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Estévez-Abe, Margarita

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FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

Gender Bias of Education Systems

MARGARITA ESTÉVEZ-ABE

Introduction

This paper is about the gender bias in education systems in a comparative perspective. Labor economists have argued that differences in human capital endowment between the two sexes are important sources of occupational segregation (see Becker 1985; Polachek 1981). It is in this light that vocational training and educational systems become relevant to patterns of occupational segregation by gender.[1] This paper argues that vocational programs that involve employers to a greater degree are more biased against women than school-based training systems. The task of this paper is to examine the validity of the argument by: first, comparing the sex ratios of various educational and vocational programs in Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) countries, and second, comparing the sex ratios of vocational programs in a subset of countries, Denmark and Germany.
The paper is organized into five sections. Sections one and two identify the mechanisms through which gender bias emerges in different vocational and educational systems. Section three examines the gender bias in upper-secondary education programs. Section four turns to the gender bias in the tertiary programs. And, finally, Section five concludes.

Locus of Vocational Training

In order to understand gender bias in educational systems, it is important to pay attention to the locus of learning. When a young person decides to acquire a particular skill, it is important that he or she be given access to the proper training or educational program. Without such an access, there will be no skill acquisition. General skills are typically acquired through school-based education or through off-the-job training (e.g. managerial courses).[2] Training for industry-specific skills can either take place in schools or apprenticeship programs. Firm-specific skills are, in contrast, solely provided through on-the-job training, and are never certified (at least in a manner that makes sense to outside employers). Compared to general and industry-specific skills, firm-specific skills involve the highest degree of employer-commitment, because employers directly plan, provide and supervise the skill acquisition by the worker. In other words, for someone to get access to firm-specific skill training, the employer has to agree that it is worthwhile to invest in his or her training. Although I have used the case of firm-specific training, employers may be involved in training of other types of skills. Employers are, for instance, often involved in vocational training programs for industry-specific skills. Apprenticeships constitute good examples of such train-

ing programs. They involve temporary employment arrangements whereby employers take in workers at a lower pay in exchange for training them in house. Yet the industry-specific skills acquired through apprenticeships are portable, because they are systematically organized and authoritatively certified. Becker (1985) has famously argued that employers would only invest in skills that were not portable to other employers – i.e. firm-specific skills (Becker 1985). Contrary to Gary Becker's original argument, however, Acemoglu and Pischeke point out that employers also invest in general skills under certain conditions (Acemoglu/Pischeke 1998, 1999a, 1999b).

Employer involvement is of great importance in considering the gender bias of skill training systems. To put it briefly, we can expect it to exacerbate what labor economists call statistical discrimination. Statistical discrimination theory explains occupational segregation by sex by making simplifying assumptions about employers' behavior (Phelps 1972; Aigner/Cain 1977). Employers who invest in the training of their workers are more likely to avoid hiring women, so it is assumed, because they are more likely than men to quit for family-related reasons (i.e. child rearing and the care of elderly parents, for instance). Even when individual women are determined to put their careers first, so statistical discrimination theory suggests, employers still discriminate against women because of the general odds that women are more likely than men to quit (or reduce work hours). Since employers have to pay for the cost of recruitment and training of new workers, they are sensitive to the turnover rate of their workforce. Has the situation changed now that women's labor market attachment has become much stronger? Although more women go back to work after child-birth and child-rearing, the fact remains that mothers rather than fathers are the ones who take more time off work.[3] In this way, the basis of employers' statistical discrimination persists. This is precisely why Scandinavian governments are "forcing" fathers to take time off work as well (the so-called " Daddy leaves"). Increasing men's time off is the only antidote to statistical discrimination.

By extension, we can assume that women are likely to face obstacles in attaining skills when employers are the gate keepers controlling who enrolls in a vocational or apprenticeship program. In countries or firms where employers value firm-specific skills – other things being equal – on-the-job training is likely to be the most important vocational training method. Because employers cover a large portion of the cost of skill training, they are more likely to prefer to invest in men's training than women's in order to minimize the loss of training costs. What should be emphasized here is that the negative effect of employer involvement is not restricted to specific skills. When employers offer general skill training either as on-the-job training or as off-the-job training, they will face the same calculations just mentioned here. The same logic applies to apprenticeships. Apprenticeships are likely to be more gender-segregating than school-based training, because employers, who take in apprentices, have an interest in making sure that apprentices complete the contract (and in many cases stay on to work for more years).[4] Because of greater employer involvement, apprenticeship is expected to be gender discriminating. The more systematic the ap-

prenticeships and more institutionally linked to the occupational labor market, the greater will be their gender bias in the labor market.
School-based vocational training, in contrast, is likely to be less gender-discriminating than on-the-job training or apprenticeships. Women can pursue skill qualifications independently of employers' calculations by enrolling in school programs. Again, the key distinction here is that employers are not involved as gate keepers. Therefore, when employers are paying for off-the-job training programs that are school-based, we can expect gender bias to persist.

Different Types of School-Based Training and Education

So far I have argued that school-based training is less gender-segregating than those training programs where employers function as gate-keepers. This is not to say that all school systems are equal when it comes to their effects on women. Broadly speaking, we can consider two dimensions in distinguishing school-based education. One dimension is whether the educational content is academically oriented general instruction rather than geared towards a specific occupation. The other dimension concerns the levels of education such as secondary and tertiary. These two dimensions combine to produce different types of programs. For the sake of convenience, we can create a two-by-two table.

Table 1: Types of Education/Training

	Low	High
General/academic	Non-vocational high schools	Academic university education
Vocational/occupational	Craft, trade occupations Technical training	Professional training

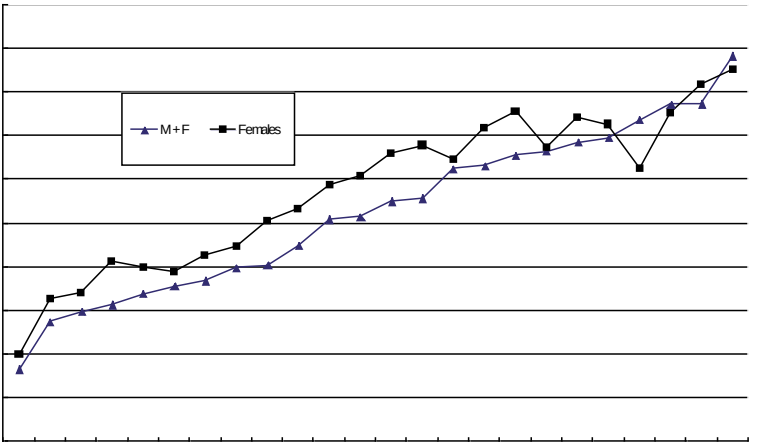
Some secondary-level programs can either be vocational or general. Although I have argued that school-based vocational training programs are less gender-biased than apprenticeships, the argument in the preceding section also implies that school-based vocational training can be more gender-segregating than general education programs. In contrast to general education programs, vocational school programs sort students into specific areas of vocational study. Two processes might affect this sorting process. First, women might sort into different vocational tracks depending on the compatibility of the skill content with their expected family roles. For instance, women who expect to take some years off or reduce their work hours when their children are small might choose vocational programs that allow them to get low-atrophy jobs or flexible jobs. Second, any gender stereotype that might exist will be exacerbated when occupational sorting happens at school (Charles/Buchmann u.a. 2001).
For the two aforementioned reasons, countries that have educational systems that track students at an early age are likely to exacerbate occupational segregation. Countries such as Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland all track students from an

early age, sending a large fraction of the cohort into vocational programs. Tracking prevents less academically-inclined students from pursuing a general education at the upper secondary level; and, instead, forces them to choose specific vocational training programs.[5] Indeed, a number of scholars have pointed out that vocationally-oriented school programs tend to segregate women into "female" subjects; and have shown that general education systems lead to a lesser degree of occupational segregation (Charles/Buchmann et al 2001; Rubery/Fagan 1993). The effect of gender bias in school-based vocational programs is likely to be much stronger in countries where school-to-work transitions are smooth and systematically institutionalized.
One consequence of tracking thus is horizontal occupation segregation where male and female students with upper secondary vocational education go into female-dominant and male-dominant occupations respectively. In contrast, some occupationally-oriented programs at the tertiary level might even alleviate vertical segregation – this means that men hold higher status jobs while women hold lower status jobs.[6] When tertiary programs are vocationally and occupationally oriented, it actually opens doors for women to advance into high status jobs. At the tertiary level, we are already talking about a relatively limited segment of the age cohort. When academic disciplines such as law and medicine train students to become lawyers and medical doctors, academically successful female students, who are seeking life-long careers, can enroll in such occupationally oriented programs. It thus follows that, once the preferences of academically oriented girls change in favor of life-long careers and they begin to pursue occupational 'tertiary degrees', we can expect the number of women in those high status occupations is likely to rise accordingly.

Gender Bias in Upper-Secondary Level: General versus Vocational, and School versus Apprenticeships

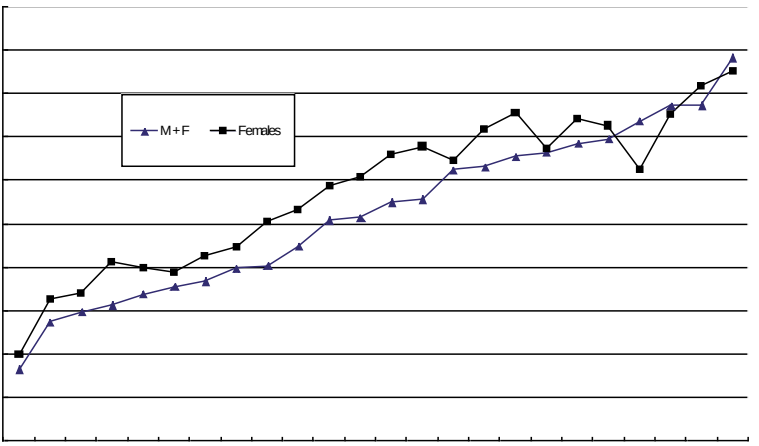
Figures 1-A and 1-B compare graduate rates of women from upper secondary school by type of education (general versus vocational) in 2006. Graduate rates have been calculated as the percentage of those who graduated with school degrees over the same age cohort. The two figures contrast female graduate rates with total graduate rates (female plus male graduate rates). Figure 1-A shows that women's graduate rates from general education programs are higher in all countries – and noticeably higher in a subset of countries. Figure 1-B, in contrast, illustrates how men dominate vocational programs. Here male graduate rates are higher than female rates in all countries except for Australia, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands and Spain.
There is no cross-national comparative data on the breakdown of subject area and sex when it comes to apprenticeship programs. Based on European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) country reports, we have some historical data on the gender breakdown of apprenticeship programs in Australia, Austria, Germany and Switzerland. In Australia, the percentage of men who pursued apprenticeships and traineeships was significantly greater than the percentage of women who did so – the ratio was 3 to 1 in the late 1980s (OECD 1988). In Ger-

Figure 1A: Graduate Rates from Upper Secondary General Education Programs by Sex



Source: OECD Education at a Glance 2008 Table A2.1. Upper Secondary graduation rates in 2006.

Figure 1B: Graduate Rates from Upper Secondary Vocational Education Programs by Sex



Source: Ibid

many, the female ratio of vocational apprentices fluctuated from between 35% to 40% (CEDEFOP 1991). Apprenticeship programs showed extremely high levels of gender concentration. The five most popular traineeships for men included different types of mechanics; and usually men accounted for around 98% of enrollment (CEDEFOP 1991; 1995a). The top three most heavily female-dominated apprenticeships were doctor's assistant (99.9% of enrollees were females), hairdresser (94.3%) and office clerks (81%). Austria displayed very similar patterns (CEDEFOP 1995b).

It is worth mentioning that, although detailed figures are not available, New Zealand and the UK have also traditionally possessed informal apprenticeships.
Even after two decades, the situation remains quite similar. According to the data published by Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (BIBB), German apprenticeships continue to be highly gender-segregated. When we look at apprentices for metal work, electricians and manufacturing, 97.6%, 96.7% and 88.3% of them are men respectively. For care work, house work and cleaning, 79.7% of apprentices are women; 94% are women for the remaining types of service work.[7] For administrative office work, 72.7% of apprentices are women. Similar gender segregation persists in Denmark as well. For instance, 98% of apprentices for electricians are male, while 91% of apprentices in services are female.[8]
A contrast between Denmark and Germany is worth exploring. In contrast to Germany, which offers vocational training for certain occupations only via the dual system and training for other occupations only via the school-based system, Denmark offers both pathways for many occupations. We can thus observe very clearly whether apprenticeships are more gender-segregating than school-based training while keeping the occupational choice constant. Let me compare a female-dominated occupation such as sales clerks and a male-dominated one such as motorcycle mechanic. In the case of training programs for sales clerks, women outnumber men almost at two to one in school-based training programs, but when it comes to apprenticeships, it becomes just the opposite: men outnumber women almost two to one.[9] When we turn to the case of motorcycle mechanics we see a similar pattern. There was no female apprentice at all for this job category. Yet, almost 10% of those training in a school-based program turned out to be women. These cases appear to support the argument that school-based training is more female-friendly.

Gender Bias in Education at Tertiary Level

In the past few decades, women's educational investments have increased almost everywhere. Although a gender wage gap persists, women nonetheless gain a wage premium by investing in education. According to the data compiled by the OECD, women with tertiary degrees earn more than women with upper-secondary education (OECD 2009 Table A7.1a). This is true for both university degrees (tertiary Type A) and non-university degrees (Type B). Before we proceed, it is important to clarify the distinctions between two types of tertiary degrees.
The UNESCO defines Type A programs as programs that are "largely theoretically based and are intended to provide sufficient qualifications for gaining entry into advanced research programs and professions with high skill requirements."[10] In contrast, Type B programs "focus on occupationally specific skills geared for entry into the labor market, although some theoretical foundations may be covered in the respective programs" but are "more practically oriented and occupationally specific" and "do not provide direct access to advanced research programs." (UNESCO 1997). The distinctions between these two types of tertiary degrees are important for

the purpose of this paper. At the upper-secondary level of education, we have already observed that more men than women pursue vocational degrees. Since Type B is closer to the vocational track in the upper-secondary in its nature, the argument put forth in this paper about the gender bias in vocational training should be applicable to the tertiary sector as well. If so, do we observe higher percentages of men in these vocationally oriented Type B programs?

Table 2: Percentage of Tertiary Degrees Awarded to Women by Field (2007)

	First degree (All Fields)		Health and Welfare	
	Type A	Type B	Type A	Type B
Australia	59	55	76	82
Austria	54	53	66	83
Belgium	54	52	64	83
Canada	61	m	83	m
Denmark	62	45	81	91
Finland	64	12	87	a
France	55	56	57	85
Germany	52	62	66	80
Italy	59	56	66	a
Netherlands	56	n	76	n
New Zealand	61	61	80	80
Norway	64	59	83	83
Portugal	61	63	80	81
Spain	61	53	78	82
Sweden	65	58	83	85
Switzerland	51	48	68	85
UK	57	66	75	86
US	57	62	79	85
OECD average	**58**	**55**	**73**	**67**

Source: OECD (2009), web only appendix, Table A3.6.

a. category not applicable.

m. data not available

n. data value negligible or nil.

As Table 2 shows, the short answer is no. Table 2 shows that while the majority of tertiary degrees of Type A has been awarded to women, even a greater majority of Type B degrees has been awarded to women in a sub-set of countries. It appears that, contrary to the expectations set out in this paper, women are not shying away from vocationally oriented Type B programs in this subset of countries. These countries

include: Belgium, France, Germany, Japan, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States. A closer look reveals a commonality in all these countries (see Table 3). In all these countries, health and welfare subjects dominate their Type B tertiary degree programs. The OECD averages for the percentage of degrees awarded in health and welfare fields out of all tertiary level degrees are: 13.5% for Type A and advanced research degrees, and 15.8% for Type B. Yet in the aforementioned sub-set of counties, the percentage of Type A degrees awarded in this subject area is much lower than the average, while the percentage of Type B degrees awarded is higher than the OECD average by ten points or more. It is clear that, because health and welfare fields are heavily feminized, when countries rely on Type B programs rather than Type A programs to provide education in this field, the percentage of females in the more vocational Type B education programs expands.

Table 3: Tertiary Degrees Awarded in Health and Welfare Fieds (as Percentages of All Teritiary Degrees Awarded in 2007)

	Type A	Type B
Australia	13.6	13.9
Austria	8.1	14.7
Belgium	12.8	25.8
Canada	9.8	m
Denmark	25.1	2.5
Finland	19.3	a
France	9.4	22.9
Germany	9.6	51.0
Italy	15.1	n
Netherlands	18.4	n
New Zealand	16.1	10.8
Norway	24.7	13.4
Spain	14.9	13.6
Sweden	26.3	13.9
Switzerland	9.7	19.3
UK	13.0	39.5
US	10.3	35.3
OECD average	**13.5**	**15.8**

Source: OECD (2009), web only appendix, Table A3.5. http://www.oecd.org/document/24/0,3746,en_2649_39263238_43586328_1_1_1_1,00.html

This is a link to an excel file that contains both A3.5 and A3.6 used in my Tables 2 and 3.

Let us look at the cases of Germany and Denmark again. *Dual systems* – countries that combine apprenticeships and school-based vocational training – typically train health

care specialists other than physicians at the upper secondary and non-tertiary levels. Germany and Denmark, however, differ from other countries in opting for training at the tertiary level. Germany relies on Type B tertiary degree, while Denmark is the only collectivist country that relies on Type A. Denmark resembles the other Scandinavian countries in its emphasis on Type A education of health care and welfare workers. Whether this "upgrading" actually leads to a better economic situation for Scandinavian women is hard to determine because the economic return on education is smaller in these countries due to their highly compressed wage structures.

Let us now leave aside the issue of vocational investment in health sector, and consider the general economic gains women achieve by investing in a tertiary degree be it Type A or Type B in any field (OECD 2009, Table A7.3). Moreover, women's relative gains – relative to women with less education – are bigger than men's. Germany, however, deviates from the general pattern among OECD countries. In Germany women's gain from Type B degrees falls behind men's gains. As mentioned earlier, German employers frequently choose competent male employees for further off-the-job training in the tertiary sector. It could be that this self-selected pool of hand-picked men in the non-university tertiary educational programs boosts the relative earnings of men in this category.

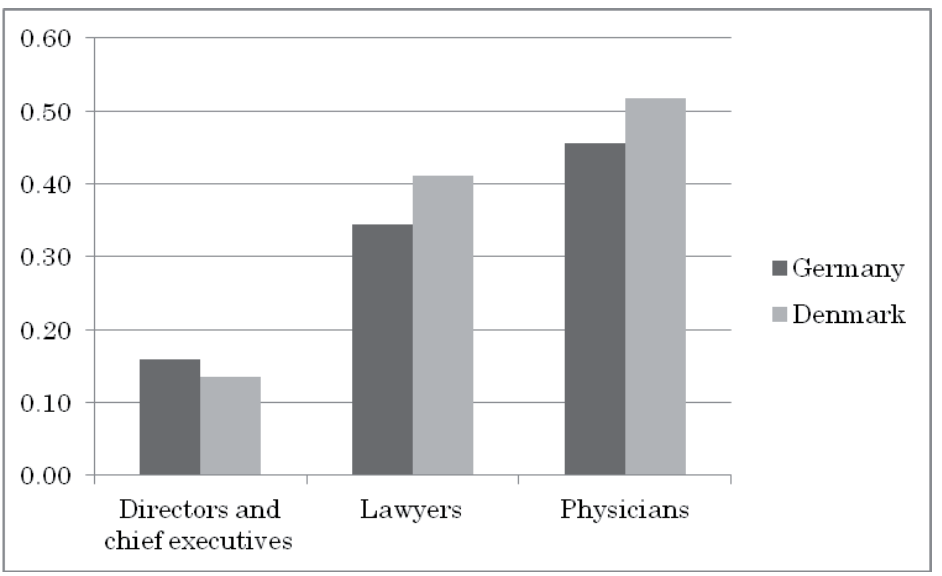
Certainly, a gender wage gap persists in countries outside Germany. The gap tends to be more acute between highly educated men and women. In many countries, the wage gap between men and women with tertiary degrees is bigger than for those with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary degrees. In other words, women with tertiary degrees still earn much less than men with similar degrees. Charles and Bradley (2002, 2009) attribute this gap to differences in the subjects that men and women choose at the tertiary level. Their argument is that traditionally "male" subjects such as mathematics and engineering fetch much higher salaries than traditionally "female" subjects. So this could be another reason for the gender gap. That said, scholars such as Shelley Correll (2001) and Muriel Niederle and Lise Vesterlund (2007) argue that women are more likely to underestimate their mathematical skills and to avoid competition. Neither of them, however, identifies the mechanism responsible for giving rise to such "female" traits.

Although solving this "gender mystery" is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be pointed out that academic degrees are not the only determinant of the gender wage gap. Once people are employed, some receive more employer-provided training than others. Michael Tåhlin (2007) and Marie Evertsson (2004) have shown that women generally receive less employer-provided training in Europe, and even a gender egalitarian country like Sweden is no exception. These recent findings support the argument presented in this paper. (In fact, Michael Tåhlin's study was designed to test this author's argument.)

In short, a tertiary degree can help women advance into high status jobs when the degree serves as an entry ticket to professional occupations once dominated by men.[11] Professions such as lawyers and physicians provide the best examples. In order to en-

ter these professions, the most important thing is that one successfully completes the tertiary degree in law or medicine, and pass standardized examinations to qualify.[12] This differs from a profession such as corporate director, where there is no specific tertiary degree qualification. Being a corporate director involves – in most European companies – rising within an organization. This process often involves more than several years of on-the-job and off-the-job training. Access to these training programs is mediated by the company rather than being up to the decision of the employee. As already explained, this type of training is likely to be gender-biased. It is for this reason that we expect women to find it easier to become lawyers and physicians than to become corporate directors. Figure 2 illustrates that this is indeed the case.

Figure 2: Percentage of Women in High Status Jobs in Germany and Denmark (%))



Source: ILO SEGREGAT online data-Employment for detailed occupational groups by sex) http://laborsta.ilo.org/

Conclusion

This paper has provided a general explanation for why some training and education systems might exacerbate gender bias. It has shown that vocationally oriented programs – especially the ones that rely on apprenticeships – are more gender-biased. In addition to a broader cross-national comparison, it has shown important differences in two collectivist countries, Denmark and Germany. Despite the fact that they both adhere to the *dual system*, there is some evidence that the greater emphasis of school-based training in Denmark might be reducing the degree of gender bias in the vocational training system when compared to Germany.

This paper has also revealed that a lot of caution is necessary in interpreting the implications of women's advancement into the tertiary sector. The precise nature of what happens within the tertiary sector varies as much as it does at the upper secondary level. Here the Scandinavian countries – including Denmark – provide insights. Many of the Scandinavian countries eliminated tracking to allow a greater number of students to pursue general academically oriented upper secondary education and then to pursue tertiary degrees. They have done so in the name of class equality. As this paper has observed, these countries rely heavily on university degrees to train welfare and healthcare workers. It may be that these countries have shifted some of the vocational training into the tertiary sector. If so, it is no surprise that the greater number of university-educated women has not led to the reduction in occupational segregation by sex in these countries.

Although not all tertiary degrees mean the same thing for women, a subset of professionally driven degrees clearly help women advance into high status jobs. This is where women have probably gained the most in real terms. This paper has demonstrated that, in both Denmark and Germany, the scope of vertical segregation is much less in high status occupations where specific tertiary diplomas serve as entry tickets.

Notes

1 This is not to say that social norms and individual preferences are irrelevant.

2 Of course, general skill training can also take place in the form of on-the-job training. For a discussion of skill types from the gender perspective, see Estévez-Abe 2000, 2005 and 2006, Estévez-Abe et al 2001.

3 Even in Sweden, the majority of workers who take time off for child-rearing are mothers (Haas and Hwang 1999). For an excellent account of mother-friendly policies across countries, see Meyers, Gornick and Ross (1999), Gornick and Meyers (2005).

4 We can think of two reasons. One, even when employers take in apprentices as cheap labor, their cost will increase if the turn over is too frequent. Two, if employers are using apprenticeship program to screen future employees, they will be more likely to take in applicants whom they expect to stay around (i.e. men).

5 Allmendinger (1989) calls this "stratification" of educational systems.

6 Of course, legal provisions such as strict equal employment law would matter for vertical segregation (O'Conner/Orloff/Shaver 1999). That said, this chapter focuses on the gender effects of training/educational programs.

7 Based on the table titled "Neu abgeschlossene Ausbildungsverträge vom 01.Oktober 2004 bis zum 30.September 2005." Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (BIBB), Erhebung zum 30, September 2005. The figures here only includes apprenticeship contracts in West Germany.

8 These figures are taken from the Statistics Denmark website (www.statbank.dk). They represent the enrollment numbers in EUD-practical training (apprentices) and school-methods in 2006.

9 All the figures have been calculated on the basis of the most recent data available (2006) downloaded from Statistics Denmark website.

10 Types A and B here correspond to ISCED 5A and 5B in the ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) developed by UNESCO (1997).

11 Buchmann and Kriesi (2009) examine the family characteristics of women who pursue higher educational degrees and non-female occupations to find that family background matters.

12 I am using these professions as high status occupations that have objective school-based qualification. One can become a lawyer or doctor by passing the qualification requirements. Note that if one wants to become a lawyer and work for a company, obstacles women encounter within corporations will persist. See Estévez-Abe 2006.

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Öffentliche Berufsberatung: Die organisierte Verantwortungslosigkeit des Gewährleistungsstaates

HELGA OSTENDORF

Einleitung

Die wissenschaftliche Beschäftigung mit beruflicher Beratung von SchulabgängerInnen wird zumeist in den Erziehungswissenschaften und der Soziologie verortet, geht es doch auch um Beratungsmethodik und Bedürfnisse Jugendlicher. Übersehen wird dabei häufig der gesellschaftsgestaltende Einfluss der Bundesagentur für Arbeit (BA), einer politischen Institution mit quasi monopolistischer Position in der beruflichen Beratung. In den letzten Jahren hat die BA ihre Organisationsstruktur grundlegend verändert. Zu den Auswirkungen auf die Arbeitsvermittlung liegen mittlerweile eine Reihe von Evaluationen vor (u.a.: Jann/Schmid 2004; Hielscher 2007; Hielscher/Ochs 2009a; Ochs/ISO 2006; Schütz 2008 u. 2009). Die