

Is Social Status Inherited as Reliably as Height?

In conventional studies of social mobility, a single aspect of overall status is singled out (e.g., education, income, occupation), and intergenerational correlations are then calculated with respect to that single aspect. The typical mobility study is carried out, for example, by examining parent-child correlations for education, income, or occupation.

Is it possible that these studies underestimate the true amount of intergenerational persistence because children sometimes trade off one type of status (e.g., occupational prestige) for another (e.g., income)? Or because random shocks may undermine the inheritance of one type of status without necessarily undermining the inheritance of other types?

This possibility is addressed by Gregory Clark and Neil Cummins by comparing the average status of those with the same surname with the corresponding average of that same-surname population a generation later. The correlation between these same-surname averages proves to be very high and suggests far less intergenerational mobility than conventional studies based on individual-level correlations. When, for example, education status is measured by attendance at either Oxford or Cambridge and calculated for surname groups (separated by 30 years), Clark reports an average intergenerational correlation in status in the range of 0.70 to 0.90. This result, which is remarkably stable over recent centuries, suggests that social status may be even more reliably inherited than height.

Clark, Gregory and Neil Cummins. 2014. "Surnames and Social Mobility in England, 1170–2012." *Human Nature* 25, 517–537.

The Gender Gap in Overwork

Why is the gender gap in wages still so large? After falling precipitously in the 1970s and 1980s, the gender gap in wages declined only slowly in the 1990s and remained steady through the mid 2000s. This slowdown is especially puzzling because the gender gap in educational attainment and other forms of human capital is still narrowing. If women and men are continuing to become more similar in their human capital, why isn't the gender gap also continuing to narrow?

In a new study, Youngjoo Cha and Kim Weeden show that this puzzle is partly explained by changes in "overwork," where this refers to working 50 or more hours per week. Because the wage returns to overwork are growing, and because men are more likely than women to engage in overwork, the wage-equalizing effects of the narrowing gender gap in education have been offset. This offsetting effect is especially large in occupations, like the professions, in which long hours have become the norm.

Cha, Youngjoo, and Kim A. Weeden. 2014. "Overwork and the Slow Convergence in the Gender Gap in Wages." *American Sociological Review*, 1–28.

Does a Strong Housing Market Make Us Selfish?

Over the last decade, the housing market first surged and then collapsed, with corresponding and well-known effects on family assets. The simple but important question: Do major economic changes of this sort affect political attitudes and behavior?

It might be expected that those experiencing price appreciation would be less supportive of redistributive policies because they are increasingly self-insured against possible income loss. In boom markets, homeowners will

have more home equity upon which to draw, thus allowing them to better weather job losses or other negative income shocks. This should in turn reduce their self-interest in supporting redistributive and social insurance policies.

In a comprehensive analysis of national surveys and national spending data, Ben Ansell finds that support for redistributive and social insurance policies indeed declined as the housing market took off and asset prices

increased. Obversely, when homeowners experienced price declines, they became more supportive of such left-leaning policies. This analysis suggests that, insofar as some regions and states continue to be hard hit by the housing crisis, the Great Recession may have a long-lasting political fallout.

Ansell, Ben. 2014. "The Political Economy of Ownership: Housing Markets and the Welfare State." *American Political Science Review*, 1–20.