

Intergenerational Mobility and Inequality: The Latin American Case

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Keywords

class mobility, income elasticity, economic inequality, comparative stratification

Abstract

Prompted by new data and a renewed concern about equality of opportunity, the study of intergenerational mobility has flourished in Latin America in the past decade. Although analysis is still restricted to a handful of countries, one conclusion appears clear: Intergenerational income mobility is weaker in Latin America than in industrial countries and is characterized by “persistence at the top,” a pattern consistent with the high levels of economic concentration in the region. However, social class mobility in Latin America does not differ from that in the industrialized world. This essay reviews two generations of mobility research since the 1960s, takes stock of current findings on economic and class mobility in Latin America, examines the linkages between mobility and macro-level factors, and engages a new literature on equality of opportunity. I suggest that the comparative understanding of mobility in Latin America can inform and inspire research in the industrialized world.

1. INTRODUCTION

Latin America and the Caribbean compose a vast region, comprising 26 countries and territories, almost 600 million people, and enormous diversity in terms of levels of economic development, racial/ethnic makeup, and institutional and cultural tradition. When considered in comparative perspective, the most striking characteristic of Latin America is its high socioeconomic inequality. Latin America is the most unequal region of the world, and it has been since at least the 1960s (de Ferranti et al. 2004).

Researchers have long puzzled about the relationship between inequality and intergenerational mobility. It is reasonable to expect that wide socioeconomic disparities will result in weaker mobility because the uneven distribution of resources will benefit advantaged families in the competition for socioeconomic success. Much research finds a negative association between inequality and mobility across industrialized countries (Björklund & Jäntti 2009, Blanden 2013, Jäntti 2006, Solon 2002). Others claim that high inequality can be offset by mobility, tacitly assuming that these two distributional phenomena can move in opposite directions (Friedman 1962, pp. 171–72). Given its wide disparities, Latin America offers a test case. If inequality shapes mobility, we should find limited opportunity for mobility in the region. More broadly, although mobility analysis has been largely restricted to a small pool of mostly industrialized countries, incorporating Latin American nations sheds light on the association between macro-level factors and mobility outcomes.

Empirical studies of intergenerational mobility emerged in the 1960s in Latin America. Research was restricted to a handful of countries including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico. This first generation of mobility research was led by sociologists and focused on occupational mobility. Researchers used two analytical approaches: tabular analysis of broad occupational categories and path analysis of occupational status, as formulated by Blau &

Duncan (1967). An important concern for researchers in the 1960s and 1970s was the influence of rapid urbanization, industrialization, and internal migration on mobility patterns. Surprisingly, findings from this first generation of research depict a process of intergenerational stratification very similar to that of the United States.

The study of mobility came to an abrupt halt during the 1980s and 1990s in a context of an economic crisis, which redirected the attention of social scientists to questions about inequality, poverty, and household strategies (e.g., Solís 2007, pp. 36–37 and references therein). As the economic situation started to improve in the mid-1990s, concerns about equality of opportunity and the intergenerational transmission of advantage have regained importance, giving rise to a second generation of mobility research.

The second generation of mobility research adds economic studies of earnings and income mobility to the sociological studies of occupational mobility of the first generation. As with the first generation, analytical approaches and methods are imported from the industrialized world. Sociologists adopted standard class classifications that ensure international comparability and log-linear models that distinguish structural mobility from social fluidity. Economists adopted the analysis of intergenerational earnings elasticities/correlations. Mobility analysis remains, however, largely restricted to the same handful of countries included in the first generation. As in the industrialized world (Ganzeboom et al. 1991), the second generation of mobility research has focused on the bivariate intergenerational association, with little examination of mechanisms.

This review proceeds as follows: Section 2 describes the Latin American context with a focus on the wide socioeconomic disparities in the region. Section 3 discusses definitional, measurement, and data issues involved in the analysis of intergenerational mobility in Latin America. Section 4 is the core of this review. It discusses what we know about occupational and economic mobility in Latin America, using a comparative approach whenever possible.

It also examines a small literature on the association between mobility and macro-level factors as well as recent literature on inequality of opportunity, which extends bivariate mobility studies by including several measures of social origins. Section 6 concludes by discussing implications of mobility research in Latin America for the region and beyond. A caveat is in order at the outset: Although empirical analysis of mobility in Latin America has grown in the past decade, the literature published in peer-reviewed outlets in the English language is still small. Restricting this review to those outlets would miss important contributions. I therefore include some publications in Spanish and Portuguese and/or from non-peer-reviewed outlets.

2. THE LATIN AMERICAN CONTEXT: WIDE SOCIOECONOMIC DISPARITIES AND THEIR POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR MOBILITY

Latin America is often singled out because of its persistently high levels of socioeconomic inequality. With an income Gini of 0.53 in the mid-2000s, Latin America is 18% more unequal than sub-Saharan Africa, 36% more unequal than East Asia, and 65% more unequal than high-income countries (López-Calva & Lustig 2010). Inequality extends to every aspect of life, from distribution of income, land, and other assets to access to education, health services, justice and political voice and influence (de Ferranti et al. 2004, Hoffman & Centeno 2003). Variation across Latin American countries is substantial: Uruguay and Venezuela feature Ginis of ~0.45, whereas Haiti and Bolivia reach 0.60 (Gasparini et al. 2011). Yet even the most egalitarian countries in Latin America are more uneven than advanced industrial countries.

Wide economic disparities are not a new development. Latin America has been the most unequal region of the world since at least the mid-twentieth century (Deininger & Squire 1996, table 5), and economic disparities are wider than in countries at similar levels of

economic development (Gasparini et al. 2011, Londono & Szekely 2000). The most distinctive feature of Latin American inequality is the large concentration at the top of the distribution and the wide difference between the rich and the middle class (de Ferranti et al. 2004; IADB 1999, p. 16). Even if inequality is by definition correlated with concentration, the Latin American case is extreme. A useful strategy to calculate concentration is to compare the gap between the wealthy and the middle class (P90/P50) with the gap between the middle class and the poor (P50/P10). In the United States, the wealthy/middle-class ratio reaches 2.2 and the middle-class/poor ratio is 2.7, even after a massive increase in concentration at the top over the past three decades [Piketty & Saez 2003 (updated 2013)]. In contrast, similar figures are 3.7 and 3.2 for Chile and 3.0 and 2.9 for Mexico, signaling a stronger concentration at the top (OECD 2011).

Latin America's level and pattern of inequality appear to have deep historical roots. They can be traced back to colonial times, when a social structure characterized by exploitation of indigenous and black populations by a small European elite was established. Three different approaches explain the "early origins" of colonial inequality.

The first approach elaborated by economic historians Engerman and Sokoloff (Engerman & Sokoloff 1997, Sokoloff & Engerman 2000) relies on differences in initial factor endowments such as the size and quality of the land, climate, and native population. Exploiting Latin America's natural resources required large-scale plantations; mineral-extractive operations; or grain and cattle haciendas based on slaves, indentured native servants, or debt peonage. In these three forms, initial factor endowments resulted in an extreme concentration of wealth in Spanish and Portuguese colonies. Concentration of assets allowed elites to establish institutions that maintained inequality and exclusion, denying basic protections to the large subordinate populations. The colonial order gave rise to exclusionary policies in the domains of land ownership, immigration, voting,

education, and financial institutions, which hampered human capital formation, access to credit, and political participation. Education provides a striking example. Canada and the northern United States became pioneers in the expansion of primary education. By 1900, the white literacy rate was 90% in the United States, and every locality in the northern United States had free schools supported by general taxes. In contrast, the Latin American elites fiercely resisted taxation for educational purposes and opposed educational expansion. As a result, by 1900, even in the most highly educated Latin American countries, the literacy rate reached only ~50% and was less than 20% in the least-educated countries (Engerman et al. 2000).

The second approach claims that the origins of Latin America's inequality are not factor endowments but colonial institutions (Acemoglu et al. 2001, 2002). This approach sees institutions as emerging from the availability of cheap labor. In places such as Latin America where Europeans faced high mortality rates and large native populations, they were more likely to set up extractive institutions. These institutions excluded the masses from access to economic and political power and failed to protect individual property rights and to enforce contracts. In contrast, in North American low-mortality contexts with sparse native populations where large numbers of Europeans settled, settlers successfully pushed for egalitarian, democratic institutional arrangements for themselves, with a strong emphasis on private property and checks against government power. Such institutions are claimed to have persisted over time owing to strong support from the elites and the high costs involved in change.

The third approach complements the former two by focusing on the characteristics of colonial powers rather than the colonies, distinguishing mercantilism among Spaniards from liberalism among the British. Mercantilistic Spain focused on resource extraction in areas where large native populations could be forced to provide free labor. In contrast, liberal Britain is claimed to have promoted profit mak-

ing through market exchange, plausibly leading to more egalitarian institutions that protected individual rights (Lange et al. 2006).

Although controversy exists between these approaches, they have much in common. All are strong at describing "original factors" but weaker at explaining the processes that maintained inequality over time, tacitly assuming strong path dependence (Bertola 2011). Given that much change in land ownership took place during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Coatsworth 2008), that some countries' liberal elites attempted to alter the status quo in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with varying levels of success (Mahoney 2003), and that Latin American inequality appears to have sharply increased at the turn of the twentieth century triggered by a boom in commodity prices and globalization (Williamson 2010), the persistence of inequality over time cannot be taken for granted easily. In fact, a critical factor accounting for persistence appears to be the weakness of Latin American states that emerged after independence, which were unable to oppose particularistic interests; enforce the rule of law; and extract resources to invest in human capital, infrastructure, or public services (Centeno 2002, Centeno & Ferraro 2013, Coatsworth 2008).

State weakness accounts for the two main proximate determinants of inequality in contemporary Latin America, namely the high returns to schooling and the weak redistributive role of governments. Average returns to schooling are higher in Latin America than in any other region of the world, and they are particularly high for secondary and postsecondary educational levels (Psacharopoulos 1994). This pattern is the direct result of educational policies that first restricted educational expansion and later focused on the postsecondary level before expanding secondary schooling (Morley 2001). The result is a bottom-heavy polarized distribution of educational attainment, resulting in a historically large premium for those with secondary and postsecondary schooling. In addition, Latin American states play an impressively weak redistributive role

owing to their lower tax revenues and limited progressivity of transfers (World Bank 2011). The comparison with Europe is striking. Around the year 2001, the Gini coefficient for pretax pretransfer income reached 0.52 in Latin America and 0.46 in Europe, signaling somewhat more inequality in Latin America. This difference, however, magnifies after taxes and transfers, with the Gini for disposable income dropping to 0.31 in Europe but only to 0.50 in Latin America (Goni et al. 2011).

Although persistently high within a comparative perspective, Latin American inequality has fluctuated over the past four decades. Economic disparities increased in the 1980s and 1990s in the context of economic crisis and market reform. The debt crisis that erupted in 1982 worsened an already battered social landscape. The sudden halt in foreign finance, deterioration of terms of trade, and the push to implement market-oriented reforms severely affected real income throughout the region. As a result, most Latin American countries had lower levels of income in 1990 than in 1980, and unemployment and informality increased throughout the region (Edwards 1995). The crisis widened inequality because the poor were less able to protect themselves from unemployment and inflation and were affected by the sharp cuts in social spending (Korzeniewicz & Smith 2000, Lustig 1995, Psacharopoulos et al. 1997).

The consequences of market reform for inequality are more contentious, partly because its different components may have offsetting consequences. Trade and tariff liberalization were unambiguously regressive because they induced skill-biased technical change, increasing the already high skill premium throughout the region. A notable exception is Brazil, where the skill premium declined in the context of trade opening (Attanasio et al. 2004, Cragg & Epelbaum 1996, Gonzaga et al. 2006). However, liberalizing the capital account appears to have been more progressive. The overall effect of market-oriented reforms appears to have been regressive (Morley 2001, Wood 1997). Overall, the result of crisis and reform was a widening of inequality, with the regional Gini

rising from 0.48 in the 1970s to 0.53 in 2002 (de Ferranti et al. 2004).

In a surprising turn, inequality started to decline in the late 1990s and the early 2000s in virtually every Latin American country. This recent equalization process is far from closing the gap with the rest of the world, but it has reversed growing disparities, with a drop of the Gini from ~ 0.55 in the late 1990s to ~ 0.49 in the late 2000s (Lustig et al. 2013). This reversal has been driven by the two main proximate determinants of inequality: a decline in the skill premium and an increase in the redistributive role of the state. Educational expansion efforts over the past two decades have increased the supply of educated workers, which, combined with the waning of skill-based technical change induced by trade liberalization, has reduced the skill premium over the 2000s. In the language of Tinbergen (1974), in the “race between skill-biased technological change and educational upgrading,” the latter has now taken the lead in Latin America.

Latin American governments have contributed to equalization by augmenting and better targeting transfers to the poor, often in the form of conditional cash transfers (Valencia 2008). The dominant factor, however, has been a decline in the skill premium. As a result, equalization has been asymmetric, with a marked compression at the top. Whereas the income share of the bottom decile has remained constant at $\sim 1\%$, the share of the top decile has dropped from 45.7% to 41.6% between 1995 and 2009 (World Bank 2011).

In sum, Latin America has historically been a “lopsided continent” (Hoffman & Centeno 2003), but a noticeable equalization turn has occurred since the mid-1990s. Recent equalization in Latin America is all the more remarkable because it is the exact opposite of the recent increase in inequality in the United States and other Anglo-Saxon countries: It is characterized by concentration at the top and driven by a growing college premium and weaker state redistribution [Leigh 2009, McCall & Percheski 2010, Piketty & Saez 2003 (updated 2013)].

Much literature suggests that cross-sectional inequality results in less mobility. Several theoretical mechanisms account for this relationship. First, inequality implies higher returns to schooling and less progressive human capital investments, both of which induce intergenerational rigidity (Solon 2004). High inequality may strengthen the political influence of the wealthy through, for instance, political contributions and lobbying, thus reducing the scope for redistributive policies (Burtless & Jencks 2003). Additionally, inequality may induce residential segregation, resulting in a more skewed composition of peer groups along socioeconomic lines (Durlauf 1996, Reardon & Bischoff 2011). These mechanisms are plausible, but they leave much to be explained in terms of their level of analysis, appropriate time lags, first-order effects versus externalities, potential tipping points, and the vast risk of spuriousness. As a result, ascertaining the causal effect of inequality on mobility becomes a daunting task (for a thoughtful approach, see Mayer & Lopoo 2008).

At the empirical level, research shows a negative association between inequality and economic mobility across advanced industrial countries. These studies consistently indicate that egalitarian Scandinavian countries feature the highest levels of mobility, whereas more unequal Italy, the United Kingdom, and particularly the United States are less mobile (Björklund & Jäntti 2009, Blanden 2013, Jäntti 2006, Solon 2002). The negative cross-country association between inequality and mobility has transcended academia and been popularized in the “Great Gatsby” curve (Corak 2013).

The negative association between inequality and mobility appears to be nonexistent when mobility is measured in terms of social class rather than income or earnings. Comparison of 15 industrialized countries in the 1970s found a very weak association between the Gini coefficient and intergenerational persistence (Erikson & Goldthorpe 1992, pp. 379–89), and a more recent study comparing 10 European countries in the 1990s found no relationship at all (Breen & Luijkx 2004, pp. 395–98). The

discrepancy in findings is intriguing and raises important questions about the validity of different measures of socioeconomic well-being used to study mobility. However, empirical research to date on the association between mobility and inequality is largely restricted to a handful of advanced industrial countries. Variation in terms of inequality among these countries pales when compared with Latin America. In this context, incorporating Latin American countries into the comparative analysis of social mobility should provide a useful setting to test the potential association between mobility and inequality as well as other macrostructural factors.

3. DEFINITION, MEASUREMENT, AND DATA ISSUES IN THE ANALYSIS OF MOBILITY IN LATIN AMERICA

Intergenerational mobility is captured by the association between the socioeconomic standing of parents (origins) and that of their adult children (destinations). A weak intergenerational association indicates that the opportunity to succeed (or fail) is open to all, regardless of their social origins. Mobility is a macro-level concept. As with inequality, mobility applies to societies, not to individuals. There are always some individuals who move from rags to riches or riches to rags. Mobility captures precisely how prevalent such movements are in different countries. Intergenerational mobility is of interest because it provides information about social openness or equality of opportunity. However, it is not a perfect indicator. Some mechanisms for the intergenerational persistence—for example, genetic inheritance or family socialization—would exist even in a society in which institutions fully compensated for socioeconomic disadvantages. If these mechanisms strongly determine socioeconomic success, then the intergenerational association could be high even if opportunity was equalized (Jencks & Tach 2006). Under the reasonable assumption that genetic inheritance and family socialization do not markedly

vary across national contexts, mobility is useful as a metric of opportunity in different national contexts.

Three sources of mobility data have been used in the advanced industrial world. These include (a) cross-sectional samples of adult populations with retrospective questions about the parental generation, (b) panel surveys that extend over a long enough period of time such that they include the socioeconomic attainment of two generations, and (c) administrative/registry data sets with linked information for parents and adult children. Some sources also include a combination thereof, for example linked survey and social security administration data in the United States (e.g., Mazumder 2005).

Long-term panels or administrative records are not yet available in Latin America, so all mobility analysis that exists relies on cross-sectional retrospective surveys (item *a* from previous paragraph). They are available in only some countries in the region, and until recently, they were representative of one single city or urban area. National surveys largely emerged only after the turn of the millennium. As a result, analysis of change over time is by necessity restricted to comparisons across cohorts using a single cross-sectional survey, with the ensuing limitations of confounding cohort and age effects. The only (partial) exception to data limitations for mobility research in Latin America is found in Brazil.

Brazil was the first country in the region to conduct a nationally representative mobility survey as early as 1973, when Brazilian scholars trained in the United States successfully lobbied to include a mobility module into the National Household Survey (Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílio) to be undertaken yearly by the Brazilian Bureau of the Census (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística). This survey included a similar mobility module in 1982, 1988, and 1996, thus allowing researchers to evaluate mobility over time. **Table 1** offers a description of available mobility surveys in Latin America by country, noting information about year, coverage, age range, and any parental variables included (to be listed in the table, a survey

has to have information on the education and occupation of one parent at a minimum).

Given data limitations, an alternative measure of mobility used in Latin America examines the association between parents' socioeconomic resources and their coresident children's educational attainment. This approach needs to be restricted to young children so that they are observed before the normative age of household leaving (generally the early 20s) because adult children who still coreside with their parents are not representative of their peers and offer a biased sample. A second alternative used in Latin America focuses on the association in schooling between coresident school-age siblings. Sibling correlations in educational attainment provide what may be a broader measure of family persistence insofar as they include family, community, and neighborhood factors shared by siblings (Black & Devereux 2011). Both strategies can be applied to simple household cross-sectional surveys, which are available in virtually all Latin American countries. However, they are restricted to educational attainment, which is measured relatively early in the life cycle and cannot be extended to occupational or economic mobility.

4. INTERGENERATIONAL MOBILITY IN LATIN AMERICA

The study of intergenerational mobility in Latin America emerged in the 1960s. The first generation of mobility research was conducted entirely by sociologists. Researchers combined simple tabular analysis of class mobility using ad hoc occupational categories and path analysis to replicate the intergenerational status attainment model as formulated by Blau & Duncan (1967). Mobility data were available only in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico, and with the exception of Brazil, data were restricted to one city.

The First Generation of Class Mobility Research: 1960s–1970s

The main concern of researchers was the impact of rapid structural change on the mobility

Table 1 Intergenerational social mobility surveys in Latin America

Country	Name (Spanish/Portuguese)	Name (English)	Year(s)	Population	Age	Sex	Respondent ^a	Parents' characteristics ^b	N
Argentina	Modulo Movilidad Social, Encuesta de Empleo y Desempleo	Mobility survey module added to the Employment and Unemployment Survey	1969	Buenos Aires	All ages	MF	HH	FO	1,072
Argentina	Encuesta de Movilidad Social en Buenos Aires Fondecyt 1990818	Social Mobility in Buenos Aires Survey Fondecyt 1990818	2000	Buenos Aires	35–50	MF	All in labor force	FE, FO, PA	386
Argentina	Estratificación y Movilidad: Estudio del Area Metropolitana de Buenos Aires	Stratification and Mobility: Study of the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires	1995	Buenos Aires	20+	MF	All	FE, FO, ME, MO	2,211
Argentina	Utilización y Gasto en Servicios de Salud	Health Services Use and Expenditures	2003, 2005, 2010	National	18+	MF	All	FE, FO, ME, MO (only 2010)	1,510; 1,000; 2,263
Argentina	ISSP–Identidad Nacional	ISSP–National Identity	2004	National	18+	MF	All	FE, FO, ME	1,000
Argentina	Estratificación y Movilidad Social en Argentina	Stratification and Mobility Survey	2007	National	18+	MF	All	FE, FO, ME, MO	3,313
Brazil	Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios (PNAD)	National Household Survey	1973	National	All	MF	HH+S	FO	92,421 ^c
Brazil	Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios (PNAD)	National Household Survey	1982	National	All	MF	HH+S	FE, FO, ME	157,390 ^c
Brazil	Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios (PNAD)	National Household Survey	1988	National	All	MF	HH+S	FE, FO, ME	96,307 ^c
Brazil	Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios (PNAD)	National Household Survey	1996	National	All	MF	HH+S	FE, FO, ME	117,310 ^c
Brazil	Pesquisa Dimensões Sociais das Desigualdades (PDSD)	Social Dimensions of Inequality Survey	2008	National	All	MF	HH+S	FE, FO, ME, MO, PA	12,326
Chile	Encuesta Nacional de Movilidad Social en Chile	Chilean Social Mobility Survey	2001	National	25–69	M	HH	FE, FO, ME, PA	3,544
Chile	Encuesta de Movilidad Social en Santiago Fondecyt 1990818	Social Mobility in Santiago Survey Fondecyt 1990818	2000	Santiago	35–50	MF	All in labor force	FE, FO, PA	581
Mexico	Movilidad Social y Geográfica en Monterrey	Monterrey Mobility Study	1965	Monterrey	21–60	M	All	FE, FO, ME	1,803

Mexico	Encuesta Demográfica Retrospectiva (EDER)	Demographic Retrospective Survey	1998	National	30–32, 45–47, 60–62	MF	All	FO, MO	2,496
Mexico	Encuesta Nacional de Empleo Urbano (ENEU), Módulo “Genero, Edad, Familia y Trabajo” ^a	National Survey of Urban Employment, Module “Gender, Age, Family and Work”	1994	Urban (6 cities)	18+	MF	All	FE, FO, ME	27,792
Mexico	Movilidad Social y Curso de Vida en Monterrey (EMOS)	Social Mobility and the Life Course in Monterrey	2000	Monterrey	30–60	M	All	FE, ME, FO	1,200
Mexico	Encuesta Nacional sobre Niveles de Vida de los Hogares (ENNVH)	Mexican Family Life Survey (MxFLS)	2002/2005	National	All	MF	All	FE, ME	35,000
Mexico	Encuesta de Movilidad Social en Mexico (EMOVI-2006)	Mexican Social Mobility Survey	2006	National	25–64	MF	HH+S	FE, ME, FO, MO, PA	7,288
Mexico	Encuesta de Movilidad Social en Mexico (EMOVI-2011)	Mexican Social Mobility Survey	2011	National	25–64	MF	All	FE, ME, FO, MO, PA	11,001
Mexico	Encuesta sobre Desigualdad y Movilidad Social en la Ciudad de México (EDESMOV)	Inequality and Social Mobility in Mexico City Survey	2009	Mexico City	30–60	MF	All	FE, FO, PA	2,038
Uruguay	Encuesta de Movilidad Social en Montevideo Fondecyt 1990818	Social Mobility in Montevideo Survey Fondecyt 1990818	2000	Montevideo	35–50	MF	All in labor force	FE, FO, PA	400

^a Abbreviations: HH, head of household; S, spouse of head of household.

^b Abbreviations: FE, father’s education; FO, father’s occupation; ME, mother’s education; MO, mother’s occupation; PA, parental appliances and assets. This is a limited list of available information. Some surveys have additional parental resources and attributes.

^c Sample size restricted to adults ages 25–64.

chances of urban populations over the twentieth century. Industrialization, urbanization, internal migration, and fertility decline created much room at the top and provided opportunities for occupational upgrading to those with disadvantaged origins, resulting in extensive upward mobility. In Argentina, Germani (1963) documented massive flows of upward mobility and explained them via the dynamism of the Argentinean economy and the large rates of international migration at the turn of the twentieth century, larger even than in the United States. Early analysis suggests Argentina had levels of intergenerational association even lower than those of industrialized countries and other Latin American countries such as Brazil and Chile (Beccaria 1978, Raczynski 1973). In Brazil, Pastore (1982) conducted a pioneer analysis of class mobility. The main finding was the very high level of upward mobility driven by urbanization and industrialization processes that altered the class structure in a single generation. The transformation was striking: Approximately 70% of adult men in 1973 had origins in rural classes, but only 30% of them held rural occupations.

The second strategy used by the first generation of Latin American mobility scholars was the replication of the path analysis of Blau & Duncan (1967, pp. 163–84) to examine how subsequent factors across the individual life-cycle (e.g., father's education and occupation, individual educational attainment, and labor market entry) shape current individual occupational status. One important concern for researchers was the differences in the stratification process in Latin America compared with those in the United States and other wealthy countries. The classic status attainment model was replicated in Santiago, Chile (Lincoln 1978, Wilson 1972); Buenos Aires, Argentina (Jorrit 1992, Wilson 1972); Monterrey, Mexico (Balán et al. 1973, p. 293); and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Wilson 1972).

The overall finding from this body of research was the similarities in the stratification process between Latin America and the United States. Both the total influence of a father's

resources on his son's attainment and the large mediating role of education in the stratification process were very similar in Latin America and the United States. When there were differences, they pointed to larger returns to education in urban Latin America (e.g., Balán et al. 1973, pp. 292–94). Similarity is not an artifact of little variation around the world. As shown by Treiman & Yip (1989), much heterogeneity across countries exists, and social origins tend to display a stronger influence in developing countries. The comparative exercise did not, however, produce a broader theoretical reflection about the sources of international commonality and variation in stratification dynamics in different macrostructural contexts.

The Second Generation of Class Mobility Research: Since the 1990s

After these initial studies in the 1960s and 1970s, mobility research virtually disappeared for nearly a quarter century in Latin America. The reasons include an ideological rejection of quantitative approaches of US provenance and the deep debt crisis during the 1980s. So deep was the crisis that the 1980s came to be known as “the lost decade” in Latin America, and social scientists' concerns were almost exclusively focused on questions about absolute deprivation. As the economic situation improved in the 1990s and 2000s, a renewed concern about inequality of opportunity emerged, and mobility surveys were conducted in several countries.

This impulse gave rise to the second generation of mobility research in the region. In-depth mobility analysis was still restricted to a few countries, namely Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico. However, more limited comparative analysis included a larger number of nations. As did the first generation, the second generation replicated questions and methodologies developed in the advanced industrial world. In contrast to the first generation of research, recent work includes contributions from sociologists and economists. Sociologists have focused on an analysis of class mobility, moving from ad hoc to international comparable

class classifications. The preferred class classification has been the EGP (Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero) schema (after Erikson et al. 1979), which has become the referent for international comparative analysis of intergenerational mobility. In its seven-class version typically used for comparative research, this classification distinguishes the following classes: professionals and managers, clerical workers, self-employed, farmers, skilled manual workers, nonskilled manual workers, and agricultural laborers (Erikson & Goldthorpe 1992, pp. 35–47). In terms of methodology, the second generation relies on log-linear models distinguishing absolute mobility flows from relative mobility or social fluidity as captured by odds ratios.

Second-generation mobility research in Latin America has addressed two important hypotheses about homogeneity in social fluidity across countries and over time. The “common fluidity” hypothesis states that countries share a similar pattern of mobility, even if the strength of intergenerational association may vary across country. The “constant fluidity” hypothesis states that social fluidity does not vary over time in spite of industrialization and institutional change (Featherman et al. 1975). Both hypotheses have found much empirical support but have also been questioned (for reviews, see Ganzeboom et al. 1991, Hout & DiPrete 2006). In particular, constant fluidity has been questioned by growing class fluidity in the United States and many European countries (Breen 2004, Hout 1988), driven by equalization of educational opportunity and by a compositional effect whereby, over time, more people reach higher levels of schooling where the intergenerational association is weaker (Breen & Jonsson 2007, Breen et al. 2009).

Second-generation class mobility research in Latin America generally supports common fluidity but rebuffs constant fluidity. In Brazil, Ribeiro (2007, p. 288) used the EGP class schema to compare the strength of social fluidity in Brazil with that of European countries. He found that Brazil is in the middle of the pack: Brazilian rates of fluidity are comparable with those of England, Germany, and Hungary,

in spite of high levels of inequality. In terms of temporal change, Brazil has experienced a clear increase in social fluidity between the early 1970s and the late 1990s, driven by a decline in the intergenerational reproduction of the professional class (Pastore & do Valle Silva 2000, Ribeiro 2007, Ribeiro & Scalón 2001). Even though this pattern replicates the growing fluidity found in the United States and European countries, its mechanisms are different. No evidence about either equalization of educational opportunity or a compositional effect is found in Brazil. Instead, growing fluidity is driven by a decline in the skill premium and by a weaker direct association between the net association of origins and destinations, after controlling for education (Torche & Ribeiro 2010).

Using the EGP class schema, Torche (2005) compared social fluidity in Chile with that of industrialized countries. As in Brazil, a surprising finding emerges: Social fluidity in Chile is comparable to that of the most fluid industrialized countries, in spite of the wide economic disparities in the former. Torche found that the pattern of class mobility is characterized by a strong barrier to mobility to and from the professional class at the top of the occupational structure but much higher fluidity between the middle and lower classes, a pattern consistent with high income concentration at the top [however, Espinoza et al. (2013) found strong barriers at both extremes of the occupational hierarchy]. The second-generation research in Argentina also highlights stronger persistence at the upper end of the occupational distribution (Jorrot 2000, p. 217).

Second-generation studies in Mexico also question the constant fluidity hypothesis, but in the opposite direction of Brazil: Whereas class fluidity increased in Brazil, it declined in Mexico during the 1980s and 1990s in the context of economic crisis and market reform (Cortés & Escobar Latapí 2005, Solís 2005, Zenteno & Solís 2006). Specifically, access to the professional and managerial class at the top of the distribution became more stratified by social background (Cortés & Escobar Latapí 2005). Comparative analysis shows

that immobility at the top is much more pronounced in Mexico than in the United States (Huerta-Wong et al. 2013). These findings are consistent with the substantial immobility at the top found in Argentina and Chile and suggest a particularly Latin American pattern of intergenerational class reproduction characterized by strong intergenerational persistence of the upper class. Mexican studies also suggest that the mechanism for increased reproduction at the top is growing inequality of educational opportunity, which most affected the cohort educated during the 1980s economic crisis (Binder & Woodruff 2002).

In sum, recent class mobility research in Latin America is surprisingly consistent with the hypothesis suggesting common fluidity across countries. Not only is there no indication of differences in pattern, but remarkably, the intergenerational class association is not stronger in Latin American countries than in the advanced industrial world in spite of the former's higher levels of inequality. The Latin American case also questions the constant fluidity hypothesis. Whereas Brazil showed an increase in fluidity, Mexico showed a decline. Both cases are noteworthy: In Brazil, the mechanisms driving growing fluidity depart from those found in industrialized countries, whereas Mexico joins Russia as the only other country in the world where a decline in fluidity has been found (Gerber & Hout 2004). Furthermore, in both Mexico and Russia, this decline occurred in the context of economic crisis and market reform.

International Comparability of Class Mobility Analysis

The use of standard class classifications such as EGP by second-generation mobility research assumes that these classifications capture the main sources of cleavages in Latin American societies and allow meaningful comparison. Without falling into an Orientalist emphasis on differences, one could assert that a class schema developed in and for the industrialized world fails to consider relevant social cleavages in Latin America. Given Latin America's

pattern of development, important differences may affect the position of some classes, particularly farmers, self-employed, and professionals/managers. Class classifications developed in the industrial world—EGP in particular—distinguish farmers from farm workers because their control of land results in more economic security and higher living standards. The distinction is less meaningful in most of Latin America. Given the concentration of land ownership (Torche & Spilerman 2008), small landholders control minimal amounts of land and are usually engaged in subsistence farming. As a result, Latin American farmers are far from a rural bourgeoisie and closer to the rural proletariat. Their mobility chances are as—if not more—limited than those of farm workers insofar as attachment to the land constrains migration in search of better opportunity.

The EGP classification also identifies a self-employed class of small proprietors with and without employees. This class is much larger and more heterogeneous in Latin America. A few of its members are well-to-do small business owners in formal enterprises. However, the vast majority are owners or employers in small, low-capital, precarious firms that operate outside legal regulation and protection. This type of employment arrangement is so prevalent in Latin America that it has given rise to the notion of the informal sector (Infante & Klein 1995, Portes et al. 1989), which expanded during the crisis and market transformation and currently comprises between one-fourth and two-thirds of employment in Latin American countries. In a context where “a significant proportion of the population is not incorporated into fully commodified, legally regulated working relations, but survives at their margin in a wide variety of subsistence and semiclandestine economic activities” (Portes & Hoffman 2003, p. 43), a distinction is necessary between a relatively secure “petty bourgeoisie” and informal workers with few assets and precarious business ventures. Finally, in its seven-class version commonly used for international comparative research, the top professional/managerial class of the EGP comprises professionals, administrators,

managers, higher-grade technicians, and supervisors of nonmanual workers. The combination of rapid postindustrialization of Latin American economies and a pattern of inequality characterized by concentration at the top suggests that finer distinctions at the upper end of the distribution may capture important mobility barriers.

These issues can be seen as examples of a very general problem of aggregation. Classes are highly aggregated entities that necessarily miss some important distinctions between occupations (e.g., Weeden & Grusky 2005). The critical question is whether, given an agreed-upon number of categories, a class schema devised in one context captures the main determinants of inequality in other contexts. This question has scarcely been examined in Latin America, and when it has, the surprising answer appears to be in the affirmative. For example, Scalón (1999, p. 71) collapsed a detailed occupational classification in Brazil into nine categories according to their mobility patterns and life chances to obtain a classification nearly identical to the EGP schema. Torche (2006) used an empirical strategy to collapse detailed occupations in Chile and also obtained a classification akin to the EGP schema. More important for this question, the main substantive findings about mobility in Chile are virtually identical to those found using the EGP classification. By the same token, Solís (2010) derived a class classification for Mexican society and found very minor departures from the EGP schema. Further historically informed research in this area will ensure that intergenerational stratification dynamics are appropriately captured and will inform the discussion about generalizability of standard class classifications.

Economic Mobility in Latin America

The study of economic mobility is a recent component of the second generation of research, and to the best of my knowledge, it is restricted to Brazil, Chile, and (with qualifications) Mexico. Because no long-term panel data exist in the region and collecting retrospec-

tive information about parental income is unviable, researchers have implemented a two-stage instrumental variable (TSIV) strategy (Angrist & Krueger 1992). This strategy is used when there is no actual information on father-child pairs but there is matched information on children's earnings and some determinants of fathers' earnings, such as schooling and occupation. The strategy uses information from two surveys. In a first step, earnings equations are estimated on an older sample of men (which represents the parental generation), and coefficients for the determinants of fathers' earnings are obtained. These coefficients can then be used to predict the earnings of fathers of a sample of adult children.¹ As with all instrumental variable approaches, this strategy produces estimators of intergenerational economic persistence that will be upwardly biased if the variables used to predict fathers' earnings have a direct effect on children's earnings. Therefore, they can be used as an upper bound of intergenerational persistence. This technique has been used in several countries including Sweden, the United States, Italy, and France (Björklund & Jäntti 1997, Lefranc & Trannoy 2005, Piraino 2007).

Using the TSIV approach, Ferreira & Veloso (2006) and Dunn (2007) analyzed intergenerational mobility of earnings and wages in Brazil. Ferreira & Veloso (2006) found a very high intergenerational earnings elasticity of 0.66, indicating that a 100% increase in a father's earnings with respect to his mean will result, on average, in a 66% increase in an adult son's earnings with respect to his mean. Dunn (2007) found an intergenerational elasticity of 0.69 among men aged 25–34, which reaches 0.85 when measures of lifetime earnings are used. These levels of intergenerational association are much higher than comparable figures of between 0.42 and 0.52 found in the United

¹Sociologists will notice that TSIV is actually an extension of Duncan's (1961) occupational status for all occupations, which used a father's education and income to predict occupational prestige scores, although economists appear to be unaware of this connection.

States using an identical technique (Björklund & Jäntti 1997).

Economic mobility is also much weaker in Chile than in the United States. Using a TSIV approach, Núñez & Miranda (2010) reported earnings elasticity between 0.57 and 0.73 among men, although mobility may be increasing among younger cohorts (Sapelli 2011). Torche (2010a) examined economic mobility in Mexico. Lacking two samples to predict fathers' income, she obtained a measure of "permanent income" for both generations by combining occupational status and a battery of household items and services. She found an intergenerational correlation of 0.67—much stronger than in the industrial world and Chile. Although this figure is not directly comparable, its high value suggests strong intergenerational economic persistence in Mexican society too.

By examining intergenerational earnings quintiles mobility tables, these studies have also considered the pattern of economic mobility. Results show an asymmetrical pattern with stronger persistence at the top than at the bottom in every country. In Brazil, 35% of those with origins in the poorest quintile remain poor, whereas 43% of those with origins in the wealthiest quintile remain wealthy (Ferreira & Veloso 2006). Comparable figures for persistence of poverty and wealth are, respectively, 37% and 47% in Chile (Núñez & Miranda 2010) and 38% and 58% in Mexico (Torche 2010a). Strong reproduction at the top contrasts with findings in advanced industrial countries. In the United States, the persistence is 42% in the bottom quintile and 36% in the top quintile. Comparable figures are 30% and 30% in the United Kingdom and 28% and 35% in Norway (Jäntti 2006).

In sum, the still-new and scattered literature on economic mobility in Latin America has found a level of intergenerational persistence much stronger than that in industrialized countries, which is consistent with the higher levels of inequality in the region. These findings contrast with the similar levels of class mobility between Latin America and industrialized countries. In one respect, however, economic and

occupational mobility studies in Latin America are consistent: Both studies highlight an asymmetric pattern of intergenerational persistence that is characterized by strong reproduction at the top of the socioeconomic hierarchy combined with more fluidity across middle and lower segments. This, again, resembles the pattern of inequality in the region.

Inequality of Opportunity

The second generation of mobility research is largely bivariate, concentrating on the overall association between origins and destinations without including mediating factors. One way economists have transcended a bivariate focus is by considering diverse dimensions of social origins. This strategy builds on Roemer's (1998) distinction between "circumstances" and "efforts." Circumstances are factors for which individuals cannot reasonably be held responsible, such as gender, race, and family background. Efforts are factors over which individuals have a measure of control, such as educational attainment and occupational choice.² Equality of opportunity is measured by the situation in which individual socioeconomic attainment, measured, for example, by income, is distributed independently of circumstances. Empirically, this strategy evaluates the proportion of a country's total income inequality that is accounted for by circumstances of origin.

In a seminal paper analyzing the Brazilian case, Bourguignon et al. (2007) considered the role that circumstances play in accounting for earnings inequality. The circumstances considered are parents' education, father's occupation, region, and race. They found that ~25% of earnings inequality is accounted for by "circumstances." This figure compares with 20% in Italy (Checchi & Peragine 2010) and a much lower proportion in other advanced industrial countries (Lefranc et al. 2008, Marrero &

²Sociologists will note the close parallel with the traditional sociological distinction between ascription and achievement (Parsons 1951), which has gone unnoticed by economists.

Rodriguez 2012), indicating that the “accidents of birth” are much more consequential for economic disparities in Brazil. Consistent with the trend in growing fluidity in Brazil, the share of inequality attributable to circumstances appears to be weaker among younger cohorts.

The study by Bourguignon et al. (2007) has given rise to a small cottage industry of research on inequality of opportunity in Latin America. In Chile, Núñez & Tartakowsky (2010) found that circumstances account for ~20% of income inequality. Paes de Barro et al. (2009) extended research to seven other Latin American countries: Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, and Peru. Ferreira & Gignoux (2011) studied the same set except for Mexico. Both examined the role that circumstances play in earnings, income, and consumption inequality. They found that circumstances account for ~30% of earnings inequality and for a higher percentage of consumption inequality. All these studies found that parental education is the most influential circumstance; ethnicity and region of birth have smaller roles. The strong influence of parents’ education is similar in Latin America and in the United States, where the dominance of race has been replaced by parental education in the past two decades (Marrero & Rodriguez 2011). Although the circumstances they account for are not exactly the same across countries, comparable tests with a shared set of variables indicate that inequality of opportunity is much wider in Latin America than in advanced industrial countries.

Comparative Studies of Social Mobility in Latin America

A few studies take a multicountry comparative approach, placing Latin America in the international context. These studies consistently find that Latin America has less educational and economic mobility than developed and even developing countries. A landmark study by Behrman et al. (2001) studied intergenerational educational mobility in four countries: Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. They found

mobility to be much more limited in Latin America than in the United States. The association of years of schooling between parents and adult children is ~0.5 in Mexico and Peru and ~0.7 in Brazil and Colombia, compared with 0.35 in the United States. Hertz et al. (2007) compared the intergenerational correlation of years of schooling across 42 countries and found that Latin America features the strongest correlations in the world. The seven Latin American countries they included display an average correlation of 0.60, which compares with 0.41 for eight Eastern Bloc nations, 0.39 for ten Asian and Western nations, and 0.36 for a small sample of four African countries.

Grawe (2004) compared earnings mobility in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Malaysia, Vietnam, Pakistan, Peru, and Ecuador using a TSIV strategy for all developing nations (except Malaysia). He found extremely high intergenerational earnings elasticities in Peru and especially in Ecuador, reaching a whopping 0.67 and 1.13, respectively (elasticities larger than 1 are extremely unusual and signal a combination of strong intergenerational persistence and a large increase in inequality across generations). These levels of intergenerational association compare with coefficients ranging from 0.10 in Germany to ~0.55 in the United States and Malaysia. Also using a TSIV approach, Andrews & Leigh (2009) compared economic mobility across 16 mostly industrialized countries. Chile is the only Latin American country included in the comparison and has the dubious honor of being the least mobile in the pool, with an outlying intergenerational correlation of 0.41, compared with an average of 0.20 for the other nations.

Other studies have focused on the association between parental resources and the educational attainment of their coresident children around the year 2000. This strategy allows the inclusion of more countries because it requires only cross-sectional household surveys. Using the United States as a benchmark, Dahan & Gaviria (2001) examined the correlation among siblings in terms of their probability of being above the average educational attainment

for their age in Latin America. They found Latin American correlations ranging from 0.34 in Costa Rica to 0.59 in El Salvador, much higher than the correlation of 0.21 found in the United States. Behrman et al. (2001) confirmed this wide gap. They reported sibling correlations in the probability of being above the median years of schooling ranged from 0.37 in Paraguay to 0.61 in El Salvador across the 20 Latin American countries, much higher than the 0.21 correlation they found for the United States. Although scattered, cross-country comparative analysis is relevant because it confirms that Latin American nations feature very low mobility, apparently even lower than countries with similar levels of development.

Macro-Level Factors and Intergenerational Mobility

A small literature has examined the association between macro-level factors and mobility across Latin American countries. Given data limitations, analysis is restricted to educational mobility of young adults who coreside with their parents. The contextual factors examined include public spending on education, inequality of schooling, per capita GDP, and macroeconomic conditions such as trade liberalization, financial depth, and inflation, which were radically altered during the market reforms in the 1980s and 1990s. Studies find that mean level of schooling, economic development, and better-developed financial markets have a positive association with educational mobility (Behrman et al. 1999, Dahan & Gaviria 2001). The association between financial markets and mobility is relevant because it reveals severe credit constraints among the poor.

Research also finds a surprisingly weak association between mobility and public spending in education in Latin America (Behrman et al. 1999, Dahan & Gaviria 2001). This contrasts with comparisons across industrialized countries, which show that educational spending increases mobility (Blanden 2013). The likely explanation is that Latin American governments have allocated a larger portion of their educa-

tional budgets to higher education than have other countries (Wolff & de Moura Castro 2003). Spending on higher education tends to benefit more affluent families whose children remain in school longer, so it provides a hefty subsidy to the Latin American upper class. This finding highlights the need for a careful examination of the meaning of standard variables used in comparative quantitative analysis across contexts.

Much research examines the effect of economic crisis on educational attainment (for an excellent summary, see Ferreira & Schady 2009). However, these studies focus on the effect of crisis on the mean level of educational attainment rather than its allocation by social origins. The few studies that examine the effect of the macroeconomic context on educational mobility consistently find a negative effect of crisis (Binder & Woodruff 2002, Marteleto et al. 2012, Rucci 2003, Torche 2010b). Interestingly, Latin American economic crises produce different effects for poor and wealthy households. A positive substitution effect results in educational gains among the wealthy, whereas a negative income effect results in losses among the poor. The end result is a stronger influence of social origins on educational attainment. This emerging literature on the macrostructural context of mobility is an important contribution and is likely to expand as more countries gather mobility data. As such, the literature is moving from ad hoc to a more systematic, theory-driven examination of contextual factors.

6. DISCUSSION: TAKING STOCK OF INTERGENERATIONAL MOBILITY IN LATIN AMERICA

A distinctive characteristic of Latin American societies is their high level of economic inequality. If, as empirical research suggests, inequality is negatively correlated with mobility, mobility should be lower in Latin America than it is in industrialized countries. Comparative research on economic mobility, educational mobility, and equality of opportunity strongly supports

this assumption. Compared to industrialized countries and even to nations with similar levels of development, Latin America is less mobile. The story emerging from class mobility is different, however. Social class fluidity is generally no less in Latin American than in the industrialized world.

What to make of this discrepancy? Different measures of economic standing provide a dissimilar evaluation of intergenerational mobility to the extent that the distributions of these measures are not perfectly correlated and, crucially, to the extent that deviations across distributions are strongly correlated across generations (Björklund & Jäntti 2000). For example, Blanden (2013) showed that class mobility is higher but income mobility is lower in the United States than in the United Kingdom. The reason is that much of the income persistence in the United States occurs via educational attainment within classes.

Even if plausible, this discrepancy questions the usefulness of social class to describe processes of intergenerational stratification, in particular if the focus of the research is economic well-being rather than outcomes such as collective identity and collective action. The issue is not simply whether a particular class classification such as the EGP is adequate. In fact, empirically obtained class schemas provide answers about mobility that are similar to those of the EGP in Latin America. The core of the issue is whether criteria for occupational aggregation that give rise to class categories miss substantial assets anchoring the intergenerational persistence of advantage.

Should we then abandon social class and rely exclusively on measures of income or consumption to study mobility in Latin America? These measures have their own limitations, including the practical difficulties of measuring earnings in a context with a large informal sector and persuading the Latin American upper class to report their income (Szekely & Hilgert 2007), as well as the theoretical shallowness of measures that provide no information about the structural causes of inequality (Portes & Hoffman 2003). Should we move from aggregate

measures of class to detailed occupations or microclasses (e.g., Jonsson et al. 2009, Weeden & Grusky 2005)? Although occupational analysis provides important insights that would be welcome in Latin America, it is difficult to obtain a conclusive answer about the persistence of socioeconomic disadvantage if we rely solely on occupational categories. The answer is not clear at this point, but “business as usual” is not a viable strategy. The Latin American case, with its sharp contradiction between economic and class mobility, invites sociologists to reconsider the measurement of mobility to strengthen its contribution to conversations about economic inequality.

Mobility research has regained importance in Latin America since the late 1990s, pushed by a renewed concern for inequality of opportunity. However, in-depth studies are still restricted to a few Latin American nations: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico. An important task is the extension of research to other Latin American countries. This task is less onerous than it may appear. Now that virtually every country in the region conducts large, nationally representative, household surveys on a regular basis, a small set of retrospective questions about social origins could be added to such surveys, and strategies such as TSIV could be used to combine information across surveys. This would allow for basic sociological and economic analysis of mobility across the region.

Another area that needs development is the study of women’s mobility, which has been the focus of only a few studies in select countries (see, for example, Scalón 1999 and Ribeiro 2007 in Brazil and Cortés & Escobar Latapí 2005 in Mexico). This limitation is understandable. Women’s participation in Latin America’s labor force is low in comparative perspective (Abramo & Valenzuela 2005), and sample size constraints have compelled researchers to focus on men. However, these reasons are increasingly less valid as women’s economic participation increases, and a large literature suggests that neglecting women’s standing misses important components of the stratification process (Beller 2009, Sorensen 1994). This effort

will require collecting information about male and female respondents as well as their fathers and mothers.

As in the industrialized world, analysis of mobility in Latin America is largely bivariate. This is no small feat given the methodological challenges of obtaining unbiased and comparable estimates of intergenerational persistence. However, research needs to be expanded to understand the role that different dimensions of social origins (such as race/ethnicity, family structure, wealth, and rural/urban residence) and mediating factors (such as education, occupational trajectory, and migration) play in the mobility process. Although research examines ascriptive sources of inequality in Latin America, including race/ethnicity and skin color (Telles 2004, Villarreal 2010), parental wealth (Torche & Ribeiro 2012), and assortative mating (Esteve & McCaa 2007, Torche 2010c), explicit links between these literatures and the work on intergenerational mobility could be strengthened.

A particularly important concern is the role that educational attainment plays in the intergenerational stratification process. Given that Latin America's inequality is largely accounted for by high returns to skill, education is likely to play a pivotal role in intergenerational reproduction. So far, the evidence is scarce, but existing studies suggest the mediating role of education is extremely strong, perhaps even stronger in Latin America than in the advanced industrial world (Balán et al. 1973, Jorrat 2000, Ribeiro 2008, Solís 2007). From one perspective, the strong mediating role of education is good news: the transmission of advantage net of education reflects processes such as the use of social capital or the direct inheritance of wealth, which are seen as pure ascription. However, the strong mediating role of education creates a situation of "inherited meritocracy"—intergenerational persistence that is legitimized and naturalized by educational attainment—when, in fact, this situation emerges from the strong barriers that disadvantaged families in Latin America face to access quantity and quality of education. Studies testing the

strength and patterns of inherited meritocracy across Latin American countries would provide important insight into the contribution of educational inequality to intergenerational persistence.

Most mobility research in Latin America has pursued questions and used analytical approaches developed in the industrialized world. Although this facilitates comparative research, meaningful comparison requires a deep understanding of national contexts. Three examples from this review illustrate this challenge. First, the association between public spending on education and mobility is strong in industrialized countries but null in Latin America. This counterintuitive finding emerges because Latin American public spending is less progressive, favoring higher education, which favors the middle class. Second, the apparent lack of association between inequality and class mobility in Latin America reemerges once the analytical focus is switched from the level to the pattern of both inequality and mobility. In Latin America, high economic concentration at the top is correlated with a strong intergenerational reproduction of the elite professional class. Third, trade-opening reforms implemented in Latin America in the 1990s expanded the skill premium in Mexico (as in most of Latin America), resulting in less mobility. However, the very same trade-opening strategy narrowed the skill premium in Brazil, contributing to an increase in mobility. As these examples highlight, explaining mobility variation in terms of "generalizable attributes of societies so that the names of nations can be substituted for those of variables" (Przeworski & Teune 1970)—an approach that those of us who are quantitatively inclined tend to embrace enthusiastically and sometimes naively—is a challenging task and requires nuanced historical knowledge of the countries compared.

Finally, the stark contrast in inequality trends between Latin America and the United States is impossible to miss. Over the past two decades, Latin America has moved away from its historically high levels of inequality thanks to a decline in the skill premium, which reduces

concentration at the top, precisely as inequality increases in the United States, driven by rapid income growth among top earners. Evaluating the implications of these contrasting trends for mobility dynamics may prove beneficial for citizens of both contexts alike.

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