

Education and the intergenerational transmission of advantage in the US

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Abstract: This paper examines mobility of income and occupational status for men and women using the GSS and the NLS surveys. The intergenerational reproduction of occupational status is stronger for men than women; it is largely mediated by educational attainment, and appears not to have changed over time. The intergenerational income association is much stronger than occupational status, equally strong across genders, and education plays a weaker mediating role. This suggests that mechanisms other than educational and occupational resources play an important role in intergenerational reproduction of advantage. The intergenerational reproduction declines among college graduates but reemerges among advanced degree holders, questioning the meritocratic character of labor markets for skilled workers. Quantile regression analysis of income mobility suggest a “fanning in” pattern of intergenerational association with stronger persistence at the top than at the bottom -- children of wealthy parents are more homogeneously wealthy than children of poor parents are homogeneously poor.

Education and the Intergenerational transmission of advantage in the US

Introduction. Social scientists consider the level of intergenerational socioeconomic association as a measure of inequality of opportunity. A strong intergenerational association indicates that socioeconomic position is closely replicated across generations. A weak association indicates that individual attainment is relatively independent from social origins, such that individuals of different social origins have a similar chance to succeed or fail. Intergenerational mobility is simply the opposite of association: A weaker intergenerational association identifies a higher level of mobility.

The intergenerational association is naturally, a crude measure of equality of opportunity (Jencks and Tach 2006, Swift 2005). There are many mechanisms leading to intergenerational association that do not question equality of opportunity—for example genetic inheritance, as small a role as it may play (Bjorklund et al. 2006). There are other mechanisms that are difficult to modify, even if they contribute to the transmission of advantage—such as children’s household socialization, or assortative mating. Family socialization may contribute to forming habits and values that help socioeconomic success (Patterson and Hastings 2007); assortative mating may exacerbate socioeconomic inequality across households, making the formative environment of children more unequal (Schwartz 2010). However, most societies—the US is paramount among them—do not directly address these factors because they are considered to belong to the private domain, and therefore impervious to policy intervention.

The difficulty of modifying some of the avenues for the intergenerational transmission of advantage makes it difficult to develop policy strategies to increase mobility, with two exceptions: One is reducing cross-sectional inequality; the other is improving educational opportunity for youth of disadvantaged origins. The first strategy—reducing cross-sectional economic inequality—is based on a simple and intuitive premise. Low levels of socioeconomic inequality in the parental generation will result in smaller resource gaps between poor and wealthy children, thus equalizing opportunity for economic success (Goldthorpe 2000: 254, Torche 2005). This assumes that the main source of intergenerational reproduction is economic resources rather than genetic endowments, cultural values, or other factors that would not necessarily change if only economic resources are equalized

(Mayer 1997). This assumption appears to be warranted by evidence suggesting that economic disadvantage shapes individual endowments since conception (Currie 2011). Thus, if resources are equalized across families, it is plausible that other determinants of mobility –from “biological” to “cultural— will also become more equal. However the effect of equalization of conditions on equalization of opportunities is not likely to be immediate. Most likely it would take a few generations.

The main problem with reducing cross-sectional socioeconomic inequality to increase mobility is that it is not a palatable strategy in the US context. Even with the dramatic increase in inequality over the last three decades, the political system has implemented virtually no policies to reduce economic disparities. Furthermore, to the extent that the link between inequality of condition and inequality of opportunity is not immediate – but rather likely takes more than one generation— the political viability of this strategy is low.

The second policy strategy to promote mobility – fostering educational attainment among disadvantaged children– is more acceptable in the US, at least in terms of discourse. This strategy is also based on a simple premise. Education has two potential roles in the stratification process. On the one hand, education can be the main avenue for socioeconomic reproduction if wealthier parents are able to afford more and better education for their children, which in turn will pay off in the labor market. On the other hand, education can be the main avenue for mobility if the educational system can offer all children the same quantity and quality of education, regardless of their social origins. Education can, then, provide the ticket to meritocracy (Hout and Di Prete 2006).

The problem with this equalizing access to education to promote mobility is that, as shown by Coleman four decades ago the educational system is limited in its ability to offset household disadvantage (Coleman 1966). The issue is simple: Disadvantaged children face so many detrimental exposures and constraints –including environmental insults, economic and family instability, violence, lack of role models, among many others— and advantaged parents have so many incentives and resources to ensure a better education for their children—that there is no amount of resources the educational system could deploy to compensate for household disadvantage.

More recently, research has shown that there is an alternative avenue whereby educational attainment may contribute to intergenerational mobility, in addition to promoting equal access to the educational system. This avenue emerges from the variation in the intergenerational association across levels of schooling. The intergenerational association is substantial among those with low levels of education, but it is much weaker or null among college graduates (Hout 1984, 1988, Torche 2011). This finding means that for those who attain a college degree, their socioeconomic standing is independent of their socioeconomic background. In other words, higher education offers equal opportunity for economic success regardless of the advantages of origins. Although this pattern was discovered in the US (Hout 1984, 1988), it is not a US anomaly. Research has shown a weaker intergenerational association at higher levels of schooling in other industrialized countries such as France, Sweden, and Germany (Vallet 2004; Breen and Jonsson 2007; Breen and Luijkx 2007). If the intergenerational socioeconomic association disappears among those who attain post-secondary education, then, as education expands and more people reach college, the aggregate level of intergenerational association will decline driven by this compositional change.

Two crucial assumptions need to be true for the meritocratic power of a college degree to hold. The first assumption the compositional change will only result in increased mobility if a college degree conserves its meritocratic power even as college expands. The validity of this assumption is contingent on the reasons why college breaks the intergenerational association. If the reason is that labor markets for college graduates are more meritocratic given universalistic recruitment, reward, and promotion rules, then the meritocratic power of a college degree may not be affected by educational expansion. But if the reason is the unobserved positive selectivity of those who attain a college degree, then college expansion will reduce selectivity and the meritocratic power of a college degree will decline over time.

Torche (2011) found that a college degree retained its meritocratic power between the 1970s and the 1990s in the US in spite of college expansion, suggesting that selectivity does not (entirely) account for mobility among college graduates. However, she also found that the intergenerational association reemerged among those with advanced degrees (rather than a terminal BA) suggesting

that there is no necessarily increasing meritocracy as the level of education increases, and questioning the inherent meritocracy of the labor markets for highly skilled workers.

The second assumption the meritocratic power of a college degree relies on is usually disregarded but equally important. Given that this compositional effect refers only to the portion of the intergenerational association that is *net* of education, its role will be only as large as the portion of the intergenerational transmission not mediated by educational attainment. If most of the process of intergenerational reproduction occurs through the educational system—as predicted by modernization theory—then, as much as college expands, little will be altered in terms of equality of opportunity.

Recent socioeconomic trends in the US. I draw on the connections between education, mobility and inequality just described to examine patterns and trends of intergenerational mobility in the US. The US's socioeconomic landscape has experienced substantial changes in the recent past. Probably the most notable trend is the increase in economic inequality since the late 1970s. The Gini coefficient for total family income has risen from .37 in 1975 to .44 in 2010 (US Census Bureau: 2013), reaching a level of economic polarization not seen since the early 20th century.

Much of this increase is driven by growing disparities in labor market earnings. During the 1980s, earnings inequality grew throughout the entire earnings distributions – the poor were getting poorer and the rich were getting richer. But around 1990, the gap between the bottom and the middle ceased to increase and in fact shrunk (Burtless and Jencks 2003). In contrast, the gap between the top and the middle continued to grow (Lemieux 2008). The increase in income inequality since 1990 has been driven by a widening gap between the top and middle earnings.

Several factors account for the increase in economic dispersion. The consensus by the early 1990s was that the growing demand for skilled workers, driven by skill-biased technological change was the main force driven disparities in pay. Demand for skill had been growing since the 1970 but it had been offset by the entry of the highly educated cohorts born in the late 1940s and 1950s into the labor market. Members of these cohorts – particularly men—experienced a pronounced increase in

educational attainment, driven by growing returns to schooling, federal responses to compensate war veterans, and (for those born in the 1940s), college draft deferments (Goldin and Katz 2008, chap. 7). However, gains in educational attainment declined for those born in the 1960s. In fact, for both men and women, educational attainment was lower among those born in 1960 than those born in 1950. As the supply of skilled workers declined and the demand for skill grew, the economic returns to skill increased inducing the growth in inequality observed since 1980.

This skill-biased technological change explanation relied entirely on market forces, and neglected the institutional context. More recent economic literature offered a more comprehensive “supply-demand-institutions” framework (Freeman and Katz 1995). Research has shown that the increase in unionization played an important role in the increase of inequality (Card 1992, Freeman 1993) as did the minimum wage (DiNardo 1996, Lee 1999), especially in the inequality among the bottom and the middle of the earnings distribution.

The increase in inequality at the top of the distribution is a central development since 1990. The increase in concentration is more pronounced the smaller the portion of top high-income group considered, i.e. it is more pronounced if we consider the top 0.1% than the top 1% than the top 10% of earners (Picketty and Saez 2006). Although income inequality has risen in many industrialized countries since the mid-1970s (Brandolini and Smeeding 2009), the enormous concentration of top incomes seems to be most pronounced in the US and other English-speaking countries. Although the phenomenon has easily been equated with the rise in executive compensation, it in fact affects a group broader than executives at the very top.

In fact, the growing income gap at the top parallels the widening gap in returns to schooling – the economic returns to an advanced degree have grown much more than the returns to a terminal BA since the late 1980s (Lemieux 2008). This phenomenon is likely partly related to supply and demand of skills and partly related to changes in pay-setting institutions and social norms that may have removed implicit barriers to higher wages at the top, and made manager more able to set their own pay (McCall and Percheski 2010).

While the analysis of growing inequality in the US has focused on labor market returns, the growth in economic disparities is even more pronounced if we consider total family income (McCall and Percheski 2010) in particular among families with children (Western et al. 2008). This trend is accounted for by factors including the increase in cohabitation and in single mother households (McCall and Percheski 2010), and (less clearly) the increase in spousal socioeconomic resemblance (Schwartz 2010, Breen and Salazar 2011).

Not surprisingly in a context of growing economic inequality, the distribution of resources critical for mobility has also become more unequal. For example, the gap in enrichment expenditures on children between the top and bottom income quintiles has grown almost twofold the early 1970s (Duncan and Murnane 2011: 11); and the economic gap in children's test scores has also grown dramatically (Reardon 2011). More directly related to labor market success, there economic gap in college attendance and completion has also widened. Kane (2004) compared the cohort who graduated high school in 1980-82 with those who graduated in 1992, and found growing income-based inequality in the probability of enrolling college. By the same token, Belley and Lochner (2007) and Bailey and Dynarski (2011) compared children born in the early 1960s with those born around 1980 and found growing gaps between children from high- and low-income families in terms of college entry, persistence, and graduation.

The increase in economic and educational inequality over the last three decades suggests that intergenerational mobility should have declined in the US. However, while cross-national comparative research shows that the US features both high inequality and low mobility compared with other advanced industrial countries (Blanden 2013, Corak 2012), the evidence does not conclusively show a decline in mobility as inequality has risen in the US. Findings about mobility trends vary widely depending on the dataset used. Findings based on the PSID show an *increase* in mobility among men born in the 1950s and 1970s, although this trend usually fails to reach statistical significance, due to the small sample sizes provided by the PSID (Ferig 2003/4, Mayer and Lopoo 2004, Hertz 2007, Lee and Solon 2009).

In contrast, analysis based on the NLS surveys show a *decline* in mobility between cohorts born in the late 1940s/early 1950s and those born in the early 1960s (Levine and Mazumder 2002, Bloome and Western 2011). The problem with these studies is that the measure of income used differs across surveys. Analysis based on Census data also shows that mobility increased between 1950 and 1980 to then decline over the 1980s and 1990s (Aaronson and Mazumder 2008). However, because the Census does not permit matching parents with adult children, a cohort of “synthetic parents” was constructed, which is less than ideal. Finally, analysis based on the GSS finds no significant trend over time (Levine and Mazumder 2002). In sum, no clear answer emerges in terms of mobility trends in a context of growing inequality, a limitation largely due to data limitations.

Research Questions, Data, and Methods. With this contextual information in hand, I now move to the analysis of intergenerational mobility in the US and the role that educational attainment plays in the mobility process. Specifically, this analysis addresses the following questions:

1. What is the total level of intergenerational socioeconomic association in the US?
2. Is there a direct association between social origins and socioeconomic attainment beyond the effect mediated by education?
3. Has this association changed over time?
4. Does the direct intergenerational association vary depending on the level of schooling attained?

I use the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS-Original Cohorts and NLSY-79) and the General Social Survey (GSS) 1972-2010 Cumulative File to examine intergenerational socioeconomic association and its change over time. The NLSY-79 is a nationally representative sample of youths born between 1957 and 1964, who were 14–22 years old when they were first surveyed in 1979. These individuals have been interviewed annually through 1994 and biennially thereafter. I evaluate intergenerational processes by combining parental information obtained in the first wave with adult children’s information obtained from recent waves between 1996 and 2006.

The NLS Original Cohorts (NLS-OC) surveys, initiated in the late 1960s, consist of four surveys: mature and young women, and older and young men. The mature women survey started in

1967 with women ages 20–44, and the young women survey started in 1968 with a cohort of women ages 14–24. Both surveys ceased in 2003. The older and young men surveys started in 1966 and included men ages 45–59 and 14–24, respectively. Both concluded in 1981. A unique aspect of the NLS Original Cohort surveys is that half of the mature women, one-third of the older men, and three-quarters of both young men and women cohorts shared a household with another cohort member. I exploit this feature to merge them, creating an intergenerational data set.

The GSS is a cross-sectional survey representative of the U.S. population, conducted annually between 1972 and 1994, except for 1979 and 1981, and biannually thereafter. I use the GSS to evaluate period change in mobility, restricting the sample to adults 28–65 years of age.

All analyses are conducted separately for men and women. The variables of interest are socioeconomic standing of parents and adult children and educational attainment of children. Educational attainment is coded into five categories: Less than high school, high school graduate, some college, college graduate, and advanced degree. Some college includes college dropouts as well as those who attained an associate degree. Socioeconomic standing is measured using two variables: Occupational status and total family income. Occupational status [SES] ranks detailed occupational categories on the basis of the educational attainment and earnings of their incumbents. While occupational status measures socioeconomic standing at the individual level, total family income captures all sources of revenue by all family members. As a result, it includes extra-occupational resources, such as financial assets and public and private transfers. These extra-occupational resources are central at either extreme of the economic distribution—among the “underclass” poorly attached to the labor market (Grusky and Weeden 2008) and among the “overclass,” whose income largely depends on returns to capital. Furthermore, this measure accounts for family-level dynamics, such as spousal selection and intra-household division of labor, shown to play an important role in the transmission of advantage (Chadwick and Solon 2002; Ermisch et al. 2006), rendering total family income as perhaps the most comprehensive measure of economic well-being.

I use the NLSY-79 to measure occupational status and income mobility. Measures of socioeconomic status for parents and children are based on Stevens and Featherman’s (1981)

socioeconomic index (SEI-SF). The SEI-SF revises and updates Duncan's Socio-Economic Index (1961) for 1970 Census Occupational Codes. The NLSY-79 codes parents' and children's occupation using the 1970 occupational census codes until 2000, and the 2000 census codes thereafter. I back-coded children's occupational titles from 2000 into 1990 codes, and from 1980 into 1970 values (a major revamping of occupational codes occurred in 1980 so recoding from 1990 to 1980 is trivial but transforming codes across the 1970 and 1980 classifications is not trivial) using the algorithms provided by Weeden (2005a, 2005b), and constructed measures of status based on the 1970 codes. Children's status scores take the average between 1996 and 2006 to reduce measurement error. Parents' status is retrospectively reported for the year when respondent was 14 years old.

Family income includes all sources of monetary income for all household members. For adult children, I average income over the 1996-2002 period (corresponding to ages 31-45). Parental income is the total household income during 1978, as reported by the parents in the first NLSY79 interview wave. Information on family income was collected only for respondents living with parents in 1979. Given that many youths leave the parental household upon completing high school, those who remain living with parents may be a selected sample. To avoid selectivity bias, I restrict the analysis to respondents who were 18 or younger in 1979 (i.e. those born between 1960 and 1964). Income measures are converted into constant dollars, averaged across years, and logged.

I use the GSS to measure occupational status mobility. I focus on the years 1998-2004 to make the period comparable to the NLSY-79, and subsequently exploit the fact that the GSS dates back to 1972 to examine change in mobility over time. As in the case of the NLSY-79, I use Steven and Featherman's SEI to measure status. The GSS uses 1970 Occupational codes between 1972 and 1990, and changes to 1980 Occupational codes from 1988 to 2010. I recode 1970 Occupation codes into SEI-SF directly for 1972-1990, and convert 1980 into 1970 codes using the algorithm provided by Weeden (2005a) for the 1991-2010 period. My second measure of socioeconomic status for the GSS is the International Socioeconomic Index (ISEI) (Ganzeboom et al. 1992), which I code from the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) provided by the GSS. The GSS uses ISCO1968 to code occupations until 1990 and ISCO1988 to code occupations between 1988 and 2010.

I recode each classification directly into ISEI. I compare results using these alternative occupational classifications to assess their robustness.

Parental socioeconomic status is measured using only father's occupation because mother's occupation is available in the GSS since 1994 only. Father's occupation is retrospectively reported by respondents and refers to when the respondents were 14 years old. Given the change in the GSS occupational coding in 1988-1990, this analysis uses different occupational classifications for the 1972-1990 and the 1991-2010 periods. Even though the algorithms used to convert occupational classifications into status scores are designed to ensure comparability, differences between classifications may remain. In order to test the sensitivity of the results to the occupational classification used, the Appendix analyzes intergenerational association and the role of education using the "old" and "new" classifications for the years for which overlapping information is available (1988, 1989, 1990). As can be seen in the Appendix, differences between classifications are negligible suggesting that any detected trend is not an artifact of the change in occupational coding.

I use linear regression models with robust standard errors for all analyses. All samples are weighted to account for sampling design and to make the sample representative of the population under analysis. Missing cases are deleted listwise. I present a series of models for each outcome of interest and dataset. In all cases, Model 1 evaluates the intergenerational association of status or income including no controls except for age and age squared. Model 2 adds controls for exogenous predictors –race and place of residence (urban/rural) during adolescence. Model 3 adds controls for education, presumed to be the main mediator in the intergenerational transmission of advantage. Model 4 examines the variation in the intergenerational association across levels of education, in order to test the hypothesis that the association weakens among those with a college degree.

Results: Change in mobility over time and the role of education in the mobility process.

Intergenerational Status Mobility. The central findings of the analysis are presented in Figures, and the complete set of parameter estimates are reported in the accompanying Tables. I start by evaluating the current intergenerational association of occupational status. Figure 1 offers the findings for men born around 1960 based on the NLSY-79. The intergenerational status association

reaches .349 (Model 1 [SEI Origins]). It drops negligibly to .323 when exogenous covariates race and place of residence in adolescence are controlled for (Model 2 [+ Controls]). Model 3 [+ Education] accounts for the mediating role of education in the process of intergenerational reproduction.

Model 3 shows a large status gradient across educational levels, with a gap of 35 status points (about two full standard deviations) between those with less than high school and those with an advanced degree. It also shows that the intergenerational status association drops substantially to .075 after controlling for education, but remains statistically significant. This confirms that education is indeed the main mechanism for the intergenerational transmission of advantage, explaining about 80% of the intergenerational association ($1 - (.07 / .349)$) but that mechanisms other than education are still relevant.

The last set of coefficients in Figure 1 capture the variation in the intergenerational status association across levels of schooling. A clear U-shaped pattern emerges: The net association is substantial for those with less than a college degree; it drops to zero among BA-holders, but then regains strength for advanced degree holders. The difference in association between BA-holders and advanced degree holders is considerable ($-.025$ vs $.084$) even if it fails to reach significance at the conventional .05 level due to the small sample size for advanced degree holders.

Figure 1.B. offers the same analysis for men born around 1950 (based on the NLS-OC) and it allows evaluation of change over time in the level and pattern of mobility. The overall level of intergenerational status association among those born around 1950 is extremely similar to the cohort born around 1960 – the coefficients are .322 and .349, respectively, and the difference is not statistically significant at the conventional .05 level. Once educational attainment is accounted for, the association drops to .094 – which indicates education accounts for about 70% of the intergenerational transmission of advantage ($1 - (.094 / .322)$), slightly less than for the younger cohort.

As to the variation in the net intergenerational association across levels of schooling, findings for this older cohort depart from the earlier cohort. We now see a pattern of monotonic decline in the net association across levels of schooling, with the influence of parental status on adult children's

status insignificant for both BA holders and advanced degree holders. This finding suggests that the stronger intergenerational association among advanced-degree holders is a new phenomenon.

Figure 2 replicates the analysis for women. The intergenerational status association for women born between 1958 and 1964 reaches .259, which is substantially lower than the association for men (and the difference is statistically significant at the .05 level). This is not a surprise, as women's intergenerational status mobility involves a double transition: Across generations and across genders. The net intergenerational status association drops to .048 after accounting for education; indicating that, as it was the case for men, about 80% of the reproduction of advantage is mediated by educational attainment. But in the case of women there is no substantial variation across educational levels. Among women, the intergenerational association is somewhat weaker among those with a college degree or more, but it is relatively low across the board.

Figure 2.B. evaluates the intergenerational status mobility for women born around 1950. The comparison with women born in the 1960s shows that the association has increased over time –it was .196 for those born around 1950 compared with .259 for women born around 1960, a statistically significant difference ($t=2.33$). One factor likely contributing to this decay in mobility is the declining selectivity of women in the labor force as the proportion of women engaged in paid work expanded, from 74% in the earlier cohort to 94% were in the younger cohort. To the extent that women engaged in paid work were more selected in the past, this can explain their higher levels of intergenerational mobility.

The intergenerational association drops to .064 once we control for education, indicating that about 67% is mediated by educational attainment ($1-(.064/.196)$). Again we find evidence of a much weaker association among those with a college degree or more than those with lower levels of schooling. Even though the intergenerational association is weaker for BA-holders than advanced degree-holders, the difference in magnitude and statistical significance is trivial. So we conclude that, in contrast to men, there is no indication of a resurgence of the intergenerational association for advanced degree holders among women, either in the 1950s or the 1960s birth cohorts.

I now replicate the analysis of intergenerational status mobility using the General Social Survey. I start by measuring the current intergenerational status association for men and women using the 1996-2004 waves, to provide a timeframe comparable to the analysis of the NLSY-79. Figure 3.A shows an intergenerational status association of .336 for men. This value is extremely similar to the .349 value found using the NLSY-79 for a roughly similar period of observation. This attests to the robustness of the estimate and suggests that it is not an artifact of survey attributes. The association drops to .292 after accounting for exogenous confounders, and to .079 after accounting for the mediating role of education, which suggests that education mediates about 75% of the intergenerational association. As to the variation in association across levels of schooling, we again find evidence of a much weaker influence of social origins on destinations among men with higher education. The association is weaker (indeed negative) among BA holders than among advanced-degree holders, but the difference between these two educational groups is not statistically significant.

As in the case of the NLSY-79, the intergenerational association is weaker among women than men based on the GSS (with parameter estimates of .285 and .336, respectively) and it drops to only .058 after education is accounted for. Again, the intergenerational association is substantial among women with less than a college degree but fully disappears among college graduates.

In sum, the intergenerational status association in the early 2000s is about .35 for men and about .25 for women, and it drops by about 75%-80% after the mediating role of educational attainment is accounted for, with results extremely similar between datasets. The direct association net of education is substantial among those with less than a college degree but insignificant among college graduates. Among men, the association reemerges among advanced degree holders, although the strength of this finding varies across datasets.

The comparison between those born around 1950 and 1960 suggests little change for men and a decline in mobility among women, perhaps related to the declining selectivity of women in the labor force. Figure 4 further examines the change over time in the intergenerational association by dividing the 1972-2010 GSS series into six sub-periods: 1972-76, 1977-83, 1984-88, 1989-94, 1996-04,

2006-10. No clear trend in mobility exists among men, a result consistent with the analysis based on the NLS surveys (Figure 4.A). For women (Figure 4.B), we observe a clear decline in the association in the mid-1980s, and stability thereafter. This trend is opposite to the one found in the NLS surveys so we cannot draw a conclusive answer about trends in intergenerational mobility of women.

Intergenerational Income Mobility: The analysis is restricted to the NLSY-79 because family income measures are not available for the parental generation in the GSS, and although the variables are available in the NLS-OC, the sample sizes are small and measures of income are not the same as in the NLSY-79. Results for men and women are presented in Figure 5.A and 5.B respectively. The intergenerational income elasticity is .374 among men, and .371 among women. This figure is similar to mobility estimates regarded as good quality by the literature (e.g. Solon 1992, Corak 2012). In contrast to occupational status mobility, income mobility is nearly identical among men and women. This suggests that factors other than labor market returns –such as spousal selection or intergenerational transfers— equalize the intergenerational transmission of advantage across genders.

After controlling for education, the intergenerational income association drops only to .172 among men, and .150 among women. This decline – by 54% among men and 60% among women – is much less than the decline in the occupational status association after education is accounted for. To the extent that total family income is a more comprehensive measure of economic wellbeing, then the mediating role of education in the intergenerational transmission of advantage is much less than what we would conclude using measures of occupational status only.

The intergenerational income association varies substantially across levels of schooling. For both men and women, a marked U-shaped pattern emerges. There is a substantial relationship between parental income and adult children's income among those with less than a college degree, the relationship shrinks to insignificance among BA holders but it reemerges among advanced degree holders, to levels even higher than those with low educational attainment.

As a final analysis, I evaluate the intergenerational income association for adult children whose income is located in different percentiles of the distribution using quantile regression. I choose

the 10th, 30th, 50th, 70th and 90th percentiles. The comparison of regression lines across levels of parental income provides an additional assessment of mobility insofar as it measures the varying dispersion of offspring's income for each specific level of parental income. Figures 6.A and 6.B offer the result for men and women, respectively.

The pattern of association across income quantiles is very similar for men and women. In both cases, the regression line is relatively flat for children with high levels of income (90th percentile) and becomes increasingly steeper as children's income decreases, forming a "fanning in" pattern. As a result of this pattern, when we compare the variation of children's income across levels of parental income, we observe much higher concentration (less mobility) at the top than at the bottom of the parental economic hierarchy. In other words, children of wealthy parents are more homogeneously wealthy than children of poor parents are homogeneously poor. Note that this analysis provides information that complements the evaluation of the conditional mean across levels of parental income provided by regression analysis and suggests that the reproduction of wealth appears to be more pronounced than the reproduction of poverty.

Conclusions. Among men, intergenerational status association reaches about .35 and intergenerational income association reaches about .40. Educational attainment is a substantial mediator of the intergenerational association – about 70%-80% of the occupational status association is accounted for by educational attainment, even when attainment is measured by a very aggregate set of five categories, and no measure of educational quality is used. This finding would suggest that a strategy oriented to promoting mobility should focus on equalizing access to education. However, when family income mobility instead of occupational status mobility is evaluated, the mediating role of education drops to only about 50%, indicating that there are powerful determinants of intergenerational reproduction that bypass the educational system. If we believe that total family income is a better measure of economic wellbeing than occupational status, then the mobility payoff of equalizing education would be more limited, and other avenues for the intergenerational transmission of advantage –such as the use of social capital, or the direct transfer of assets –should be considered.

In terms of trends over time, little change in status mobility is detected among men over the last three decades, in spite of the substantial increase in economic inequality. This finding should not be read as supporting a lack of association between inequality and mobility. Rather, it may reflect that occupational status is a poor measure of economic inequality because the majority of earnings inequality is still generated within occupations within occupations (Bjorklund and Jantti 2000, Weeden et al. 2007, Blanden 2013).

Another relevant finding for men is the variation in intergenerational mobility across levels of schooling. There is clear evidence that the association is substantial among those with less than a college degree but declines to insignificance among college graduates. Less consistently, there is indication of the reemergence of the intergenerational association among advanced-degree holders, which is more pronounced for total family income. This pattern questions the putative meritocratic nature of labor markets for highly skilled workers and suggests that both attributes of educational systems and labor markets should be explored to understand sources of intergenerational persistence among those who attain graduate degrees (Torche 2011).

The comparison of mobility patterns between men and women reveals interesting gender differences. The intergenerational status association is weaker for women than men, but the total family income association is of similar magnitude. This suggests that factors other than labor market success—such as assortative mating and intra-household gender-based division of labor—result in similar levels of intergenerational mobility for men and women, once we measure it at the household level. In other respects, women’s mobility patterns are similar to men’s. As it is the case for men, there is no clear indication of change in status mobility over time, and there is indication of a U-shape pattern of intergenerational association across levels of schooling, which is more pronounced for income than for occupational status.

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Table 1. Models predicting respondent's occupational status. Men born 1958-64 (NLSY-79) and 1947-51 (NLS-OC).

	NLSY-79				NLS-OC		
	Model 1 SEI Origins	Model 2 + Controls	Model 3 + Education	Model 4 By Education	Model 1 SEI Origins	Model 3 + Education	Model 4 By Education
LTHS (omitted)							
HS graduate			4.738*** (0.546)	4.476** (1.371)		8.260*** (2.035)	11.974** (3.802)
Some college			12.880*** (0.737)	12.184*** (1.673)		18.875*** (2.134)	25.237*** (3.982)
College grad.			25.088*** (0.843)	30.471*** (1.945)		37.173*** (2.219)	46.344*** (4.218)
Adv. Degree			34.432*** (1.132)	34.731*** (2.567)		47.118*** (2.575)	59.938*** (5.005)
Father's SEI/ LTHS	0.349*** (0.018)	0.323*** (0.019)	0.075*** (0.016)	0.106** (0.043)	0.322*** (0.029)	0.094*** (0.025)	0.412** 0.144
FSEI/HS grad				0.108*** (0.028)			0.184*** 0.048
FSEI/Some coll.				0.114*** (0.033)			0.095* 0.046
FSEI*Coll. Grad.				-0.025 (0.034)			0.034 0.048
FSEI*Adv. Deg.				0.084* (0.042)			-0.045 0.07
Age	-1.158 (2.154)	-1.295 (2.156)	0.651 (1.740)	0.687 (1.735)	-19.708 (13.743)	-10.811 (10.925)	-11.256 (10.900)
Age ²	0.037 (0.061)	0.041 (0.061)	-0.011 (0.049)	-0.013 (0.049)	0.658 (0.405)	0.362 (0.322)	0.376 (0.321)
Race: White (omitted)							
Race: Black		-4.856*** (0.646)	-3.991*** (0.519)	-3.858*** (0.521)			
Race: Other		-0.003 (1.892)	0.091 (1.425)	0.177 (1.363)			
City (omitted)							
Country, no farm		-2.306** (0.808)	-1.109 (0.633)	-1.072 (0.632)			
Farm		-3.321** (1.272)	-2.553* (1.047)	-2.571* (1.048)			
Constant	26.265*** (0.640)	28.384*** (0.762)	25.120*** (0.616)	24.325*** (1.089)	36.736*** (2.300)	22.692*** (2.385)	16.402*** (3.691)
Observations	3,712	3,682	3,667	3,667	1,126	1,126	1,126
R-squared	0.150	0.159	0.486	0.489	0.120	0.448	0.455

Source: NLS Original Cohorts (NLS-OC) and National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY-79).

* p<.05, ** p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 2. Models predicting respondent's occupational status. Women born 1958-64 (NLSY-79) and 1949-53 (NLS-OC)

	NLSY-79				NLS-OC		
	Model 1 SEI Origins	Model 2 + Controls	Model 3 + Education	Model 4 By Education	Model 1 SEI Origins	Model 3 + Education	Model 4 By Education
LTHS (omitted)							
HS graduate			6.634*** (0.667)	5.806*** (1.637)		15.075*** (1.682)	17.988*** (2.931)
Some college			11.943*** (0.717)	10.908*** (1.685)		21.389*** (1.739)	22.807*** (3.097)
College grad.			22.570*** (0.859)	23.852*** (1.918)		33.120*** (1.909)	42.911*** (3.461)
Adv. Degree			30.933*** (1.037)	31.119*** (2.490)		41.487*** (2.542)	47.800*** (4.775)
Father's SEI/ LTHS	0.259*** (0.016)	0.246*** (0.017)	0.048** (0.016)	0.038 (0.047)	0.196*** (0.022)	0.064** (0.021)	0.208* (0.082)
FSEI/HS grad				0.067* (0.034)			0.091* (0.038)
FSEI/Some coll.				0.070** (0.030)			0.121*** (0.037)
FSEI*Coll. Grad.				0.014 (0.027)			-0.061 (0.042)
FSEI*Adv. Deg.				0.039 (0.042)			0.009 (0.075)
Age	-3.959 (2.188)	-3.962 (2.187)	-2.954 (1.739)	-2.928 (1.730)	-21.248* (10.795)	-18.727* (9.444)	-19.019* (9.447)
Age ²	0.106 (0.062)	0.106 (0.062)	0.080 (0.049)	0.079 (0.049)	0.656* (0.320)	0.571* (0.280)	0.578* (0.280)
Race: White (omitted)							
Race: Black		-3.413*** (0.613)	-3.726*** (0.516)	-3.680*** (0.519)			
Race: Other		-1.214 (1.772)	0.078 (1.271)	0.031 (1.268)			
City (omitted)							
Country, no farm		-0.849 (0.767)	-0.208 (0.627)	-0.228 (0.626)			
Farm		0.348 (1.374)	-1.235 (1.095)	-1.265 (1.100)			
Constant	31.471*** (0.598)	32.518*** (0.715)	27.250*** (0.729)	27.531*** (1.326)	41.904*** (1.928)	25.836*** (2.222)	22.101*** (3.007)
Observations	3,644	3,608	3,593	3,593	1,299	1,289	1,289
R-squared	0.096	0.101	0.384	0.385	0.060	0.300	0.309

Source: NLS Original Cohorts (NLS-OC) and National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY-79).

* p<.05, ** p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 3. Models predicting respondent's occupational status. Men and Women 28-65 years old. General Social Survey 1996-2004.

	Men				Women			
	Model 1 FSEI	Model 2 +Controls	Model 3 +Education	Model 4 By Educ.	Model 1 FSEI	Model 2 +Controls	Model 3 +Education	Model 4 By Educ.
LTHS (omitted)								
HS graduate			3.519*** (0.920)	3.236 (2.132)			7.144*** (0.991)	7.424** (2.581)
Some college			10.328*** (0.929)	9.251*** (2.102)			13.958*** (1.001)	14.795*** (2.566)
College grad.			24.680*** (1.016)	32.319*** (2.285)			27.090*** (1.080)	31.824*** (2.690)
Adv. Degree			39.743*** (1.126)	43.454*** (2.510)			38.230*** (1.214)	41.404*** (2.967)
Father's SEI*LTHS	0.336*** (0.017)	0.292*** (0.017)	0.079*** (0.015)	0.150* (0.065)	0.285*** (0.015)	0.254*** (0.016)	0.058*** (0.014)	0.135 (0.089)
FSEI*HS grad				0.150*** (0.033)				0.114*** (0.030)
FSEI*Some coll.				0.159*** (0.025)				0.089*** (0.024)
FSEI*Coll. Grad.				-0.050 (0.028)				-0.005 (0.025)
FSEI*Adv. Deg.				0.040 (0.032)				0.032 (0.033)
FSEI*Adv. Deg.				-0.095 (0.231)				0.168 (0.222)
Age	0.495 (0.293)	0.477 (0.290)	-0.087 (0.232)	0.002 (0.003)	0.578* (0.266)	0.541* (0.266)	0.140 (0.222)	-0.001 (0.002)
Age ²	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)	-2.243* (0.890)	-0.006* (0.003)	-0.006* (0.003)	-0.001 (0.002)	-2.346** (0.763)
Race White (omitted)								
Race Black		-5.015*** (1.120)	-2.379** (0.894)	-2.138* (1.040)		-3.984*** (0.909)	-2.460** (0.763)	-1.862 (1.034)
Race Other		-2.020 (1.301)	-2.367* (1.042)	-2.099* (1.011)		-1.350 (1.234)	-1.956 (1.034)	0.521 (1.002)
Country (omitted)								
Farm		-2.057 (1.274)	-2.148* (1.015)	0.872 (0.852)		2.170 (1.199)	0.590 (1.003)	1.615* (0.808)
Small town		3.208** (1.074)	0.897 (0.856)	0.730 (0.978)		2.222* (0.968)	1.607* (0.809)	2.345* (0.911)
Large town		2.777* (1.232)	0.683 (0.983)	1.567 (0.991)		4.137*** (1.091)	2.341* (0.912)	1.828 (0.952)
City		6.510*** (1.240)	1.588 (0.996)	1.378 (1.012)		5.144*** (1.138)	1.801 (0.953)	3.121*** (0.947)
Big city		5.223*** (1.272)	1.347 (1.017)	21.483*** (1.942)		4.940*** (1.131)	3.151*** (0.948)	19.651*** (2.482)
Constant	27.694*** (0.696)	27.160*** (1.077)	23.358*** (1.090)	3,500 0.452	30.515*** (0.606)	29.114*** (0.961)	21.602*** (1.160)	3,968 0.375
Observations	3,507	3,504	3,500		3,981	3,977	3,968	
R-squared	0.105	0.125	0.445		0.086	0.096	0.373	

Source: General social survey, cumulative 1972-2010 file. * p<.05, ** p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 5. Models predicting respondent's total family income. Men and Women born 1958-64 (NLSY-79).

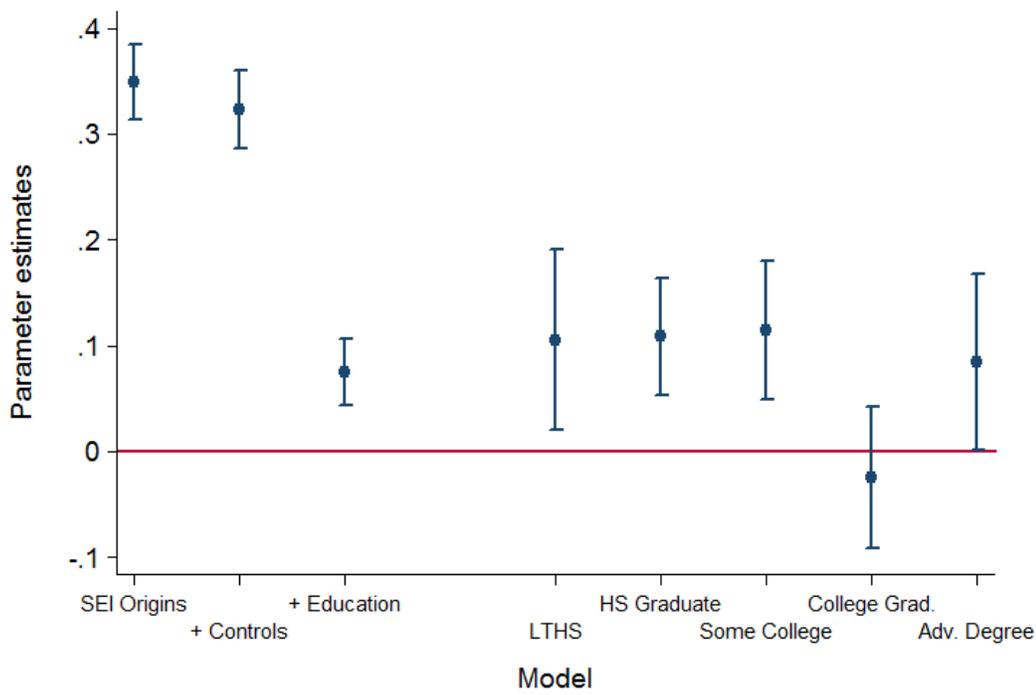
	Men				Women			
	Model 1 FSEI	Model 2 +Controls	Model 3 +Education	Model 4 By Educ.	Model 1 FSEI	Model 2 +Controls	Model 3 +Education	Model 4 By Educ.
LTHS								
HS graduate			0.368*** (0.054)	1.857* (0.776)			0.494*** (0.087)	-0.942 (0.932)
Some college			0.588*** (0.062)	2.026* (0.962)			0.617*** (0.088)	0.773 (0.924)
College grad.			0.818*** (0.071)	2.975* (1.248)			1.022*** (0.099)	1.666 (1.192)
Adv. Degree			1.035*** (0.077)	0.103 (1.372)			1.121*** (0.103)	-0.905 (1.181)
Father's SEI	0.374*** (0.030)	0.323*** (0.033)	0.172*** (0.031)	0.267*** (0.064)	0.371*** (0.029)	0.280*** (0.030)	0.150*** (0.027)	0.096 (0.083)
FSEI*HS grad				0.123* (0.042)				0.233*** (0.045)
FSEI*Some coll.				0.129 (0.068)				0.083* (0.042)
FSEI*Coll. Grad.				0.065 (0.099)				0.041 (0.082)
FSEI*Adv. Deg.				0.344*** (0.110)				0.283*** (0.080)
Age	0.488 (0.398)	0.455 (0.396)	0.459 (0.368)	0.510 (0.366)	-0.367 (0.455)	-0.355 (0.451)	-0.204 (0.412)	-0.165 (0.411)
Age2	-0.015 (0.012)	-0.014 (0.012)	-0.014 (0.011)	-0.015 (0.011)	0.012 (0.014)	0.012 (0.014)	0.007 (0.013)	0.006 (0.013)
Race: White								
Race: Black		-0.340*** (0.053)	-0.335*** (0.049)	-0.349*** (0.049)		-0.459*** (0.047)	-0.455*** (0.043)	-0.450*** (0.042)
Race: Other		-0.188 (0.109)	-0.149 (0.101)	-0.141 (0.102)		-0.376** (0.125)	-0.218* (0.107)	-0.217* (0.108)
City								
Country, no farm		0.022 (0.051)	0.043 (0.048)	0.046 (0.048)		-0.078 (0.051)	-0.068 (0.047)	-0.064 (0.047)
Farm		0.103 (0.074)	0.099 (0.070)	0.091 (0.069)		0.064 (0.102)	0.063 (0.094)	0.056 (0.095)
Constant	6.642*** (0.333)	7.236*** (0.365)	8.378*** (0.344)	7.399*** (0.665)	6.832*** (0.321)	7.902*** (0.323)	8.648*** (0.281)	9.189*** (0.826)
Observations	2,178	2,165	2,158	2,158	2,097	2,081	2,077	2,077
R-squared	0.101	0.119	0.236	0.240	0.093	0.125	0.249	0.253

Source: NLSY79.

* p<.05, ** p<.01 ***p<.001

Figure 1. Intergenerational Status Association among Men NLS Original Cohort.

1.A. Intergenerational Status Association among Men born 1958-64 NLSY79



1.B. Intergenerational Status Association among Men born 1947-51 NLS Original Cohort

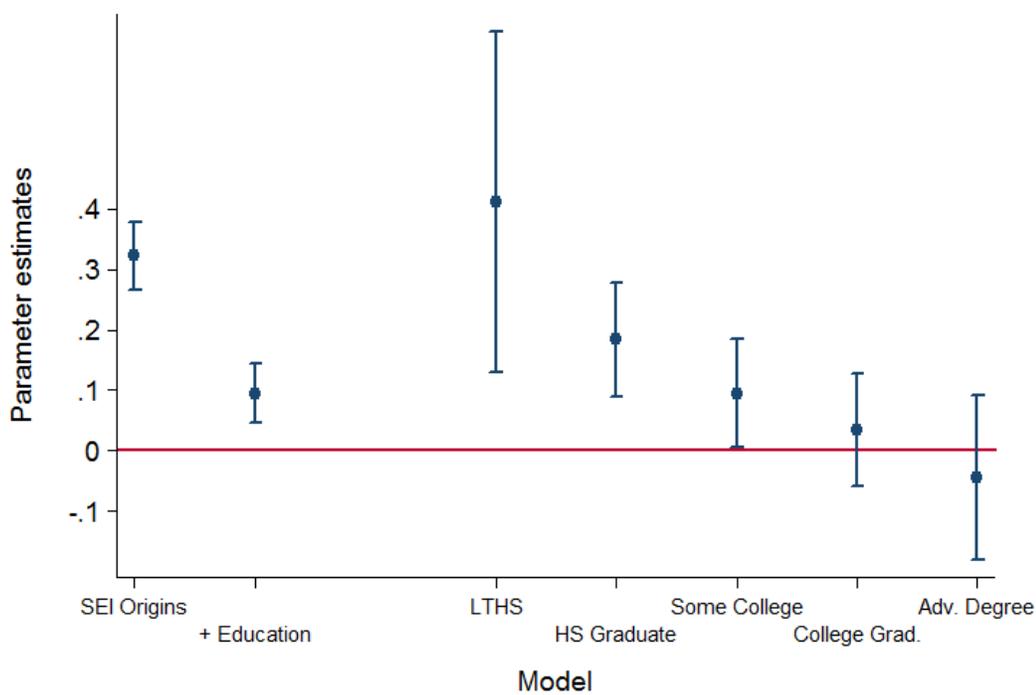
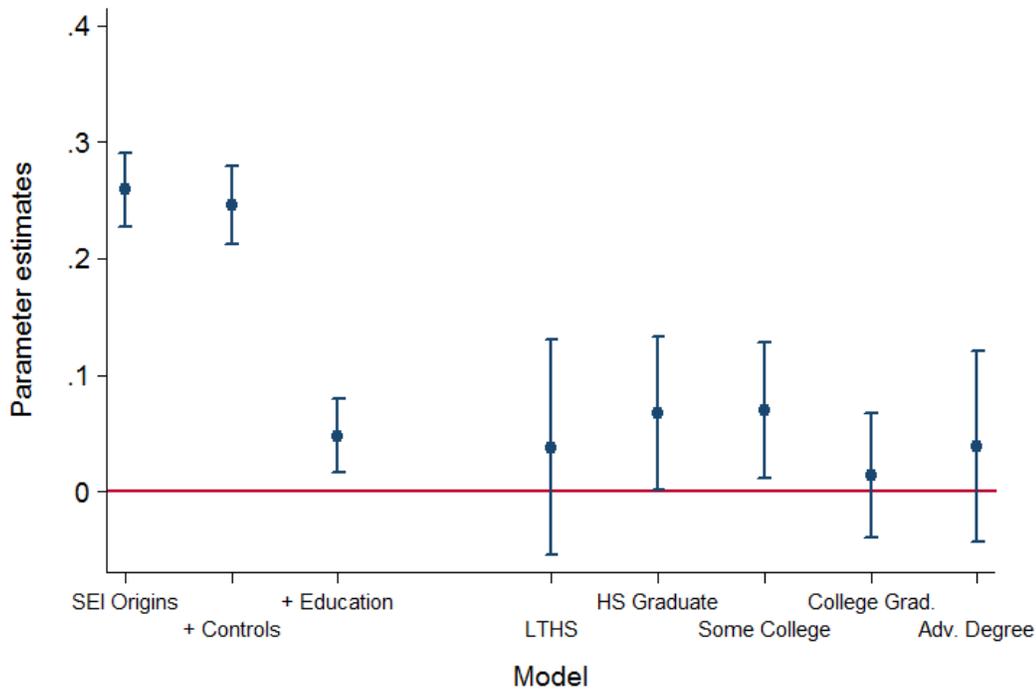


Figure 2. Intergenerational Status Association Among Women born 1958-64 (Panel A) and 1947-51 (Panel B).

2.A. Intergenerational Status Association among Women born 1958-64 NLSY-79



2.B. Intergenerational Status Association among Women born 1947-51. NLS-OC

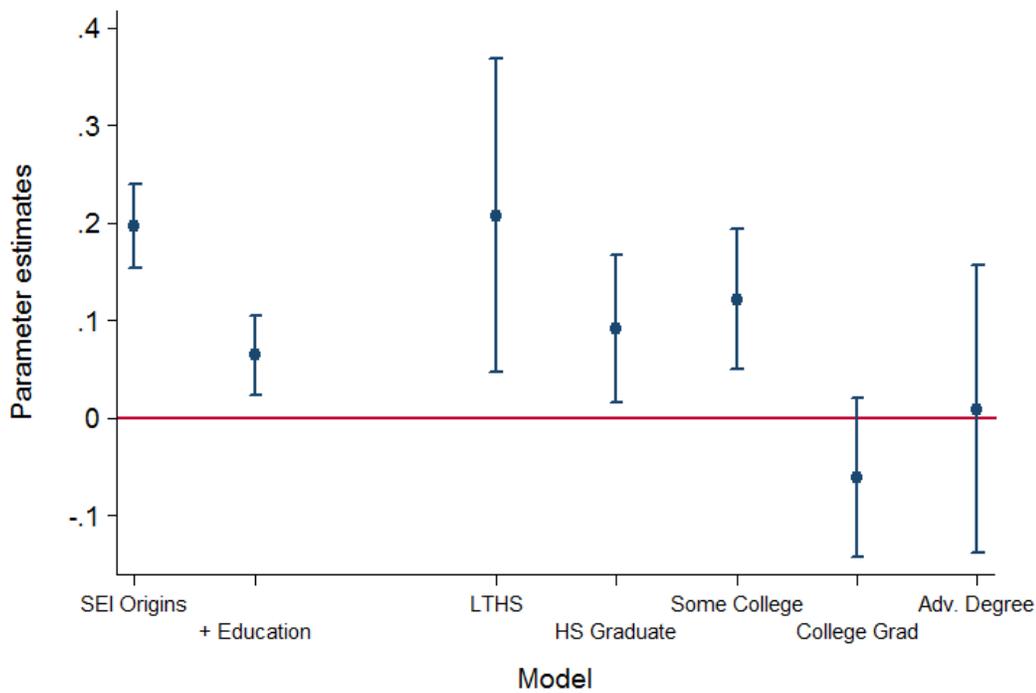
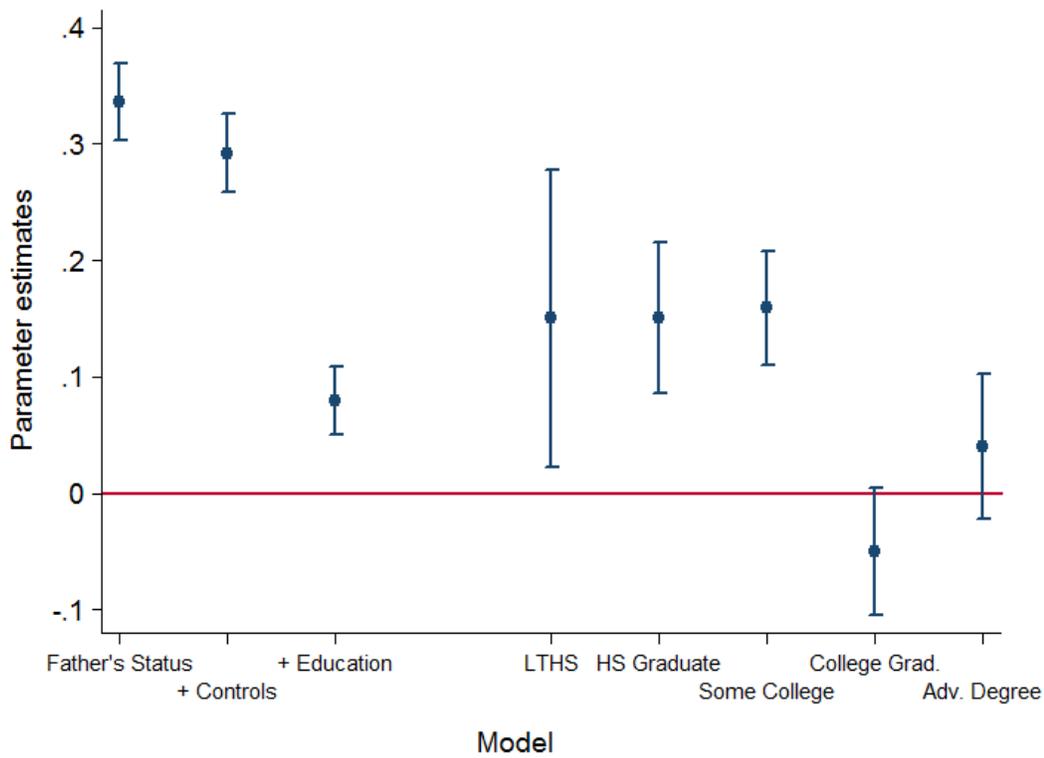


Figure 3. Intergenerational Status Association among Men and Women 1996-2004, GSS.

3.A. Intergenerational Status Association among Men.



3.B. Intergenerational Status Association among Women.

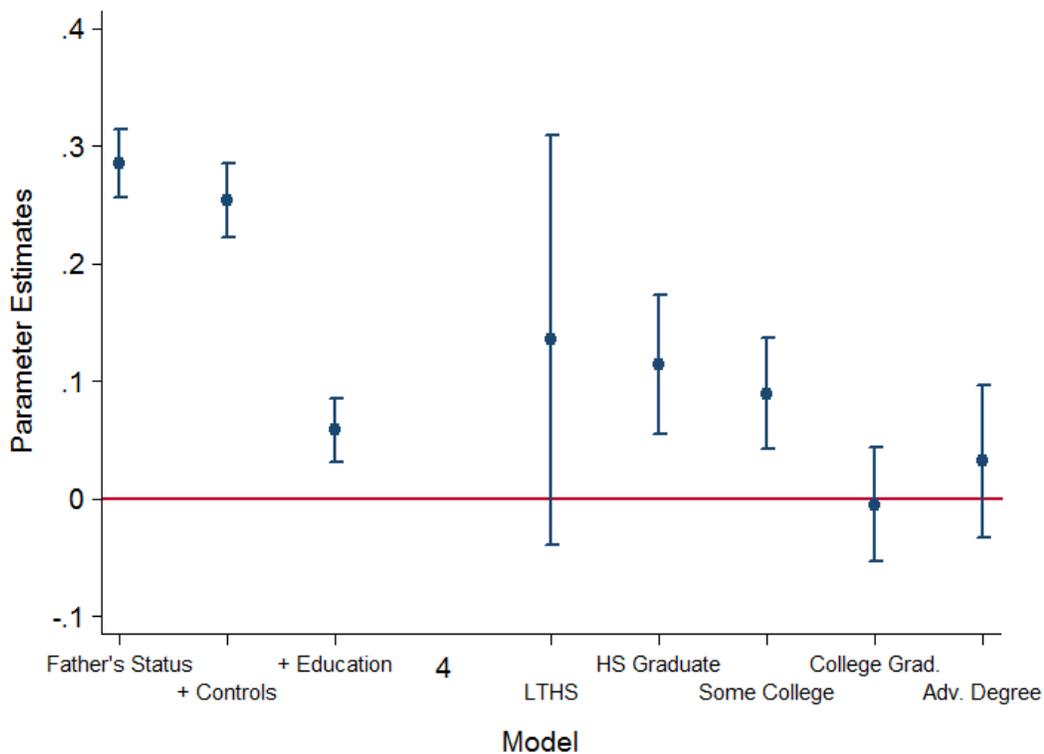
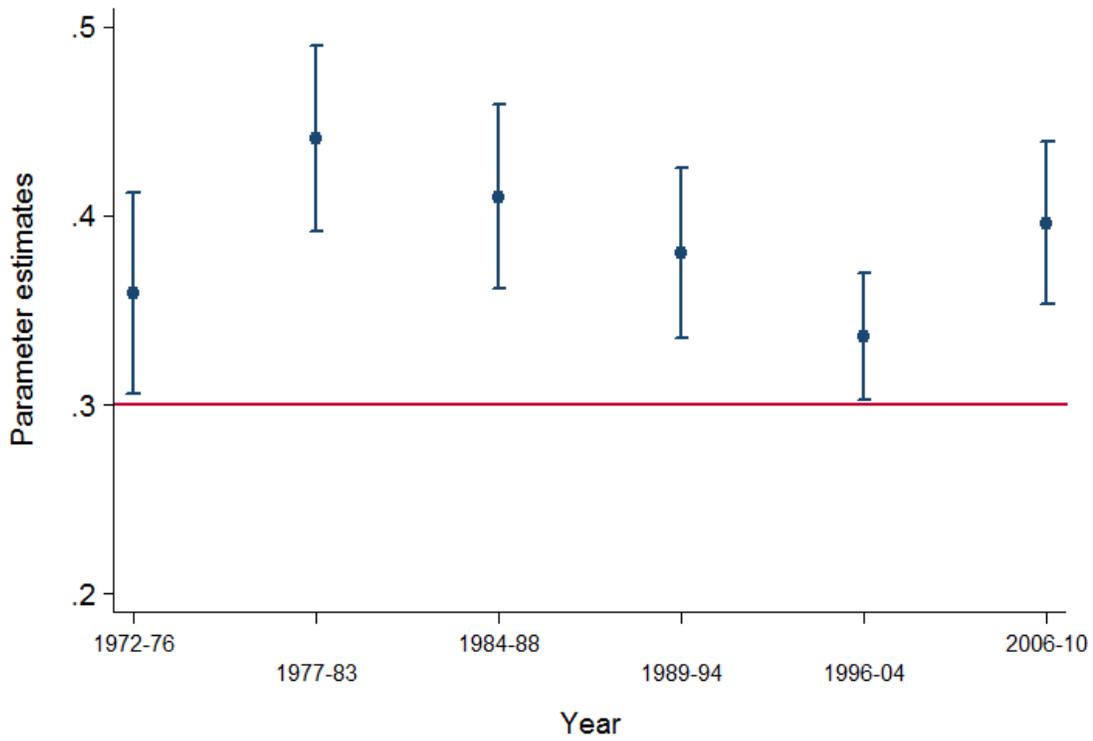


Figure 4. Change in Intergenerational Status Association over Time 1972-2010. GSS.

4.A. Males



4.B. Females

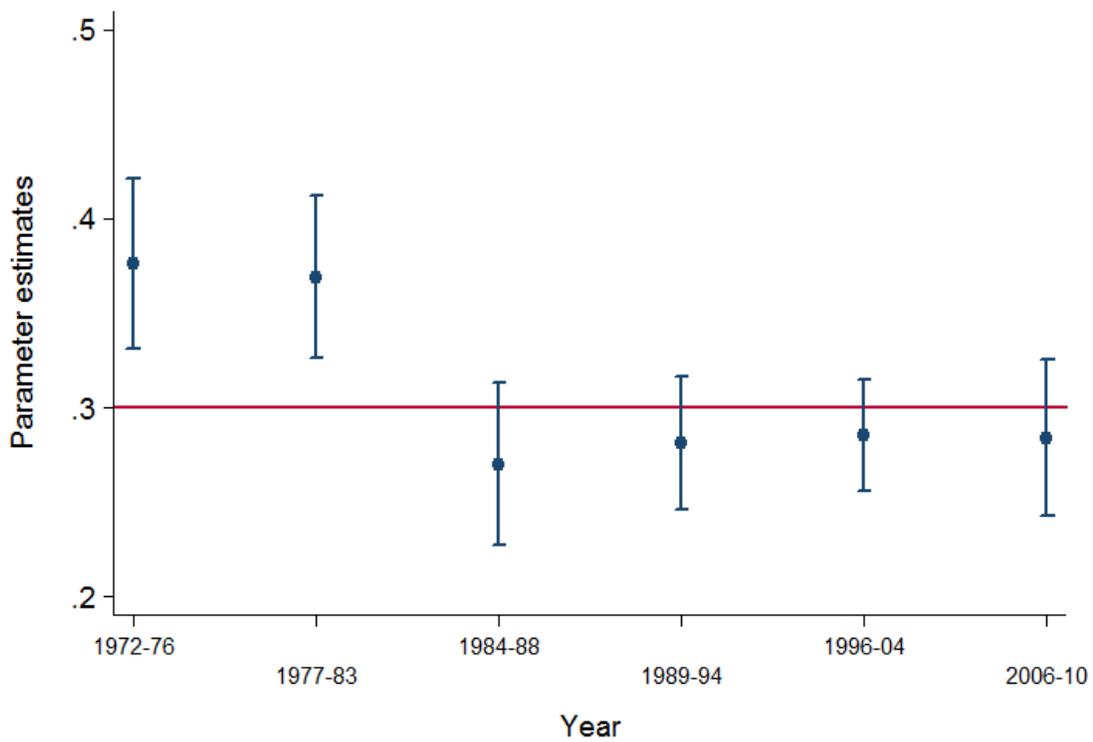
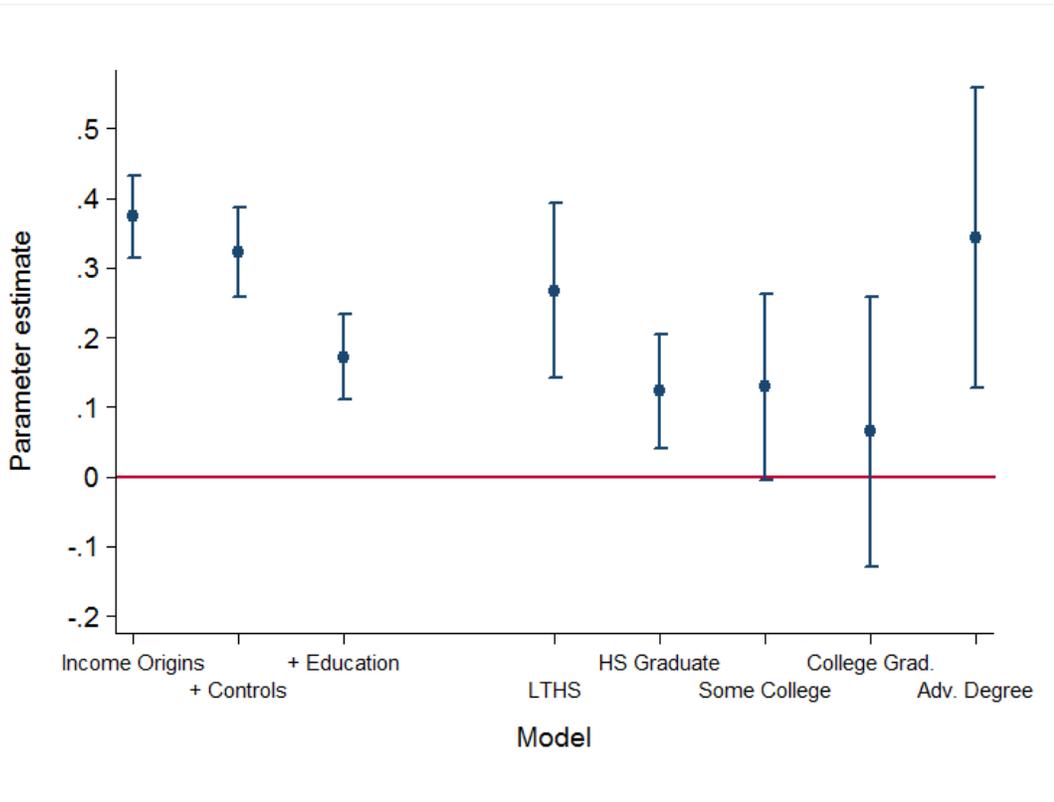


Figure 5. Intergenerational Income Association, National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979.

5.A. Men



5.B. Women

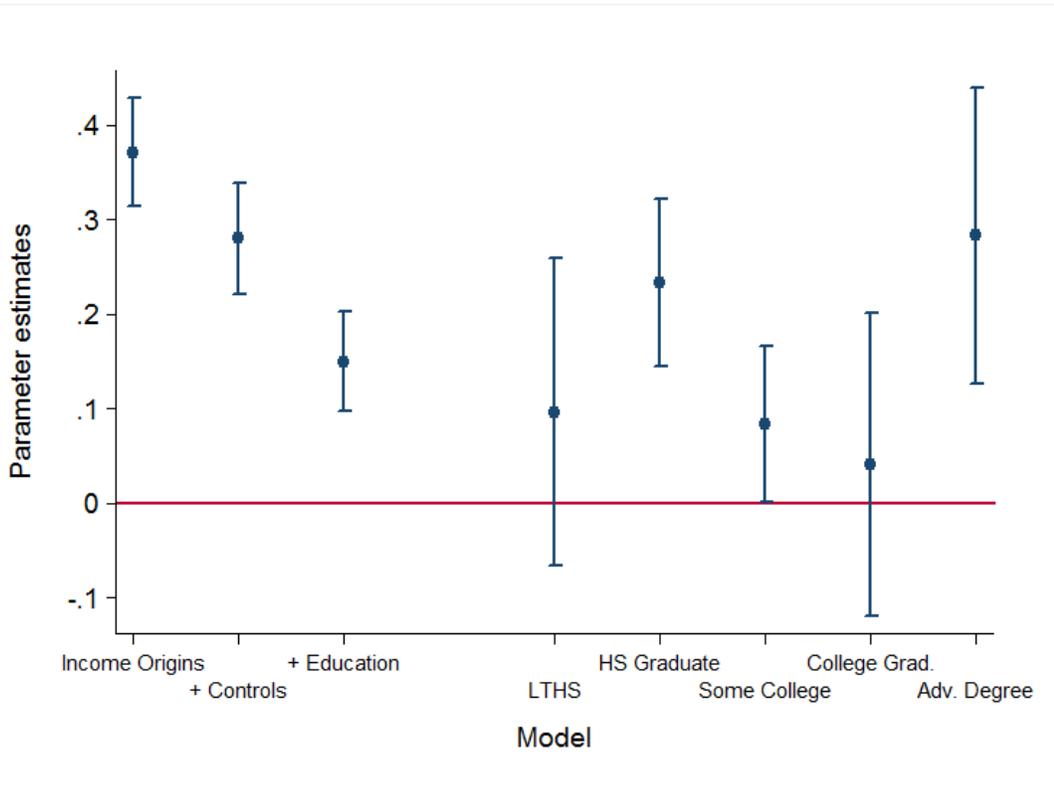
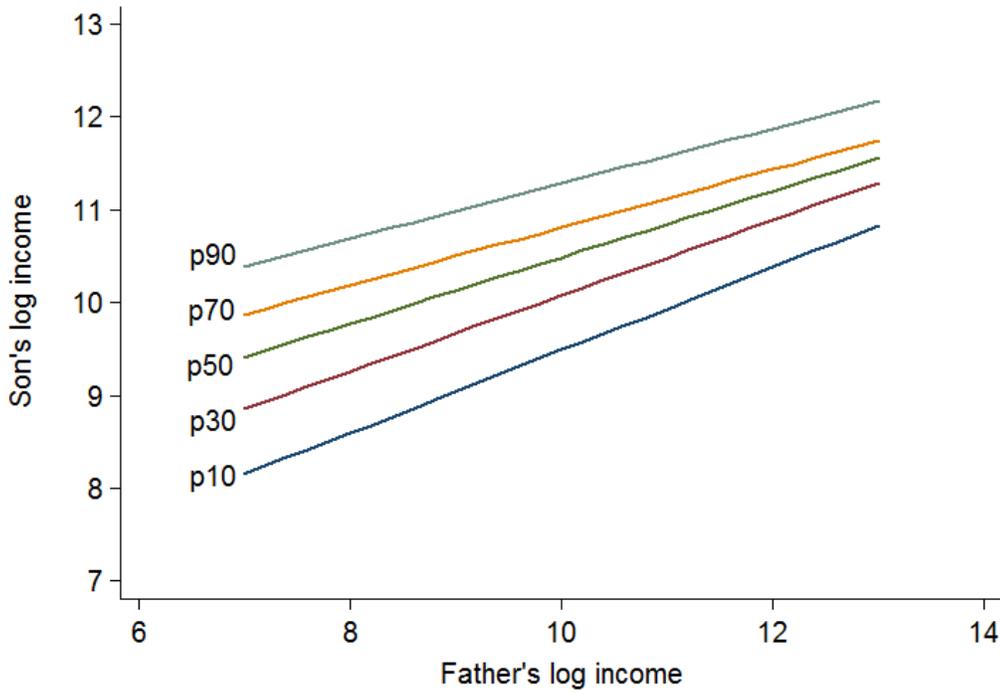


Figure 6. Intergenerational Income Association: Quantile Regression. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979.

6.A. Men



6.B. Women

