

The Role of Social Mechanisms in the Formation of Social Inequalities

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Abstract

Despite lacking a commonly shared definition, social mechanisms have recently received considerable attention in sociology. Social inequality research has been a trailblazer in providing examples of how social mechanism can further, theoretically and methodologically, progress. Two different understandings of social mechanisms are reflected in the literature. One refers to theoretical and methodological precision when describing the causal chains that lead from specific antecedents to specific outcomes. The other is a program designed to articulate a complete taxonomy of a limited number of mechanisms as abstract ideas to explain social inequalities. I discuss both approaches how they can fruitfully refer to each other. In the final section, I discuss social mechanisms in the view of a new challenge to social inequality research, that is, a growing interdisciplinary interest in gene–environment interference. By superseding the old and fruitless nature-versus-nurture debate, new fields of social inquiry emerge, but pose also the question what it can add to a better understanding of inequality-generating social mechanisms. As I will show, the inclusion of genetic information in social science explanations does not threaten sociology as a discipline, but will potentially enrich both the currently proposed mechanistic approaches in social inequality research.

THE GROWING INTEREST OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN SOCIAL MECHANISMS

Over the past two decades or so, mechanisms and mechanism-based explanations have received increased attention in the fields of philosophy and science. This is also true of sociology, a discipline in which mechanisms are advocated as an alternative to both descriptive empiricism without causal relevance and untestable, highly abstract grand theory (Hedström & Swedberg, 1998). On one hand, mechanism-based explanations should avoid empiricism, in which correlations between variables can be mistaken for proof of generative processes. Correlations can be distorted by endogeneity and unmeasured confounders, making observed correlations merely spurious instead of actually bringing about a specific outcome under defined

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conditions (Elster, 2007). An often cited example for causality problems in correlational research is the indeed existing positive correlation between storks and childbirths in the same region. On the other hand, the search for covering-law explanations is also seen as a fruitless effort. Universally valid explanations for social phenomena by means of strictly deductive, universally valid laws in a strict sense do not appear to be possible. There is nothing like the law of gravity in physics, working in the same way all over the world. The same can be said of grand theory, for example, systems theory, which is more philosophical than scientific in that it purports to explain everything but cannot be tested empirically.

What can the mechanisms approach offer to avoid all the problems and pitfalls that plague these other approaches? Though there is no unitary definition of social mechanisms, one common denominator is the conviction that there is a more promising intermediate level of generality and abstraction. Such an intermediate degree of generalizability is derived from a proven robustness that specific antecedents regularly produce a specific effect under particular conditions, though maybe not, or to a much lesser degree, under other conditions. As an example, there is a universal predisposition of humans to prefer similar humans as interaction partners. However, whether this predisposition leads indeed to such relations is largely dependent on structural opportunities and constraints to get acquainted with similar or dissimilar others (Blau, 1974). If in addition possible confounding elements are ruled out or controlled effectively, mechanisms may be conceived of as laws that have some restricted generality (Elster, 2007, p. 44). On the basis of this common ground, two very distinct mechanistic agendas have emerged in the social sciences.

SOCIAL MECHANISM AS STYLE OF THEORIZING AND MODELING

The first refers to concrete mechanisms as real, existing phenomena, as concrete and observable causal chains. In this case, the mechanisms approach is no more than a commitment to a number of principles of conducting social research in order to explain human agents' behavior and its consequences. Indispensable requirements are minimizing spurious correlations and confounders to make causal inference as reliable as possible. Theoretically, as especially analytical sociology insists, generative processes must be traced back to agents and their actions (Hedström, 2005). However, compared to the former concentration of rational decision-making, now attention should be paid to more sophisticated ideas about how individual actions aggregate to form stable patterns of agency among individual and collective actors (Kalter & Kroneberg, 2014). In a similar vein, Gross (2009, p. 369) advocates a "pragmatist theory of mechanisms," also with an emphasis on "chains or

aggregations of actors, problem situations, and habitual responses—always with the possibility, greater in some circumstances than [in] others, that a novel way of responding to a problem could emerge for any of the actors involved, potentially altering the workings of the mechanism.” However, opinion is divided over how far one should go to reach a deeper understanding of the “cogs and wheels” involved (Elster, 2007, p. 7). For Hedström, reducing behavior to extrasocial forces such as neuronal processes or genetics should be avoided by such stopping rules. Reskin (2003, p. 6) already rejects motive-based explanations because they themselves must be explained by social forces and therefore are not at the left side of the equation.

TOWARD ABSTRACT, THEORETICAL MECHANISMS

The second agenda considers mechanisms as analytical constructs, or abstractions from real processes. It goes beyond the fairly imprecise notion that mechanisms have “some generality” or regularity (Hedström & Swedberg, 1998, p. 19). These constructs are theoretical creations, or ideas, about how a certain outcome is produced, leading in the end to a complete taxonomy of mechanisms that shape the social world, which admittedly is only imaginable as a long-term project of social inquiry. Which taxonomy, as a “grammar of the social,” will be successful in the end is an open project. It will depend not only on whether highly abstract mechanisms can be successfully traced back to a number of convincing, more specific empirical substantiations of this general mechanism but also on whether the persuasiveness of the theoretical idea provides an overarching general mechanism. Thus, concrete and abstract mechanisms are not independent of one another. Rather, concrete mechanisms can, by way of analogies and abstractions, be categorized from the bottom up into abstract mechanisms that then have a higher degree of generalizability, are less bound to certain contextual circumstances, and can be related to a wider range of social phenomena. Yet the discussion about properly defining a defined set of mechanisms can also influence the operationalization of substantive concrete mechanisms from the top down, as I will show for the case of mechanisms that create social inequality.

MECHANISMS IN SOCIAL INEQUALITY RESEARCH

Social inequality research may be the field of social inquiry in which the mechanisms approach has received most attention in order to overcome a merely descriptive account of unequal distributions of outcomes, such as Gini coefficients for the income distribution, and earnings inequality between, say, women and men in the labor market. Maybe due to rising

inequality in the Western world the interest in how, by which “cogs and wheels,” unequal chances and distributions come about and change over time was strengthened. I will trace the contribution of mechanism-based explanations by referring in an exemplary way to three prominent developments in social inequality research: revitalized mainly by Tilly (1998) the attempt to define theoretical mechanisms of high generality and the long-term project of outlining a classification of highly abstract theoretical inequality-generating mechanisms; at a more concrete but still medium level of generality the role of perceptions and evaluations; and as research field where both abstract and concrete mechanisms are tried to relate to each other research on relational inequalities in work organizations with a specific focus on gender.

TOWARD ABSTRACT-THEORETICAL MECHANISMS GENERATING INEQUALITY

Defining and referring to abstract, inequality-generating mechanisms as having a high degree of generality is motivated by the goal to overcome the often disparaged fragmentation, or “balkanization” (Reskin, 2003, p. 5), of social-inequality research into highly specialized theories confined to particular domains that lessen the scientific and sociopolitical significance of inequality research. Among such mechanisms, Marx’s exploitation and Weber’s social closure theories have a long-standing tradition in social-inequality research, partly under other labels, such as “ascription.” In addition, in many cases, the new surge of interest in the mechanisms approach within inequality research is stimulated by these theories, as evidenced by Tilly’s *Durable Inequality* and the “Symposium on Class Analysis” in the *American Journal of Sociology* (2000), during which A. Sørensen made an influential suggestion about not only how to bridge the gap between these two mechanisms as unrelated alternatives but also how to overcome the different viewpoints in sociology and economics concerning wage-setting mechanisms.¹

There are only few attempts in the literature to extend these two classical theoretical mechanisms to a more comprehensive taxonomy of inequality-generating mechanisms. One is provided by Tilly (1998) himself in terms of two additional abstract mechanisms, which he calls *emulation* and *adaptation*. These mechanisms are thought to give attention to the important point of how inequalities endure over time and spread within a society.

1. Exploitation occurs in cooperative relationships when the more powerful party is in a position to secure a disproportionate share of the value created through cooperation. Social closure is the monopolization of access to positions, resources, and market opportunities. An example is the exclusion of competitors for jobs due to characteristics that have nothing to do with a differential ability for these jobs, like sex and ethnicity. Reducing competition then enhances bargaining power which offers the greatest opportunity for exploitation.

Emulation, according to Tilly, refers to a transfer of existing organizational forms and practices of exploitation or opportunity-hoarding, which is largely identical with Weber's social closure, from one social context to another; adaptation means the embedding of inequalities in daily rules, routines, and rituals, which make such inequalities appear ubiquitous if not "natural." These mechanisms stabilize patterns of inequality both within organizations and across different social contexts. In other words, they are conceived as general generic mechanisms but whose effect is contingent on specific conditions.

Therborn (2006) and Diewald and Faist (2011) have tried instead to identify additional mechanisms complementary to social closure and exploitation. Therborn defines distantiation as the rules of competition that yield a winner-loser gap (e.g., the Matthew effect). By hierarchization Therborn means the structure of institutionalized roles and positions with their respective unequal rights and resources. Diewald and Faist distinguish between exclusion and opportunity hoarding as two different degrees of social closure. While *exclusion* refers to the access to informal (networks) or formal (organizations) modes of cooperation, *opportunity hoarding* refers to practices of privileging or disadvantaging certain groups *within* these social spheres, for example, in career ladders. Moreover, Diewald and Faist include the perception and appraisal of different groups as important precondition of the generation of inequality, though they must not have a direct bearing on the generation of social inequalities.

PERCEPTIONS AND EVALUATIONS

The decision of including group-related perceptions and evaluations reacts to a renewed interest in social psychological mechanisms, which seem especially relevant for interaction in highly diversified societies. It corresponds moreover to the shifting interest from individual rational action to interaction, bargaining, and chains of social action mentioned earlier. Unlike rational-action theories, social-psychological concepts point to the often unconscious perception of groups along easily observable, more or less familiar attributes that automatically lead to stereotypes and prejudices or, more generally, expectations about group members' performance and status in society. If, for example, women are regularly observed to work in lower status occupations compared to men, then they are easily assigned less competence than men simply by being female (Ridgeway, 2011), which then influences interaction generating social inequality. Similarly, boundary drawing, mostly along easily observable characteristics such as ethnicity or gender, leads to perceptions of strangeness ("us" vs "them"), and then

inferiority, which shapes interaction patterns as well and contributes to legitimizing inequality: “Heterogeneities are always perceived and appraised, there is always a historical backdrop of cultural representations and practices for dealing with them, and they are always invoked or engendered by actors in the generation of inequality” (Diewald & Faist, 2011, p. 16). Such perceptions and immediately (and mostly unconsciously) linked evaluations are generic mechanisms in the sense of social mechanisms with a high level of generality. In essence, they are universal, but their strength, and the salience of certain attributes compared with others are contingent and subject to a variety of conditions, which in this research field are not least the conditions of work organizations and their embeddedness in cultural and institutional environments. Therefore, the relevance of being male or female, native or migrant, varies considerably between workplaces in different countries (Avent-Holt & Tomascovic-Devey, 2012).

RELATIONAL INEQUALITIES IN WORK ORGANIZATIONS

Organizational inequality research is perhaps the research field where mechanistic approaches have developed farthest. This applies both to an ever more fine-graded, methodologically advanced identification of concrete, substantial mechanisms as well as the attempt to formulate a limited number of generic, abstract-theoretical mechanisms at a high level of generality. Not least organizational research applied sophisticated inquiries into intergroup perceptions and evaluations and action motivations.

When looking at generic abstract-theoretical mechanisms, an implicit assumption about selfish motivation is inherent to the system. Tomascovic-Devey (2014), for example, offers two more “core organizational” abstract mechanisms: claims-making and resource-pooling. The mechanism of resource-pooling directs attention to the fact that within-organization groups try to exploit and hoard for themselves the resources that flow into the organization. Organizations vary greatly in the amount of these resources minus investments and in the structure of the resource flow (e.g., profit centers). The struggle over the distribution of these resources among different within-firm groups or actors is referred to as *claims-making*. Claims-making can take place as part of taken-for-granted practices and formal rules, including industrial relations that extend beyond a given organization, and it can be mobilized through individual actions such as applying for a better job or voicing a perceived discrimination. Both mechanisms are seen as generic but are contingent on different organizational conditions.

In other words, the degree to which a given categorical distinction gets activated first at the level of perception and evaluation, and then perpetuated in different interaction contexts, is in the sphere of gainful employment determined by formal rules and practices within work organizations. Organizations often make reference to existing categorical distinctions in society. However, whether or not a work organization adheres to such existing beliefs is contingent on organizational and environmental conditions. In sum, the investigation of these processes made organizational inequality research to a major driving force to establish the social mechanism approach in social inequality research.

With regard to concrete, substantial mechanisms, it is important to note that these studies try to move away from assigning significance to organization variables—which usually are less-than-appropriate measures for any mechanism—to measuring within-firm practices that are shared, disputed, or bargained among coworkers, supervisors, and upper management, and to note how they are framed by organizational conditions. This approach comes closest to what was defined as the core feature of substantive mechanisms derived earlier: the “nuts and bolts” processes by which cause-and-effect relationships come about are seen as “chains or aggregations of problem situations and the effects that ensue as a result of the habits actors use to resolve them” (Gross, 2009, p. 375). Consequently, in this view, “inequality is *not* lodged in positions, occupations, or even jobs but in the relationships between positions within organizations [... and ...] similarly *not* lodged in people, races, or genders but in the relationships between people and between status categories” (Tomaskovic-Devey, 2014, p. 52, emphases in the original). The increasing availability of high-quality, information-rich employer–employee data provides us with unprecedented opportunities to properly define such contingent constraints that enable or prevent mechanisms from becoming effective.

GENDER INEQUALITY IN EARNINGS

However, sometimes inequality-generating mechanisms are not simply located in one sphere of life but refer to interdependencies between different spheres. Recent research in sociology and economics has revealed a key mechanism behind gender earnings inequality in the disproportionality of rewards for long, and particularly irregular, working hours, which usually affect men more than women. Such nonlinear pay with respect to hours worked seems to account for most of the residual differences in earnings based on gender (Cha & Weeden, 2014; Goldin, 2014). This effect was strongest in occupations in which “long work hours are especially common and the norm of doing extra work is deeply embedded in organizational

practices and occupational cultures” (Cha & Weeden, 2014, p. 457). To be sure, employers’ expectations concerning overtime work and irregular working hours appear to be gender-neutral, as are the monetary rewards for such extra work. In addition, a third study confirmed this mechanism by investigating the gender gap in performance among associate lawyers in the United States. It had the advantage that employees’ performance (which is very difficult to measure) could be assessed on the basis of criteria that were unequivocally accepted and highly transparent: the number of hours billed to clients and the amount of new client revenue generated (Azmat & Ferrer, 2015). In both respects, male lawyers considerably outperformed their female counterparts. Again, the gender difference in pay could not be explained by the classical modes of workplace discrimination, as the “cogs and wheels” that serve to explain this difference is the factor of motivation for long and irregular working hours, namely the aspiration to become a partner in the law firm.

However, it is striking that neither of these studies interprets the results as a final argument against any discrimination hypothesis. Instead, they point out that it is, indirectly, the unequal obligations of men and women with respect to unpaid domestic work and childcare that has caused the discrepancy between organizational practices and the ability to require employees to do extra work and work irregular hours. In the lawyer study, the presence of preschool children proved to influence the gender performance gap, though of only to a moderate degree when compared with the factor of differential aspirations. Although this study by Azmat and Ferrer effectively rules out the possibility of contemporaneous reverse causality during an individual’s working life, it does not explain what might have caused differences in aspirations between men and women earlier in their lives, and whether anticipated future childcare obligations might contribute to it.

This leads to questions about whether to increase women’s capability and willingness to do extra work and/or to work irregular hours or to revise the way jobs are structured and remunerated as a way of improving temporal flexibility and doing away with disproportionate rewards. At first glance, these studies merit the following conclusions: discriminatory workplace characteristics do not explain gender-related differences in pay, at least not in the first place, whereas performance differences are a major factor; differences in aspirations contribute to performance differences and may also affect employees’ willingness to do extra work and work irregular hours. However, this is not to be taken to mean that discrimination plays no role at all when it comes to gender differences in pay. Organizational practices that disproportionately compensate for extra work and irregular working hours are gender-neutral only if they do not take into account unequal obligations at home that are relevant for gender differences in

motivation. This is why Reskin (2003) generally denies the use of motives for explaining inequality. I agree with this verdict if understood as cause, but motivation can be important to disentangle the “nuts and bolts” between cause and effect, as can be seen in these examples.

These three studies give a striking example of how difficult it may be to identify inequality-generating social mechanisms, as at first glance nondiscriminatory, gender-neutral practices can nevertheless play a part in “chains or aggregations of actors, problem situations, and habitual responses” cited earlier, that in the end create inequality by discrimination.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Whether a more or less consensual “generative social grammar of inequality” (Therborn, 2006, p. 1), generalizable throughout different areas of society, is a reasonable long-term objective is still debated (Diewald & Faist, 2011). The taxonomies of Therborn and of Diewald and Faist have both shown that it is difficult to arrive at such common acceptance of a handful of general abstract mechanisms that are theoretically well developed and also fully distinguishable from one another. Maybe it would appear more promising to stay with the classical mechanisms (i.e., exploitation and social closure) and to elaborate on them by defining a small set of variations of these very abstract mechanisms. The major advantage of these two classical mechanisms is that they provide a comprehensive and in the same time parsimonious account of how inequality is generated by cooperation (exploitation) and by excluding others from cooperation (social closure). To take the taxonomy presented by Diewald and Faist (2011, p. 12) as a starting point for further development, other abstract mechanisms could be allocated as variants of these two. For example, stereotyping and prejudices can easily be conceived of as variants of social closure at the levels of perception and evaluation instead of being independent additional mechanisms. The same is true for inclusion versus exclusion and opportunity-hoarding, whereas hierarchization could be linked to exploitation.

As already realized in the taxonomy suggested by Diewald and Faist (2011), a second important specification of mechanisms is to break them down according to different levels of social context—in this case, between informal interactions in families and social networks, formal organizations, and societal institutions. In general, these context-specific mechanisms should have an intermediate level of abstraction between the few highly abstract mechanisms at the top and the many specific, substantive mechanisms for specific situations. Such a differentiation between abstract, inequality-generating mechanisms is thought to be only the starting point for a much more comprehensive endeavor, namely to determine, across

different relational groups and different contexts, whether the same mechanisms work for the same relational groups in the same way (e.g., men vs women, or within different age groups or ethnicities).

There are two other complementary ideas that could add to such a taxonomy of abstract mechanisms. One is to include mechanisms that show how inequality is not only generated but equalized, a method that would be preferable to the use of inequality-generating mechanisms alone in integrating, among others, the paramount role of modern welfare states. DiPrete (2002) and Diewald (2016) elaborated on this aspect as risk compensation.

The other idea takes into account the social dynamics of inequality in Tilly's mechanisms of emulation and adaptation. Although a temporal dimension is already inherent in these two mechanisms, they refer mostly to spillovers between different social contexts without addressing their temporal order. Literature on cumulative advantage and disadvantage could complement the view concerning social dynamics in the generation of inequality and the processes that make these dynamics durable, by addressing the development of inequality over the life course, as well as its stability and change through risks and risk compensation under different circumstances.

GENETIC INFORMATION FOR SOCIAL MECHANISMS?

One of the challenges now arising in social-inequality research is the inclusion of genetic information when attempting to define the mechanisms that produce social inequality, whether in the form of behavioral genetic modeling or in the form of molecular genetic information. Whether or not this might benefit social inquiry in general, and the study of the mechanisms that create social inequality in particular, is still very much a subject of debate. On the other hand, it would be inappropriate for the social sciences to ignore the challenges posed by emerging doubts (in other disciplines as well as in public debate) that certain social mechanisms (such as social closure against children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds that prevents access to higher education or, later, to well-paid jobs) are in fact due to genetic variation between these groups rather than to social mechanisms of social closure against lower social origin, as social-inequality research would insist.

So how does including genetics in mechanistic explanations of social inequality improve our understanding of this phenomenon? In keeping with the two agendas for the mechanisms approach outlined earlier, this question has two answers. For the first goal, which is to define and operationalize the causal chains of substantive mechanisms as reliably as possible, the use of molecular genetic information or behavioral genetic modeling is simply a powerful methodological tool to control for possible genetic

confounding of social effects (Johnson, Turkheimer, Gottesman, & Bouchard, 2010)—in other words, to get “purer” social effects that are not suspected of being caused by genetic factors. Thus, heritability serves as a placeholder for unmeasured genetically shaped characteristics that affect the outcome under investigation (Freese & Shostak, 2009). Without controlling for the genetic resemblance of parents and children, a correlation between parents and children cannot be seen simply as “prima facie evidence for sociocultural causal mechanisms” alone (Turkheimer, 2000, p. 162; see Avinun & Knafo, 2014 for the role of gene–environment correlation). If there is heritability in ability and schooling (which is indeed the case), any assessment of how social origin influences education and of how education influences social outcomes will be severely biased owing to unobserved genetic heterogeneity (Diewald, Baier, Schulz, & Schunck, 2015).

In general, genetic confounding of social effects may be due to an unequal distribution of relevant alleles among related groups (e.g., lower-class children have less favorable genetic propensities than higher-class children) or by gene–environment covariance, which means that measured social effects are partly genetic effects, because genetic propensities lead us to select ourselves into different social environments and the social environment’s responses to us are induced in part by genetically influenced characteristics. It is important to note, however, that in this view heritability and molecular genetic variation play no role in the definition of social mechanisms; the point is that we need to measure social mechanisms more properly. Because virtually “everything is heritable” to some degree (Turkheimer, 2000), the advantage of controlling for genetic influences is ubiquitous, also for seemingly quite “distal” outcomes, such as wealth and socioeconomic status. Therefore, at least in this sense, Hedström’s verdict that one should not refer to ever more finely graded causal “nuts and bolts” outside the realm of the social sciences is unconvincing.

It is, however, a completely different question whether genes, or heritability, should play a role in the formulation of abstract social mechanisms in the sense that genetic variation has a substantive, theoretically embedded place in the explanation of social inequality. A first—and rather obvious—idea would be to complement social origin with genetic origin as a starting point for studies on the emergence of social inequality over the course of individuals’ lives. Yet the theoretical meaning would then, in my view, be opposite to the way heritability is usually interpreted in behavioral genetic modeling of status attainment processes, namely as unmeasured achievement characteristics, in contrast to a shared environment as a placeholder for social origin characteristics (Branigan, McCallum, & Freese, 2013; Nielsen, 2006). As regards ascription versus achievement, this explanation is difficult to understand. Are genes less ascribed than the social characteristics of

one's parents? The answer is: certainly not. This interpretation becomes more questionable the more achievement is interpreted in the sense of a meritocratic ideal.

However, it is reasonable to interpret heritability, or specific alleles, as individuality in the sense of an individual's potential, as given propensities for unequal life chances, and as a starting point for an analysis of what a society does with its members from the very beginning of their lives. We know from existing research that such genetic propensities are far from being deterministic and that, to a considerable degree, genetic expression is shaped socially. This understanding benefits from, and at the same time inspires, the flourishing research on gene–environment interaction. Such methodological *and theoretical* inclusion of genetic variation in social-inequality research provides valuable insights into causal chains, from origin to unequal life course outcomes, namely how favorable characteristics such as cognitive and noncognitive skills are developed from the genome by different degrees of improvement, and how the development of unfavorable characteristics such as antisocial behavior and aggression is enabled by triggering or is inhibited by compensation or social control in different social contexts (Shanahan & Hofer, 2005).

There is also the possibility that the same alleles are transformed culturally into favorable or unfavorable characteristics and behaviors according to the social class into which individuals are born. For example, the same genetic propensity for aggression “lands you in prison if you're from the ghetto, but in the boardroom if you're to the manor born,” as an adage cited by Conley (2009, p. 238) says. In a similar way, genetic information benefits the study of abstract social mechanisms by adding to the social explanation of inequality. It, again, does not suggest that we think of genetics as falling under the interdisciplinary stopping rule. Blocking the potential for favorable characteristics and releasing the potential for unfavorable characteristics can easily be conceived of as a variant of social closure.

CONCLUSION

Both understandings of social mechanisms have certainly helped to advance social inequality research. Most visible is this maybe in organizational inequality research where both elaborated methodologies and discussions about theoretical mechanisms of some generality play a prominent role. Especially in the growing interdisciplinary discourse about causes of social inequality the mechanism-related methodological reflection seems almost necessary. Moreover, even the reflection about generic theoretical mechanisms may profit from interdisciplinary discourse. Stopping rules regarding the role of nonsocial explanations make sense, if the inclusion of,

for example, biological information does not enhance our understanding of how social forces work. However, the contentious goal of a grammar of a limited number of inequality-generating theoretical mechanisms can be reached only in a long-term perspective, if at all.

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Mr. Diewald has published widely in the areas of social stratification; the transformation of former socialist countries; the life course, family, and social networks; early life pathways to inequality; and employment relationships, including the work–life interface. His current research focuses on the role of genetic and social forces in the shaping of life chances, and, together with Rainer Riemann and Frank M. Spinath, he launched the longitudinal behavioral genetic study TwinLife.

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