired-for level of education. Like the results, the argument itself thus makes no claim to be generalizable to the full population. However, if the argument is correct, we could anticipate that the institutional setting has a stronger impact on the optimism felt by young people in disadvantaged schools about their futures than on their levels of aspiration. To the extent that young people act on their perceptions of structural constraints, rather than their aspirations, those who perceive institutional blockages might therefore feel disincentivized to pursue their goals at an earlier age.

By fitting similar regression models to the three data sets in Study III, the idea is to examine whether similar patterns emerge despite the differences in sampling. That results replicate across data sets, thus suggesting that the better access to social capital among children of immigrants is not local to low-GPA schools, or to urban schools. While this does not guarantee generalizability, it does suggest a common pattern of better access to social capital among children of immigrants across many different settings, and not just in disadvantaged schools.

Study IV, finally, draws on a representative sample and in this sense the results are generalizable. That said, the study covers only two adjacent birth cohorts in an institutional landscape notorious for its frequent and large policy interventions. As discussed above, since the two cohorts completed compulsory education, compulsory schooling has been extended to ten years, the entry criteria for upper secondary education has become stricter, and second-chance education has experienced but cuts and (smaller) expansions. Meanwhile, precarious jobs continue to proliferate in the labour market. Establishment on the labour market might therefore have been even slower for those who leave youth education today without a diploma from upper secondary education.

Findings

In this dissertation, I answer four questions connected to the relationships between aspirations and pre- and post-migration resources. The empirical part of the dissertation consists of four self-contained studies, addressing one question each. I discuss the studies and their results below.

Pre-migration status, social capital, and outcomes

In the first study, I explore the relationships between pre-migration status, social capital, and educational aspirations for young people in disadvantaged Swedish schools. The results showed substantial positive educational selectivity among the foreign-born parents, despite comparatively low absolute levels of education in that group. Parents in immigrant families consequently had substantially higher average education rank than parents in non-immigrant families. Education rank offers a contextualizing measure of status to compare the pre-migration status of immigrant parents with the status of non-immigrant parents (Feliciano and Lanuza 2017). The high education rank therefore points to a pre-migration status that was substantially higher than the families post-migration class positions.

The higher education rank was in turn found to be associated with access to social capital. Results showed that education rank was a better predictor of the family's access to contact networks than the non-contextualizing measure years of education. This suggests that access to post-migration social capital is indeed related to pre-migration social status, resources, and selectivity (Lee and Zhou 2015).

Consistent with theory and previous research, the high relative educational rank among immigrant parents was also associated with high educational aspirations among their children. This indicates that the beliefs and values relating to education are not necessarily transmitted between parents and children through the same process as skills and knowledge, which are more strongly related to absolute levels of education (see also Engzell 2019). Treating the two outcomes separately recasts the problem of educational attainment from a question of why children of immigrants aim high, to why they struggle to turn these ambitions into reality. Such questions call for a greater focus on processes within and between schools. This includes both experiences and anticipations of discrimination and segregation, but also the availability of compensatory education and institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar 2011).

Both selectivity and social capital have been suggested to affect children's aspirations through elevating their parents' expectations (Behtoui 2017; Feliciano and Lanuza 2017; Ichou 2014). Consistent with theory, I found that both educational rank and family contacts were positively associated with parents' expectations. However, only educational rank could explain some of the higher expectations in families with two foreign-born parents. Therefore, parents' expectations in general seem to stem more from their perceived status position than from their exposure to aspirational or resource-rich contacts.

The role of institutions

Educational tracking, or the sorting of students into separate types of education, affects both the trajectories and the composition of peers met by students in school. In the second study, I explore the extent to which social contexts influence students' aspirations differently under different institutional settings. The study compares the relationships between significant others and educational aspirations among students in disadvantaged schools in Sweden and the Netherlands. Swedish and Dutch education reflect two different transition regimes, with the Swedish being more comprehensive and the Dutch more stratified. Due to early educational tracking, the chances of attaining a university education depend to a large extent on primary school performance for Dutch students. This

makes social background a more prominent feature of educational trajectories (Burger 2016; Breen and Jonsson 2005).

The results demonstrate that the Dutch students in the sample were significantly less likely to think they would succeed in attaining university education than the Swedish students. Since education and labour-market outcomes are related, lower habituated aspirations also indicate less optimism about future career trajectories. However, there were no differences in doxic aspirations. In other words, while the Dutch students were less optimistic about attaining a university education, they had equally strong preferences to do so as the Swedish students. This, I argue, is a sign of the pervasiveness of a doxa, where higher education is a norm (see Goyette 2008; Spruyt et al. 2014). It also suggests that, for students in disadvantaged schools, early tracking or other forms of institutional barriers result in a disconnect between what students hope for, and what they see as likely. Social structures, opportunities, and obstacles are thereby internalized as part of students' habitus, or understanding of their positions within the social field (Bourdieu 1977).

In both countries, native-born students with foreign-born parents exhibited higher doxic aspirations. In Sweden, foreign-born students also exhibited higher levels of doxic aspirations than students with a Swedish background when significant others were not accounted for. In both settings, these associations were reduced in strength – sometimes to the point of disappearing – once significant others were controlled for. Categorical differences in educational aspirations can therefore at least in part be explained by categorical differences in influences from significant others.

The association between aspirations and the expectations of parents and teachers was strong in both countries. Peer groups, on the other hand, had a considerable influence on the Swedish students' aspirations, but only on the habituated aspirations of Dutch students. Since peer-group composition was also a more important factor for the Swedish than for the Dutch students, this could indicate that segregation between peer-groups *within* the classroom is a larger factor for variations in university aspirations in the more comprehensive Swedish schools than in the tracked Dutch schools.

Overall, Study II shows that, among students in disadvantaged schools, children of immigrants generally perceived higher expectations of a university education from their parents, which in turn led them to have higher aspirations. The higher levels of aspiration among students with a migrant background have been described as “immigrant optimism” (Fernández-Reino 2016), or conceptualized as “ethnic capital” (Modood 2004; Shah, Dwyer, and Modood 2010). Based on these results, I argue instead that higher educational aspirations might reflect

categorically unequal access to social capital. This could be the case, for example, if pre-migration social networks are retained, rather than lost in migration, if the migration experience results in a branching of social trajectories that increase network heterogeneity, or if ethnicized exclusion or bounded solidarity result in networks that are more durable and less segregated by class.

Social capital and counterstratification

Lack of social capital has often been assumed to be a factor that impedes integration and labour-market success for immigrants and their children. Conversely, better access to social capital has been suggested as a countervailing force that can offset inequalities and produce favourable outcomes even in the face of disadvantages, creating counterstratification (Stanton-Salazar 2011). In the third study, I together with Alireza Behtoui explore the extent to which access to, and educational returns from, social capital vary between children of immigrants and children of non-immigrants.

In contrast to common assumptions about a social capital deficit, we found evidence from three data sets that children of immigrants have equal or better access to social capital through their families than children of non-immigrants. For young people with an Asian background, we found consistently better access to social capital across all three datasets. For young people with a Southeast-European background, the results revealed better access to social capital in two of the three datasets. The results for children of immigrants from Africa were inconclusive. We therefore conclude that children of some immigrant groups, but not all, have better access to social capital than children of non-immigrants in disadvantaged schools.

This better access was also associated with higher grades, all else being equal. However, because social capital is context specific, previous research has sometimes warned that better access to social capital might not always translate into more favourable outcomes. For children of immigrants, this could be the case if, for example, their families' social networks are geographically dispersed and less embedded in the local context where outcomes are produced. This, or other factors, such as having more contacts who are currently unemployed, could result in unequal returns from social capital. The results showed, however, that social capital was positively associated with educational outcomes, and that students benefitted equally regardless of their parents' country of origin. The magnitude of the associations was however modest, meaning that better access to social capital should be seen as a partial buffer rather than a levelling factor, making its potential for counter-stratification incomplete.

School-to-work trajectories of children of immigrants leaving school early

In each cohort graduating from Swedish compulsory school, more than 20% of students either do not enter, or fail to complete, upper secondary education within five years. In the public discourse, early school leaving is currently seen as a large problem – both for the individual and for the economy at large (Ross and Leathwood 2013; European Commission 2010). Research, on the other hand, has emphasized that many early school leavers find ways to succeed, but that there are systematic differences depending on factors such as migration background and parental resources (Schoon and Duckworth 2010; Achatz, Jahn, and Schels 2020; Dorsett and Lucchino 2014).

In Study IV, I explore how migration background and family resources relate to school-to-work trajectories among early school leavers. I study these trajectories by following the transitions in and out of work and education during the ten years after completing compulsory school. Using sequence analysis, I identified six principal clusters of school-to-work trajectories: 1) *exclusion*, 2) *compensation*, 3) *academic*, 4) *precarity*, 5) *delay*, and 6) *career*. More than 40% of early school leavers were in the work-oriented delay or career trajectories, while approximately 19% were in the education-oriented compensation or academic trajectories. Finally, about 34% were in the precarity trajectory, while less than 7% of the early school leavers were in the exclusion trajectory.

Having identified these clusters of different school-to-work trajectories, I used them as the dependent variables in a series of LPM regressions to study how immigration background and family resources predicted being in either of them. Since educational aspirations tend to be higher among children of immigrants, and aspirations have been highlighted as a major factor in positive outcomes for early school leavers, I expected that young people with an immigrant background would more often be in education-oriented trajectories. Having an immigrant background also increases the risk of discrimination, leading to less favourable labour-market outcomes (Zschrnt and Ruedin 2016). Because of this, I expected that young people with an immigrant background would also be found more often in trajectories with weak labour-market attachment, meaning the exclusion and precarity trajectory clusters.

The results were in line with these predictions. Having an immigrant background from sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, the Rest of Asia, North-West or Central and Eastern Europe was associated with a greater likelihood of being in the academic trajectory than having non-immigrant parents, and all immigrant backgrounds except Central and Eastern Europe were also more likely to be in the

compensation trajectory. However, depending on their parents' region of origin, early school leavers with an immigrant background were also more likely to be in either the low-income or exclusion trajectories, while having non-immigrant parents was positively associated with being in the career trajectory. This suggests that early school leavers with an immigrant background still benefit from their strong educational aspirations, but also that discrimination or lack of contacts in the local labour market who could provide openings or apprenticeship positions (Roth 2018) makes the transition into the labour market more difficult for early school leavers with an immigrant background than for early school leavers with a non-immigrant background.

Having parents with a higher income was associated with a lower risk of being in the exclusion trajectory, while having parents with a longer education was associated with a greater likelihood of being in the compensation and academic trajectories, but a lower chance of being in the delay or career clusters. Parental resources consequently lead early school leavers towards more successful school-to-work trajectories, but different types of parental resources lead to different types of trajectories. This became even more evident when parents' years of schooling were considered in relation to the average levels of education in their respective country of origin. Parents' relative educational rank could fully account for the increased likelihood of being in the compensatory or academic trajectories for early school leavers with foreign-born parents. Parents' education therefore seems to be a resource for early school leavers' school-to-work trajectories primarily through expectations and attitudes towards education, owing to (past) status positions. This again highlights that resources are not always devalued or lost in migration, but can also be retained or transformed (Erel 2010; Weiss 2005; Erel and Ryan 2019).

Like previous studies, I also found gender to be a major predictor of school leavers' school-to-work trajectories (Achatz, Jahn, and Schels 2020; Dorsett and Lucchino 2014; Struffolino and Borgna 2020). In fact, gender was the single most important predictor of being in the career trajectory cluster, making the career trajectory a predominantly male, and non-migrant trajectory. This lends support to the conclusion from Struffolino and Borgna (2020) that, while there is rightfully much concern about the frequency of early school leaving among boys, the disadvantages faced by women in the labour market – especially for low-educated women – often make early school leaving more detrimental for girls. This problem is further compounded by the fact that girls, on average, tend to do better at school and have higher aspirations. This means that girls who leave school early are a highly select group, who might struggle more than boys who leave school early.

Early school leavers consequently face very different outlooks in the labour market, depending on their parents' region of birth, their family resources, and gender. For young men with a non-immigrant background, leaving education early can be a path to quick labour-market success, while for women with an immigrant background it more often leads to becoming stuck in low-income jobs.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the four studies indicate an interplay between resources lost, retained, and created in and after migration, but also suggest that these resources are often insufficient to compensate for disadvantages embedded in the institutions of education and the labour market.

Children of immigrants in disadvantaged Swedish schools often come from families that had relatively high levels of education in their countries of origin. Disadvantage is therefore not due to the family background per se, but rather to how resources are lost, devalued, or mis-recognized during the migration process. Despite this, positive attitudes towards education are often retained, leading to strong expectations for children's success among parents, and high aspirations among children of immigrants.

Combined with bounded solidarity (Portes 1998) and/or a lack of other options (Tilly 2005), pre-migration and other resources are also concentrated and shared within networks, leading children of immigrants to have better access to social capital through family contacts than children of non-immigrants. While this better access to social capital appears to differ between groups and contexts, it is not only true for young people in disadvantaged schools. Instead, the evidence suggests that children of immigrants often have better, and never worse, access to social capital than children of non-immigrants in both disadvantaged and advantaged schools.

Access to social capital differs from family to family because networks are not neatly bounded. Still, social capital refers by definition to resources that are, at least temporarily, shared by someone who controls them with someone who does not – for example when sharing information about educational transitions or helping with homework. Social capital is therefore, at least within individual transactions, a levelling factor.

Better access to social capital is associated with both higher educational aspirations and better chances of realizing them through grades. Still, the association is dwarfed by other background factors, meaning that social capital in itself will not suffice to generate counter-stratification. This requires other factors, such as institutionalized support and

accessible opportunities for education, and of participatory fora where the existing resources can be combined with voice to improve schools, rather than exit that leads to further decline (Hirschman 1970). In addition, it also requires that structures outside of education – in policies, neighbourhoods, and the labour market – do not compound already-existing inequalities. Previous research has shown that disadvantages in education for immigrant families are often made worse in the labour market (Brandén, Hällsten, and Szulkin 2016).

A similar situation is also seen in the school-to-work trajectories of young people who leave school early. These teenagers, who often studied in disadvantaged schools during their compulsory education, often find ways back into education. This is especially the case for children of immigrants, who leverage resources associated with their family's pre-migration position – such as dispositions, aspirations, and social capital – to complete secondary education or even attain academic success. Still, non-immigrant young people who leave school early become established in the labour market much more quickly, resulting in a head-start that the more well-educated might struggle to catch up with.

In summation, this dissertation shows how the educational incorporation of the children of immigrants in disadvantaged schools is bound up in a complex web of relations, between past and present resources, the migration process, and the labour market. Successful educational incorporation must therefore start during the migration process, by making sure that as little disadvantage as possible is produced, and extend all the way through to how credentials are valued in the labour market.

Originally, research on aspirations often assumed that children of immigrants lacked aspirations. By empirically studying the levels of aspirations, and finding that children of immigrants often have higher aspirations than children of non-immigrants, contemporary research has provided a much-needed corrective. With this dissertation, I have joined research that proposes an additional corrective – that these high levels of aspiration in turn reflect a general misrecognition of the resources held by immigrant families and their networks. This troubles the, often well-meaning, narrative that immigrant families suffer from a lack of resources, and suggests that they might also, and sometimes even more so, suffer from having those resources misrecognized as lack.

Limitations and further research

A key finding of this dissertation is the relationship between pre- and post-migration resources, and their simultaneous importance for educational aspirations and attainment. These relationships should be further explored in future studies, preferably covering representative samples

and including a wider range of resources than just education and post-migration social capital. For example, pre-migration social capital could also be studied through retrospective questions – including questions about contacts already in place on arrival in the country of destination. Pre-migration resources could also be tapped through contextualized information about occupational status in the country of birth. Similarly, the role of such resources and the interrelationships between them should also be studied for other outcomes than grades and aspirations. Such studies could greatly contribute to theorizing about the transferability of capital across contexts, and how such spatial autonomy impacts upon outcomes for both migrants and sedentary individuals (Weiss 2018). Both qualitative and quantitative studies would also be helpful for better understanding the extent to which migration can generate resources, not just lead to their loss or devaluation (Erel 2010; Erel and Ryan 2019).

In Study II, I argue that the large discrepancy between doxic and habituated aspirations should be attributed to tracking. If the same logic is applied to advantaged schools, Dutch students in advantaged schools could be expected to be more confident about attaining a university education than their Swedish counterparts, by virtue of previous experiences of being placed in tracks destined for university. Further studies are also needed to investigate the psychological and social consequences of students' attempts to reconcile their high educational ideals with the perceived hopelessness of making them come true.

A valid counterargument to the conclusions drawn here is that there are other things setting these two countries apart. It is easy to imagine other country-level factors that could lead young people in one country to be less certain that they will attain a tertiary degree, such as how accommodating the labour market is to those without a university degree, or the cost associated with further studies. Swedish tertiary education is free of tuition, and even supported by low-interest student loans and bursaries for those working part-time or less. Dutch tertiary education, on the other hand, requires students to pay a tuition fee. This fee varies with university, but is approximately 2,000 Euros per year for EU citizens and Dutch residency permit holders in publicly funded universities. While this fee is smaller than in many other countries, it still adds a substantial financial burden to families. Especially for low-income families, the economic cost could therefore be a powerful barrier making higher education seem less feasible. Future studies could rule out these alternative explanations by including a larger number of countries with different levels of tracking, or by following students' aspirations over time as their educational context becomes more and more tracked.

A recurring theme in this dissertation is the importance of social capital for the educational aspirations and attainment of children of immigrants. The results presented in Study III show that children of immigrants often have better access to social capital than children of non-immigrants in both advantaged and disadvantaged schools. These results are in line with findings from some other contemporary Swedish (Andersson, Edling, and Rydgren 2018; Hällsten, Edling, and Rydgren 2017) and international (Verhaeghe, Van der Bracht, and Van de Putte 2015) studies. Nevertheless, other studies have found that immigrant families have less access to social capital in many contexts. Future studies should therefore seek to explain the circumstances under which immigrant families have better, or worse, access to social capital through their networks. Factors such as geographical clustering, the strength of ethnic identification, and degree of diaspora formation should be considered, together with regional differences.

Another possibility is that there is a systematic difference in the ways in which contacts are reported by young people and by adults, with adults interacting with more peripheral workplace acquaintances and similar contacts whom their children rarely meet. If this is the case, the reported contact network can be expected to change substantially during the transition from school to work, and probably to the benefit of young adults with Swedish-born parents who are more likely to quickly become employed and start a career. Longitudinal studies on access to social capital at key transition points therefore have the potential to explain the contradictory findings regarding access to social capital in immigrant families, and more generally to explore the recursive relationships between status position, life events, and social capital formation.

In both Studies I and III, I used family contacts as an indicator for social capital. Since this indicator is focused on occupations, it might miss aspects of social capital that are more relevant to school-age young people – including peer groups and attitudes. Further research is needed to explore the extent to which such aspects are also associated with migrant selectivity; for example, through classed forms of concerted cultivation (Carolan 2016). Researchers have also noted that migrants exercise agency by creating new forms of migration-specific capital (Erel and Ryan 2019). Ethnic social capital can be understood through this lens, as something that emerges from the interplay between factors relating to the country of origin, the available resources, and the social and institutional contexts in the country of destination. Future research should therefore seek to examine group or network resources more directly.

In Study IV, I have outlined a typology of school-to-work trajectories among early school leavers. Because many of these individual trajectories included higher education and labour-market establishment, it is

reasonable to assume that there is a substantial overlap with the school-to-work trajectories of young people who complete upper secondary education on time. Some, like the compensation trajectory, appear to be “standard” linear trajectories, only inconvenienced by a slight delay due to second-chance education. Future studies could therefore benefit from exploring the extent to which trajectories are fundamentally different between early school leavers and non-leavers, and the extent to which they are just slight variations. Future research could also benefit from including more birth years to allow for comparisons over time, and to better study the role of institutional factors in shaping long-term trajectories.

A conclusion from the studies in this dissertation is that both family resources and network resources – social capital – are important for the educational outcomes of children of immigrants. Still, the young people in the data are only at the beginning of their educational trajectories. There is consequently a possibility that they can realize their educational aspirations gradually over the life course, even if their educational attainments were initially hamstrung by disadvantaged schools or early school leaving. Studies on sedentary populations have shown considerable persistence of educational inequalities between grandparents and grandchildren, or even between generations further apart (Lindahl et al. 2015; Clark 2014; Hällsten and Pfeffer 2017; Pfeffer and Killewald 2018). To what extent migration permanently alters or just temporarily disrupts this intergenerational persistence of inequalities, could therefore be an important question for future studies on how migration affects the stratification process.

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Papers

Papers

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Many children of immigrants in Sweden attend disadvantaged schools with low grade point averages. At the same time, they tend to have higher educational aspirations than children of non-immigrants in similar circumstances. This dissertation addresses the relationships between educational aspirations, pre- and post-migration resources, and educational attainments for these young people. The four studies included highlight an interplay between resources lost, retained, and created in and after migration, but also suggest that these resources are often insufficient to compensate for inequalities embedded in the education system and the labour market.

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