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EDUCATIONAL AIMS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
AND IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY - A CROSS-  
NATIONAL COMPARISON.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In September 1982, a conference was held at Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., on the NORC General Social Survey and the German General Social Survey (Allgemeine Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften - ALLBUS). In a series of papers, the results of comparative analyses of American and German data were presented, based on a common set of questions from the 1982 ALLBUS and some of the NORC General Social Surveys. One of these papers was concerned with educational aims in the United States of America and in the Federal Republic of Germany. The present article is a revised version of this paper.<sup>1)</sup>

In both the NORC General Social Survey of 1980 and the German ALLBUS of 1982, a list of goals for the education of children was presented to respondents (in two split versions of the surveys), and the respondents had to assign a value to each one on a scale reaching from "not important" to "very important".

Before reporting the results of our analyses, we will discuss the sociological importance of educational aims, dealing especially with some of the results Melvin Kohn has reported on this topic.

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1) *Kai Hildebrand (ZUMA, Mannheim) has taken the trouble to read the first draft of this paper, and he has made a lot of substantial comments, which have been taken into consideration when writing the present article. Above all, I want to thank Kai Hildebrand for running down my own translation and for*

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## 2. SOCIOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATIONAL AIMS

To use Milton Rokeach's term (1973), educational aims may be classified as 'instrumental values'. They are of high importance to the socialization of children, and can be thought of as indicators of social change and of value orientations of societies (Bargel 1979: 69).

The question of structural determinants for parental value orientations regarding educational aims describes the starting point of Melvin Kohn's research. Kohn and his colleagues have tried to demonstrate in a series of empirical studies that a person's job has evident consequences for his or her behavior, attitudes, and value orientations. The fact that a person's job essentially defines his or her place in the system of social stratification leads to the conclusion that class membership has strong effects on the thinking and behavior of people in modern industrial societies.

This is a brief statement of Melvin Kohn's main thesis; in his work he has repeatedly specified and modified this thesis, and provided evidence for it.

He treats "the problem of social class and parent-child-relationships as an instance of the more general problem of the effects of social structure upon

behavior" (Kohn 1963:471). His main independent variable is social class membership, which he finds useful

"because it captures the reality that the intricate interplay of all these variables creates different basic conditions of life at different levels of the social order. Members of different social classes, by virtue of enjoying (or suffering) different conditions of life, come to see the world differently - to develop different conceptions of social reality, different aspirations and hopes, and fears, different conceptions of the desirable" (Kohn 1963:471).

As indicators of social class, Kohn uses the level of education and above all, occupational position as a "serviceable index of social class for urban American society" (Kohn 1963:472).

Kohn points out,

"that working-class parents value obedience, neatness, and cleanliness more highly than do middle-class-parents, and that middle-class-parents in turn value curiosity, happiness, consideration, and - most importantly - self control more highly than do working-class-parents".

Further,

"there are characteristic clusters of value choice in the two social classes: working-class parental values center on conformity to external proscriptions, middle-class parental values on self-direction" (Kohn 1963:475, original emphasis).

The connection between social class and parental values exist in Italy as well:

"In both Italy and the United States, middle-class parents put greater emphasis on the child's self-direction and working-class parents on the child's conformity to external proscriptions" (Pearlin and Kohn 1966: 478).

Analyzing a sample of about fifteen hundred men, representative of all men throughout the United States who are employed in civilian occupations and who have one or more children aged three to fifteen, Kohn and Schooler again found, that

"the higher the mens' social class, the greater is their valuation of consideration, an interest in how and why things happen, responsibility, and self-control, and the less their valuation of manners, neatness and cleanliness, being a good student, honesty, and obedience" (Kohn and Schooler 1969:662).

Kohn's analyses of the connection between social class membership (measured by education, occupational status, and income) and parental value orientations mainly focus on the dimension of occupation. The conditions of work, which differ systematically by social class, are detected as the link between social structure and personality: Working-class parents are working under job conditions which presuppose acting upon precise instructions from some kind of supervisor. They usually are working with objects and their jobs are high-

ly standardized. Middle-class parents, on the other hand, usually are doing jobs dealing with people, ideas, and symbols. These jobs are characterized by self-direction and personal responsibility.

Nowadays, one has to ask whether this dichotomy of job situations and job conditions still exists. There is considerable evidence that the boundary between blue-collar (manual) and white-collar (non-manual) occupations has become fluent, including the boundaries between the respective characteristics of how the job is carried out, the job autonomy, and so on.

But if the job situations and the job conditions have tended to become similar, then one should expect the educational aims of different social classes to become more similar, too. That means that society would move towards a more and more homogenous set of value orientations, and thus also of educational aims.

Finally, one should no longer expect a rigid horizontal boundary of value orientations but a reduction of differences regarding educational aims between members of different social classes. It is quite likely that the permanent distribution of middle-class values by the electronic mass media is contributing considerably to this development.

Irrespective of what the main dimensions of such homo-



genous value orientations regarding educational aims will be - they should be distributed equally among members of all social classes, i.e., educational aims should no longer differ by social class membership.

Based on the analyses of Melvin Kohn and his colleagues one should expect that educational aims as parental values represent at least two dimensions.

The first one should include educational aims like good manners, neatness and cleanliness, obedience, and so on. The second dimension should cover educational aims like good sense and sound judgement, responsibility, considerateness, and so on.

In Melvin Kohn's terms one can characterize the first dimension as indicative of conformity to external rules, the second dimension as indicative of self-direction.

If Kohn was right, these dimensions should be found in the empirical data. If Kohn's original findings continue to describe reality today, the empirical distribution of educational aims should differ with regard to those characteristics of the respondents which contribute to their social status, i.e., variables like education, occupational status, and so on. On the other hand, if the societal value orientations

of different classes are getting more and more similar, such differences should no longer be detected.

We cannot discuss this issue definitive, and we do not prove Kohn's main thesis or many of its specifications. Neither do we have the respective data - particularly, in the ALLBUS there are no data on the respondent's job situation, for example on autonomy, self-determination, or routine in work - nor do we replicate Kohn's methodic proceedings and his analyses exactly.

All we want to do is to make some first and preliminary steps towards the research of Melvin Kohn and his colleagues by asking for socio-demographic variables determining the value orientations of people, especially in regard to their educational aims.

### 3. HYPOTHESES

Most of the independent variables employed in our analyses were gleaned from the publications of Melvin Kohn and his colleagues, especially from Kohn (1963), Pearlin and Kohn (1966), Kohn and Schooler (1969), and Kohn (1981).

We have formulated the following hypotheses based on their results as summarized by Kohn (1981) in an

article on personality, occupation, and social class:

Hypothesis 1: In the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany there are similar orderings and structures of educational aims in the population as a whole (e.g. the total of the respective samples).

This hypothesis can be tested through comparisons of frequencies and simple statistics (means), as well as by comparing the factor structures derived from factor analyses.

Based on this comparability of value structures across countries, the remaining hypotheses relate to within-country differences between different social groups and strata.

Hypothesis 2: The higher the respondent's level of education, the more important are the educational aims which indicate self-direction ("self-direction"), and the less important are the educational aims indicating conformity to external rules ("conformity").

Hypothesis 3: The higher the respondent's occupational prestige, the more important is "self-direction", and the less important is "conformity".

Hypothesis 4: a) It makes a difference in educational aims, whether respondents do or do not have supervisors on their job.

b) It makes a difference in educational aims, whether respondents do or do not supervise persons themselves.

Hypothesis 5: It makes a difference in educational aims, whether respondents are self-employed or not.

Hypothesis 6: It makes a difference in educational aims, whether respondents do or do not have children of their own.

Moreover, we have examined the following hypotheses, which are not deduced from Kohn's research directly:

Hypothesis 7: It makes a difference in educational aims, whether respondents are employed or unemployed.

Hypothesis 8: It makes a difference in educational aims, whether respondents are male or female.

Hypothesis 9: The older the respondents are, the more important is "conformity", and the less important is "self-direction".

Hypothesis 10: It makes a difference in educational aims, whether respondents are married (or have ever been married) or have never been married.

Hypothesis 11: The higher the self-estimation of social class, the more important is "self-direction", and the less important is "conformity".

Hypotheses 2 through 11 are analysed as bivariate relationships. As mentioned above, this can only be considered as a first and very preliminary step towards the analysis of educational aims. Multivariate analyses are necessary, but have not been carried out so far.

#### 4. DATA

To investigate the hypotheses, data from the NORC General Social Survey of 1980 and the German ALLBUS of 1982 are used. A short study description can be found in table 1.

<i>Table 1: Study Description of the NORC General Social Survey of 1980<sup>1)</sup> and the German ALLBUS of 1982<sup>2)</sup></i>		
	<i>General Social Survey 1980</i>	<i>ALLBUS 1982</i>
<i>Universe:</i>	<i>Total non-institutionalized English-speaking population of the continental United States, 18 years of age or older</i>	<i>Noninstitutionalized individuals of German nationality living in the FRG or West Berlin, 18 years of age or older</i>
<i>Sample - Original:</i>	<i>2 210</i>	<i>4 562</i>
<i>Net:</i>	<i>1 933</i>	<i>4 292</i>
<i>Completed Cases:</i>	<i>1 468</i>	<i>2 991</i>
<i>Sampling Design:</i>	<i>Stratified, multi-stage area probability sample of clusters of households in the continental United States</i>	<i>Random sample on the base of the multi-stage ADM-sample using voting districts or artificially created districts</i>
<i>Survey Period:</i>	<i>March 1980</i>	<i>Feb., 20th. to March, 31st, and April, 19th to May, 31st of 1982</i>
<p><i>1) Davis, James Allan: General Social Surveys, 1972 - 1980; cumulative codebook. Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, 1980: Appendix A.</i></p> <p><i>2) Zentralarchiv für empirische Sozialforschung der Universität zu Köln und Zentrum für Umfragen, Methoden und Analysen (ZUMA) e.V., Mannheim (Hrsg.): Allgemeine Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften ALLBUS 1980. Codebuch mit Methodenbericht und Vergleichsdaten. Köln 1982:8-40.</i></p>		

In both the NORC General Social Survey of 1980 and the German ALLBUS of 1982, a list of educational goals for children was presented, and the respondents were asked in one split version to pick out those goals they thought to be most desirable for a child

to have, and those which were least important. In another split version respondents had to assign a value to each of the goals by using a scale ranging from "not important" to "very important". Our analyses are concerned only with the second split version. The question wording of the NORC question and the translation of the equivalent ALLBUS question is presented in figures 1 and 2:

Figure 1: NORC Question on Educational Aims

-31-

DECK 04

46. Please look at the qualities listed on this card. (SHOW CARD; LET R INSPECT)  
All of the qualities may be desirable for a child to have, but could you tell me whether the quality is extremely important, very important, fairly important, not too important, or not at all important. READ AND RECORD RESPONSES FOR EACH.

HAND  
CARD  
J

	Extremely Important	Very Important	Fairly Important	Not Too Important	Not at All Important	Don't Know	
1) that he has good manners.	1	2	3	4	5	8	52/
2) that he tries hard to succeed.	1	2	3	4	5	8	53/
3) that he is honest.	1	2	3	4	5	8	54/
4) that he is neat and clean.	1	2	3	4	5	8	55/
5) that he has good sense and sound judgment.	1	2	3	4	5	8	56/
6) that he has self-control.	1	2	3	4	5	8	57/
7) that he acts like a boy (she acts like a girl).	1	2	3	4	5	8	58/
8) that he gets along well with other children.	1	2	3	4	5	8	59/
9) that he obeys his parents well.	1	2	3	4	5	8	60/
10) that he is responsible.	1	2	3	4	5	8	61/
11) that he is considerate of others.	1	2	3	4	5	8	62/
12) that he is interested in how and why things happen.	1	2	3	4	5	8	63/
13) that he is a good student.	1	2	3	4	5	8	64/

Figure 2: ALLBUS Question on Educational Aims -  
Translation

Q. 8: Our next question concerns the area of education. On these cards are some characteristics and abilities which can be furthered by education. How important to you personally are these educational goals? Think in terms of a child about ten. Once again, use the scale on the right side of the cards.

- A) Independence
- B) Self confidence
- C) Good manners
- D) Persistence
- E) Good grades
- F) Sense of responsibility
- G) Critical capacity
- H) An understanding of other people
- I) Diligence

01 = unimportant  
02  
03  
04  
05  
06  
07 = very important

The full list of educational aims obviously differ between the American and the German versions, but a core set of five items was designed to be comparable (figure 3).



Figure 3: Comparable Items on Educational Aims

<u>NORC Question</u>	<u>ALLBUS Question</u>
good manners.....	good manners (gute Umgangsformen)
tries hard to succeed..	diligence (Fleiß)
good sense and sound judgement.....	critical capacity (Kri- tikfähigkeit)
responsible.....	sense of responsibility (Verantwortungsbewußt- sein)
good student	good grades (gute Schul- leistungen)

## 5. RESULTS

Because of the different number of categories of the scales (5 in GSS vs. 7 in ALLBUS) the frequencies or the means of the General Social Survey data and the ALLBUS data cannot be compared directly. Yet, to enable a comparison of the data, we have decided to report on a rank order of means, and to compare only the rank orders of the two studies (not the means themselves!).

The rank ordering of the educational goals in the American sample is rather similar to that in the German sample (table 2). In the General Social Survey honesty is the most important educational aim, followed by good sense and sound judgement. To act like

a boy/like a girl is the least important educational aim.

Table 2: Educational Aims - Rank Order of Means

Rank	<u>GSS 1980</u>	(mean) <sup>1</sup>	<u>ALLBUS 1982</u>	(mean) <sup>2</sup>
1.	is honest	(4.63)	Self confidence	(6.22)
2.	has good sense and sound judgement	(4.31)	Independence	(6.06)
3.	is responsible	(4.29)	Sense of responsibility	(6.01)
4.	is considerate of others	(4.29)	An understanding of others	(5.89)
5.	obeys the parents well	(4.28)	Good manners	(5.80)
6.	has self-control	(4.20)	Diligence	(5.79)
7.	has good manners	(4.10)	Persistence	(5.66)
8.	tries hard to succeed	(4.05)	Good Grades	(5.58)
9.	is interested in how and why things happen	(3.97)	Critical capacity	(5.39)
10.	is neat and clean	(3.93)		
11.	gets along well with other children	(3.93)		
12.	is a good student	(3.82)		
13.	acts like a boy/like a girl	(3.66)		

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1) 1 = not at all important  
2 = not too important  
3 = fairly important  
4 = very important  
5 = extremely important

2) 1 = not important  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7 = very important

In the German study, self confidence and independence are most important, persistence and good grades are less important. Since self confidence and independence are valued highly, it is a little surprising that critical capacity is considered the least im-

portant educational aim. However, this could be a consequence of the denotation: nobody knows what 'critical' should say.

If the American and the German rank orders are compared, there is a remarkable difference in the evaluation of "good sense and sound judgement" in the US and that of "critical capacity" in Germany. Aside from the methodological question raised above, this difference could indicate a positive interpretation of the first term in the US and a negative interpretation of 'critical' by German respondents.

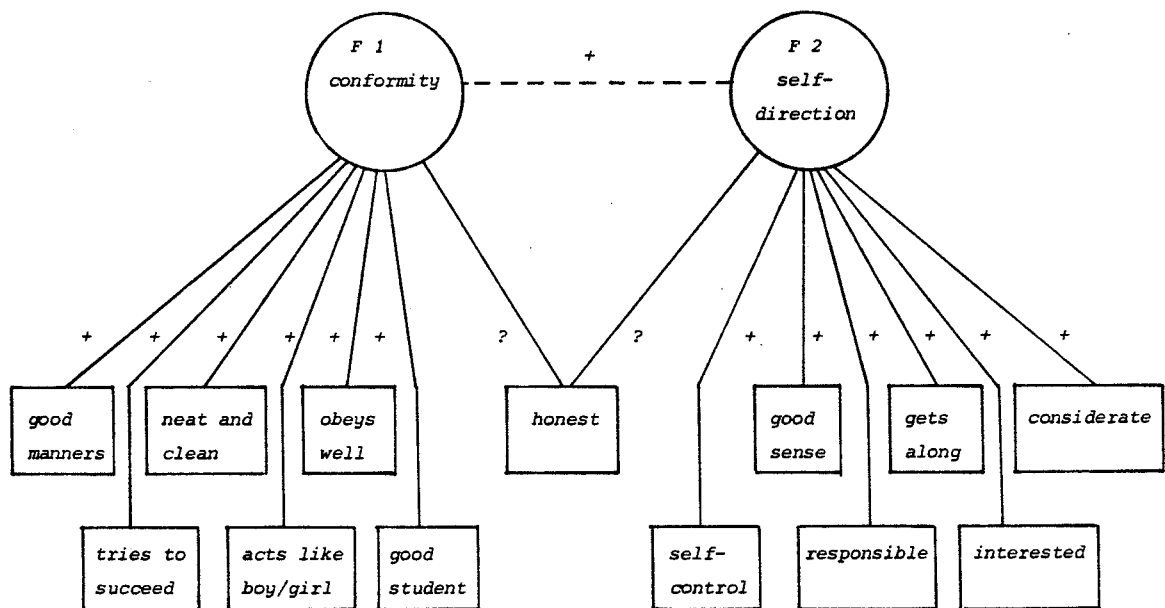
The other items show no outstanding differences in the rank order of educational aims. Remarkable is only the overall positive evaluation of each single educational aim. Both in the American and the German data, the difference between the highest and the lowest mean is less than 1, and all means lie considerable above the scale mid-points of 3 (US) and 4 (Germany).

To identify different dimensions of educational aims, factor analyses were performed. With reference to Melvin Kohn's dimensions "conformity to external rules" and "self-direction", for the General Social Survey data we expected a two-dimensional factor structure as shown in figure 4, where "conformity" describes Kohn's first dimension, and "self-direction" his second. We expected a positive relationship be-

tween the two dimensions: This assumption is derived from the overall positive evaluations of educational aims and conforms to the idea that there is no contradiction in evaluating both dimensions as important.

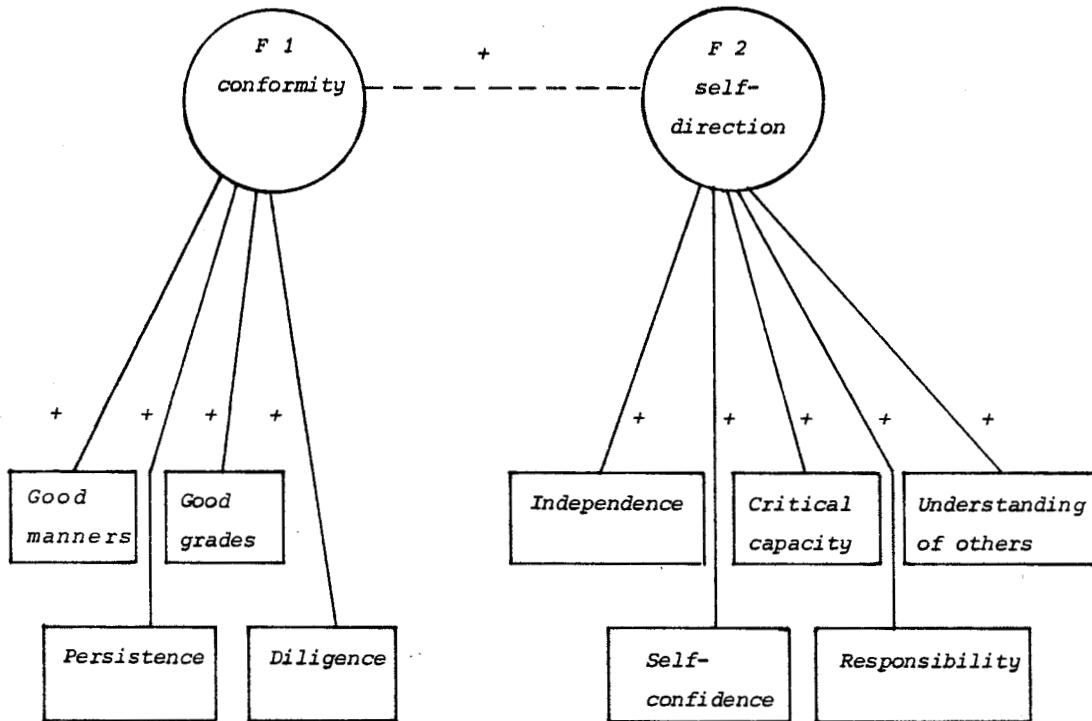
There was no decision whether "honesty" should be a "conformity" or a "self-direction"-item, because there are fundamentally different ways of interpreting this term.

Figure 4: Educational Aims (GSS 1980): Expected Factors



For the ALLBUS data we expected the factors shown in figure 5, which is rather similar to the model of factors and indicators postulated for the GSS data:

Figure 5: Educational Aims (ALLBUS 1982) - Expected Factors

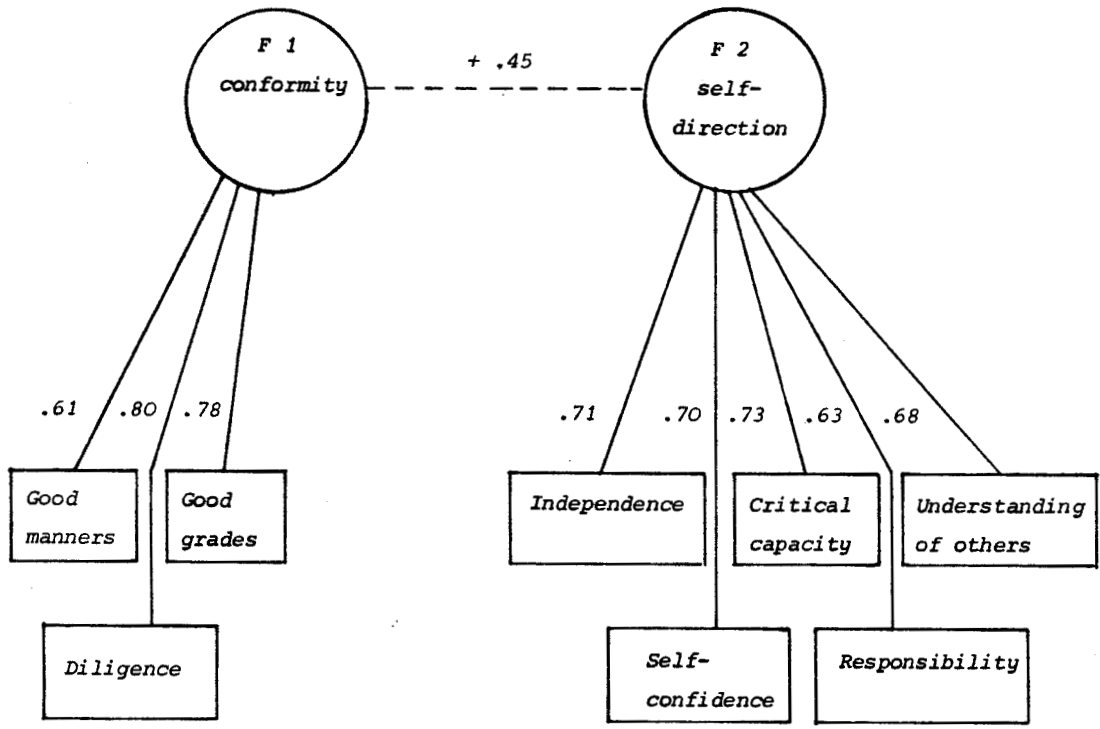


The ALLBUS-model shown in figure 5 had already been confirmed by using the data of ALLBUS 1980 (figure 6). The two expected dimensions were identified and measured with the expected indicators. All the factor loadings are rather high, and only the loading of "persistence" was less than .40 (which was used as the criterion to associate indicators to a dimension). As we had presumed, a positive relationship was found between the two factors themselves.<sup>1)</sup>

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1) All factor analyses were carried out by using SPSS factor analysis program with oblique rotation of the factors.

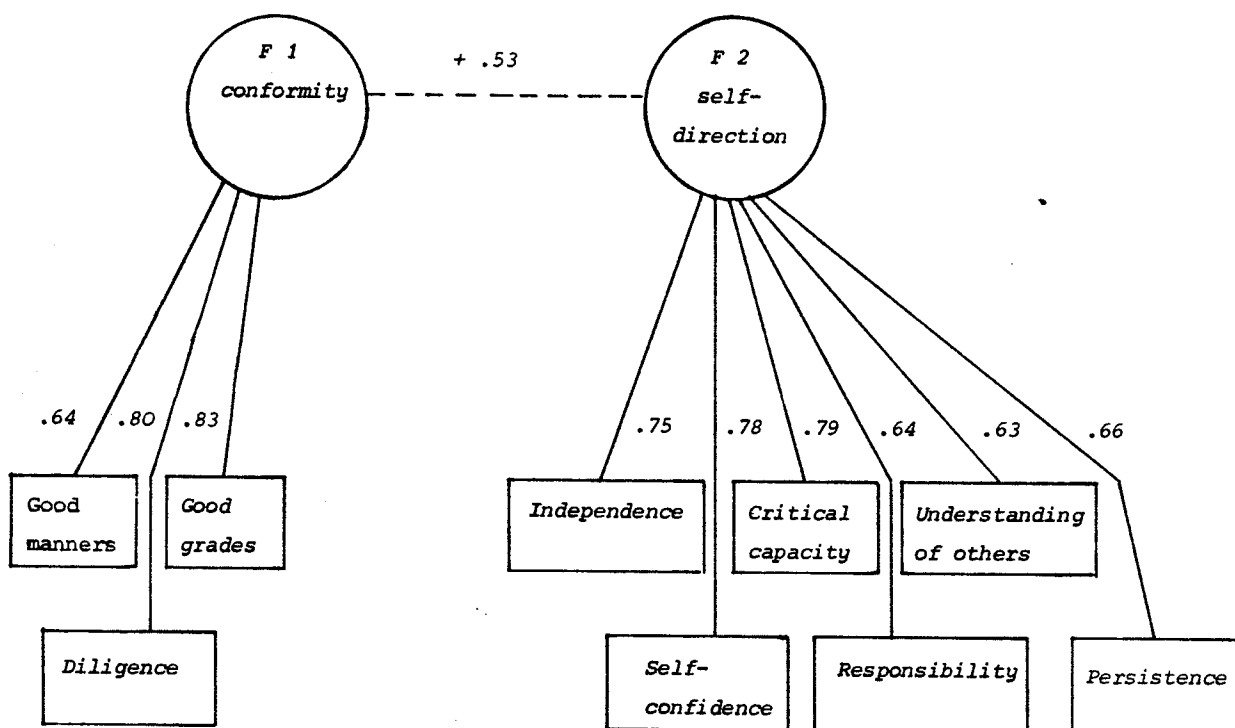
Figure 6: Educational Aims in West Germany - Empirical Factors (ALLBUS 1980 Data)



(no factor loading  $\geq$  .40: persistence)

Let's turn to the 1982 data. The results of the factor analyses are presented in figure 7 for the ALLBUS data, and in figure 8 for the GSS data.

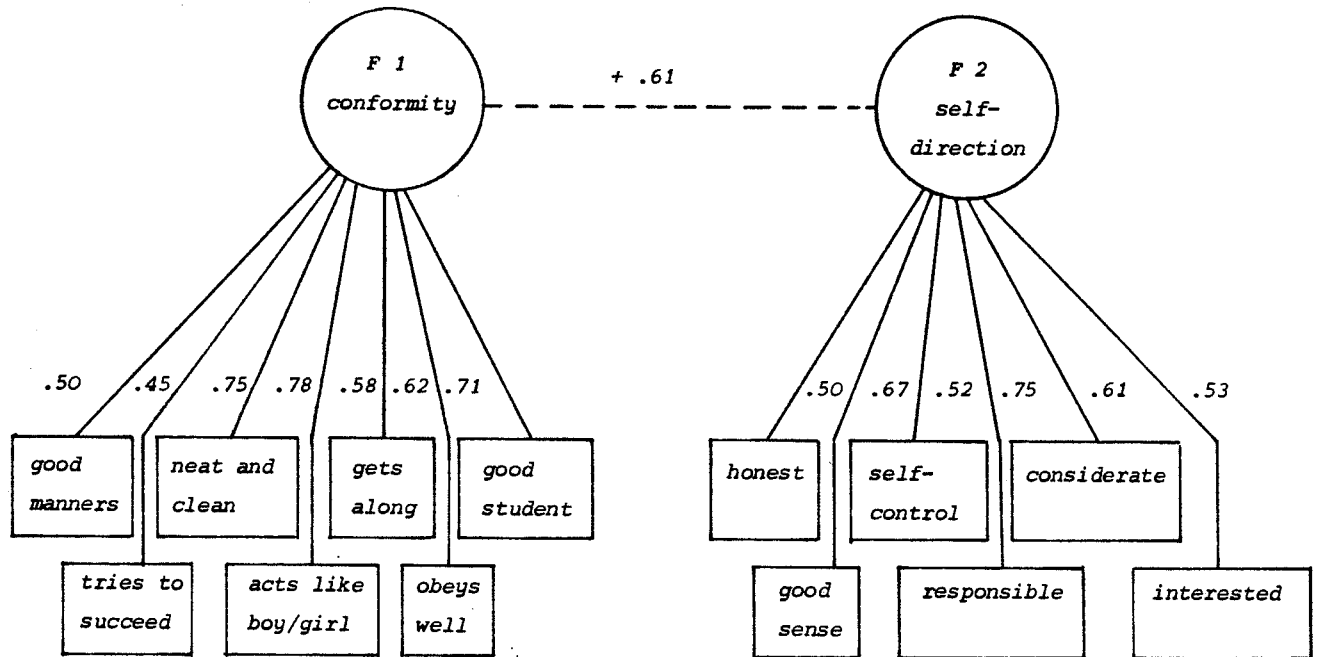
Figure 7: Educational Aims in West Germany - Empirical  
Factors (ALLBUS 1982 data)



For the ALLBUS 1982 data essentially the same structure emerged as was shown for the ALLBUS 1980; even the factor loadings are about the same. Only "persistence", which was expected to be an item of "conformity", turned out in 1982 to be one of "self-direction".

In the American data again two dimensions of educational aims were found which can be interpreted as the expected dimensions of "conformity" and "self-direction". But while "getting along with other children" turned out to be an item of "conformity", "honesty" on the other side turned out to be an item of "self-direction". These two associations differ from the expected model.

Figure 8: Educational Aims in the United States -  
Empirical Factors (GSS 1982)



These analyses support hypothesis 1, which posited the similar structures and the similar orderings of educational aims in the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany.

In order to investigate the subsequent hypothesis 2 through 11 which posited differences within each country according to a series of variables, we have chosen four items, two of them representing aims of "conformity", two of them representing aims of "self-direction" on the basis of the above factor analyses. The respective items are also comparable with respect to question wording.

As items of "conformity" we have chosen "good manners"



and "good student" ("good grades"), as items of "self-direction" we have selected "good sense and sound judgement" ("critical capacity") and "responsible" ("responsibility"). These four items have been used to examine the above mentioned hypotheses 2 through 11. The result of these analyses will be summarized below (no data shown).

First of all, several hypotheses were not supported by the data: The expected relationship between occupational prestige and educational aims (hypothesis 3) could not be found. There are also no relationships between having supervisors on the job (hypothesis 4a) and to supervise persons oneself (hypothesis 4b), and educational aims. Whether one is self-employed or not makes no difference in evaluating educational aims (hypothesis 5).

To be employed vs. unemployed does not influence the evaluation of educational aims (hypothesis 7), nor does the respondent's gender (hypothesis 8). Finally, the expected relationship between subjective social class and educational aims also does not exist (hypothesis 11).

Regarding the remaining hypotheses, some relationship could be found, but all of them are rather weak.

With respect to the relationship between level of education and the importance of educational aims (hypothesis 2), there is no relation with the items

of "self-direction", but a low one in the expected direction with the items of "conformity": the Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) between level of education and "being a good student" is  $-.21$  in the GSS; the respective coefficient in the German data ("good grades") is  $-.20$ . Thus, with increasing level of education, respondents both in the United States and the FRG tend to value aims of "conformity" less important.

Having children or not (hypothesis 6) is only related to the items of "conformity", and only in the FRG, but the coefficients are generally low. People who have children tend to value "good manners" (Cramer's  $v = .20$ ) and "good grades" ( $v = .24$ ) more than persons without children.

About the same results are found in regard of the marital status of respondents (hypothesis 10): Persons who are married or have ever been married tend to value "good grades" ( $v = .24$ ) and "good manners" ( $v = .22$ ) more than people who have never been married. Again, there is no relationship with the "self-direction" items. In the United States, again, there is no relationship between marital status and educational aims.

Similarly, there is no influence of age (hypothesis 9) on educational aims in the United States; in Germany only the items of "conformity" are related to the age of the respondents: the older people are, the more they value "good manners" ( $r = -.25$ ) and "good grades"

( $r = .20$ ), but again, these are weak relationships.

## 6. SUMMARY

In analyzing educational aims, both in the United States and in the Federal Republic of Germany, we found the expected dichotomy of aims of "conformity" and aims of "self-direction", and about the same ordering of items.

However, with respect to our hypothesis relating socio-demographic determinants to the evaluation of educational aims we did not find strong relationships (at least not in bivariate analyses), neither in the GSS data nor in the ALLBUS data. There were weak effects on aims of "conformity" in the German population of having children, marital status, age, and level of education. Of these, only the level of education also has some effects in the GSS sample.

All in all, there are no remarkable differences in the evaluation of educational aims between the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany. In both countries the structures found by Kohn continue to exist. However, in both the nations we find a clear similarity of value systems throughout different categories of respondents characterized by different socioeconomical and socio-demographical variables - in contrast to Kohn's results.

These results may be interpreted as a consequence of the overall positive evaluation of each of the educational aims, as well in the United States as in the FRG.

There is another - substantial - interpretation, which conforms to our early speculations: maybe, the differences in the evaluation of educational aims depending on sociodemographic determinants, as shown by Melvin Kohn, no longer exist. For the FRG, similar results and interpretations are presented by Sakellariu (1984). If correct, this change could be a consequence of modern societies becoming middle class societies. Such a development could have led to an adaption or a homogenization of general value orientations in society, accelerated by the mass media, and thus also of educational aims. This could be applicable in the United States as well as in the Federal Republic of Germany.

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