Social Class and Adolescents’ Beliefs about Justice in Different Social Orders

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We report on the justice beliefs of 4508 adolescents from 4 security societies in transition to market economies (i.e., Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Russia) and from 2 opportunity societies (Australia and the United States). Using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), justice beliefs were examined as a function of type of society, social class, and gender. In the security societies, working-class teens wanted the state and schools to provide a safety net, while middle-class teens preferred that schools promote student autonomy and competition but also reported the most negative school climates of any group. In the opportunity societies, working-class youth believed success was based on individual merit, while middle class youth expressed more doubt about this connection.

The stability of economic and political systems depends on diffuse support in the population for the principles on which the system is based (Easton & Dennis, 1969; Keil & McClintock, 1983). In other words, societies remain stable when there is a general consensus that the social order is just. This consensus is maintained by social policies and the practices of institutions such as schools which configure people’s options and inform their normative beliefs. The principles of the social order guide the goals and practices of institutions such as schools and children’s social theories incorporate the norms, expectations, and justifications emphasized in these environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Goodnow, Miller, & Kessel, 1995).

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Still, the principles of a social order are not simply reproduced but are reconstructed and sometimes challenged by new generations, with schools playing a key role in this dynamic process (Carnoy & Levin, 1985). As we shall argue, the goals and practices of schools accommodate to fit the needs of changing social orders.

Our article concerns adolescents’ normative views about justice—what they think ought to be the responsibilities of states and citizens for people’s welfare and what they view as appropriate roles and practices of schools. The empirical basis for our article is drawn from our program of work on “adolescents’ interpretations of the ‘social contract’” by which we mean their views about the bargain or deal that inheres between persons and society (Bowes, Flanagan, & Taylor, 2001; Flanagan, Bowes, Jonsson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998; Flanagan & Tucker, 1999). We explore adolescents’ primary and secondary justice ideologies, the former based on beliefs about their society and the latter on assessments of their position within that society (Wegener & Liebig, 1995). In keeping with the notion of widespread beliefs (Fraser & Gaskell, 1990), we expect that adolescents’ views of what “ought” to be will reflect the arrangements to which they are accustomed.

However, even with high degrees of consensus, variation in public opinion exists within every society. As particularist political theorists contend, beliefs about justice depend on the way in which situations are defined by different groups in specific historical contexts (Walzer, 1983). In other words, what we consider to be just or fair depends on the context, on who is doing the assessment, and on historical conditions. Thus, our second focus is on the role of social class and gender in explaining variation in adolescents’ views of the social contract. We will argue that adolescents’ views of their social order depend on how they and others like them experience that order. In other words, their views about what is just and right reflect their perceptions of how the social contract works for people “like them.”

We compare the views of youth from six nations which represent two types of societies: security societies and opportunity societies. The first group (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Russia) are labeled security societies because, for the forty years prior to this study, the state guaranteed the basic needs of citizens. Justice was based on the principle that outcomes generally should be equal. In opportunity societies, by contrast, liberal or private market principles have been in place for many years and the state plays a relatively minor role in regulating the economy, in compensating for its vagaries, or in providing social entitlements for citizens. In this study, the United States and Australia represent the opportunity societies. (Financial constraints made it prohibitive to add more nations in the opportunity group). In these nations, equal opportunity, or a level playing field, is the foundation on which individuals prove their worth. Justice is based on principles of equity (i.e., that rewards such as income or status such as class are deserved because they were earned by one’s own work). In the next section, we describe in greater depth the concept of security and opportunity societies, emphasizing how the implications of the social contract vary by gender and social class within
each of these social orders. We note that the goals and policies of schools reflect the political, economic, and cultural norms of these different types of societies but also focus on schools as dynamic institutions which contribute to changes in widespread beliefs.

Security Societies: Justice as Equality in Outcomes

In 1995 when the data for this study were collected, the four security societies were in transition from socialist to market economies. During the forty prior years, social policies and a highly compressed wage structure minimized disparities and promoted social equality. The Marxist dictum, “from each according to ability, to each according to need” (Marx, 1972, p. 17) translated into full (mandated) employment and provisions by the state of a range of entitlements available according to needs including child care for working parents, health care, retirement insurance, and family leave. For example, in the late 1970s, direct cash benefits for family supports (i.e., birth grants, maternity leave, family allowances) represented 4% of annual government expenditures in Czechoslovakia with an additional 7% in other subsidies for children (i.e., day care, school meals, tax and rent reductions; Heitlinger, 1993).

At the same time and despite a commitment to sexual equality in official party rhetoric (Toth, 1993), working women earned less money than men. This was due to a number of factors including the artificial wage structure adjusted to a two-earner family (Adamik, 1993), conservative sex role attitudes in public opinion and in socialization practices (Toth, 1993), and the gender segregation of women into lower paid vocations (Nickel, 1993). Paradoxically, although women on average were better educated than men (an issue identified as the feminization of education), this fact was not reflected in their earnings (Havelkova, 1993). In some cases, they were paid even less for the same jobs because they lacked specific job qualifications (Toth, 1993). However, the fact that women shouldered the double burdens of paid work and family care meant that they were less likely to be in managerial positions and, by extension, their issues were often not a high priority for management (Havelkova, 1993; Heitlinger, 1993). In this context, it is hardly surprising that female-headed families were disproportionately disadvantaged. Nonetheless, relative deprivation was even worse for marginalized groups such as the Roma (Gypsies) due to a combination of poor education, illiteracy, large families, and ethnic discrimination (Adamik, 1993; Feffer, 1992). Despite differential levels of income and deprivation, poverty received little attention in official sociology even in Hungary, arguably the most progressive of the Central/Eastern European nations (Adamik, 1993).

A major turning point in the terms of the social contracts of these countries took place in the early 1990s with the shift to market economies. Economic shock therapy, introduced as a mechanism for rapid privatization and liberalization of
the economy, resulted in increased unemployment, a rise in wage inequality, and a decline in real wages (Rutkowski, 1996). Erosion of entitlements such as subsidized day care and family leave was common in most countries as well. The relative “shock” of economic liberalization varied across the region. For example, from the mid-1970s and with official state sanction in Hungary, a “second economy” existed in which people worked first for the state and then earned additional income by selling products in the market (Toth, 1993).

Nonetheless, after 1989, the basic rules of the social contract between the state and its citizens would undergo fundamental changes in all of these nations. As a result, after forty years of the securities of socialism, by 1995, all of these nations were in what Mason (1995) has referred to as an “ideological limbo”—struggling with the historical fact of having rejected the old economic system, but dealing with the vagaries of a new order, without being clearly committed to its principles. Analyses of data from the International Social Justice Project indicate that the adult populations of these societies wanted both the security provided by the welfare state as well as the higher standard of living presumed to come with a change to a market economy (Mason, 1995). It is precisely because these nations were in an “ideological limbo” and were debating the principles and policies that they wanted for their future that they were ideal settings to focus on class as a dynamic concept.

The Role of Schools Pre- and Post-1989

Prior to 1989, educational policies in the four security societies were structured to redress gender and class inequities that were part of the “dual system” of a bourgeois education. Whereas this “dual system” increased pre-existing gaps in students’ social backgrounds, the “unified school” was intended to democratize education by creating a common, standard, practical curriculum (Stech, 1994). These policies were successful in terms of increasing access to basic education, although highly specialized vocational courses were prioritized at the expense of a more flexible secondary school curriculum (LaPorte & Ringold, 1997).

Affirmative action policies also were designed to insure that students from proletarian backgrounds would be represented in the ranks of higher education. However, there was no monetary incentive to pursue education beyond secondary school. Better educated parents who were motivated to enroll their children in university were able to do so. Even policies requiring university matriculants to have prior work experience were a hurdle that could be overcome if one had connections to the managerial staff of industries (Tomusk, 2000). In the end, the cultural and social capital that better educated families accrued meant that their children were more likely to pursue higher education and in this way status differences persisted across generations (Tomusk, 2000). Thus, although wage compression minimized economic disparities, a kind of class system based on educational attainment was maintained.
As a major socialization institution, schools had a clear mandate in this era. Charged with promoting a commitment to the group rather than focusing on individual differences in achievement, teachers were supposed to impart values such as love of work, intrinsic learning, and collective behavior (Mitter, 1996). Curricular decisions were centralized and pedagogical practices minimized the autonomy of local authorities, teachers, and students (Jordanova, 1994). Just as the state acted as a “benevolent parent,” insuring the needs but restricting the autonomy of citizens, schools also were expected to act on students’ behalf. For example, rather than leaving students on their own to find work after graduation, partnerships between vocational schools and industries were common, insuring a smooth transition from school to work. After 1989, as state-run industries closed down or cut back, many school-industry partnerships dissolved (Rust, Knost, & Wichmann, 1994). For students in vocational schools, the loss of this job security was one of the costs of the transition to a market economy.

Since 1989, there have been fundamental changes in the roles and organization of schools. Schools are now considered places where the dispositions and competencies needed in the new social order should be nourished. Thus, developing the capacities of younger generations to think for themselves and to form autonomous opinions is a high priority. Also, local autonomy of teachers and school districts replaced the centralized control of curriculum. For example, the Hungarian National Core Curriculum drafted in the early 1990s through a national consensus process established core competencies but gave wide berth to teachers and local schools in interpreting the mandates (Karpati, Farkas, & Kovacs, 1994). However, after many years of teaching under the old rules, it was difficult for many teachers to suddenly become more autonomous in their thinking and flexible in their pedagogical methods (Rust et al., 1994).

Another fundamental change in the new order is the coupling of schooling to the demands of the market. Whereas education had little connection to earnings in the old system, it is the determinant of success in the new. In the vernacular of economists, there are now “returns to education” in the form of better paying jobs (Newell & Reilly, 1999). However, this new role of education occurred in the midst of cutbacks in state support and thus families had to assume a greater share of the financial burden. Despite economic insecurities in the region, the growth in private schools and courses in such areas as information technology and foreign languages suggests that families see the value of such supplements to their children’s schooling (Stech, 1994).

Fewer students are opting for the vocational school, preferring instead the breadth and flexibility of the curriculum in technical schools which is likely to improve their prospects for employment (Laporte & Ringold, 1997). In some nations educational reforms are the result of a longer evolutionary process. For example, the Hungarian School Law of 1985 made local school autonomy, alternative texts, and teacher sovereignty legal and allowed parents free choice of the schools their
children would attend while still maintaining the Communist Party’s domination over education (Nemeth & Pukánszky, 1994). In the Soviet Union in 1988, a special Committee for Educational Innovation (VNIK) focused their recommendations for policy reform on humanizing and democratizing the education of children (Rust, 1992). But the two changes (the economic returns to education and the increased emphasis on autonomy) are fundamental revisions in the role of schools that have been part of the transition in all of these nations.

The youth in our study from Central and Eastern Europe were a unique cohort—raised as children in the old system but facing the transition to adulthood under a new set of rules. Reiterating Mason’s (1995) observation that these nations were in an ideological limbo, we contend that in the shift to a market economy, the “winners” are the young people with more formal education and English fluency—those prepared to compete in the marketplace—who are the emerging middle class. It is this group who will be ready to take advantage of liberalization and who will appreciate the potential of competition to improve their lives. In line with the ambivalence noted by Mason, we do not expect anyone, regardless of their social status, to want to give up the family supports provided by the state. These supports were not means tested—everyone was eligible to receive them. But we expect that the middle-class youth in particular would see that they can benefit from a combination of the supports of the old system and the freedoms of the new.

The working classes in Central and Eastern Europe stand to lose in the new bargain and at least one national youth survey suggests that they may be cognizant of this fact. According to a 1993 national study in Hungary, working-class youth were more likely than their middle-class peers to feel insecure about their futures and concerned about finding their way in the world (Toth, 2001). During the transition to a market system, the scaffold of benefits is disappearing and people are increasingly “on their own.” This requires a psychological shift in the way that future generations will think about and make decisions for their future. For young people, schools no longer fulfill this role. But in addition, the whole array of structured outlets formerly provided by the state from youth clubs to organized sports to discotheques have disappeared as well. Although these settings may have served to maintain social control, they also helped to incorporate younger generations by extending networks of support. This and future generations are free to decide on their own what direction their lives will take and how to get there. But the onus of responsibility is on them and their families.

Since parents of working-class youth have fewer possibilities than their middle-class peers for providing a safety net for their children, we expect working-class youth to be even more committed than their middle-class peers to the customary social entitlements provided by the state. Likewise, since women are more likely to shoulder the responsibilities of family care giving, they should be more committed than their male peers to the state’s role in the provision of a social safety net. In terms of views about schools, with state-run industries closing, youth in
vocational tracks (i.e., the working class) are especially vulnerable. Thus, we expect them to be more committed than their middle-class peers to the schools’ tradition of smoothing the transition to work for non college-bound youth by helping them find jobs.

**Opportunity Societies: Justice as Equity in Outcome**

In contrast to security societies where policies guard against unequal outcomes, there are opportunity societies, in which justice is based on the principle of equity and there is no illusion that outcomes will (or should) be equal. In fact, income disparities are expected as the inevitable costs of an open competition (Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Lane, 1986). In Australia and the United States, principles of justice are based on the assumption that the playing field is level and that opportunities to succeed are the same for everyone. It is incumbent on the state to level the playing field by, for example, making schools and workplaces accessible to people with disabilities and providing public education which is supposed to compensate for uneven beginnings. Against the background of equal opportunity, the logic is that differences in status must reflect individual differences in performance. If one’s status is earned, then failing to move up the social ladder can be considered a reflection on one’s character (e.g., he’s lazy, or she doesn’t try).

Although, like Americans, Australians are considered rugged individualists, the sink-or-swim principle is moderated in Australia by social welfare programs, some of which are means tested, others not. For example, all Australian citizens, regardless of ability to pay, are entitled to a package of health and hospital benefits. Other aspects of the safety net are categorically based (e.g., government support for the disabled, unemployed, or single mothers) but these tend to be more generous than similar programs in the United States. In fact, the United States has the dubious distinction, compared to other developed countries, of spending very little of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on social programs to reduce poverty (Smeeding, Rainwater, & Burtless, 2001). Not surprisingly, international comparisons find that Americans are less supportive than people in other nations of government provisions for the needy (Kluegel, Mason, & Wegener, 1995).

**Schools in Opportunity Societies**

Carnoy and Levin (1985) argue that schools in the United States face a dialectical tension: They must respond to the uneven hierarchies (and equity principles) of a market system as well as the equality values that underlie a democratic political system. Education is the main mechanism for social mobility of lower socioeconomic status (SES) groups and the public school is one of the most egalitarian institutions most individuals will encounter in their lifetimes. Yet schools also turn out a work force to fit the job opportunities of a stratified economic system (Carnoy
Schools in the United States and Australia are not only expected to prepare the next generation of workers, but also to develop the dispositions of citizens in a democracy, including skills in perspective-taking and tolerance of difference. For such purposes, the comprehensive public high school (as opposed to separate vocational and college preparatory schools) where young people from different social backgrounds can mingle with one another is the prototype of the ideal organizational structure. In practice, residential segregation by class means that schools typically do not draw from a broad SES range. Furthermore, as Oakes (1985) has noted in her research on American schools, tracking or ability-grouping practices separate students from different social backgrounds even within the same school. Ultimately, such practices promote a widespread belief in the unequal giftedness of different social classes and endorsements of ability-grouping as natural and right (Fine, 1992).

Because citizens in democracies are expected to make decisions free from control by the state, democratic societies require citizens who are autonomous thinkers. Schools play an integral role in the development of such citizens by encouraging tolerance and the free exchange of ideas and opinions. Thus, an open climate of discussion in which students are encouraged to voice autonomous opinions, even if they disagree with the teacher, is considered an important pedagogical practice. In a 28-nation study of 14-year-olds, Torney-Purta and her colleagues found that such practices are correlated across countries with students’ civic knowledge and engagement (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001).

However, these are not standard instructional practices. Torney-Purta et al. (2001) found that, whereas the reports of Australian, American, and Russian students were above the international mean on measures of an “open classroom climate” (with U.S. students significantly above), Bulgarian, Czech, and Hungarian students’ perceptions were significantly below the international mean. Furthermore, research in the United States indicates that it is the socially advantaged, not the working class, who are encouraged at school to be autonomous thinkers. Different teaching practices and school climates are reported by youth in high- and low-tracked classes with the former noting more autonomy, self-direction, and cooperation and the latter reporting more alienation and punitiveness (Oakes, 1985). In part, this may be driven by expectations developed at home. As Kohn and his colleagues have shown, in both security and opportunity societies, middle class parents are more likely to consider autonomy and self-direction important values in their child rearing (Slomczynski, Miller, & Kohn, 1981).

**Summary of Hypotheses**

**Differences Between Types of Societies**

Based on the notion of widespread beliefs, we expected that youth in the opportunity societies would be more likely to endorse principles of equity, contending
that their society is a meritocracy where an individual’s hard work gets him/her ahead, that relying on support from the state undermines personal initiative, and that the state has little responsibility for programs that insure the security of her citizens. In contrast, youth in the security societies, accustomed to the state’s provision of social welfare, should, like adults in those countries, want social insurance programs to continue. Furthermore, in the midst of the 1990s high unemployment rates, we did not expect the youth in these nations to view their societies as meritocracies where, by dint of hard work, anyone could succeed.

Class and Gender Comparisons Within Different Types of Societies

Besides a general understanding of their social order, we contend that adolescents appreciate how that order works for people “like them.” Thus, we expected different patterns in the beliefs of working-class and middle-class youth in the two types of societies. In the security societies, the terms of the social contract were eroding. Because women and working-class families bore a disproportionate burden of the changes, we expected that they would be more supportive of the state’s obligations to continue providing for the welfare of citizens. Thus, in security societies we expected that female and working-class youth would be more supportive of the state’s social welfare role when compared to their male and middle-class peers.

Similarly, we expected that adolescents’ micro level justice beliefs (their views of appropriate roles and practices in schools) would reflect their views of how these societal institutions work for people “like them.” It was the working-class youth in vocational schools who were facing unemployment as state-run industries closed and the seamless connection between schools and industries dissolved. Thus, this group should be more likely than their middle-class compatriots to feel that schools should play a role in finding jobs for non college-bound youth. In contrast, middle-class students in those societies should endorse pedagogical practices that increase autonomy and competition because this group is more likely to reap the benefits of such school reforms. Not only are middle-class youth more likely to benefit from these changes, but autonomy may be more salient to this group if it is more highly valued by their parents (Slomczynski et al., 1981).

In the opportunity societies we argue, also, that adolescents develop a particular understanding of how the rules of the social order apply to people “like them.” However, in these nations where the equity principles that underlie a market economy have been in place for many years, we contend that youth from working-class backgrounds who stay in school will be even more committed than their middle-class peers to a meritocratic ethos. This thesis is consistent with the psychological implications of social class uncovered in our studies of American youths’ theories about inequality (Flanagan, Ingram, Gallay, & Gallay, 1997; Flanagan & Tucker, 1999) and in Hochschild’s (1995) research on middle- and working-class African-Americans’ beliefs about attaining the American dream. In both cases, it is the
working class who believes that individuals can achieve the American dream by their own hard work whereas the middle class expresses more doubt. We have argued that such cynicism carries little psychological cost for middle-class youth who are less vulnerable to failures of the system. Even if it is flawed, it is not flawed for them. But if working-class youth are going to make it, they may have to disregard systemic failures and believe strongly in the efficacy of individual effort, a view which is consistent with a decision to stay in school (Flanagan & Tucker, 1999).

Competition and student autonomy have been typical pedagogical practices in the opportunity societies and we do not expect that endorsement of these practices will vary by gender or class in these settings. With rare exceptions, such as school-work apprenticeship, students in opportunity societies are accustomed to finding jobs for themselves. Thus, we expected that, regardless of gender or class, adolescents in opportunity societies would be unlikely to feel that schools should help students find jobs. Finally, with respect to adolescents’ views of the climate at their own school, we expected that sensitivity to students’ seeking their own competitive advantage would be higher in the security societies. During this period of rapid transformation, familiar moorings were lost and the future was unclear. With little training in new pedagogies and often with no new textbooks, teachers, students, and schools suddenly had to adjust to a new reality. In this context of an uncertain future where anxieties were high, we expected that adolescents generally would be inclined to look out for themselves.

Method

Participants

A school-based sampling strategy was used to collect the data. Purposive sampling was used to obtain groups of adolescents from “high” and “low” status backgrounds within each country. To obtain comparable samples, students were sampled in different school types in the security societies, whereas in the opportunity societies they were recruited from schools located in middle-class and working-class/poor communities. Schools were located in urban settings in each country. A minimum of five hundred adolescents from each country participated, ranging in age from 12 to 19 years, with a mean age of 15.7 years (see Flanagan et al., 1998 for additional details).

Procedures and Measures

Data were gathered in the spring of 1995 by research teams led by a Principal Investigator (P.I.) from each country (Each P.I. was either a research scientist or a university faculty member). Surveys were administered to groups of students in
social studies classes. The project was described as an international study of young people’s opinions about issues in society. Measures were developed after lengthy discussions among the collaborating scholars about the terms of the social contract in their country and the policies, including the organizational and instructional practices of schools, that flowed from that contract. Some items were developed specifically for the study and others were adapted from the International Social Justice Project (Kluegel et al., 1995). Items were developed in English and checked by each P.I. for validity and then translated by the respective P.I.s into the principal language of their country after which each survey was translated back into English and checked for consistency across sites. The survey tapped a wide range of topics but we discuss only those germane to this article.

**Independent variables.** Three independent variables were used in the analyses: Type of social contract (opportunity society vs. security society), gender (male vs. female), and social class (working class vs. middle class). Our operationalization of social class requires some discussion. In a study of this kind, parental occupation and family income as measures of family SES pose problems of comparability across countries. In the Central/Eastern European nations, there was little variation in income associated with different occupations making both income and occupation poor indicators of social class. However, there were differences in family status associated with education. We chose maternal education as the most valid indicator of an adolescent’s “relative” status within a society for the following reasons: first, within our data maternal and paternal education were highly correlated in each country; second, single-parent families across all of these countries are likely to be female-headed, and third, in Central/Eastern Europe generally, women’s educational attainment equaled or surpassed that of men. Finally, as Toth (1993) observes, whereas fathers in those countries contributed a greater share to the family’s income, mothers nurtured the educational aspirations of children. (In our data, adolescents’ educational aspirations are significantly related to their mother’s level of education). Based on this logic, we created a two-level categorical variable to indicate an adolescent’s social class: Working-class youth were those whose mothers completed thirteen years of education or less and middle-class students were those whose mothers completed fourteen or more years of education.

**Dependent variables.** Teens responded to each measure described below using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree.” Two dependent variables were used to assess adolescents’ macro-level justice beliefs: (a) whether they considered their society a meritocracy, and (b) whether they felt that the state should provide a package of social entitlements to citizens. Four items tapped adolescents’ contention that their own society was a meritocracy where anyone who was willing to work hard could get ahead and their belief that
relying on government aid undermined personal initiative by encouraging laziness and cheating. This scale had an overall Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of .53 (α = .63 in the opportunity societies and α = .48 in the security societies). Three items were used to measure adolescents’ view that the government should provide social entitlements such as health and legal services and financial support for families raising children. Cronbach’s alpha was .46 in the opportunity societies and α = .40 in the security societies.

Three variables were used to indicate adolescents’ views about appropriate practices in schools, (i.e., their micro-level justice beliefs), and one tapped adolescents’ perceptions of the climate at their own school. Two items (r = .40) comprised the measure of adolescent’s view that schools should foster student autonomy (that students should have a say in how their school is run and that students become better thinkers if allowed to disagree with their teachers). A single item was used to measure adolescents’ opinions about the extent to which schools should help non college-bound students find jobs. The four items used to measure adolescents’ endorsement of a competitive ethos at school tapped their beliefs that competition in school prepared one for competition in life and that cooperative learning practices were both unfair to the smarter students and allowed some students to be lazy. For this scale, Cronbach’s alpha was .51 in the opportunity societies and α = .45 in the security societies. Finally, three items tapped teens’ perceptions of a competitive ethos among students at their own school (overall α = .44; α = .47 in the opportunity societies and α = .42 in the security societies). High scores reflected the view that “most students” in their school looked out for themselves and their close friends but were not interested in the general welfare of others in the institution.

Analyses and Results

A 2 (Social Contract: Opportunity vs. Security) × 2 (Gender: Male vs. Female) × 2 (Social Class: Working vs. Middle) MANOVA was run on the six dependent variables. Using the Wilks’ criterion, the combined dependent variables were significantly associated with Social Contract, \( F(6, 4495) = 237.43, p < .001 \), Gender \( F(6, 4495) = 9.28, p < .001 \), and Social Class \( F(6, 4495) = 23.41, p < .001 \). Multivariate analyses also revealed a significant Social Contract × Gender interaction \( F(6, 4495) = 3.18, p < .005 \), and a significant Social Contract × Social Class interaction \( F(6, 4495) = 6.92, p < .001 \). These findings justified further examination of the univariate effects, which are reported below. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for each dependent variable by social contract, gender, and social class. Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of each dependent variable, separated by working-class and middle-class groups within each type of society. Because several scales had low alphas, we ran all of the analyses with the individual items from each scale as dependent variables. The
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Contract</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Social Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 2115</td>
<td>N = 2393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society is a meritocracy</td>
<td>3.62a</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government support for entitlements</td>
<td>3.02a</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools should foster autonomy</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools should help students find jobs</td>
<td>3.37a</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support competitive ethos at school</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of negative school climate</td>
<td>3.18a</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 2670</td>
<td>N = 1838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.58a</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>3.44b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.01a</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>4.17b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Note: Scales range from 1 to 5. Higher scores indicate stronger support for the belief.

a,b For each scale, within Social Contract, Gender, and Social Class, means bearing different superscripts are significantly different, p < .05.
Table 2. Adolescents’ Macro and Micro Justice Beliefs: Social Class Comparisons Within Different Types of Societies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working N = 579</td>
<td>Middle N = 530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society is a meritocracy</td>
<td>3.76a</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government support for entitlements</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools should foster autonomy</td>
<td>4.01a</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School should help students find jobs</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support competitive ethos at school</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of negative school climate</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scales range from 1 to 5. Higher scores indicate stronger support for the belief.

For each scale, within Social Contract, means bearing different superscripts are significantly different, $p < .05$.

results from these analyses essentially confirmed those based on the use of scales and we have elected to present the results for the scales.

Belief that One’s Society is a Meritocracy

There were significant univariate main effects of Social Contract, $F(1, 4508) = 76.01, p < .001$, Gender, $F(1, 4508) = 28.67, p < .001$, and Social Class, $F(1, 4508) = 30.51, p < .001$ on adolescents’ contention that their society was a meritocracy. Overall, teens from opportunity societies, working-class teens, and boys were significantly more likely to endorse this belief compared to teens from security societies, middle-class teens and girls, respectively. However, the Social Contract and Social Class effects are qualified by significant two-way, $F(1, 4508) = 28.75, p < .001$ and three-way interactions, $F(1, 4508) = 4.38, p < .05$. As expected, whereas there were no class differences in the security societies, in the opportunity societies, middle-class teens (and especially girls $M = 3.35 SD = .83$ vs. middle-class boys $M = 3.62 SD = .74$) were less likely to believe that their society was a meritocracy (see Table 2). Additional analyses comparing adolescents in the United States with their Australian counterparts revealed that the class by social contract interaction was specific to the American sample: Whereas working-class youth in the United States believed that they lived in a just society where individual initiative was the main route to success $(M = 3.80 SD = .75)$, their middle-class compatriots were less likely to endorse this view $(M = 3.35 SD = .85)$.

Government Support for Social Entitlements

Univariate analyses revealed main effects of Social Contract, $F(1, 4508) = 1189.00 p < .001$ and Gender, $F(1, 4508) = 10.92, p < .001$. In general, youth
from security societies and girls were more likely to endorse a helping role for the government. Additional comparisons of Australian and American youth revealed that the former \( (M = 3.22 \ SD = .68) \) were more likely than the latter \( (M = 2.85 \ SD = .71) \) to endorse a social welfare role for the state (albeit significantly less so than the endorsement given by their peers in the security societies). Follow-up tests of the Social Contract × Social Class interaction, \( F(1, 4508) = 5.02, p < .05 \), revealed that while no class differences existed in the opportunity societies, as we had predicted, working-class youth in the security societies were more likely than their middle-class peers to believe that it is a government’s obligation to provide for citizens.

**Schools Should Foster Autonomy**

There was a main effect of Social Class, \( F(1, 4508) = 37.89, p < .001 \) and a Social Class × Gender interaction, \( F(1, 4508) = 4.58, p < .05 \) on adolescents’ endorsement of schools’ fostering autonomy. Overall, middle-class youth and especially girls were more likely to support this role for schools. They were more likely \( (M = 4.25 \ SD = .66) \) than working class girls \( (M = 4.00 \ SD = .70) \) and than middle class boys \( (M = 4.12 \ SD = .80) \) to endorse this role. The main effects of social class were contrary to our expectation that middle-class youth in the security societies in particular would endorse student autonomy.

**Schools Should Help Students Find Jobs**

Main effects of Social Contract \( F(1, 4508) = 18.00, p < .001 \) and Social Class \( F(1, 4508) = 28.04, p < .001 \) were found for youth’s endorsement of a role for schools in smoothing the transition to work by helping students find jobs but these effects were qualified by a significant Social Contract × Social Class interaction, \( F(1, 4508) = 6.28, p < .01 \). Contrary to our expectation, youth in opportunity societies, particularly in Australia \( (M = 3.44 \ SD = .98 \) vs. United States \( M = 3.33 \ SD = 1.11) \), were more likely to endorse this view and working-class youth were more likely than those in the middle class to feel this way. As expected, the interaction was due to the fact that working-class youth in security societies who had benefited from this practice were more likely than their middle-class peers to endorse it.

**Support for a Competitive Ethos in School**

A main effect of Gender, \( F(1, 4508) = 19.69, p < .001 \), an interaction of Social Class with Social Contract \( F(1, 4508) = 4.82, p < .05 \), and a three-way interaction, \( F(1, 4508) = 5.43, p < .05 \) were found for the extent to which adolescents endorsed competitive learning practices at school. Overall, males were more likely to endorse these practices and, as expected, middle-class youth in the
security societies were more supportive of competition at school when compared to their working-class peers. The three-way interaction was due to the fact that, in the opportunity societies, middle-class females ($M = 3.28 \ SD = .64$) were less supportive of competition at school than were males from the middle class ($M = 3.46 \ SD = .63$). In the security societies, by contrast, it was the working-class females ($M = 3.27 \ SD = .61$) who were less supportive than their male counterparts ($M = 3.39 \ SD = .64$).

**Perceptions of the Student Climate at School**

Students’ perceptions of a self-absorbed, alienating student climate at their school revealed main effects of Social Contract, $F(1, 4508) = 99.13, \ p < .001$, Gender $F(1, 4508) = 7.70, \ p < .001$, and Social Class, $F(1, 4508) = 14.63, \ p < .001$. Youth in security societies, males, and middle-class youth were more likely to perceive this climate (see Table 1). Again, the results are qualified by interactions of Social Class with Social Contract $F(1, 4508) = 5.57, \ p < .05$ and of Gender with Social Contract, $F(1, 4508) = 12.92, \ p < .001$. As shown in Table 2, whereas no class differences were found in the opportunity societies, middle-class teens in the security societies were more likely than their working-class peers to feel that students at their school looked out for themselves and their friends and didn’t care about other members of the student body. The Gender by Social Contract interaction was due to the fact that, whereas there were no gender differences in the security societies, boys in the opportunity societies ($M = 3.25 \ SD = .67$) reported this type of climate more so than did girls ($M = 3.10 \ SD = .67$).

**Discussion**

We have argued two points in this chapter. First, that adolescents’ normative beliefs about the relationship between states, citizens, and institutions would reflect the arrangements of the social contract to which they are accustomed. Second, that social class and gender differences within particular social orders would reflect adolescents’ perceptions of the way the social contracts of their societies operate for people “like them.” We discussed the evidence for each of these hypotheses first for adolescents’ macro-level justice beliefs and then for their views about schools as institutions in their societies.

Support for our first hypothesis was found for adolescents’ macro-level justice beliefs. Compared to their peers in the security societies, adolescents in the opportunity settings were more likely to believe that their nations were meritocracies where hard work paid off in an individual’s success. Likewise, endorsement of the government’s role in providing a package of social welfare programs reflected the arrangements to which the adolescents were accustomed. Not only were those in the security societies more likely to endorse this role, but Australian youth,
accustomed to some government subsidies (albeit more modest when compared to those of other social welfare states), were more likely than youth in the United States to feel that the government should provide them.

Support was found for our second hypothesis in the case of social class but not in the case of gender. As expected, working-class teens in the security societies were more likely than their middle-class peers to feel that the state should continue providing a safety net for citizens. The transition to a market economy implied special hardships for the working class who stood to lose benefits, under the new deal, that would be difficult for them to recover in a market system. In the opportunity societies, social class differences in the youths’ beliefs that their society was a meritocracy also were consistent with our prediction. In Australia, but especially in the United States, where a rugged individualist ethos has been the norm for many years, it was the working class-youth who were more likely to believe that by dint of hard work anyone could get ahead and that relying on welfare ruined a person’s character. This world view may be functional for working-class youth in an opportunity society who want to move up the social ladder. Indeed, embracing a belief in the efficacy of an individual’s hard work may be even more important for these youth than for their more privileged peers. The latter group is protected by social networks that extend from their families, connect them to a range of opportunities, and help them to navigate the system. In contrast, self reliance and hard work for the working class is indispensable. There is no other way for people “like them” to make it. That said, we note that these macro-level justice beliefs are generic views. As others have found (Hochschild, 1995; Mickelson, 1990), although marginalized groups may believe in the promise of the American dream as a guiding principle, they may be less convinced that the specific tenets will pay off for people “like them.”

Contrary to our predictions, it was not females in the security societies but females in general who were more likely than males to endorse the view that the state should provide for the needs of the people. In contrast, males generally had stronger beliefs in meritocratic principles, such as “individuals who work hard get ahead.” Our measure of state support for social entitlements included support for families raising children. The stronger endorsement by females may reflect an awareness of the care-giving responsibilities they are likely to shoulder or the greater sense of social responsibility and concern for others’ well-being noted in the gender socialization literature (Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, Wagner, & Chapman, 1992). The pattern for adolescent males lends itself to a more “rugged individualist” interpretation. Not only did they endorse a meritocratic image of their societies but, as a group, males were more supportive of a competitive ethos at school, feeling that competition in school prepared one for competition in life and that there were costs of cooperative learning for smarter students. Finally, there were interactions of gender with class and of gender, class, and social contract which we had not hypothesized. Middle-class females across the two types of society were
more committed to the inclusion of students’ voices at school. More than any other group, they contended that schools should foster students’ autonomy. Within the opportunity societies, middle-class females were less supportive of competition at school when compared to middle-class males but within the security societies, working-class females were less supportive of competition when compared to their male counterparts. With respect to adolescents’ perceptions of the student climate at their own school, males in the opportunity societies were more likely than their female peers to feel that the typical student at their school was just looking out for him/herself.

In general we found little support for the operation of normative beliefs in our respondents’ micro-level justice beliefs, i.e., their views about schools as social institutions. Teens in the two types of societies were equally likely to endorse both a competitive ethos and student autonomy as appropriate pedagogical practices. And, contrary to our expectations, teens in the opportunity rather than the security societies gave a stronger endorsement to schools helping non college-bound students find jobs. In the security societies where this had been a common practice prior to the transition in 1989, working-class teens would have preferred that schools continue this practice. Consistent with our second hypothesis, they endorsed this normative practice which benefited people “like them.” But the middle-class teens in these societies were more realistic. Insofar as the connections between schools and state-run industries were disappearing, one could argue that they saw the writing on the wall—although the strength of their opposition is somewhat surprising. More than any others, middle-class youth in the security societies were opposed to schools helping non college-bound students find jobs.

Perhaps their opposition reflects an emerging class consciousness, an interpretation of these data which is consistent with the pattern revealed in two other results. First, as predicted, these middle-class youth were more likely than their working-class peers in the security societies to hold that students should enjoy autonomy at school. What we had not expected was that middle-class teens in both types of societies would be more likely than their working-class peers to feel that schools should promote student autonomy. However, as already noted, these results are consistent with the greater emphasis that middle-class parents in both types of societies place on autonomy in their child rearing (Slomczynski et al., 1981). Although there are class differences in opportunities for autonomy at school in the United States (Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Fine, 1992; Oakes, 1985), we believe that in the Central/Eastern European societies, family factors are more likely to be implicated in the class differences in youths’ preferences for autonomy at school. In the midst of the transition, teaching styles in those countries could not have accommodated so quickly. Furthermore, international studies suggest that students in three of the four security nations in our study are less likely to report open communication climates in their schools (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).
Adolescents’ endorsements of competition at school is the second piece of evidence for an emerging middle-class consciousness in the Central/Eastern European nations. Consistent with our predictions, it was the middle-class youth in the security societies who were more likely than their working class peers to endorse a competitive ethos at school as good preparation for life. This pattern of results supports our contention that social orders are not simply reproduced but are reconstructed as new generations come of age, and that schools are settings where this dialectic is played out. Again, this may reflect family values. As Stech (1994) points out, whereas in the old system in Central/Eastern Europe, schools provided the guidance and connections students needed for a smooth transition to life, in the new order, individuals (and by extension their families) have to define their own paths to success.

Overall, youth in the transitional nations of Central/Eastern Europe had a more misanthropic view of their fellow students. They felt that most students in their schools cared only about their friends and looked out for themselves rather than helping others. We had predicted this main effect and believe that the perception reflects the loss of moorings and the strains associated with the uncertainties of life in the new order. Yet, the fact that these perceptions as well as a belief in a competitive ethos at school were higher among teens from the middle class may mean that looking out for oneself was already coupled with success in their world view.

Carnoy & Levin (1985) argue that schools are a social form that is characterized by change, one that is always coming into being. Their observation may be more obvious in a context of rapid social change. The role of schools is shifting as the nations of Central and Eastern Europe make the transition to a market economy and to a democratic multi-party political system. Education increasingly is linked to pay-offs in the market. But schools also are charged with changing their pedagogical practices to develop more democratic dispositions in the next generation of citizens. As the practices of schools evolve, new opportunities for self-determination may be appreciated by middle-class youth who, more than their working-class peers, are likely to reap the benefits of these changes. Schools are mediating institutions, settings where the principles of the social contract between states and citizens are interpreted and negotiated. That interpretation is dynamic because the people in these settings have different views of the way things are, the way they should be, and the way the rules work for people ‘like them’. The rules of opportunity and security societies imply distinct costs and benefits to different social groups. And members of those groups make individual and collective decisions as they see the options before them. In the end, these choices, which we believe reflect the psychological meaning of social class within different social orders, are the bases for both social stability and social change.
References


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