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Relative deprivation and social mobility: structural constraints on distributive justice judgments

BERND WEGENER

ABSTRACT In social justice research, evidence shows that—in western societies—a majority of the population considers their shares of material goods as just. A number of largely psychologically oriented models have been proposed to explain this astonishing finding. This paper goes beyond these statements, first, by asking why a minority of individuals are convinced of being treated *unjustly* and, second, by reflecting on *structural* antecedent conditions for judgments of injustice. Considering that occupational careers are shaped by institutional distribution systems to varying degrees, it is proposed that patterns of social mobility determine feelings of injustice. Based on a theory of rational investments and expected returns, four different types of mobility patterns are distinguished, and predictions are made as to how these patterns affect justice evaluations. Data from a life history study are used to test these predictions. It is concluded that feelings of injustice are not so much a matter of personal values but rather reactions to structural facts.

THE MICRO-JUSTICE PROBLEM

In empirical social justice research, it is useful to distinguish between *macro-justice* and *micro-justice* (Alwin and Mason, 1989). With macro-justice, the perception of distributions with regard to a society as a whole is meant. Here justice is a belief characterizing a society, its income distribution, its tax system or, for instance, its system of political participation. Micro-justice, on the other hand, is concerned with the individual and the individual's belief about whether what he or she gets is just. The micro-justice focus, then, is on the perceived welfare of the *individual*, whereas the macro-justice focus is on the perceived welfare of the *society* and its systems of distributing social goods.

As has been noted frequently, both views need not converge and, in fact, rarely do (Kluegel and Smith, 1986; Lane, 1986; Kluegel, 1989). Macro-justice judgments in particular are likely to be guided by ideological and political beliefs. They tend to be based on 'utopian' rather than 'existential' standards of justice

(Jasso and Rossi, 1977), thereby highlighting the inevitable shortcomings of social distributions against these ideal standards. In contrast, it is an extensively proven empirical fact that personal shares of material goods in (western) societies are found to be just by a majority of the population. In cross-sectional surveys, only a very small minority state that they are 'underpaid' or that they are 'unsatisfied' with their income level (Glatzer and Zapf, 1984; ISSP, 1987). If one asks respondents what they would consider a 'fair and just' income for themselves, the stated amounts differ only insubstantially from the respondent's actual income. In fact, up to 80 per cent of the income designated as just can in these cases be explained by the actual income (Shepelak and Alwin, 1986; Wegener, 1990). If one believes public opinion, then the world is—from a micro perspective—clearly quite just.

This finding is astonishing, and it is in need of explanation. Objectively, social inequality, and in particular income inequality, is substantial. Why does public opinion disregard this reality,

or accept the material conditions of personal well-being as normatively correct?¹ The question touches upon the political culture of a society. The perceived fairness or unfairness of the distribution of valuable goods, and thereby the agreement of the population with the *institutions* which play a role in this distribution, reveals a central facet of the political culture. Why is this culture, in this respect, so accommodating and harmonious? This question presents a problem for sociology as well as for social psychology and political science. Its solution has yet to be found.

In this paper, an attempt toward such a solution is made. In two respects, however, I will restrict the scope of the problem. First, only the perceived justice of the *income* of individuals is dealt with. My second restriction may, at first sight, seem somewhat strange. I do not ask, Why does the majority of a society feel justly rewarded? but, Why is it that a minority are convinced of being treated unjustly?

To pose the question in this way is reminiscent of Durkheim's work in *Suicide* ([1897]). Durkheim, also, did not study why so *many* people do not commit suicide but why so *few* do. Answering this question, he was able to identify a number of *structural* constraints that make suicide a probable behavior. Had he sought to answer the question of why the overwhelming majority of human beings refrain from killing themselves he would not have been able to give a structural explanation, but would very likely have had to turn to psychological, if not biological causes or, in any event, to 'internal' conditions (to use Durkheim's terminology).

In this respect, the micro-justice problem is closely related to the problem Durkheim tried to solve. Off hand the similarity is obvious since for Durkheim, suicide is but the ultimate consequence of felt injustice. Both, suicide and injustice, are expressions of a moral crisis in society. But the relationship between Durkheim's problem and the micro-justice problem is more intricate than that. I will return to this at the end.

The problem to begin with, however, is quite elementary: Why and under which circumstances do people feel that their income is unjust? A straightforward question like this calls

for a straightforward theory, and for an empirical test of this theory. Can social justice research offer such a theory?

THE LIMITS OF EMPIRICAL SOCIAL JUSTICE RESEARCH

The empirical, largely psychologically oriented research on justice is presently an extraordinarily active field (see Alwin, 1989, for a recent review). This research provides explanatory models of fairness opinions within three theoretical paradigms. A number of models are oriented towards equity theory. Equity theory attempts to explain justice judgments by comparisons of equal reward-to-investment ratios in exchange relations (Adams, 1965; Homans, 1974). Other models employ theories of relative deprivation. These theories reflect on the referent persons or groups we choose for comparisons (Stouffer *et al.* 1949; Merton and Rossi, [1957]; Runciman, 1966). Thirdly, there are attempts at a further determination of these statements through social perception theory. According to this approach, we *perceive* social distributions as systematically distorted. This distortion depends, among other things, on where our own position in society is. High status observers, for instance, discriminate social distribution continua more strongly than low status observers. The justice evaluations of social distributions are then consequences of these different perceptions (Wegener, 1987, 1988, 1990).

In general, however, empirical justice research, being very much dominated by social psychology, is blinded to structural social theory. Being experimental in nature, this research isolates the justice response from its social environment.² Therefore, for the explanation of the facets of political culture which are considered here, this research tradition is of marginal relevance.

If it is true that a society's political culture is substantially influenced by the acceptance by the population of its distributions of material rewards and the institutions which regulate these distributions, then one must consider that this acceptance stands in an interactive relation to the political structures. The political culture is

itself institutionally conditioned. Of course, sociologists since Durkheim have often referred to this (most recently Weil, 1989b). More abstractly—and translated into philosophy of science principles—this means that individual action indeed follows certain law-like regularities (that it has a certain ‘nomological core’), but that we encounter such action empirically only under structural restrictions. In other words, social action is dependent on external conditions. Lindenberg and Wippler (1978) have called this problem the ‘co-ordination problem’: the problem of how structural antecedent conditions cause ‘individual effects’.

For the micro-justice problem and our ‘sense’ of justice (Rawls, 1971: chap. VIII), this means that an explanation cannot be found by being familiar with, and testing, psychological judgment principles based on, for example, equity, deprivation or perceptual illusions. In terms of behavioral theory, that is only an expression of the nomological core. One must add to this the theoretical reconstruction of the processes by which structural and social antecedent conditions are converted into fairness opinions. Which conditions are those, and what are their effects?

DISTRIBUTIONAL PROCEDURES

In the search for such conditions, one becomes aware of the fact that exchange, deprivation and perception theory approaches to justice research do not just fail to include any structural aspects as antecedent conditions for perceived justice. These theories also concern themselves simply with the already existing distributions; they do not consider how these distributions came about. Sometimes, however, *what* we get is not as important as *how* we get what we get. In recent psychological research on distributive justice this is indeed recognized, leading to a consideration of ‘procedural justice’ (e.g. Leventhal, 1980; Deutsch, 1985; Walzer, 1983). Until now, however, in as much as there is empirical work, it is limited to the experimental manipulation of distribution strategies in the laboratory (Thibaut and Walker, 1975;

Schwinger, 1980; Mikula, 1980; see Lind and Tyler, 1988, for a recent review).

In contrast, we know from general population surveys that in real life, it makes a difference whether the distribution of socially desired goods came about through, for example, market processes or political distribution processes; in other words, existing institutional procedures exert an influence on our perceptions of justice. In western societies, empirical evidence shows that distributions based on market mechanisms are perceived as being more just than distributions which are a product of political allocation processes. Examples of this can easily be found in both national and international surveys (Hochschild, 1981; Lipset and Schneider, 1983; GSS, 1984; Verba and Orren, 1985; Lane, 1986; ISSP, 1987; Verba *et al.* 1987; Weil, 1989a).

With the consideration of both significant types of institutions which regulate the distribution of goods (the ‘market’ and the ‘polity’), we arrive at two sets of conditions. From a structural point of view, we can then examine the effects of these on distributive justice perceptions. Justice has, as a minimum requirement, to do with comparisons and with the feeling that one is entitled to something (Cohen, 1986: 1); or, in the negative case, with the demand for something which others have undeservedly, but one does not have oneself. However, the ‘magic’ of the market means that it can stimulate demands without at the same time creating the feeling that one deserves more than one actually gets. The comparison with people in better ‘market positions’ (Weber, 1985: 43) may well be bitter, but such a comparison does not awaken any feelings of injustice. Also, in markets, expectations and the feeling of being responsible for oneself are important. I expect that my previous achievements will be rewarded in a not too distant future. This expectation is rooted in my confidence that ‘natural laws’ govern the market, laws which will insure that my anticipation will be met. I am, however, myself responsible for success or failure. These elements of justice lose their validity when allocations are *not* determined by the market, but rather follow from structural or political

restrictions: for example, when my occupational career is determined by external factors and not simply by my own performance. This difference is well captured in Max Weber's dictum (1985: 23): market allocations are positionally 'open' while political allocations are positionally 'closed'. Positional openness, it seems, promotes justice opinions; closed processes will potentially be experienced as unjust.

However, contrasting market with political distribution processes along this line is very unrealistic, since a market economy is only really 'open' in theory. The habit of classical economists, who view restrictions on free market processes as mere imperfections, is not satisfactory from a sociological point of view (Thurow, 1975, 1981). Empirically, we should therefore turn to the fact that different people *experience* restrictions on the market to differing degrees. Such an experience is especially strong and of existential importance in those cases where occupational advancement is affected. In view of the previously mentioned co-ordination problem, one may therefore ask: Can it be demonstrated that justice opinions are influenced by *occupational mobility patterns*, which sociologists have for a long time known to be only to a small extent the product of free market processes?³ Obviously, we should expect a weakening of felt justice when careers are handicapped by market restrictions.

It is necessary, then, to define parameters of career mobility processes and to treat these as independent variables for the explanation of judgments of just income. Based on a life history study in which, among other questions, respondents were asked for the just income, this is what I will do. We must turn to theory first, however, and ask which effects of different restrictions of occupational careers on justice perceptions we can expect.

RELATIVE DEPRIVATION

I begin with the more 'sociological' contribution to conventional empirical justice research: the theory of relative deprivation and the concept of reference groups. Both concepts derive from *The American Soldier* by Samuel Stouffer and his colleagues (1949; see also Merton and Rossi,

1957; Davis, 1959; Hyman, 1960; Runciman, 1966). In their study of the United States Army, the authors encountered the following strange phenomenon. A comparison of two military units, the Air Corps and the Military Police, revealed that the Air Corps men were very unsatisfied with their opportunities for promotion while the Military Policemen expressed great satisfaction with their opportunities. The astonishing part of this finding lies in the fact that, objectively, the Air Corps had a substantially better promotion rate than the Military Police; Air Corps men had much better chances of being promoted than Military Policemen.

Stouffer's explanation of this paradox employed the concept of a reference group. Since there are a large number of people in the Air Corps who are promoted, all of those who are not promoted compare themselves to those lucky ones and are consequently frustrated or 'relatively deprived'. The situation for the Military Policemen is different. Since here the number of promotions is small, the reference group is not those few who are promoted, but rather those who are not. There is no reason for frustration; one is 'in the same boat' as the majority.

Against this proposed explanation one must object that the determination of the reference group rests on a wholly unproven psychological intuition. One must ask directly: *why* do Air Corps men compare themselves with their relatively many successful colleagues and the Military Policemen with their relatively many unsuccessful colleagues? The opposite is also imaginable.

A critique by Raymond Boudon (1986) focuses on this consideration. Boudon attempts to explain the degree of relative deprivation not in psychological terms, but rather in terms of the objective conditions associated with a promotion or advancement situation. He argues on the basis of decision and game theoretical reconstructions. A promotion situation is accordingly distinguished by two factors (in a very abbreviated version): first, through a certain probability of mobility or success and, second, through the expected profit associated with a promotion. While the probability of

success is determined by the number of open positions and the number of game participants or competitors, the expected profit of promotion is determined by the profit of advancement as well as the costs which I must invest to 'play the game', i.e. to take part in the competition for advancement.

Even though I do not discuss the details here, it should be clear that the combination of those parameters according to simple rules of subjective expected utility theory will lead to profit expectations of different sizes. Correspondingly, one can determine when a person will make a competitive investment and when not. It also follows, in the case of non-occurring promotion, that the number of individuals who suffer disappointment depends on the futility of the investments they made. But their disappointment is solely due to the objective characteristics of the situation.

In a situation where the probability of success is large (as in for example Stouffer's Air Corps), the subjective profit expectation of participation is relatively large; in other words, relatively many will assume the costs of competing for promotion. But since the probability of success is necessarily always much smaller than one, there will be many 'losers'. These losers will be frustrated *since they invested in vain*. When the probability of success is small (the Military Police), the rationality of participation declines; not many individuals will invest in promotion activities. Indeed, there will also be frustrated losers, but the majority can lose nothing, since they did not expose themselves to competition in the first place.

OPPORTUNITIES AND RESTRICTIONS

Boudon's formulation of deprivation theory is much more acceptable than Stouffer's original proposition because it does not rely on psychological speculations with regard to the choice of reference groups, or on psychological speculations at all. Instead, it considers objective situational attributes. Because this is so the theory can effortlessly be subjected to an empirical test. However, Boudon's theory needs a slight reformulation in order to be susceptible to such tests.

One implication of the theory is that mobility situations are characterized by two conditions: by *opportunities* and *restrictions*. Each mobility move—regardless of direction—is determined, first, by an antecedent condition providing either many or few opportunities. It is the perception of these opportunities on which the individual's decision for investing in promotion efforts is based. There is, however, no guarantee that the mobility process, when it is actually realized, will make use of all the opportunities. The move may be more or less severely constrained resulting in either an upward move, a downward move, or no move at all.

By dichotomizing the extent of opportunities and restrictions as the two conditions characterizing mobility (as in Table 1), we can then distinguish four *mobility types*:

1. Individuals of type 1 begin with many opportunities and will, according to Boudon's theory, invest in competition because of the high promotion probabilities. Factually, their moves, however, are inhibited and these persons will therefore not be compensated for their investments. Accordingly, individuals of this mobility type will experience relative frustration which will document itself in judgments of injustice and discontent (expressed as '—' in Table 1).
2. Members of type 2, conversely, begin with few opportunities and will therefore not invest. In the sequel, their careers are restricted but these individuals will not feel especially deprived, because there is nothing for them to lose since no promotion investments were made. We expect judgments

TABLE 1 *Four mobility types*

		RESTRICTIONS	
		MANY	FEW
OPPORTUNITIES	MANY	Type 1 (--)	Type 3 (+)
	FEW	Type 2 (+)	Type 4 (++)

of justice in this case. However, these judgments will not be especially strong because the individuals will be in a state of 'content resignation' ('+' in Table 1).

3. Type 3 members will react similarly, but for different reasons. These persons have invested in the competition (because they assumed there were many opportunities) and they were lucky: their careers were confronted with only few restrictions. Having their investments reimbursed, these persons will feel justly rewarded ('+' in Table 1).
4. Type 4 designates a group of very fortunate individuals. Though these persons have not invested in competition, they experienced positive mobility, i.e. they were not hindered by mobility restrictions. We expect exceedingly favorable judgments from this group ('++' in Table 1).

This typology can guide us in distinguishing different groups of careers and in making predictions for the justice responses of these groups. But how can the typology be applied to empirical data?

TYPES OF JOB CHANGERS

The answer to this question is dependent on how 'market restrictions' are defined empirically. In this respect it is plausible to assume that an influence on justice opinions will only be found in those cases where the market restrictions have an especially crude influence on mobility experiences. This is, for example, *not* the case when upward mobility is due to seniority or to internal promotion rates that are relatively independent of performance. In most labor market systems, these forms of occupational mobility are 'normal'; they can therefore not create an experience of especially limited or especially unconstrained mobility.⁴ Rather, only those career mobility patterns that deviate substantially (positively or negatively) from the norm can lead to such experiences. One must therefore distinguish the *standard mobility* of a given job market system from those occupational changes which deviate from this average.

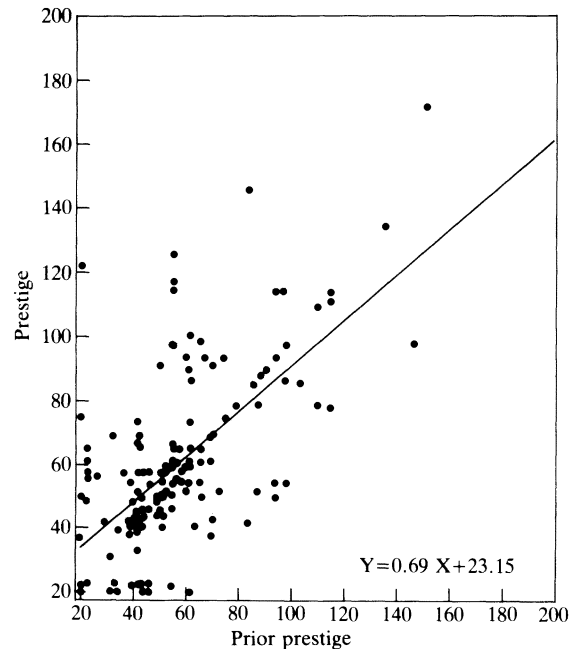


FIGURE 1

One can formulate this difference statistically: The standard mobility for a job market system derives from the prediction of the prestige values which a participant in this system achieves after a job change.⁵ The important independent variable in this context is the prestige of the respective previous position. We can distinguish the standard mobility, defined in this way, from that mobility whose variance remains unexplained. Figure 1 clarifies what is meant.

Figure 1 displays, from a population of job changers, the occupational prestige value of the present occupation against that of the immediately preceding position.⁶ I will discuss these data shortly. Presently, I should simply make clear that the *residuals* of the equation represent that share of the mobility of job changers which exceed or are lower than the standard mobility. This unexplained mobility can therefore be used to classify the 'atypical' changes as either upward or downward movement, according to whether the residual is positive or negative. Not simply the occupational improvement or worsening by a job change, but rather the degree to which a

change in prestige deviates from the norm, is an occasion for mobility experiences that can at all be relevant to a person's attitudes. Since this mobility must be expressed in relation to the standard mobility of a job market system, it should be termed *relative mobility*.⁷ Divided at the zero residual level, the dichotomy of relative mobility is thus our empirical formulation of the restriction condition of Table 1.

For a complete description of occupational moves, however, it is necessary not only to consider the degree of relative mobility by a job change as such, but also to distinguish between a high and a low *outset level* of the job change. The classification according to residuals only reveals differences in deviation, but not the prestige level at which this deviation takes place. However, for mobility experiences, it makes a difference whether I, by a job change, rise or sink from an occupation with high prestige or one with low prestige. With a high outset level, it will be easier for me to endure the limits of advancement opportunities than with a low outset level.

Occupational changes by high or low prestige levels do not, however, only differ in a psychological aspect. It is also decisive that the amount of advancement *opportunities* are different at the upper and lower ends of the prestige spectrum. In high prestige occupations, the possibilities for social advancement are fewer than in low prestige occupations. There are—in so far as a society is pyramidically constructed—fewer 'empty places' in the higher strata than in the lower. Of course, it is easy to find counter-examples. Stewman and Konda (1983), for instance, have shown that, *within an organization*, an individual's career prospects need not decline the higher he or she rises in that organization. In organizational labor markets, we may well find microstructures and mobility regimes that advantage higher status individuals. However, when applied to all positions of a society it is obvious that, on the average, the availability of positions decreases as we approach a society's upper layers.⁸

When we therefore classify the experienced career mobility by a job change as either 'positive' or 'negative' relative mobility (whereby in one case the positive and in the

other case the negative residuals in Figure 1 are meant) and classify the prestige level of the respective previous occupation as either 'high' or 'low', we get four types of job changers. With regard to these four types (see Table 2), we must test to see whether an influence on justice opinions, in accordance with the given theory, is detectable.

We expect that people who experience, from a high starting level, a positive relative mobility (type 4) will to a greater degree find a reason for this in their own performance and accordingly perceive their income as appropriate and just. On the other hand, people who, on the basis of a low prior prestige, experience a negative relative mobility (type 1) are confronted with a situation where many mobility opportunities have actually not been of use. These job changers must accordingly feel there to be unfulfilled opportunities for which they have invested in vain. We can expect that we will encounter increased perceived injustice among this group. Both of the two other mobility types are 'mixed' types (types 2 and 3) in that for both we expect a positive degree of perceived justice. Type 2 individuals began with few advancement opportunities, they did not invest and made no progress; type 3 individuals put efforts into promotion activities and did in fact succeed. In both cases the results will seem rational and just.⁹

DATA AND VARIABLES

The employment biographies of 604 individuals from the 1943–47 and 1953–57 birth cohorts in

TABLE 2 *Types of job changers*

		RELATIVE MOBILITY	
		NEGATIVE	POSITIVE
PRIOR PRESTIGE	LOW	Type 1	Type 3
	HIGH	Type 2	Type 4

TABLE 3 *Regression of just income on actual income, mobility parameters and controls*

	M ₁		M ₂		M ₃		M ₄	
Actual income	1.24**	(31.88)	1.23**	(31.16)	1.29**	(29.28)	1.31**	(29.66)
1 Negative Mobility/Low Prestige	—	—	306.38*	(2.38)	280.03*	(2.10)	266.70*	(2.02)
2 Negative Mobility/High Prestige	—	—	4.28	(0.02)	32.95	(0.19)	911.02*	(2.16)
3 Positive Mobility/Low Prestige	—	—	-42.62	(-0.20)	-17.78	(-0.10)	-47.10	(-0.21)
Informal Job Search	—	—	-187.06	(-1.73)	-121.82	(-1.14)	-108.84	(-1.03)
Fatalism	—	—	50.59	(0.97)	81.00	(1.59)	79.39	(1.57)
Achievement Orientation	—	—	154.27**	(2.74)	161.16**	(2.95)	156.80**	(2.89)
Postmaterialism	—	—	-118.90*	(-2.23)	-104.58*	(-1.98)	-114.29*	(-2.18)
Labor Force Experience (LFX)	—	—	—	—	4.73	(0.16)	3.07	(0.10)
Squared LFX	—	—	—	—	-0.16	(-0.19)	0.01	(0.01)
Quality of Income Estimate	—	—	—	—	309.76	(1.85)	323.47	(1.95)
Averageness	—	—	—	—	240.90**	(3.26)	239.58**	(3.28)
Job Change Probability	—	—	—	—	278.45	(1.24)	319.68	(1.43)
Interaction of 2 with LFX	—	—	—	—	—	—	-51.28*	(-2.29)
Constant	-131.43	(-1.32)	-468.83*	(-2.48)	-1556.80**	(-3.73)	-1655.31**	(-3.99)
R ²	0.8247	—	0.8425	—	0.8555	—	0.8593	—
p (F _{q,N-k}) M _n : M _{n-1} ≤ ^(a)	—	—	0.01**	—	0.01**	—	0.05*	—

Results of ordinary least squares regressions; t values in brackets. *p≤0.05; **p≤0.01; N=218.
^(a) Probabilities of F-test statistics comparing models M_n with models M_{n-1}.

West Germany are examined. In drawing the sample, it was previously known that the respondents were employed at least once in their life. The criterion for a job change was a change of employer or firm. The sample is approximately 50 per cent male and 50 per cent female. It is also regionally stratified and is made up of approximately 50 per cent respondents from a large industrial city (over 300,000 in size) and 50 per cent from urban-rural areas. Within the framework of these stratification criteria, the sample is a random probability sample of residency address files (see Schneid, 1988, and Wiedenbeck, 1988, for details of the sample design).

In addition to the data concerning occupational careers and details of the job search process (Wegener, 1991), the face-to-face interviews also collected estimates of the income of the respective last occupation. The

monthly individual income was requested along with the income level respondents found to be 'fair and just' for their occupational activity and position. With this information, one can construct a measure for the perceived justice of the income. A high statistical association between the actual income and the 'just' income in a population points to perceived economic distributive justice (Shepelak and Alwin, 1986; Wegener, 1987, 1990). In the present case, a determination coefficient of $R^2=0.82$ is found (see Table 3, model M₁). As in other studies, we also find that own income is to a high degree found just.

According to our structural approach, the question now is to what extent the *remaining* variation in justice opinions can be explained through the four mobility types. In other words, to what extent is the income that is perceived as just determined by the four mobility patterns, if

that income is the dependent variable? Attitudinal variables and a series of control variables should also play a role. A short description of the measures involved follows (see the Appendix for simple statistics of the variables).

1. The *mobility types* are operationalized in accordance with the previously presented classification and are derived from the respective last job change. On the basis of the regression analysis in Figure 1, the residuals for the relative mobility are dichotomized at zero and the prior prestige levels at the sample mean.
2. *Informal job search*: As an additional variable that is important for the type of experienced mobility, we also consider the manner in which individuals arrive at their new positions (Granovetter, 1973; Wegener, 1991). It is especially important whether the new position was *personally mediated* or whether the respondent has achieved the position without outside help. According to the logic of the market, the opinion of an income's fairness must depend on whether or not the acquisition of the new position can be seen as one's own achievement or not. In this sense, we expect that respondents who found their new jobs through personal contacts and help from others will make fewer claims to deservedness. The respective variable is coded as one if the respondent made use of informal contacts, and zero otherwise.

The different mobility experiences should not be the only determinants of justice opinions. We must also consider that different attitudinal variables may influence justice judgments. In the present analysis, three attitudinal dimensions are considered: achievement orientation, locus of control expectations, and values.

3. *Achievement orientation* concerns factor scores from a principal component analysis of 'occupational orientations' (e.g., ALLBUS, 1982). Besides a 'social contact factor', and 'intrinsic motivation factor' and a 'status factor', the analysis leads to the extraction of a factor which relates to the achievement

components of a job. The latter factor was included in the analyses.¹⁰ Its factor scores are high if achievement orientation is high.

4. *Control expectations*: In the interviews, respondents were asked to identify those conditions necessary 'to move upward with the greatest ease in our society' (ALLBUS, 1984; ISSP, 1987). The respondents were to determine the extent to which 'family origins', 'education', 'contacts', 'luck' and so on play a role in this respect. The item battery measures—as has been proven repeatedly through factor analysis (Allmendinger, Schmidt and Wegener, 1983)—the advancement related concept of internal vs. external control expectations (Rotter, Seeman and Liverant, 1962; Phares, 1976). Besides the internal and external control expectations, the instrument also includes a *fatalism factor* in the attitude toward the world (Hoff, 1989). In the following analysis, this factor will be included in order to control for possible disinterest with respect to distributive justice questions.¹¹ As factor scores, high values express strong 'fatalism'.
5. *Postmaterialism*: This pertains to the operationalization of Inglehart's (1977) 'new political values'. To avoid the problematic construction of measures suggested by Inglehart (Evans and Hildebrandt, 1979: 564–566), the analysis will only consider reactions to a question concerning 'protection of the free expression of ideas'. High values on this variable represent high values of postmaterialism.

Additionally, a series of control variables must be included to ensure that the effects we find cannot be attributed to unconsidered variables.

6. Since the respondent's last job change is considered, *labor force experience* is included in the models in order to control for the 'time dependency' of effects. Labor force experience means the time in months from entry to the labor force until the beginning of the job held presently.
7. As an additional control variable, the *quality of the income estimate* is included. The stated

monthly income is a central independent variable in the determination of 'just' income. The stated income, however, is quite an unreliable variable and the respondents are often, with respect to this statement, quite unsure of themselves (Wegener and De Graaf, 1990). For this reason, a variable was included which measures whether, according to the opinion of the respondent, the statement was precise or only a rough estimate.¹² One can assume that a rough estimate of the income is usually lower than the actual income. This variable is coded one if the income given is only a rough estimate, and zero otherwise.

8. It is also necessary to control whether the respondents perceive their own income as above or below average. A corresponding estimate was included with the help of a five-point category scale (Shepelak and Alwin, 1986). The *averageness estimate* measures whether respondents, with respect to their income, objectively count themselves as among the 'upper' or 'lower' half of those receiving income. Including this variable in the equation models ensures that possible effects do not derive from felt status differences, but rather from mobility experiences. 'Averageness' is measured on a five-point category scale, one indicating 'far above average' and five 'far below average'.
9. Finally, a sampling problem must be taken into account. There is some probability that the analysis may be distorted by the fact that only people who have gone through a job change (to their present job) are included. I obviate this 'censoring problem' by calculating the probability of a job change on the basis of the respondent's occupation in the entire sample and include these probabilities in the models (Berk and Ray, 1982; Berk, 1983). In the determination of these *probabilities of job change*, status variables and firm indicators were used as predictors in a logit regression analysis (not shown here). In accordance with life-course studies (e.g. Halaby, 1982; Baron and Bielby, 1984; Tuma, 1985) it appears that educational attainment, labor force experience and the status of the occupation

are the best predictors of a job change (all with negative signs). Additionally, people often change jobs when they come from small firms and when they do not have supervisory status.

FINDINGS

The indicators just described represent the independent variables for the determination of the 'just' income. Table 3 presents the results of hierarchically ordered regression models (simple statistics and correlations are reported in the Appendix). Model M_1 is the 'base model' in that only the main predictor, actual income, is included. In the following, the issue is particularly whether the remaining unexplained variance can be accounted for by our mobility parameters.

The mobility parameters are included in model M_2 . These include the way in which the new position was found ('formal' vs. 'informal') and the mobility types. The latter appear as dummy variables with the group 'positive mobility/high prestige' (type 4) as the reference category. In accordance with our prediction, the coefficient of mobility type 1 is significant ($p \leq 0.05$). People who experience a negative relative mobility by a low prior prestige make high demands on their just income (i.e., with control variables added, they want 306 Marks more).

As controls, model M_2 includes the three attitudinal variables. We can see that achievement orientation is a highly significant predictor of the just income, with a positive sign ($p \leq 0.01$). In other words, individuals with high levels of achievement orientation demand considerable increases in income for it to be just. In addition, job changers with postmaterialistic attitudes are content with less income ($p \leq 0.05$).

It should be noted that in spite of the fact that model M_2 explains only 2 per cent more variance in comparison to M_1 , statistically this increase is significant: The F-statistic for this comparison (Hanushek and Jackson, 1977: 127) is significant at the 0.01 level (see the bottom row of Table 3). However, since in model M_1 , 82 per cent of the variance are already accounted for, model M_2

and the models that follow are in effect analyses of residuals.

The variables added in model M_3 serve as additional controls. We can see that the previously established effects remain when one controls for labor force experience at the time of job change (in linear and squared forms), the quality of the income estimate and the judgment of the actual income with respect to its 'averageness'. Model M_3 also includes the estimate of the probability of job change as a corrective for selection errors. It is not surprising that people who feel their incomes to be 'below average' demand, at a highly significant level ($p \leq 0.01$), higher incomes. That the effect of mobility type 1 still remains significant means that this effect cannot be attributed to felt status differences.

A close comparison of models M_2 and M_3 makes it clear that the inclusion of the control variables leads to a certain shift in some of the coefficients. This is especially true of the coefficients of the mobility types. The reason for this may lie in interaction effects with the newly included variables. An analysis relevant to this possibility revealed a strong interaction between mobility type 2 and *labor force experience*. When we take this interaction effect into account in model M_4 , we find that mobility type 2 now has a significant positive influence on justice opinions ($p \leq 0.05$) and that the interaction with occupational experience is likewise significant ($p \leq 0.05$), although with the opposite sign.

The interpretation of this finding must be that we are dealing with two distinguishable groups in mobility type 2: with young and old people, both of whom are negatively mobile. While the younger job changers, who have a shorter occupational experience, place substantial income demands, the older ones state as their just income an amount smaller than their actual income. This difference expresses the adjustment to those job market conditions that give older workers worse opportunities for advancement.

As is clear from Table 4, this explanation applies, tendentially, for all mobility types. This table contains, for all four groups, the average amounts in German Marks which appear as

TABLE 4 *Mobility types, labor force experience, and justice judgments**

		RELATIVE MOBILITY			
		NEGATIVE		POSITIVE	
LOW	PRIOR PRESTIGE	Type 1		Type 3	
		Labor Force Exp		Labor Force Exp	
		short	long	short	long
		58	141	-143	-270
HIGH	PRIOR PRESTIGE	Type 2		Type 4	
		Labor Force Exp		Labor Force Exp	
		short	long	short	long
		-33	-537	33	-304

*Values are mean residuals in German Marks (see text).

residuals in a regression analysis predicting the just income from the actual income.¹³ The values thus represent the relative deviation in German Marks of the just from the actual income. Furthermore, the length of labor force experience is dichotomized as 'short' or 'long' (at the sample mean). For our typology, we find that the income demands lie considerably lower than the actual income in three of the cases of longer occupational experience, while respondents with shorter occupational experience place higher demands. Obviously, the advancement opportunities that are determined through the outset prestige level are additionally differentiated by the length of labor force experience. As the analyses show, the associated decrease in the 'probability of success' influences the felt income justice.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have attempted to show that the widely spread feeling of (micro) income justice, which has repeatedly been revealed by empirical social justice research, is in no way invariable. Of course, one can study, with *psychological* explanations, the high correspondence between

the actual and the 'just' income (as do Shepelak and Alwin, 1986; Alwin, 1987; Wegener, 1987, 1990). One must, however, still ask how the variance *not* explained by these approaches can be accounted for.

On a general level, sociological explanations of individual social action have to cope with the co-ordination problem. Which structural and social antecedent conditions trigger individual actions—actions that follow certain internal nomological principles, the appearance of which are, however, determined empirically by external social conditions? For income judgments, I here pursued the question of to what extent own mobility experiences are such determining conditions. The results confirm the supposition: The degree to which individuals can profit from structural opportunities for mobility in their careers, and the prestige level from which this occurs, co-determine their feelings of being justly or unjustly paid.

More important than the procedural character and the life course perspective of this study, however, is the fact that this perspective follows from objective characteristics of mobility situations. When one views these situations from the perspective of advancement opportunities and actual achieved mobility, then distributive justice judgments are not so much a matter of personal values, but rather reactions to structural facts.

This is the Durkheimian supposition referred to in the beginning. In *Suicide*, Durkheim also attempts to link his explanation to social mobility—mobility which, due to changing solidarity structures, creates anomie. However, whereas Durkheim used his study to demonstrate the disruptive consequences of moral crises on societal development, the present paper wants to underscore the universal antagonism of social openness versus social closedness, of opportunities versus constraints. It is with this emphasis,¹⁵ that an explanation of the *explanandum*—felt justice—can be reached. According to the theory of relative deprivation, felt injustice is a function of specific combinations of opportunities and restrictions in the mobility and career process. Both conditions of matching persons to social positions are present simultaneously, albeit to variable

degrees. In order for these differing structural combinations to be relevant as antecedents for felt injustice, a theory of action, and Boudon's theory of relative frustration in particular, must be introduced. This theory operates as a *bridging device* (Lindenberg, 1985) which can connect specific combinations of opportunities and constraints to the behavior we want to explain. Based on the rationality of investments and expected returns, the theory indicates which reactions to certain patterns of experienced mobility are likely. Therefore, feelings of injustice do not result from a crisis of norms in Durkheim's 'moral personality' from which suicide may follow.¹⁶ The deepest disturbance is likely to be experienced by the person who knows that he or she has invested in vain.

NOTES

1. The finding that most people feel justly rewarded does not contradict the results of many class awareness and subjective social inequality studies according to which feelings of justice covary with social status. In particular, compared to the privileged social strata, it seems that members of the lower strata tend to advocate a more equal distribution of wealth (Robinson and Bell, 1978; Form and Hanson, 1985). It should be kept in mind, however, that these results are based on *macro-justice* considerations. In these studies, respondents are not asked how much money they should earn themselves—a *micro-justice* issue—but to respond to survey items portraying ideological convictions about society.
2. There have been theoretical efforts in further elaborating exchange as well as relative deprivation theory by introducing social status reflections into the judgment process (for instance, Blau, 1971, or Berger *et al.*, 1972). But these attempts are *normative* statements about the dependence of justice judgments on social status values.
3. Thus in sociological mobility research, the question of the open or closed nature of the acquisition of positions has recently led to a paradigm change. The 'normal science' of status attainment research and human capital theory has not concealed the fact that the filling and changing of occupational positions does not behave according to the principles of the free market (Horan, 1978; Sørensen, 1986). The status positions of individuals are not solely determined by their attributes and abilities; rather, these positions are determined in an interaction with institutional factors. This leads to the constitution of different labor markets which vary in their degree of 'openness' (Sørensen and Kalleberg, 1981).
4. The same holds true for upward occupational moves dependent on status levels. In normal biographies, the

- rate of upward mobility declines with the level of the previous occupational position (Jencks *et al.*, 1972).
5. It is appropriate to look at prestige measures instead of social economic status because we are dealing here with subjective impressions of the effects of opportunities and job changes.
 6. There exists in this case a correlation between the two prestige variables of $R = 0.64$; the regression equation has the form $Y = 0.69 X + 23.15$, Y being the prestige of the present and X the prestige of the previous job. The association between the two prestige variables is, as a matter of fact, linear. Theoretically, it would be wise to fit a double logarithmic function, since the increases become smaller with increasing prestige. For the population considered here, however, a log-log fit leads to a lower correlation ($R = 0.57$).
 7. Of course, this is not to be confused with 'relative mobility' in log linear analyses of mobility tables; there, 'relative mobility' is the mobility found without considering marginals.
 8. It should also be noted that the co-ordinates in Figure 1 are MPS-prestige values (Wegener, 1985). The MPS-scale represents a validated version of Sørensen's (1979) SAS-scale. It is true of this scale that high values express low structural advancement opportunities and small scale values express large structural advancement opportunities. This is, in any case, also psychologically plausible; common positions are subjectively worth less than rare positions.
 9. However, the psychological correlate of type 2 individuals will be 'resignation' whereas a career pattern of type 3 is likely to result in a feeling of 'righteousness'.
 10. The principal component analysis of the items yielded four factors and gave an eigenvalue for the 'achievement' factor of 1.34, 7.80 being the total of communality estimates. For similar results, see Allmendinger, Schmidt and Wegener (1983).
 11. The eigenvalue of this factor in a three-factor principal component solution is 1.18. Communality estimates total to 5.34.
 12. Thereby the actual (as well as the 'just') income was assessed without specified categories.
 13. This, of course, refers to model M_1 . Considering the residuals in this comparison, and not for example the difference between the actual and the just income, insures that a possible association between the *differences* and the actual income level is of no relevance here.
 14. An exception to this rule is only found by mobility type 1. Here, the perception of injustice increases with occupational experience. At this level, it is apparent that the expectation of a decrease in advancement opportunities with mere occupational experience is less marked, since the structural restrictions on mobility are found unfavorable to the same extent at both the beginning and the end of the occupational career. By an analysis of variance of the factors in Table 4, a corresponding significant interaction effect between the prior prestige and the occupational experience was found ($p = 0.042$).
 15. Which comes closer to the Durkheim of 1893 and, of course, to Weber, or with respect to class formation, to Parkin (1979).
 16. Indeed, it is difficult to see on what grounds Durkheim makes the prediction of suicide if the individual is in a state of normlessness. Norms I feel unsure about can explain *any* behavior.

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APPENDIX 1

Simple statistics of regression variables (N=218)

Variable	Mean	Std Dev	Minimum	Maximum
Just Income	2556.5413	1856.2574	450	20000
Actual Income	2174.8349	1363.9164	200	10000
1 Negative Mobility/Low Prestige	0.5642	0.4970	0	1
2 Negative Mobility/High Prestige	0.1193	0.3248	0	1
3 Positive Mobility/Low Prestige	0.0734	0.2614	0	1
Informal Job Search	0.3395	0.4746	0	1
Fatalism	-0.0127	1.0346	-3.0028	2.4837
Achievement Orientation	-0.0182	0.9539	-2.1662	3.7300
Postmaterialism	-2.1239	0.9688	-4	-1
Labor Force Experience (LFX)	18.1074	7.9781	1.5009	33.6064
Squared LFX	391.2349	290.8880	2.2526	1129.3896
Quality of Income Estimate	0.1009	0.3019	0	1
Averageness	3.0183	0.7914	1	5
Job Change Probability	0.6370	0.2384	0.0992	0.9130
Interaction of type 2 with LFX	2.0388	6.0268	0	29.2554

APPENDIX 2

Pearson correlation coefficients of regression variables (N=218)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
(1) Just Income	1.0000													
(2) Actual Income	0.9081	1.0000												
(3) 1 Negative Mobility/ Low Prestige	-0.1075	-0.1987	1.0000											
(4) 2 Negative Mobility/ High Prestige	0.0189	0.0595	-0.4187	1.0000										
(5) 3 Positive Mobility/ Low Prestige	-0.0148	0.0207	-0.3202	-0.1036	1.0000									
(6) Informal Job Search	-0.1010	-0.0710	0.0635	-0.0247	-0.0903	1.0000								
(7) Fatalism	0.1668	0.1619	-0.2264	0.1049	0.0028	-0.0346	1.0000							
(8) Achievement Orientation	0.2848	0.2376	-0.1123	-0.0041	-0.0269	0.0470	0.2036	1.0000						
(9) Postmaterialism	-0.0010	0.0675	-0.1030	0.0911	0.0543	-0.0384	0.1086	0.0506	1.0000					
(10) Labor Force Experience (LFX)	0.2228	0.2642	0.1576	-0.0468	0.1662	0.0885	-0.0402	-0.0116	-0.0663	1.0000				
(11) Squared LFX	0.2234	0.2623	0.1395	-0.0675	0.1824	0.0943	-0.0284	0.0040	-0.0898	0.9773	1.0000			
(12) Quality of Income Estimate	-0.0425	-0.1061	-0.0127	0.0177	-0.0943	-0.0151	-0.0796	-0.0523	-0.0359	-0.0919	-0.0740	1.0000		
(13) Averageness	-0.3326	-0.4682	0.2313	-0.0982	0.0157	-0.0535	-0.1963	-0.1625	-0.0812	-0.1891	-0.1759	0.1079	1.0000	
(14) Job Change Probability	0.0586	0.0005	0.0377	-0.1167	-0.0216	-0.1318	-0.1079	-0.0292	-0.1223	-0.2663	-0.2721	0.0853	0.1063	1.0000
(15) Interaction of type 2 with LFX	0.0614	0.1274	-0.3858	0.9214	-0.0954	0.0028	0.0901	-0.0051	0.0398	0.0709	0.0570	0.0238	-0.1312	-0.1057