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Abstract:

This paper deals with the relationship between educational choices, educational cultures and social background among students in three different Higher Education (HE) Programs. HE students is statistically and sociologically often treated as a homogenous group, but the ever increasing number of students in HE demands a closer examination of the emerging sociocultural differences within HE - of the 'hidden' heterogeneity in social background as well as in educational strategies. Issues of class and culture are at the centre of the investigation: Using a mixed method approach (statistics, ethnographic observations and interviews) the paper focuses on the students' class origins and the different cultural practices in three different Danish HE Programs, adapting an empathetic approach towards understanding student strategies and everyday student life. The question of how social action generates and is generated by culture and class is addressed as well as the question of how a sociocultural practice is constituted and to what extend it is 'classed'. It is shown that the HE students in the three Programs have different class origins and, correspondingly, it is argued that the educational settings are characterized by distinctively different cultural practices and that the students correspondingly have distinctively different strategies towards education and future work life.

Introduction

In the last half of the twentieth century the higher education system[1] in Denmark has witnessed a massification – the number of university students has increased eightfold the last fifty years. As have been noted, the increasing number and the overall rising level of education necessitates a new analytical focus on HE (Broady, 2001; Reay, David, & Ball, 2005; Thomsen, 2005). The massification has resulted in credential inflation (Ball, 2003; Bourdieu, 1996; Collins, 1979), an increasing number of jobs require formal education (and at ever higher levels), and an increasing number of institutions gets university status. The expansion of higher education institutions is as much a consequence of the increased struggle over status by social groups, as it is a result of societal priorities and the rising need for better

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[1] In this paper Higher Education primarily refers to university level educations.

work force qualifications. This warrants the hypotheses that social struggle and differentiation moves *upwards* in the educational system, making the universities a new arena for processes of social differentiation. It is no longer sufficient to view higher education institutions by their place in the vertical categorization of the educational system – one must examine the social differences *within* HE, within individual Subjects and Programs. While one could be inclined to view a university student as a specific 'type' coming from the same social background and with roughly the same habitus 40 years ago, today, the chosen few have multiplied enormously: The stereotypic university student disintegrates and a whole range of different backgrounds, pathways, strategies and biographies emerge.

At the same time, paradoxically, the transition from elite to mass university has only led to a small widening access to HE, when looking at HE as a whole: The last 30 years have shown persistent social differentials in educational attainment. While absolute numbers in student population have increased, the relative difference between the classes remains the same (Hansen, 1995; Thomsen, 2005). The question of why there is this persistency of social class in higher education is the pivotal point of my PhD project. In this paper I present key findings from my PhD based on statistics, observations and interviews. I explore the relationship between choice of HE, cultural practices at different HE Programs and the students' social background. The statistical data serves as a large-scale investigation into the social structure of higher education out of which relationally interesting HE Programs are chosen for in-depth qualitative ethnographic studies. At the time of writing this paper, I have only just begun analysing the data collected through observations and interviews. The analyses, or analytical sketches rather, presented in this paper should be read with that in mind – it is, work in progress.

The relative persistency of social class in HE *as a whole*, taken together with the hypothesis that university Programs become more differentiated socially, necessitates an investigation into the role of culture and cultural practices in the educational system. It seems that trying to explain these classed differences would entail a research perspective that takes both social class origin and cultural practice into account. Are we – with the ever increasing rising educational level of the population – seeing historically new class formations? Class formations that may be 'cultured' in new ways? Is it possible to talk about different cultural 'logics' of 'new' emerging middle classes? These are some of the questions I try to pursue in this paper by analyzing students' class origins and different cultural practices in the three different HE Programs.

Class and culture

Class analysis and the concept of class is a huge research field recently challenged with new class approaches or approaches questioning the whole concept of class (focus on class processes and practices, the cultural turn in class theory, 'race' and gender issues, individualization, poststructuralist approaches, etc. (Devine, Savage, Scott, & Crompton, 2005; Savage, 2000; Wright, 2005) . I will not go into these discussions here, but only make a brief outline of my class approach. I understand class formation as a dynamic process arising out of historical struggles between groups on society. These groups, classes, are constituted historically by their relation to each other in society. This class perspective follows Weber (1978) and Bourdieu (1987) in looking at class positions as results of a market struggle, providing citizens with different life chances. From this follows that classes can not be

theoretically deduced *a priori,* but must be constructed out of the empirical investigation into the given social space. Furthermore, the dynamic of class formation is stressed by a focus on class practices and processes (Reay, David, & Ball, 2005). A sociology of class that has not exclusively economic relations at its base, but tries to incorporate other (cultural) dimensions, has also been referred to as the 'cultural turn' in sociology (Devine, Savage, Scott, & Crompton, 2005). This is an attempt to unite opposites: On the one hand, overtly 'cultural' accounts might indeed reduce social inequality to more or less discursive 'recognition plays', while strictly socioeconomic accounts neglects the formative power of sociocultural interaction. I have tried to combine the sociology of Bourdieu with inspirations from British cultural studies, in order to get analytical tools to investigate the symbolic exchanges in peer groups at the one and the same time founded on mechanisms of recognition and meaning, but also sites of social struggles over positions in society (Skeggs, 2003).

By the analytical construct *'cultural practice'* I am referring to the everyday life interaction shared by the students in the different Programs, and to the everyday life interaction they all recognize as meaningful. In working with the concept of cultural practice, I am inspired by the British cultural studies tradition seeing culture as 'a whole way of life' (Hall, 1996; Johnson, 1986).[2] Belonging to the same culture means, with the words of Stuart Hall, to interpret the world in roughly the same ways – ways which will be understood by each other: "Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and 'making sense' of the world, in broadly similar ways" (Hall, 2003, p. 2), s. 2).

The boundaries of a cultural practice, in this case the cultural practice of studying at a specific HE Program, can be defined as being where the social act no longer has any affect with respect to the creation and recreation of the cultural practice. The practice encompasses all that the students have a common interest in, in relation to studying at the Program. A (study-) cultural practice is the social interaction the students are 'stakeholders' in – what is mutually considered and recognized as the site of cultural enactment. This also involves the adherence to certain social 'rules of the game' in which the creation of meaning and recognition are central concepts. Therefore, frequenting the right café, listening to the right music, having the right aesthetic appearance, etc., might and might not be a part of a cultural practice – it all depends on whether it 'makes a difference' and whether it is given meaning and recognition among the peers. It follows that a cultural practice thus has a formative power; even though it is always conditioned by the social circumstances, it acts on its members and it consequently works back on class dynamics.

To sum up: My research focuses on the constituting dynamics of a cultural practice as a well-defined site of social interaction and how this is linked to social class (this also implies a focus on what constitutes peer practices, more than looking at what makes the students different).

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[2] Even though sometimes parts of this tradition runs the risk of mystifying 'culture' for example by saying that 'it is its own thing' (Willis, cited from Griffin, 2005, p. 169). In order to try to distance myself from mystifying or essentialist notions of culture (and to link it to Bourdieu) I talk about cultural practices.

Social characteristics of Danish HE students

The emphasis in this paper is on the qualitative studies of the three HE Programs. Here I will deal briefly with the quantitative part of the study, before analysing the qualitative data. The quantitative part of the study consists of data from Statistics Denmark on students enrolled in university Programs in 2002 along with data on gender, ethnic origin, parents' education and occupation, income, etc.

A simple odds ratio calculation reveals that only one out of twenty university students has unskilled parents (only primary school), while every third student has parents with a university degree. This means that young people with HE parents are seven times more likely to attend university as young people with unskilled parents. These unequal educational chances illustrate clearly the socially biased HE take-in. As table 1 shows, the bias is even greater when looking at the differences within individual Programs.

Table 1: Programs by education chances

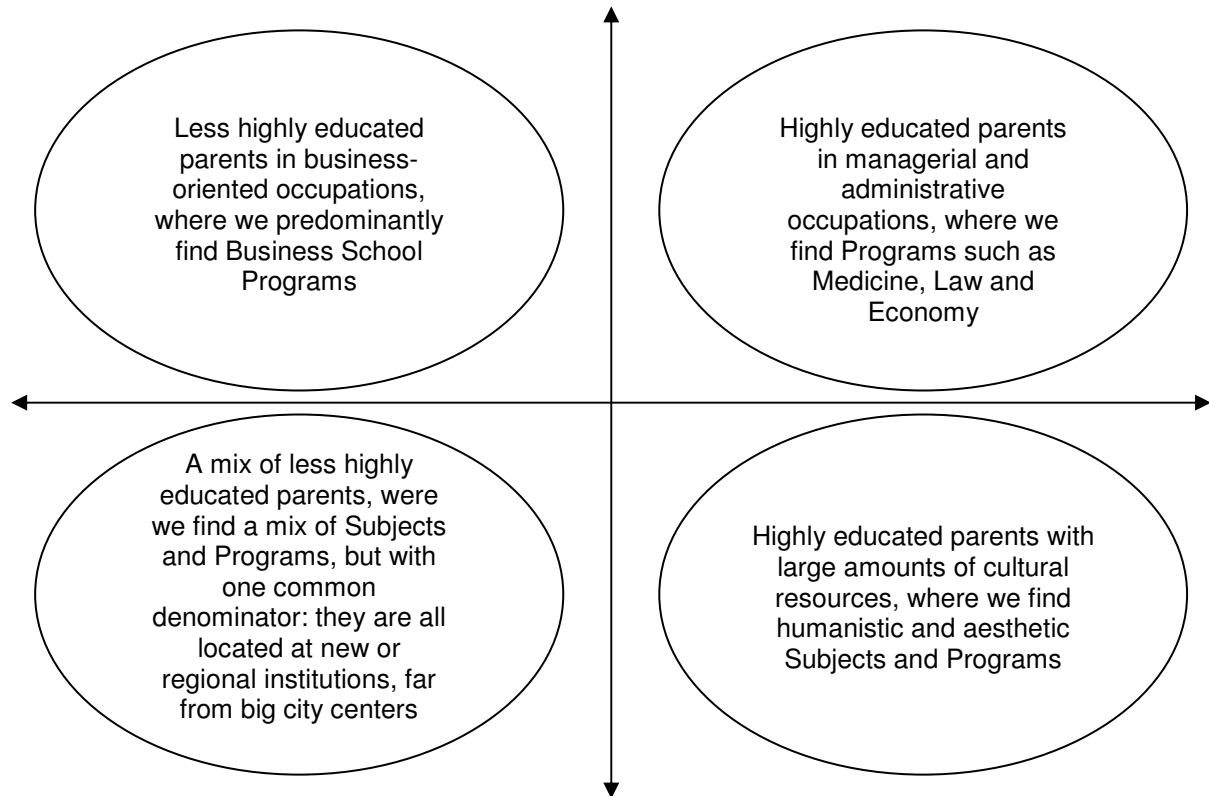| University Programs	Education chances
Medicine – University of Copenhagen	21
Political Science - University of Copenhagen	17
Literature Studies - University of Copenhagen	17
School of Architecture – Copenhagen	14
Engineer – Technical University of Denmark	13
Law - University of Copenhagen	9
Business – Copenhagen Business School	9
Pharmacist - Danish University of Pharmaceutical Sciences	7
Law – Aarhus University	6
Business – Aarhus Business School	4
Engineer – Aalborg University	3

Remarks: Examples from large university Programs. Education chances calculated as proportion of HE parents in relation to HE parents in the parental generation, divided by the proportion of primary school parents in relation to primary school parents in parental generation. Calculations based on own data and data from Statistics Denmark.

Generally, the social differentiation is within Programs as well as within institutions – 'old' traditional institutions in Copenhagen have the largest inequality in chances, while new institutions far from Copenhagen have more equal educational chances. These social differences stress the need to differentiate between specific Programs when addressing the problems of in- and exclusion in HE. As mentioned earlier, these differences mark the historic move from small and few elite institutions to mass institutions with new elites and internal differentiations.

Utilizing simple correspondence analysis on the data, I have constructed the field of higher education with respect to the students' choice of Subjects and Programs seen in relation to their social background (represented by their parents' occupation). There is no room for a

presentation of correspondence analysis here; I will only give a brief outline of the findings from the analysis. Four areas emerge from the social map of the university students (figure 1):

Figure 1: The social space of higher education in Denmark

Less highly educated parents in business-oriented occupations, where we predominantly find Business School Programs

Highly educated parents in managerial and administrative occupations, where we find Programs such as Medicine, Law and Economy

A mix of less highly educated parents, were we find a mix of Subjects and Programs, but with one common denominator: they are all located at new or regional institutions, far from big city centers

Highly educated parents with large amounts of cultural resources, where we find humanistic and aesthetic Subjects and Programs

The correspondence analysis reveals clear and marked social differences within Danish university educations. A vertical and horizontal class hierarchy emerges. Figure 1 shows students' choice of Programs and their parents' occupation. The vertical axis clearly differentiates between parents with manually unskilled or semi-skilled jobs to the left and parents in highly skilled jobs to the right. Looking at the students' university Programs, we find Programs in provincial and new university institutions to the left, and Programs in old institutions (plus the newer Roskilde University) in Copenhagen and Aarhus to the right. In short, the vertical axis can be interpreted as amounts of capital/resources. The horizontal axis differentiates predominantly between economic and 'hard'-social science Programs at the top and humanistic, aesthetic and soft social science at the bottom. As to the parent's occupations, parents with jobs in the economic and managerial sphere is at the top, and parents with jobs in the cultural and social sphere at the bottom. This axis can be interpreted as differentiating between economic capital at the top and cultural capital at the bottom of the figure.

To sum up on table 1 and figure 1: The HE recruitment remains highly socially selective. There are large differences in the individual Programs' degree of selectiveness; education chances vary greatly with different Programs. The social differentiation is regional, institutional and Program-based. Similar Programs in e.g. Aalborg (provincial city) and Copenhagen (the capital) recruits very differently, as does institutions with the same pedagogical principles (e.g. Aalborg and Roskilde Universities).

Methodology

The three Programs chosen for qualitative studies are: the Literature Studies Program (LS) and the Political Science Program (PS), both at University of Copenhagen (KU), and the International Business Communications Program (IBC) at Copenhagen Business School (CBS). On the one side, they should meet a criterion of having different profiles in terms of social class origin (table 1 and figure 1 shows that the two KU educations are highly selective, while this is not the case for IBC), and I have also wanted to explore differences within educations with roughly the same profile (as table 1 shows, PS and LS have the same chances ratio and they are close to each other in figure 1). Furthermore, a selection criterion has been that the Programs were physically near Copenhagen, and that they (out of ethical considerations) were numerically large Programs.

Being interested in cultural practices, the methodology for the qualitative study is ethnographic (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). I have made use of participant observation, observing in the back of the classroom during classes and interacted with the students between classes. My aim has been to adopt an empathetic approach to life at university. What was initially an open student-everyday-life perspective (on forms of interaction, rituals, student-teacher interaction, processes of recognition, hegemonic practices, etc.), has slowly turned into a more focused look on specific topics. These topics have then been guiding the semi-structured interviews together with various questions on the informant's background (educational pathway, leisure activities, etc.). The interviews are also ethnographically inspired; they investigate the student's stories on what it is to be a part of the student life at the specific Program.

Field work was conducted between February-December 2006. In all Programs I have been doing observations for 3-4 months, typically between 5-10 hours a week. On PS and LS, a class of about 30 students were followed, and on IBC two classes of about 25 students were followed (all being in their second or third year of studies). I have interviewed between 8-10 students at each Program, as far as possible trying to choose a representative sample of students with respects to gender and ethnicity (being ultimately subject to the students' willingness to be interviewed). On IBC, 7 women and 2 men have been interviewed (of which 1 man was an ethnic minority student), On LS 6 women and 2 men, and on PS 6 women and 4 men.

The Programs have been strategically selected after a principle of exemplarity; as examples of sites of processes of interaction whose dynamics have a more general relevance for HE studies. Hence, it is not in any common sense of the word a representative study – we can not generalize from the students and Programs studied here to all HE students and Programs in Denmark. The point here being that the Programs in themselves are not interesting - they are interesting in relation to each other, as examples of more universal social dynamics and cultural practices within university Programs generally (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, pp. 42-44).

Cultural practice at three Programs: International Business Communication (IBC), Political Science (PS) and Literature Studies (LS)

In the following, I will present the three Programmes separately, giving a very condensed version of student life and interaction relevant to the cultural practice at each Program.

International Business Communication (IBC)

The IBC students statistically have the least educated parents of the three Programs. The occupations of the interviewed students parents gives some examples: airport catering, cosmetologists, sports clothes salesman, clothing industry, insurance, top business manager, military, teaching, office worker, team manager, coach, bank assistant and cleaning. For IBC students, their families have not played a prominent part in choice of HE. Compared to the other two Programs, it is interesting that seven out of eight students says that their parents have had no influence at all on choice of education.

Asked about their thoughts on choice of education, they often refer to an overall interest in language studies and marketing, combined with future job considerations. That it ends up being that specific Program is not seen as having been important; several students describes it more as an elimination of Programs where future job opportunities are uncertain. As one student expresses:

> "[…] I couldn't imagine getting a degree, spend 3-5 years on something where I wouldn't be certain to get a job where I could earn some money […] one of my friends, she's just dying to be a designer, but I mean, that's just precarious like hell […] I could never imagine getting an education where I wouldn't be certain to get a job. Its way too many years in school." (Dorte, 20 years)

There's something in the IBC students stories on choice of education that could lead one to think that they haven't really given it a lot of thought, but this would be to miss the point. Choice is no less 'strategic' than it is for the PS and LS students; it's just phrased in a different way, as a more straight forward instrumental choice. Bolette sums it up: "I was probably more the business college type than the university type." In most of the interviews the practical and job-directed aspects of the Program is emphasized. Salik, an ethnic minority student, elaborates on his thoughts on the usefulness of education:

> "I was at an open house event for prospective students at Philosophy on University of Copenhagen, and with my grade point average, I could easily have chosen that and it was exciting and all, but I just couldn't see the degree's usefulness, and even though the students there tried to tell what you could do with the it, it was still very theoretical and unclear…here I feel that what I'm studying can actually be useful afterwards […] It's a very pragmatic education. It might be a myth, but you keep hearing that what you can study at Copenhagen Business School you can actually use afterwards and what you study at University of Copenhagen and Roskilde University you can't use for anything. Copenhagen Business School is depicted as something positive and you can use it and get a job and a good paycheck and a career and all, and if you study at University of Copenhagen you end up as assistant professor or something like that. We talk about this, my friends and I, none of my friends study at University of Copenhagen […] University of Copenhagen and other universities have something antiquated to them." (Salik, 23 years)

This is a view on the role of education that is predominant among ethnic minority students and students from lower socioeconomic status families (Reay, David, & Ball, 2005; Thomsen, 2005; Thomsen, Petersen , & Lejre, 2003; Zeuner, 1988). Basically there has to be a clear and present point in venturing into a lengthy HE. The strategy is instrumental: Education is

weighed on a scale of usefulness. Compared to the PS and LS students none of the IBC students have leisurely activities they link to academic life, and none of the interviewed have jobs especially relevant to the Program they're studying.

At Copenhagen Business School there are two faculties: The Business Economics Faculty and the Business Language Faculty, where IBC resides. The two faculties are located in two architecturally distinctively different buildings. The contrast between the 'hard' male-dominated Economy Programs in the stark grey modern building and the 'soft' female-dominated Language Programs in the soft-colored white building is striking. One of the elements in the construction of a collective identity among IBC students is the ambiguous relationship their own Faculty has to the Business Economics Faculty. It is considered a 'tougher' place, more competitive with more elbows, but it is also considered to have a somewhat higher status and to be the economically favored faculty of the two. The Business Language Faculty, on the other hand, has a cozier atmosphere, where studies are not considered to be tough in any way. But at the same time the students feels that 'they are not being taken seriously because of all the language' and a lot of the IBC students talk about doing their masters at the Business Economics Faculty – a masters degree from there has a higher status and better job offerings than the ones at the Business Language Faculty. Compared to the Faculty of Business Economics the students find the dress code at Faculty of Business Language more casual:

> "If you look at the Faculty of Business Economics, the guys and girls are more well dressed, more conservatively dressed, like, they wear Polo shirts, Lloyd shoes, its very stereotypical, where the Faculty of Business Language, the guys a more casual, a bit more hip-hop. More high school boys, than business school boys." (Susanne, 24 years)

While they see more suits and high heels at the Faculty of Business Economics, they themselves sport a casual but still somewhat fashion/brand-oriented look. Compared to the two other Programs, the clothing style is more casual-conservative with colours in the black, white and blue ranges.

The IBC students are generally very satisfied with the teaching situation, the critical comments being more directed towards the administrative level: most students have the feeling that the Programs at the department are subject to bad planning and organization, while it seems that the Business Economics Faculty is better organized with better funding. The IBC teachers generally encourage and support discussions in the classroom, asking questions directly aimed at specific students, something I newer witnessed at PS, where the level of 'uninvited' student remarks often rendered teacher questions obsolete. At PS (and at LS), one could say that the students needed no help to get the discussions going – the challenge here would more often be to hold the discussion within limits. The 'school' terminology is also very present among the IBC students – the students regularly refer to themselves as 'pupils', going to 'school' and having to do 'homework'. (PS and LS students very seldom use words such as 'school', 'class', 'pupils' and 'homework').

Political Science (PS)

Statistically PS students have highly educated parents: the interviewed students provide some examples; they have parents working as top educational manager, biologist, university professor, book editor, journalist, physiotherapist, economist, engineer, teacher, pedagogue, and unskilled worker.

Unlike the IBC students, parents are seen as having a significant influence on the educational pathway – on educational interest and choice of education. Eight out of ten students state that their parents have had an important influence on educational choices. In the interviews the students say it's about coming from social-minded homes, where there has always been lots of discussions, lot of newspaper and book reading. Choice of university education is described as a 'natural' choice, parents and brothers and sisters exerting a big influence:

> "I think I discussed it a great deal with my family, both of my parents have been very involved in their children's education, and they were very helpful, they helped me find my way around things. My mom set up a meeting with the school career advisor and she said that PS would be just the thing for me… I mean your parents play an incredibly important role […] from the many travels abroad, my mothers many languages and from my dad: I thought it was incredibly exciting to hear him tell about the cold war, while we were out camping he would come up with a long story about it, things like that I thought were incredibly exciting." (Martin 24 years)

The PS students' highly educated parents are familiar with the educational system and its possibilities, they have a wide social network, and they provide a cultural milieu that supports and encourages their children in their choice of university education, preparing them for the practical mastery of the culture there. The cultural practice is in this sense a preparation for future life: It socializes and prepares the individual student for hers or his position in society:

> "It is clear to me that many from our class have grown up in north Zealand [a wealthy, well educated area north of Copenhagen, JPT] with academic parents and you can see that they have some embedded academic knowledge - I may have that to some degree and many persons don't have it and would never get on here […] This means that for those people here, from a situation like that where everything is not served up to them, they are the really, really bright ones, they have gone through a highly selective process, and they'll make it…the ones from the suburbs and the academic families, everything is a lot easier for them, but they haven't been through the same selective process." (Jacob, 23 years)

What Jacob is talking about here is a sense of belonging that is the result of years of prior 'training' for this educational situation. For the student in the specific HE Program, it's all about the practical mastery of the situation, having a 'feel' for the game, a practical sense (Bourdieu, 1984). For the children of academic families everything is given: It would require an effort *not* to choose a selective HE, while those few students unfamiliar with academia have to be the 'really, really bright ones', often starting out with significantly lesser resources, be it academic, economic, cultural or social.

For the PS students, interest in society and social issues is often told as having started in lower secondary school, and developed further in high school (with school council work and other pupil and student activities). None of the PS students have considered alternatives to upper

secondary school, the Danish HE-prep *Gymnasium*, 'this was natural for me', 'I didn't give it any thought', are frequently occurring statements. For half of the students choice of PS was not given from the start, but the Program is chosen because it is a comprehensive education ('you get a bit of everything') with a very good reputation. Several describe the educational choice as a pragmatic weighing off of academic interest and choosing sensibly. Compared to the students at the other two Programs, one can say that studying PS is being told as a choice that is partly instrumental (as in IBC) partly non-instrumental (as in LS).'The *pragmatic* choice' is an expression that is often found among the students. None of them have great concerns about future work life – in this they resemble IBC students. But the difference is that the certainty is more linked to the notion of ending up with a degree that carries lots of possibilities with it. Almost all of the interviewed student, think of work life after university with peace of mind, because 'PS is so versatile a study', as several says.

The PS Program is a highly selective education: To enter you require some of the highest grade point average of any HE: "My impression is that PS is a very high-status education", Jacob says, talking about the students there. This is also evident in the teachers' expectations and the spirit of the faculty:

> "Our head of department held a welcome speech and said: "I am proud to look at all you young people and know that this is best of the best of your generation. You are the most talented students from high schools all over the country". Everybody, you know, suddenly 2 meters taller, right, yes, it's true, and I am one of them. And this was a sweet way of doing it, but it creates anticipation from day one, that this is like elite, right. Everyone in here are the best and that's the reason you were accepted, right." (Lisa, 22 years)

> "And then they stand in these black gowns and look like, I don't know, priests or Darth Wader or something. […] when they put on the gowns the first day and the surroundings that must be grand, like, you're glad you're not a faculty residing in a modern building. We like it old and grand right?!" (Sara, 26 years)

Half of the interviewed have what they themselves describe as activities in their leisure time relevant to their university studies. Having a student job relevant to the Program is a consideration for most of the students. Most of the students take an active part in the student life at university and several are politically active. The PS students have a lot of socials, and they describe themselves as 'entrepreneurial'. They're considered resourceful by their peers, as people with a lot of energy. Most of the students interviewed mentions how fantastic it is to study a place were the level is so high and students are so good:

> "People here are fantastic, they have the same background without being the same…I think that it is very easy for people at PS to have fun with each other….I think they are generally pretty social people, people with at very strong academic and strong social profile." (Martin, 24 years)

> "This is not meant to sound snobbish, but being a PS student is fantastic, because the level is so outrageously high – the people getting in here are really, really talented, this is something I enjoy immensely. I know it's not supposed to be a good thing when entry requirements are so tough, but with a filter of 9,6 [a very high grade point average, JPT] you just don't get any misfits." (Mattias, 21 years)

Two observations can be made here: The level of social activity is high, building friendships and networks that may be a valuable asset in later work life; the whole social capital discussion springs to mind here. And the giftedness portrayed here, is in a way made possible because of the selectiveness of the Program; this giftedness statistically follows with the privileged classes, it is nurtured in the families, and it enables the students to enjoy the privileges of a milieus where the 'ungifted' are filtered out. Marie, a student that transferred from another social science Program for PS, gives an account of some characteristics of the majority culture at PS:

> "I feel a bit different than the majority […] I think it has to do with how big a part of my life the study is, both in terms of how much time you spend reading but also how much you spend talking about the study in your leisure time, if you use breaks between classes to talk about the next lesson or what you didn't understand in the last one, how much you at socials and parties talk about who you want to be examined together with, how much space the study take up in peoples heads, how big a part of your private life the study is […]" (Marie, 26 years)

The PS students are very active in classes and they are also by far the most critical towards the quality of teaching. While they experienced a lot of replacements and teachers not familiar with their progress, while I was observing, it was never the less evident that many teachers would be very aware of the fact that they would teach 'the best of the best'; bright and sharp resourceful students who would often question statements from the teachers.

Looking at the aesthetic appearance of the students, one notes that designer clothes a rarer than on IBC: casual-street wear is more prevalent at PS (the students often refer to the style as being "relaxed"). Even the students' clothes depict a multitude of interests here: presentable-conservative, street-casual, trendy, and a few very trendy. Most teachers are dressed relatively conservatively.

Literature Studies (LS)

Like PS, LS is highly selective and like the PS students, LS students have very well educated parents. The interviewed students have parents working as engineer, nurse, psychiatrist, psychologist, self-employed, pedagogue, high school teacher, physician, artist, top manager, consultant, biologist and school teacher. Generally the students are trendier than at PS and IBC, with more students having an urban 'chic' style in their clothes, especially the men. Several students sport an avant-garde, stylish look.

Six of the eight interviewed students mention their parents as a source of inspiration and as being influential in relation to choice of education from the very beginning:

> "I think I have just been very lucky, having parents that has always read a lot, and from early on given me books, and told me about literature…" (Nadja, 24 years)

Or, as another student puts it:

> "I: Have your family read a lot of books?
> R: Oh yes, like, really a lot. We have a huge book collection back home.
> I: Have you also discussed literature?

R: All the time. All kinds of cultural subjects. So I have always been interested in culture and the theatre and going to the movies and books. A lot of the things I know, I know from back home." (Julie, 22 years)

Generally, the influence from homes with large amounts of cultural capital is conspicuous in the way the students at LS tell about their thoughts on educational choice. The home has actively supported the students' educational choices, through vacations, discussions about culture and literature, reading and reading aloud – everything preparing the individual student towards the university education.

The interviewed LS students describe their choice of education as driven by interest and commitment. Most of the interviewed do things in their leisure time which they see as an integral part of their study, like going to literature readings, the theatre, writing fiction, etc. Nearly everyone think it is hard to draw a line between life at university and life outside – it is hard to distinguish between study, and then more interest- or pleasure-related reading and writing activities. Half of the students describe it as having a 'con amore' relation to the Subject, being really enthusiastic about it:

"This is the first time I've tried to study a place where people actually take a genuine interest in their Subject. […] When classes are finished, we go down to the 'X'-café, grab a beer or coffee or something, and continue talking about the stuff we have read or about other books." (Marie, 24 years)

Another student describes the Subject as identity creating, as a lifestyle Subject:

"When I say lifestyle, I mean that it is a big part of your identity to say you study LS….and I think it expresses a desired way of living, like, when you choose LS, it's about being a bit bohemian…" (Nadja, 24 years)

The commitment-driven educational choice is reflected in the level of studying - several students describes it as an ambitious Program with a high academic level. At the same time the students are very aware of the uncertainties of future work life. The story in the Program is that it is an education without prospects and for the majority of the interviewed LS students, ideas of a future work life are either absent, diffuse, or marked by an ambivalence between the commitment driven choice of education and an uncertain future:

"Then I thought about what I wanted. I mean, on the one side, where can I get a job, and what do I want to study - and the last thing won [R laughs, JPT]." (Marie, 24 years)

"People have so many doubts. It is the whole invent-yourself thing. I mean, there are no jobs for you." (Julie, 22 years)

From my observation data and through my interviews with the LS students, I got the impression that it was not as social a study as the other two Programs. There would be less socials and the students would not socialize with as many fellow students as the case was in the IBC or PS Programs. It might be the case that the working up of social capital is not as important here as it is in PS, for example (studying LS is more of a 'lonely' task, the image of the lonely writer sitting by the candle light in her study, sticking more to the Program here). One hypothesis could be that we find a more individualistic cultural practice here, because the

study prepares them to a relatively more solitude literary life, where the future for PS students, for example, will be in more team oriented work life situations, social capital being more valued and important.

During my LS observations, I saw a form of argumentation different from the other two Programs. Where discussions in the IBC Program (and even more in the PS Program) would adhere to logical-rational principles of argumentation, the form was more intuitive and 'associating' here. I asked the students about this:

> "I think seminar discussions often points in to many directions with no clear focus. I mean, even though you're studying LS and therefore accepting a certain subjectivity, I think it is still allowed to use rational arguments, because the alternative, the free associations, they tend to get very free and, like, springing from a very spontaneous thought or something like that. And I really don't think that it is meant to be that way." (Nadja, 24 years)

> "It's about being able to take it to the extreme, to the point were it doesn't make sense any more. It is so annoying, it kills any discussion." (Anne, 25 years)

The teachers themselves would be experts in giving references and making associations, and it is this form that was being valued in the discussions. Of course some elements has to do with the classification of the academic Subject, but it's about the framing as well: It's about valorising positively a specific way of talking about the Subject. This was also gendered - the male students were dominating in the discussions, and in the comments made by students, often with more self-confident comments. The expression 'the quiet girls' often popped up in the interviews.

On the IBC Program I never saw a teacher be more than 1-2 minutes late and the lesson always stopped when the timetable said so. Most students would be on time for class here. PS had a more 'relaxed' attitude to the clock – classes seldom started on time, and teachers would frequently be 10-15 minutes late. Breaks would often be held 'when needed'. Breaks between classes would not necessarily follow the timetable at PS and some students would be late. This was even more the case at LS where many students would be late, and breaks would be totally at the discretion of the lecturers (who, It seemed to me, most of the time didn't quite have a sense of when a break was needed).

Strategies and cultural practices – the Programs compared
Comparing the students at the three Programs, some marked differences appear: The PS and the IBC students especially, describe their choice of education as a mix of interest and considerations regarding future job opportunities. LS students see choice of education as an act of personal interest, where future work life considerations play a minimal role. For the PS and LS students, leisure activities are often linked to academic life and to the Subject studied – being a LS student is a lifestyle for some. It is interesting that so many PS and LS students stress the importance of influences from back home, while the IBC students doesn't mention parental influence often. This could be seen both as a sign of a relative social mobility in the case of the IBC students, and as the opposite in the case of the PS and LS students; as the cultural dynamics of social reproduction.

To sum up, we might talk of different educational strategies[3] linked to different cultural practices among the students at the three Programs. PS contains a hybrid of strategies (from the more goal oriented public management career, to the political, working with communication, in NGO's , etc.) but the common denominator is an elite attitude preparing for elite jobs. In lack of a better word, we might talk about 'invested' strategies, where the cultural practice is an integral part of everyday life. The boundaries between study and leisure time are blurred, and the build-up of social capital and networks constitutes a much larger part of the PS student life than it does for the IBC students. At IBC we might talk of a more instrumental approach to education - a more 'detached' strategy, where the student culture does not play as big a part in student life as for the PS students. Education is first and foremost a formal qualification and a prerequisite for the work life that lies ahead.[4] The LS students seem to have educational strategies where 'the love of literature' is the key dynamic. The cultural practice at the LS Program can be characterized as evolving around a personalized or existential attitude towards the Subject.

We might tentatively differ categorically between an *instrumental* attitude, a semi-instrumental, semi-interest driven *pragmatic* attitude, and a more *existential* personalized attitude. Choice of education is being told as an existentialist choice by many LS students, as a more pragmatic weighing of interest and job opportunity by PS students, and as a relatively instrumental choice by IBC students.

Conclusion

My aim with this paper has been to convey a picture of students within HE as highly differentiated with regard to class as well as to cultural practices, attitudes and strategies. University students are a very heterogeneous group – I have given three examples and further research would add more dimensions to the picture of university students. It is no longer viable to perceive the HE student as a specific 'type'. With the credential inflation (Collins, 1979) social differentiation has moved upwards in the educational system, making HE the new arena for processes of differentiation (Bourdieu, 1996). Culture plays a vital role in the production and reproduction of social differences. Culture and class are intertwined, but not determined: The students 'make their own history, but not under conditions of their own choosing', to paraphrase Marx. In the following, I will conclude this paper by summing up four major points, and end by discussing a fifth point at some length:

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[3] Strategy signifies the individuals' path of life, as a series of practical, socially, culturally and psychologically conditioned acts, as opposed to 'strategy' as rational action theory understands it. (Bourdieu XXXX)

[4] An example can illustrate the difference between PS and IBC students: Presenting my research project to the IBC students, one of them asked me: "So, what's your real job?" – I sensed that my presentation was met with a kind of wonderingly (polite) indifference. The PS students were significantly more interested, and it was clear that researcher-informant identification was stronger here. Often to an almost troubling point as when one of the students in a class break wanted to know if I had a Bourdieu perspective on this, a Foucault perspective on that, etc. On reflection, these reactions are quite understandable: The reason why the IBC students greet me wonderingly, with a polite indifference, might very well be that it simply doesn't make much sense to them – why would it be interesting to observe them? The goal-orientedness in the student's attitude toward their study reveals itself here. In their own logic, what I do is 'strange' and their reaction is therefore perfectly 'natural' (as the PS students' reaction is 'natural' as it is in line with their valorization of social capital).

1. University access in Denmark remains highly socially selective. In our society, education is the primary transmitter of societal positions, but the educational system is still characterized by social inequalities, even though we have formally equal opportunities (study grants for all and no tuition fess) of access to higher education. This is evidence of the immense importance of culture for the understanding of the persistency of social class in higher education. For the working class, not familiar with HE, admission continues to be the exception.

2. There are very large differences in the individual Programs' degree of selectiveness - education chances vary greatly. The social differentiation is regional, institutional and Program-based.

3. The Programs have distinct cultural practices and the students have distinctively different strategies towards study and future work life – they are preparing for the future in different ways: One group taking on strategies, where education is first and foremost the means to a future work life in the business sector (instrumental), one group viewing education as an integral part of their present student life and future work life in public administration (pragmatic), and one group studying first and foremost out of personal interest (existentialist).

4. It might further be possible to talk of the different cultural practices as different cultural logics, inasmuch as the different practices constitute specific coherent and, to a certain degree, ritualized 'logical' ways of interacting.[5] One logic might see education as the means to and end (a job), while another logic might only accept as legitimate a personalized, interest driven attitude towards education, where it is an end in itself. From a cultural theoretical point of view, expressing such sociocultural affiliations is part of the peer socialization, where the specific cultural practice supplies subjective meaning as well as social recognition. This also implies that when young students, as the LS students does, emphasize their education as part of a constant identity work, the question is (following the sociocultural perspective in this paper) if it is not to be understood as a ritualized cultural interaction, expressing affiliation to certain social groups (peers) in everyday life situations.[6] In this way the practice of the LS students, stressing the personal, identity-constituting lifestyle aspects of their education can be seen as an example of the cultural logic of a certain social class. This leads me to my last point.

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[5] These constitutive logics have specific ritual elements, reinforcing the cultural practices. For, as Collins writes (referring to Goffman): "[….] ritual is a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership." (Collins, 2004, p. 7). This might often be an exclusive process reinforcing mechanisms of peer recognition through the elimination of 'strange' acts (the PS students' exchange of glances when a student makes an 'off' remark, for example, or in the IBC student's attitude towards 'the others' at the Economics Faculty). Rituals are enacted and reenacted continually as a constitutive part of the creation of symbols that lies at the foundation of all social practices. It follows that 'culture is socially alive only when rituals are successful' (Collins, 2004, p. 31).

[6] Emphasizing education as part of a constant identity work can not be seen exclusively as a reflection of the impact of the reflexive modern. In a class- and culture perspective, explaining students choices as products of reflexive modernity and cultural liberation, as diagnosed among others by Thomas Ziehe (1984), only holds some truth for a minor part of the students. Young people speak about their educational choices in individualistic terms partly because they're 'hailed' to do this by media discourses, etc., partly because this signifies group membership, partly because, for some, biographies has actually opened up.

New middle classes?

I want to end this paper with putting my data into perspective by relating them to the discussion about middle class strategies and choice of higher education (Ball, 2003; Power, Edwards, Whitty, & Wigfall, 2003). My question is: If there is a covariation between academic culture and the social class origin of the students, is it then possible to talk about (educational) cultural logics of different middle classes?

When discussing middle class and education, Bernstein's sociology of education is central. Bernstein differentiates between opposite forms of control (symbolic and economic) by the 'new' and 'old' middle class.[7] For Bernstein, the new middle class, with its control over cultural and symbolic production and distribution, represents a new division of labour. Where the concept of the *person* is indicative of the new middle class (having a person-centred family pattern), the *individual* belongs to the old middle class (having a positional family pattern) (for a discussion, see Power & Whitty, 2002):

> "Whereas the concept of *individual* leads to specific, unambiguous role identities and relatively inflexible role performances, the *concept* of the person leads to ambiguous personal identity and flexible role performances." (Bernstein 1977, s. 125)

Bernstein's middle classes and his distinction between invisible and visible pedagogies and restricted and elaborated codes (Bernstein, 1990), enables us to see how and why the sociolinguistic structure is different in different areas of the educational system. Even though Bernstein isn't writing with HE pedagogies in mind, his arguments echo some of my findings. The valorisation of the *personal* is a hallmark of the LS students, having what Bernstein would call new middle class person-centred family patterns (with large amounts of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1987)). Similarly, the LS Program is characterized by an invisible pedagogy and an elaborated code, while IBC is characterized by a less elaborated code and a more visible pedagogy (with parents having predominantly economic capital). It is not a perfect match however, between Bernstein's categories and the Programs analysed in this paper, and the preliminary analysis presented in this paper might indicate that Bernstein's division between an old and a new middle class might be inadequate.

Ball (2003) and Power et al. (2003) have tried to deal with the issue of the middle class and education. In *Class Strategies and the Education Market,* Ball (2003), drawing on several different studies of educational choice, puts forth the argument that it is the middle class that is able to take advantage of the marketization of education, utilizing middle class capitals and values in the class struggle taking place in the education market. Ball is somewhat vague in defining the middle class – he states that families included in the study are members of the

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[7] There are strong similarities between Bernstein and Bourdieu, especially in Bernstein's analysis of the 'old', economic, and 'new', symbolic middle class; in the new middle class' way of reproducing itself through a strong public sector; and of course more fundamentally in the identification of the languages of the different classes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979; Bourdieu, Saint Martin, Passeron, Baudelot, & Vincent, 1994).

'service class' and later cites others for calling his concept of middle class 'rather broadly conceived and internally undifferentiated' (Ball, 2003, pp.181-182).[8]

Power et al. attempts to outline differentiations within the middle classes (through Bernstein's division between old and new middle classes). Having followed the educational pathways of 350 young middle class men and women, they argue that Bernstein's theorisations of the distinctive dispositions and orientations of the 'new' and 'old' middle class can be used to explain contrasting parental preferences for types of school, patterns of student engagement with school and the complex processes of cultural reproduction (Power, Edwards, Whitty, & Wigfall, 2003). Power and Whitty are critical towards talk of an advantage-preservation strategy of *the* middle class:

> "[…] the concept of 'a middle class strategy' is again based on an assumption of a relatively homogeneous middle class disadvantaging the working class. As we have already argued, many of the battles over education are better interpreted as battles between sections of the middle class for ascendancy. In doing so, they adopt different strategies." (Power & Whitty, 2006, p. 452)

Similarly, I might argue that the analysis presented here, of different practices and different social class origins, renders it problematic to talk of *one* middle class, but a division between an old and new middle class isn't adequate either. The problem is, that as the concept of the middle class has widened and widened, its explanatory power has weakened, letting more and more occupational groups into the category. If the middle class as a concept is to have a future in academic research (which is not a given) it is vital that it ceases to be so ill-defined. What is the scope of the middle class/the middle classes? And how is the middle class related to an upper- and a lower class? How do we define different sections of the middle class?

I have tried to show that what is normally considered as a typical 'middle class' scene (Danish university students) is in fact made up of a range of distinctively different family backgrounds, with students with correspondingly distinctively different cultural practices. I have only given a few examples, where a larger research project could be more thorough. But the three Programs are examples of a larger field of different (middle?) classes and cultural practices, each with their own specific logic - and each with their own specific social battles over that very logic.

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[8] In one of the studies, Ball is drawing upon, 'middle class' is defined as being families in groups 1,2 and 3 (manual) in the now outdated British Registrar General's Social Class (Reay, David, & Ball, 2005, p. 13). Interestingly, middle class here is apparently made up of the top three groups.

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