

INTERGENERATIONAL MOBILITY OF BLACK UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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BACKGROUND

The black university student represents a unique case for the study of social mobility. Such a student, as a member of the upper stratum of the black population is attaining the necessary credentials to compete in the white-collar labor force which has hitherto been dominated by whites. Each year more blacks enter college anticipating that this avenue of social mobility will improve their social status. Theoretically, everyone, including every black has an equal opportunity to attend college and to become socially mobile, but this may not be true, due to differentials in environment and socialization.

I shall try to determine whether black university students are actually upwardly mobile in relation to their fathers, and then I shall try to identify which environmental or socialization factors are responsible for the mobility.

Knowledge of these two factors will contribute to understanding of the social mobility phenomenon. When key variables are identified, we will be in a position to predict the future mobility of persons with similar backgrounds. We might then be able to control mobility rates during times of a poor market for labor, perhaps by singling out the appropriate persons for redirection into more favorable career lines. The importance of this capability becomes clearer when it is recognized that unfulfilled aspirations and related social-psychological manifestations such as status inconsistency and relative deprivation often aggravate other social problems such as black militancy, attacks on the individual, alcoholism and drug abuse.

Several studies on related variables may contribute to our investigation of social mobility as it applies to blacks. Rosen (1959) concluded that the disparity between the vertical mobility rates among racial groups can be explained as a function of their dissimilar psychological and cultural orientations toward achievement. He identified three main components of the psychological and cultural orientation: 1) achievement motivation; 2) achievement values, and 3) educational-occupational aspirations. Hare (1965), in

studying social mobility, found that blacks gained occupational status between 1930 and 1950, but lost some of these gains during the 1950's. Education was an important factor during this period. It will therefore be necessary to compare the educational aspirations of the black students' with their fathers' educational attainments.

Glenn (1962) found a relation between occupational gains of blacks during the 1940's and general changes in the occupational structure, with evidence that the greatest gains were made in rapidly expanding job areas of declining desirability. A group of six demographic variables are associated with social mobility according to Broom and Selznick (1970 181). These are 1) family size; 2) number of siblings; 3) mother dominance; 4) age of marriage; 5) number of children, and 6) presence of father in the home.

The probability that manual workers will be upwardly mobile varies directly with the size of the city where they spent childhood and adolescent years. A large city offers greater educational and occupational opportunities. Children from a 1- or 2-child family have a greater chance of upward mobility than if the number of siblings increases, because the family resources can be more adequately channeled to one or two children, plus the fact that measured intelligence is generally higher for the first child. Mother dominance is thought to be important because the mother is the primary source of instilling aspirations into children, and in the matriarchal family she would be particularly effective.

Upwardly mobile couples tend to have fewer children than non-mobile or downwardly mobile couples, and downward social mobility is associated with the absence of the father.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Perhaps by determining the significance of relevant theoretical variables in connection with empirical information obtained from black university students we can reach some conclusions about the characteristics of the upwardly mobile black person which would fill an apparent gap in social mobility research. H1: Educational achievement is positively

related to upward social mobility.

H2: Upward mobility among blacks is a direct result of the opening of rapidly expanding occupations with declining desirability.

H3: The probability that sons of manual workers will be upwardly mobile varies directly with the size of the city where they lived as children and adolescents.

H4: Children with no more than one sibling have a greater propensity toward upward mobility than those with more siblings.

H5: Children in families where the mother is dominant in most family affairs tend to be upwardly mobile.

H6: Children from families where there was no father tend to be downwardly mobile.

METHODS

The sample consists of 55 black males attending the University of Oklahoma. Females were excluded from the sample because of the ambiguous nature of the determination of their mobility rates, especially as regards their marital status. University students generally present a problem regarding their mobility which is necessarily future-oriented. Therefore I chose to compare the respondent's occupational and income aspirations with their fathers' actual occupational and income attainment, in order to come to some conclusion about intergenerational mobility.

Information from respondents came from a questionnaire including multiple choice and open-end questions. It was designed to provide data which could be tested to determine intergenerational mobility. A question applied to compare the fathers' approximate annual income with the respondents' anticipated income ten years in the future, when respondents would presumably be employed. Similarly, comparison was made between the occupational and educational attainments of the father and the respondents' aspirations for these variables.

FINDINGS

In our sample, 36 listed their educational aspirations, with a mean of 18 years' schooling, compared to the fathers' mean schooling attainment of 12 years, showing that education among this group of blacks is strongly increasing. To determine whether education

is associated with upward mobility we established the mobility direction of 49 respondents who supplied the required information. Of these, 92 percent were upwardly mobile, 6 percent were stationary and 2 percent were downwardly mobile, as compared to their fathers' attainments. This confirms Hypothesis 1.

To test for Hypothesis 2 it is necessary to categorize occupations to which the respondents aspire, and find the direction with respect to the fathers' attainments, and the occupational categories must be ranked. Table 1, columns 2 and 3, for fathers' attainment shows the rank order, with the lowest at the bottom, and the highest at the top, based on median income and education. The increase in percentage of income or years of education is shown as one moves up from the bottom by rank. Only one of the percentage differences is negative. The category of *professionals* receives a higher ranking than *accountants* with higher socioeconomic status by the Edwards ranking scale of occupational categories (Miller 1971). Columns 4 and 5 of Table 1 show comparison data for sons' aspirations for occupational category and years of education. The sons aspire to substantially larger income and education, demonstrating a propensity to higher mobility even within the same occupational level.

Table 2 demonstrates the mobility from the fathers' occupation to the sons' aspired occupation. Sons of doctors plan to become doctors. Two sons of professionals aspired to become college professors and two anticipate entering the sales ranking. The son of a manager wants to become a doctor, and the two sons of accountants wish to become managers. Sons with fathers on the sales ranking level wish to become lawyers, other professionals, or, in one case, a salesperson or craftsperson. Of the eight sons of fathers in government service, one each aims at the level of doctors, other professionals and accountants. Three aspire to become managers, and two wish to reach the sales ranking. Of the sons of manual workers, one each aimed at being a doctor, professor, accountant, and salesperson. Three aspired to become lawyers, and five indicated other professionals.

TABLE 1: FATHERS' ATTAINMENT VS SONS' ASPIRATION BY RANK OF OCCUPATION
(Figures are median \$1000's income, years education; percent increase from lower rank)

Occupation	Fathers: Income Schooling				Sons: Income Schooling			
	Median	Difference			Median	Difference		
Doctors	17.0	30	21	11	22.0	16	20	- 5
Lawyers					19.0	-10	21	17
Professors					21.0	5	18	0
Other professionals	13.5	10	19	46	20.0	25	18	0
Managers					16.0	23	18.0	13
Accountants	15.0	25	13	- 7	13.0	-18	16	- 9
Sales, Crafts	12.0	9	14	22	11.0	-39	17.5	13
Government service	11.0	-38	11.5	5	18.0		20.0	
Manual	8.0		11.0					

TABLE 2: IMPLICIT INTERGENERATION MOBILITY TABLE:
SON'S ASPIRED OCCUPATION RANK (Column) BY FATHER'S ATTAINED RANK (Row)

Father's Rank	Son's Aspired Rank										total	
	Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		10
Doctors	1	1										1
Lawyers	2											
Professors	3											
Other professionals	4			2				2				4
Managers	5	1										1
Accountants	6					2						2
Sales, crafts	7		1		1			1				3
Government service	8	1			1	3	1	2				8
Other	9				1		1					2
Manual workers	10	1	3	1	5		1	1				12
Total		4	4	3	8	5	3	6				33

Of the total sample over half aspire to the upper levels of occupational ranks, and these definitely are *not* occupations that are expanding rapidly while having little desirability. The same is true of the other half of the sample who aspire to become managers, accountants, and salespersons. Hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Hypothesis 3 cannot be evaluated because only 21 of the 55 respondents supplied the necessary information.

Regarding the relation of number of siblings to upwardly mobile aspirations, I consolidated stable and downwardly mobile respondents for comparison with upwardly mobile respondents. The Chi squared statistic is 4.11 with one degree of freedom, and the Hypothesis is supported. For this sample, the smaller number of siblings is associated with

greater upward mobility in terms of the respondents' occupational and educational aspirations.

The evaluation of Hypothesis 5, that mother-dominant families are associated with upward mobility in terms of aspirations is strongly supported, with a Chi squared statistic of 13.8. Clearly, a dominant mother positively affects the sons' aspirations for upward social mobility.

According to Hypothesis 6, the smaller the incidence of absent fathers in the family household, the greater the probability that the children will aspire to be upwardly mobile. In this test, the Chi squared statistic of 5.29 with 3 degrees of freedom indicates no difference between the two family situations. Families where the father is not present in the home experience no negative effect on social

mobility aspirations of the children in this sample, and by inference, for other similar black youth.

CONCLUSION

This empirical evidence shows that black college students are intergenerationally mobile toward higher socioeconomic status in terms of occupational and educational aspirations. Education is the major causal factor of the upward mobility, as indicated by the six year difference in educational attainment of fathers and the aspirational level of the sons. These findings generally support the findings of earlier studies on social mobility for black persons.

The special nature of the sample in this study is one of its major weaknesses. Every person in the sample has high educational and occupational aspirations, and therefore, the

study fails to provide an adequate control group of persons with lesser aspirations with which to compare data. Further, almost every respondent in the sample is upwardly mobile, and the number of downwardly mobile persons is of rather insignificant proportions. Finally, the data here deal only with stated aspirations, and lack any concrete referents.

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