

What we have learned: RC28's contributions to knowledge about social stratification

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Abstract

After 55 years of research on social stratification and mobility, we take stock of RC28's contributions to knowledge. Our review identifies 19 empirical generalizations and several orienting themes. Some of the items come from an open discussion of the state of the research committee at the World Congress in 2002. Others reflect our own reading of the literature. The generalizations span the fields of interest within the research committee, including individual life chances, classification and scoring of social positions, education, state and labor market processes, and family structure. The orienting themes are for the most part overly simple, but they are powerful and useful images that orient research and have, to this point, contributed to the research committee's productivity. © 2005 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

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In RC28's plenary session at the World Congress in Brisbane (10 July 2002), a group of about 40 RC members collectively took stock of the empirical generalizations and conceptual developments that can be traced to the activities of the research committee. The session was billed as a discussion of a collective research agenda for the future, but it quickly became clear that we could not specify a future until we agreed on our past, that is, what we have learned up till now. The exchange was very engaging. Some generalizations and ideas drew assent quickly, but most spawned discussion. Some were nominated only to be withdrawn after the consensus in the room contradicted the nomination. For example, we moved the "MMI" hypothesis¹ from "empirical general-

ization" to "concept" after several speakers cited exceptions to MMI's predictions but affirmed the usefulness of those predictions as a guide to research.

The amount and quality of the collective discussion was gratifying. It was a risk to walk into a room and ask 40 people to assess our collective life with very little prompting. People responded enthusiastically, and all the participants we heard from declared it an interesting and useful exercise. Table 1 lists the generalizations and concepts that emerged from the Brisbane discussion in the order that they appeared on the board that day. At the Tokyo meeting in March 2003, Mike Hout presented the first draft of this paper, and Wout Ultee and Tom DiPrete provided commentary. From that session and from later conversation, it became apparent that the generalizations which were suggested at the Brisbane meeting focused heavily on the accomplishments of research programs that had their origins in the 1970s, or even earlier, even though in many cases these research programs came to fruition in the 1990s. Accomplish-

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¹ MMI refers to the "maximally maintained inequality" hypothesis of Raftery and Hout (1993). More on the substance of MMI will follow.

Table 1

Empirical generalizations and conceptual advances nominated by the Assembled Research Committee, Brisbane, 10 July 2002

A. Empirical generalizations	
Treiman constant	
{MMI}	
Common pattern in mobility; differences are in strength	
Education is the prime mover in intergenerational reproduction; it is also the key to upward mobility	
Occupational destinations are gendered	
Gender differences in educational outcomes are disappearing and, in some countries, reversing to women's advantage	
Tracking increases variations in educational outcomes	
B. Conceptual developments	
Disaggregation of educational attainment (Mare model)	
School-to-work involves institutional context	
MMI	
Modernization theories are wrong	

Notes: Curly brackets indicate that an item was discussed under one heading then moved to another.

ments of RC28 research programs that had their origins in the 1980s or 1990s were less well represented in the Brisbane list. This made us realize that the collective character of more recent research programs and the major empirical findings of these programs were less well known among the RC28 community as a whole.

Fortunately for the research community, a database of RC28 activity for the past 23 years has recently been constructed by Yunus Kaya, a graduate student in sociology at Duke. This database made it possible for the coauthors of this paper to comb through the 1600 or so presentations that have been given at RC28 meetings during these years in a systematic fashion that would have been impossible based on human memory alone. From the Brisbane meeting, the Tokyo meeting, and our scrutiny of the RC28 database, we have gleaned a set of 19 empirical generalizations that we describe and substantiate below.

While 19 empirical generalizations are at least by some measures an impressive accomplishment, we recognize that this list is still a limited portrayal of the scholarly achievements of the committee, for three reasons. First, it is quite likely that additional generalizations have in fact been established by subgroups of RC28 researchers, and that we are unfamiliar with their existence. Second, there are many solid findings by RC28 members that characterize the structure and dynamics of specific societies well. But our aim is to find robust generalizations that stand either the test of time or the test of space—ideally both. In the end, we exclude some interesting results for which we have not been able to identify either the extent of cross-national or cross-temporal variation. Third, there are many ongoing stimulating and

productive research programs by RC28 members that are too new to provide generalizations of the type presented in this paper. For example, we know of one collaborative RC28 affiliated project: Marcus Gangl is now directing a “Human Capital Effects of the Welfare State” project to study different career-smoothing effects of strong welfare states along with Matthias Strandh, Mikael Nordenmark of Sweden, and Brendan Halpin, Richard Layte, and Helen Russell of Ireland. It is the nature of scientific research, especially in a community that is thriving to the extent now true of the RC28 that any such list will be out-of-date soon after it is produced. The great value of this exercise in our view is that it codifies the current state of knowledge. We do not look to produce something lasting. Our goal, rather, is a stimulating review of the past that can point researchers to the future.

1. Nineteen empirical generalizations

(1) Occupations are ranked in the same order in most nations and over time

At the RC28 meeting in Warsaw (1974), Don Treiman articulated the problems of concept and measurement in the comparative study of mobility and promoted his newly developed cross-national scale of occupational prestige as the solution to both sets of problems (published version: Treiman, 1975). While completing the project, he learned – from analyses of 85 prestige studies from 60 countries (13 of them involving replications over time) – that prestige hierarchies were basically invariant through space and time. The correlation between the scores obtained in each study with the standard scale constructed from them ranged from .68 to .97; the average correlation was .91. Treiman subsequently reported these and further analyses in *Occupational Prestige in Comparative Perspective* (1977). In Brisbane, Mike Hout referred to the pattern of invariance as the “Treiman constant.” While a cross-national correlation of .91 shows more variation than a true constant might, it is a useful shorthand. Treiman (1977) reported some interesting exceptions and variations involving specific occupations that make the general point.

Subsequent work has extended the case base of this fundamental finding. We know of no study that contradicts it. Work by Ganzeboom and Treiman (1996) extended the findings regarding the prestige of specific lists of occupations to a socioeconomic index (SEI) for all occupations in the 1988 ISCO classification schema. Hauser and Warren (1997) revised, renormed, and validated the American SEI in ways that suggest how an update might well be undertaken for the international standard.

We rank the Treiman constant as first among the achievements of RC28 for three reasons. First, the RC was instrumental in encouraging researchers to do national prestige studies, in setting standards that would make the studies comparable, and in disseminating the results. Second, the Treiman constant is indispensable to the line of research that understands occupational achievement and social mobility in terms of moves through a finely differentiated and vertically ranked occupational space (as distinct from class analysis; see the exchange between Hout & Hauser, 1992 and Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992b). In particular, parameters relating socioeconomic destinations to socioeconomic origins would have little or no meaning if the rank ordering of occupations differed significantly from country-to-country or time-to-time. The universal ranking pattern motivates this line of research and gives it meaning and coherence. Finally, the Treiman constant may be the only universal sociologists have discovered—not just in stratification but sociology as a whole. Demographers find some regularity in the age patterns of fertility and mortality, but both vary more over time and place than the rank ordering of occupations does. Criminologists refer to a highly regular pattern relating age and criminal activity but shifts in the age distribution can account for only a tiny fraction of change in the main parameter of interest—the absolute frequency of crime. In contrast, the slight variations in occupational ranking are trivial compared to the regular patterns established by dozens of RC members and codified by Treiman (1977).

(2) Occupational segregation by gender is universal, though the specific pattern varies

Men and women tend to be segregated into different occupations and into different jobs within occupations and workplaces. Furthermore, the more fine-grained the measure, the greater is the level of gender segregation (Bielby & Baron, 1984; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1996). This by now commonplace observation is more taken for granted than demonstrated in the work of the RC. We have had, since the mid-1980s, dozens of papers detailing the gender segregation in different countries. Reskin's (1991) study of trends in occupational sex segregation was reported at the 1991 RC28 meeting at Ohio State University, while Tam's more recent trend analysis was presented at the 2000 meeting in Libourne. Jacob's (1993) comparative analysis of gender segregation across the public and private sectors was presented at the 1993 RC28 meeting at Duke, as was Petersen's (1993) investigation of gender segregation at the occupation-establishment level. The systematic survey of cross-national variation by Charles and Grusky

(1995) was first reported to the RC in Prague 1991, while Bridges' more recent analysis of cross-national variation using ISSP data was presented in 2001. These studies have identified several different profiles of gender differentiation that reflect the rate of growth of service employment, the education of women, and the availability of part-time work (Blossfeld & Hakim, 1996). Just as important as the catalog of differences, is the implicit finding that there are no universals when it comes to gender stratification. Societies differ from one another and over time in the outline and specifics of occupational segregation.

The gender difference in occupational destinations is in sharp contrast to the necessary absence of gender difference in social origins and the much more contingent (but usually observed) absence of gender difference in the association between origins and destinations. All classes have boys and all classes have girls. Unless some classes practice selective abortion or infanticide while other refrain from these practices or do less of them, each class will produce the same share of the male population as it will of the female population. If origins affect the odds of working, we could conceivably see a correlation between gender and origins in a mobility study.² Usually, however, researchers report no difference between men's and women's origins. Likewise most studies report no gender difference in the association of origins with destinations. Thus, the gender difference in occupational destinations is not only the main source of gender differences in mobility, it may well be the only source.

(3) Social mobility exhibits a common pattern but varies in strength across nations and over time

The original RC was founded in 1950 with the express purpose of standardizing mobility data and analysis. The founders' goal was to quantify cross-national differences in social mobility. Glass, Svalastoga, and others mostly had the impression that their nations differed markedly as social mobility reflected the history, economy, politics, and demography of each nation. The first systematic compilation of results, however, contradicted those expectations. Lipset and Zetterberg (1956) reported to the Third World Congress in 1956 that the rate of mobility (between white collar and blue collar occupations) in the 12 national mobility studies (nine nations) that they were able to assemble varied little—variation among nations was about the same as across different studies from the same nation. Mobility from farm to either blue

² Hout (1988) argued that the absence of such a correlation in U.S. data for 1972–1985 indicated that he needed no correction for selectivity in his comparison of men's and women's social mobility.

collar or white collar destinations differed according to the relative sizes of the three categories, but what came to be known as the “Lipset–Zetterberg hypothesis” was generally understood to be a conjecture that non-farm mobility rates were invariant. In italics, they proclaimed (Lipset & Bendix, 1959, p. 13):

The overall pattern of social mobility appears to be much the same in the industrial societies of various Western countries.

They went on to say “Since a number of the countries for which we have data have had different rates of mobility and of expansion but show comparable rates of social mobility, our tentative interpretation is that the social mobility of societies becomes relatively high once their industrialization, and hence their economic expansion, reaches a certain level” (Lipset & Bendix, 1959, p. 13). Lipset and Zetterberg never tested the statistical significance of the variation they found, they merely asserted the lack of substantive significance in the range of differences they uncovered. They also took note of the rank of U.S. mobility amidst the assembled nations. Many observers up to that time had supposed that the U.S. had exceptionally high rates of social mobility—owing, among other things, to the lack of an inherited aristocracy in U.S. history. Lipset and Zetterberg found no basis for thinking that American mobility was exceptionally high. Subsequent analyses using tests of statistical significance have uncovered significant differences, contradicting Lipset and Zetterberg (e.g., Grusky & Hauser, 1984; Hazelrigg & Garnier, 1976). More importantly, differences among nations reflect political and historical variation, thus overturning Lipset and Zetterberg and confirming the conjectures of Glass, Svalastoga, and other RC founders (Grusky & Hauser, 1984).

While the first round of mobility studies was compiled from various sources collected for various purposes, several scholars undertook national mobility studies in the early part of the 1970s. These were almost all focused on mobility questions from the beginning and several of them were conducted with an eye toward cross-national comparison. In the late 1970s, several RC members set out to standardize and compare these data sets under the collective name of the CASMIN project (comparative analysis of social mobility in industrial nations). In preparing their data for the CASMIN project, Featherman, Jones, and Hauser (1975) undertook a two-country comparison of Australia and USA. They found—and reported at the 1974 RC28 meeting in Warsaw—that the two countries had substantially different mobility rates due to different patterns of farming, manufacturing, and services, but they shared common *relative* mobility

rates. That is the association between origins and destinations, as revealed in a log-linear model that controlled for cross-national differences in the distribution of origins and destinations, was the same in both countries. From their two-country comparison they advanced the bold conjecture that mobility will differ but the association will be the same in nations with a market economy and a nuclear family system (Featherman et al., 1975, p. 340). This came to be known as the FJH hypothesis and the model it implied—the log-linear model of no three-way interaction in the three-way table of origins by destinations by nation—came to be known as the model of “common social fluidity” or “CSF” for short.

The first test of the FJH hypothesis by Erikson, Goldthorpe, and Portocarero (1979) compared England, France, and Sweden. They found that the association between origins and destinations in England and France was very similar—barely statistically significant in a test involving 20,000 observations—but that the association in Sweden was significantly weaker. Over the years, Erikson and Goldthorpe (1987a, 1987b) and Erikson et al. (1982); with an intervention by Hauser (1984a, 1984b) refined the analysis, but the principal finding stood: England and France were nearly identical and Sweden was more open. As countries were added to the CASMIN caseload, they were judged by the English–French pattern—which came to be called the “core” pattern. The German mobility pattern exhibited more closure (Müller, 1986) as did the Irish (Hout & Jackson, 1986); the Dutch pattern differed little from the Swedish (Ganzeboom & de Graaf, 1984), and the Hungarian pattern also exhibited substantial openness although communism ruled out the self-employed destination. Erikson and Goldthorpe (1987a, 1987b) brought all of these data sets together (and added Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Poland to the analysis) in two papers that introduced their core model and its national variations. Their main conclusion was that the countries differed in the strength of association (or, inversely, openness) but that they exhibited a strong similarity in the pattern of association. In 1992, they introduced the “unidiff” model (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992a; also see Xie, 1992) that expressed this idea formally as a log-multiplicative model and found that their revision of FJH could not be rejected.

Several interesting countries could not be fitted within the CASMIN scheme because the unit-record occupational coding scheme could not be reconciled with the CASMIN standard one. Australia, Japan, and USA, in particular, were left out of the core analysis; Czechoslovakia and Italy were too because their data became available too late. Yet analyses by Erikson and Goldthorpe

(1992a) indicate that the fundamental conclusion of *The Constant Flux* is validated by these cases. To the extent to which they can be compared with the other countries, they appear to differ only in the strength of association and not in its basic pattern. Indeed, as far as Erikson and Goldthorpe could tell, Australia and USA closely resembled Britain and France—more closely than any of the CASMIN nations did. Kerckhoff, Campbell, Trott, and Krauss (1989) also concluded that the American and British mobility was very similar and that the association between origins and destinations was the same in the two nations. Japan more nearly resembled the stronger association of origins and destinations that characterized Germany (also see Ishida, 1993; Ishida, Erikson, & Goldthorpe, 1991).

At the same time, researchers following Hauser's (1984) lead began to apply "vertical" models to the CASMIN data (Ganzeboom, Luijckx, & Treiman, 1989; Hout & Hauser, 1992; Wong, 1992). They, too, found a common pattern that differed only in the strength of association. The class and vertical perspectives on mobility were quite distinct. The class view – championed by Erikson and Goldthorpe – emphasized differences of kind among occupational categories. These differences are rooted in the employment relations that typify wage work on a simple labor contract compared with service relations that entail owners trusting managers and professionals to act in the interest of ownership and cultivating this by tying compensation to the long-term health and vigor of the enterprise rather than to the hours spent working last week. The vertical perspective notes the even grading of prestige assessments, pay scales, and annual incomes. They see occupations as differing in degree rather than kind. Work within the RC has not resolved the disputes between these points of view. And work that has attempted to adjudicate the dispute have found a balance of evidence that favors neither and prefers a mixed model that includes elements of each approach (e.g., Hout, 1989, Chapter 5). Most importantly for present purposes, though, the two points of view both support the conclusion that mobility patterns – whatever they are – differ among nations only in strength, and not in type. Furthermore, the relative ordering of nations from most open to most closed is nearly identical (compare Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1987b with Hout & Hauser, 1992).

Many nations have been added to the pool of countries under study since the CASMIN study was completed. Spain (Rodriguez Menes, 1993; Salido Cortes, 1999), Austria (Haller, Colossi, & Peter, 1990), Denmark (Hansen, 1998; Park, 2004), Norway (Ringdal, 1994, 2001), Canada (de Seve, 1998; Wanner & Hayes, 1996), Israel (Goldthorpe, Yaish, & Kraus, 1997), China (Cheng

& Dai, 1995; Wu & Treiman, 2001), Taiwan and South Korea (Phang & Lee, 1996), Russia (Gerber & Hout, 2004; Marshall, Svetlana, & Stephen, 1995), Slovenia (Ganzeboom, Kramberger, & Nieuwbeerta, 2000), Brazil (Costa Ribiero & Scaloni, 2001; Wong, 1992), and Chile (Torche, 2005). And replications within countries have established that the pattern remains the same even if the trends point to change (Breen & Whelan, 1996; Ganzeboom et al., 1989; Hout, 1988; Ringdal, 2001; Schizzerotto & Pisati, 1998).³

In a very real sense this is the major intellectual accomplishment of the RC. The Treiman constant is essential and unique; that is why it is listed first. But finding a common pattern of social fluidity has been a collective endeavor. Far more RC members have participated in these mobility studies than in the prestige studies. And they came to the task with very different priors. The discipline of interacting with one another and communicating research results to a community of scholars that shared the larger goal of getting the results right but who differed in how to approach that goal added rigor. The intense debates and exchanges – face-to-face and in print – that marked the late 1980s and early 1990s identified the weak points in all arguments and advanced the collective endeavor. The debates and multiple sessions no doubt tried the patience of some RC members who did not share the mobility researchers' fascination with the fine points of the debates. For our part, those of us engaged in the debates developed too many code words that obscured from many the substance of our concerns. Nonetheless, it was invaluable to the participants and to our search for reliable knowledge that there be a community of scholars that would host the debates, participate in testing the hypotheses, and agree to live by the results. In the end neither the class nor the vertical perspective won outright. But the research in each tradition points to the same conclusion. Some countries have relatively open class structures and/or hierarchies that are readily breached by upwardly mobile persons from less privileged origins; other societies are relatively closed to intergenerational mobility. These are differences of degree but not kind.⁴

³ Change almost always goes from less to more open. The only exceptions in the literature are Bolivia (Kelley & Klein, 1977) and Russia (Gerber and Hout, 2004).

⁴ The Marxist class approach (e.g., Wright, 1997) shares with Erikson and Goldthorpe a concern with discrete social relations of production but begins with a Marxist theory, derives an appropriately different set of classes, and applies its own models. Despite the foundational differences, the Marxist approach also concludes that mobility has a common pattern (with differences in strength of association) across nations (Western, 1994; Western and Wright, 1995).

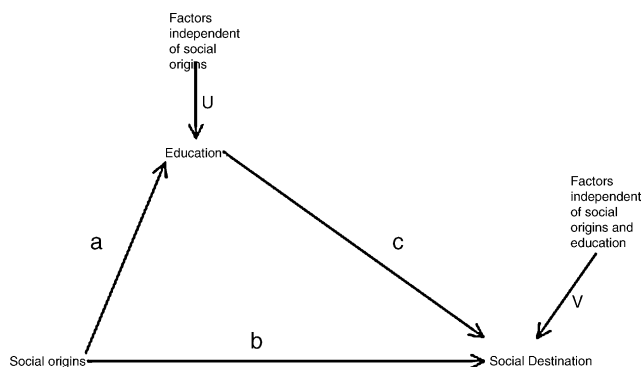


Fig. 1. Simplified path diagram of how destination depends on origins and education.

Efforts to explain the reasons for cross-national differences in the degree of mobility are not as far along as the collective project that has established the existence of this common pattern of mobility. Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992) argued that cross-national differences are idiosyncratic, a product of each country's unique history and institutions. Grusky and Hauser (1984), Ganzeboom et al. (1989), Wong (1990) and others have tried instead to identify a parsimonious set of country-level variables describing core characteristics of each country's economic and political system and to use these characteristics as predictors for cross-national differences in mobility structure. While some partial success has occurred (see the discussion below of societal transformations), complete explanations are still elusive (Ganzeboom & Treiman, 1997). Whether the idiographic theory of Erikson and Goldthorpe or a nomothetic approach will ultimately prevail as the most useful answer to this question cannot yet be answered on the basis of RC28 research.

(4) Education is the main factor in both upward mobility and the reproduction of status from generation to generation

This is the central finding in Blau and Duncan's seminal book, *The American Occupational Structure* (1967), replicated by Featherman and Hauser in *Opportunity and Change* (1978), and extended to other countries by several authors, most notably Treiman and Ganzeboom (1990; also see Hope, 1985; Hout, 1989; Ishida, 1993). Prior to Blau and Duncan's specification of the attainment process, it was generally thought that the two propositions were contradictory and mutually exclusive. Education must either promote mobility or reproduction. But within the formal model of their path analysis, it is rather easy to see how education – due to its central role in occupational achievement – can foster both mobility and reproduction. Fig. 1 simplifies the Blau–Duncan

model in a way that emphasizes its essential parts. Variation in education comes from two sources: social origins (X) and all those things that are independent of origins (u). The portion of education's variance that comes from origins contributes to reproduction; the portion that is independent of origins contributes to mobility. Education is the main factor in the intergenerational reproduction of social standing because the product ac is greater than the direct effect of origins (b).⁵ But education is also the main factor in upward social mobility because the product uc is greater than ac . The variation in education that is independent of social origins contributes more variance to destinations than the portion of variation in education that comes from origins does.

This once-central question about how social stratification works has – somewhat mysteriously – received less attention recently than the other mobility questions have. And we certainly have nothing like the base of cross-national comparisons to draw on for making generalizations. In part, the variety of educational systems in Europe (not to mention globally) intrudes. Many of them are not as easily rendered as a simple uni-dimensional score. Duncan and Hodge (1963) were the first to specify this approach. They got great mileage out of the simple convention of scoring peoples' educational attainments according to the number of years of schooling they successfully completed. The relatively undifferentiated school system in the United States invites this kind of scoring, occasionally augmented with a dummy variable for taking vocational courses, and it captures the key aspects of educational differences (see Blau & Duncan, 1967, pp. 144–145, 165–166; Arum, 1998; Jencks et al., 1972). Educational systems elsewhere differ in ways that are not well-captured by the time spent earning the credential (see Shavit & Müller, 1997). Some people spend more time gaining a less valuable credential than others spend gaining a more lucrative one. The labor markets of these societies are tailored to these distinctions and so employers usually look only for the relevant credential the wrong credential no matter how valuable in other contexts can have no value to some employers.

The CASMIN educational stratification scheme facilitated some research of this type (e.g., Ishida, Ridge, & Müller, 1990), but it is only a partially ranked set of distinctions and not reducible to a single score. Furthermore, because it may describe the educational systems of some countries better than others, it is difficult to know whether cross-country differences in the effects of

⁵ If $b > ac$, then direct reproduction would be more important than indirect reproduction by way of education and the generalization would be rejected.

education are structural or due to different levels of measurement error in the ability of the CASMIN scores to represent adequately each country's native educational categories (Kerckhoff, Dietrich-Ezell, & Brown, 2002). Several useful models facilitate the analysis of qualitative variables. But few of these methods extract a single parameter of the sort common to path analysis. More daunting, most methods for qualitative dependent variables standardize the error variance, ruling out estimating u as an independent parameter. Without a single parameter equivalent to c and without an estimate of u , it is impossible to compare ac with uc . And without the comparison between ac and uc , researchers cannot address the question of reproduction versus mobility with the same efficacy that Blau and Duncan achieved.

That cannot be the whole story. Difficulties of measurement and scoring exist in other subfields that nonetheless have vigorous research agendas. A lot of very high quality and important research in educational stratification has been done in the last 35 years. Furthermore, several respectable measures exist for measuring the power of socioeconomic background to predict who will or will not make given educational transitions, which is the fundamental issue raised by the reproduction versus mobility debate. That these measures have not been employed suggests that there is less interest in this debate than that existed during the writing and the immediate aftermath of Blau and Duncan's book.

This debate is worth revisiting because it addresses the central sociological question of the basis for the legitimacy of a country's educational system. A central assertion of Blau and Duncan was that the legitimacy of the American educational system rests with the perception that it provides young people with the opportunity for social mobility. In *Schooling in Capitalist America*, Bowles and Gintis argued that schools not only reproduce the class structure, they legitimate inequality by turning advantages of birth into legitimate achievements.⁶ While it works out in the United States so that the product of the effect of origins on education and education's subsequent effect on destinations is outweighed by the variation in education that is independent of origins, there is no reason to think that the balance will tilt that way everywhere, or indeed that it will remain as it has been in the United States either. The basis for the legitimacy of education is shifting away from "equal opportunity" to the fundamentally different

question of whether the "rate of return" to education is high enough to justify its cost. As the basis for its legitimacy changes, so may the impact of education within the system of mobility also change. As a research community we can and should apply our comparative and historical perspectives to stimulate discussion of these fundamentally important issues.

(5) Trends in educational stratification favor women

Men born before 1930 attained far more education than did women born about that time. This male educational advantage began to abate in most industrialized countries around the end of World War II as women born in the 1930s narrowed the education gap (a remarkable development considering that men's educational attainments were rising faster than ever in most countries). Women born from 1940 onward continued to move ahead more rapidly than their brothers and other men were moving. In some nations, women born in the 1970s have achieved more education than men born in the 1970s have. This finding first appeared in the RC papers that contributed to *Persistent Inequalities* edited by Shavit and Blossfeld (1993). Experts in the various countries were aware of the trend in their country of interest, but it was Shavit and Blossfeld who first identified how widespread it was.

The descriptive result is widely appreciated. The RC has not kept up with this trend however, and until recently, few members have endeavored to explain it (but see DiPrete & Buchmann, 2006; England, 2003). A useful project in the near future would take up the challenge of explaining female-favorable trends in higher education that have led women to surpass men in educational attainment in many industrialized countries including the U.S. Fruitful explananda might include gender differences in the trends in earnings returns to education, in the relationship between education and marriage, in educational homogamy, in the educational and occupational aspirations of post-feminist women, in the level of family resources, and in the way parents invest these resources in children.

Two additional ideas were initially floated as generalizations that might be included, but enough contrary findings were cited to nix including them. First was MMI—the maximally maintained inequality hypothesis put forth by Raftery and Hout (1993). It was shifted to a conceptual contribution so we will explain the meaning of MMI in the next section. Here we just note that the American case does not fit MMI (Hout, Raftery, & Bell, 1993; Lucas, 2001), and the Netherlands, Sweden, and France show evidence of declining class barriers even though the advantaged classes have not reached "satu-

⁶ Indeed it was Bowles (1972) who first drew attention to the relation $ac > b$ to emphasize their point. And in his reply to Bowles that Duncan (1972) it was noted that $uc > ac$ implies that education does more to promote mobility than to reproduce advantages.

ration” (Ganzeboom & Nieuwbeerta, 1996; Jonsson & Mills, 1993; Vallet, 2001)—negating a key element of MMI.

The other was the proposition that educational expansion leads to educational differentiation. Secondary and higher education in the United States conform to this pattern, but several initially complex small systems – such as that in the Netherlands – have simplified as they have taken on ever-larger fractions of recent cohorts. Institutional isomorphism or some other generalization probably explains these changes better than the idea that size fosters difference.

Some of the most significant contributions of the RC have come from the development or refinement of concepts that have reoriented thinking about a subject or provided a focus for further research. The FJH hypothesis and the companion concept of common social fluidity properly belong in this category. But as they are so closely integrated into the empirical generalizations about mobility patterns that they have been fully discussed already. We do have four other critical conceptual developments to our credit.

(6) Modernization theory is wrong

Many founders of the RC shared a view of social life that now goes under the rubric of “modernization.” The idea is that the succession of social structure from primary to secondary to tertiary production – from foods stuffs to manufactured goods to services – brings with it myriad other changes. Among these are the supplanting of ascription with achievement (and the attendant disappearance of particularism in the face of universal norms) and the tendency for work roles to become narrower and more specialized.

The results of the research committee have supported some predictions of modernization theory but called many other of its predictions into question. Essays by Goldthorpe (1964) and Treiman (1970) over 30 years ago critiqued this paradigm and called for a broad empirical assessment of its predictions. The intervening research record will show few trends that accord well with the modernization theorists. Research by Hout (1988) and DiPrete and Grusky (1990) found rising levels of universalism in status attainment and intergenerational mobility over time, and declining levels of ascription, in particular as it applies to race (Hout, 1984). Meanwhile, Ganzeboom et al. (1989) found generally rising levels of achievement over the 20th century for a large set of countries (though this finding is contested – see Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992), while Treiman and Yip (1989) found that the ratio of achievement to ascription is generally higher among more industrialized countries. At

the same time, scholars have found that other factors besides industrial development play a major role in a society’s structure of social mobility, and trends in the structure of social mobility as well as inequality are not necessarily monotonic over time (Alderson & Nielsen, 2002; Hout & Beller, 2004). The hardest observation for modernization theory to survive is the oft-repeated finding that the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands have less inequality and more openness than more modernized nations like Britain, the United States, and Germany. The Social Democratic political project has allowed those countries to attain greater equality of outcomes and opportunities than their more fully modernized neighbors and competitors. Further confounding the modernization theorists is the modernization catch-up those countries achieved after adopting Social Democracy. The total lack of trends in Britain through Labour’s centralizations and Thatcher’s dismantling also calls the modernization thesis into question. Modernization theory also predicted that inequality would fall over time, but work by members of this research committee (Firebaugh, 2003) show that the Kuznets curve has turned around in much of the world (see also Atkinson’s work).

(7) Class affects educational transitions differently

Mare (1980) noted that the association between origins and destinations arises through a process that is composed of many steps. At any step along the way from the beginning of schooling till ultimate school leaving, class or status can come into play in the decision to continue or to stop – a decision that could, in principle, be made either by the student or the school. Ultimately the correlation between origins and education is the (non-linear) accumulation of these local effects of origin on each transition. Boudon (1974) had previously argued for disaggregating the educational attainment process into its constituent steps, but it was Mare who specified the aggregation/disaggregation fully and explicitly.

This conceptual shift altered how RC members studied education and led, eventually, to the Shavit and Blossfeld (1993) project. First launched at the Utrecht meeting of RC28 in 1989, the Shavit–Blossfeld project involved an explicit protocol whereby each participant adopted Mare’s conception of the educational process and produced a set of calculations that could be compared (by the editors) across cases. The protocol specified that all participants divide the available data into birth cohorts, compute the effect of origin on years of schooling as a baseline, and calculate the effect of origin on (as a minimum) three transitions: entry into secondary education, completion of academic secondary educa-

tion (conditional on entry into secondary education), and entry into college or university (conditional on completion of academic secondary education). Participants were also to take account of differences in trends for men and women, immigrants and natives (where relevant), and majority and minority groups (where relevant). Each national report was to describe the major educational institutions and provide some historical background. We presented initial results at the Madrid meeting at the 1990 World Congress and further revised our papers over the next 2 years.

This model of accumulating comparative results accompanied by details about its context was instrumental in spawning other projects on school-to-work transitions (Shavit & Müller, 1997), self-employment (Arum & Müller, 2004), and origins and destinations (Breen & Luijckx, 2001).

(8) Maximally maintained inequality

Raftery and Hout (R&H) (1993) put forth the hypothesis that privileged groups have interest in their own children's success but little or no interest in the existence or size of class differentials per se. Thus, R&H supposed, class barriers will persist as long as some high-origin individuals do not successfully attain some educational threshold, but that privileged parents will not take action to limit the achievements of other peoples' children once all theirs have attained the stated goal. R&H laid out their hypothesis in the context of an analysis of Irish educational stratification, but were prompted to make it by the British case. Halsey, Heath, and Ridge (1980) had noted that the reforms in British education had failed to bring down class barriers. Hout (1989, p. 195–196) noted the low rate of university attendance by the British middle classes prior to the reforms. R&H thought this was crucial to how free higher education worked out in Britain. The reforms did not make available to poor people goods that the middle class already had in abundance, it made scarce goods more available to all classes. R&H figured that the class barriers would not come down until the middle classes were satisfied.

Some subsequent research has supported MMI; some has contradicted it. It never fit the U.S. case well (Hout et al., 1993; Lucas, 2001; Mare, 1981). The decline of class barriers in Social Democratic regimes challenges it. MMI, like the FJH hypothesis of constant social fluidity, nonetheless is a useful baseline for assessing each case. It continues to orient research. It does well on its home turf in Britain and Ireland. It makes sense of the Italian case whichever way the abandonment debate is settled (Schizzerotto & Pisati, 1998; Shavit & Westerbeek, 1998) and of the Russian case in which class barriers

to higher education rose after all classes saturated secondary education (Gerber, 2000; Gerber & Hout, 1995).

2. More recent developments

In 1991, Ganzeboom, Treiman, and Ultee published a paper with their interpretation of the “three generations” of comparative stratification research. From their perspective, the central question of the first generation concerned whether societies differed in their level of “openness” to social mobility. The second generation focused on the question of how intergenerational transmission of status occurs. The third generation was the return to the question of whether societies differ in the structure of mobility, but using more sophisticated statistical models, which in their words allowed for greater statistical rigor “at the cost of a successive narrowing of research questions, from a general interest in the determinants and consequences of social status and mobility between statuses to a narrowly focused interest on the bivariate relationship between the occupational classes of fathers and sons” (Treiman & Ganzeboom, 1998). They argued that a fourth generation of comparative stratification research was emerging which focused on “the central question of how the stratification outcomes of individuals are affected by their social environment” but did so with improved data, improved research designs, and improved statistical tools, notably the use of multilevel techniques that allowed the estimates of both macro and micro effects on stratification outcomes (DiPrete & Forristal, 1994).⁷ Sometimes the methodological approaches of these new studies have been explicitly multilevel, in that cross-national or cross-temporal differences in the coefficients have been statistically modeled in terms of macro-variables that purport to explain the macro-level variation (e.g., DiPrete & Grusky, 1990). In other cases, the macro-level analysis has been carried out in a more qualitative fashion, via a specific focus on structural/institutional differences that may account for differences in micro-level parameters (e.g., Shavit & Müller, 1997).

It is an empirical fact (as any comparison of an RC28 program from the middle 1980s with one from the past few years will show) that an increasingly large proportion of research committee efforts since the early 1990s have focused on fourth generation themes. This research falls within five basic areas: (1) the impact of family structure beyond the status variables that were the core

⁷ Kerckhoff (1995) argued in a similar vein that a fourth generation of stratification research was emerging, “in which the roles of institutional arrangements in the shaping of stratification processes are systematically taken into account.”

of the Blau–Duncan model; (2) the impact of neighborhoods; (3) the impact of school systems; (4) the impact of labor markets; and (5) the impact of the welfare state. The first four topics need not imply comparative research or trend analysis, because variation in family, neighborhood, schools and labor markets occurs within single countries. However, family, school, labor market, and welfare state effects on stratification have increasingly been the focus of research presented at RC28 meetings. The other notable trend about RC28 research is that an increasing proportion of this research focuses on life course rather than intergenerational issues.

2.1. Education

(9) Educational tracking increases the variance of educational outcomes

Educational researchers within the RC and elsewhere have devoted significant time and resources to documenting educational differentiation and its consequences (variously known as tracking or streaming). Researchers differ on whether the effects of tracking are, on balance, positive or negative, but they do seem to have reached a consensus that the more differentiation that gets built into a school system, the more differentiation comes out. Schools where all students study the same subjects with the same intensity have less variance in educational achievement test scores and labor market outcomes than we see in schools that teach different students different subjects or the same subjects with different intensity.

It would seem from that generalization that the consensus of the RC is that schools should homogenize their curricula. But that is not the implication that most researchers draw from their work. Gamoran, Nystrand, Berends, and LePore (1995), for example, argue that streaming that maps onto the local labor market can produce useful variation in outcomes while what might be thought of a superfluous differentiation can have harmful effects on young peoples' career prospects and their prospects for higher education.⁸ Arum (1998) showed that what he called "substantive" vocational education can increase some peoples' life time earnings by completing their training in secondary school – saving them from having to spend time taking substantive vocational courses in community colleges. Lucas argued in *Tracking Inequality* (1999) that schools that ended explicit tracking but continued to offer a variety of courses actually increased the correlation between ori-

gins and educational outcomes because the students of college-educated parents better understood the connection between specific courses and the opportunity to attend college than did the students whose parents had not been to college. Under the old tracking regime, the "college preparatory" label on some courses gave students the information they needed whether their parents had attended college or not.

(10) Vocational training and certification in secondary school smooth school-to-work transitions

The Shavit–Müller school-to-work project was organized around Rosenbaum and Kariya's (1989) research into the communications between secondary school placement counselors and human resources people at prospective employers. They focused on the correlation between education and first job status, and described how counselors and human resources managers developed relationships of trust and information that guided the school-to-work transitions of Japanese secondary school leavers. Müller immediately saw the parallels in German work credit practices, and these ideas then helped organize both the research each author did and the sense that Shavit and Müller, as editors, made of the cross-national patterns of similarity and difference. Further research by Gangl and Müller (2003) has found the above generalization also to be true when the dependent variable is the probability of early unemployment. Further confirming evidence comes from Van der Verden and Wolbers (2003).

2.2. The state and the labor market

Important additional social context consists of the labor market and state policies, including tax and social welfare programs, and patterns of recruitment into the civil service and state-owned or state-controlled firms. States differ in the level of social insurance they provide and in the principles that determine how benefits are distributed (e.g., Esping-Andersen, 1990). In the following discussion, we refer to "strong" versus "weak" welfare states to summarize a multidimensional concept along its major dimension (cf. Gallie, 2000).⁹ Similarly, labor markets are governed by a complex set of institutions according to the power of unions to set wages, the manner in which wages are set (e.g., collective or decentralized), the level of employment protection, and

⁸ At the Brisbane meeting, Gamoran recounted how a Scottish radio show host sniped at his nuanced answer to a "thumbs up or thumbs down" question about streaming in Scottish secondary schools as a "typical academic's answer."

⁹ Gallie analyzed cross-national variation in terms of the "qualitative" distinctions found in the Esping-Andersen typology to which the "Mediterranean" category was added, and found that the "strong/weak" dimension captured much of the differences in the four-category scheme.

the barriers to mobility. We refer to labor markets that have strong employment protection and high minimum wages (whether set by law or by collective bargaining) as highly “institutionalized” as opposed to “flexible” labor markets.

(11) Strong welfare states and institutionalized labor markets reduce poverty and slow the growth in wage inequality

While much of the American-focused poverty research in recent years has taken place outside the research committee and even (one might say, regrettably) outside sociology, important comparative work on the subject of poverty and inequality has been done in the research committee. Poverty rates are generally lower in strong welfare states (Brady, 2003, 2005; Headey, Krause, & Muffels, 1999; Jesuit, Rainwater, & Smeeding, 2001; Jznitti, Kangas, & Ritakallio, 1994; Lewin and Stier, 2000; Rainwater, 1991; Stier & Lewin, 2001; Whelan, Layte, Maître, & Nolan, 2001). Brady (2003) and Whelan et al. (2001) in particular have done innovative methodological work in this area by showing the resiliency of this generalization to alternative definitions of poverty.

This work on poverty rates is closely related to comparative work on wage, earnings, income and wealth inequality (Kalleberg & Lincoln, 1988; Alderson & Nielsen, 2002; Rice, 1998; Shirahase, 2002; Firebaugh, 2003). Ongoing projects in this area include the work of several RC28 members contributed papers a special issue of *Work and Occupations* that was edited by DiPrete (2005). This project compares the level of wage and income inequality and employment instability across several European countries as part of a critical evaluation of the “unified theory” recently put forward by Blank (1998), Blau and Kahn (2002) and others to explain the different positions on an apparent inequality-employment tradeoff curve that the U.S. and western European countries currently occupy.

(12) Social welfare policies that facilitate the combining of work and motherhood cause women’s work careers to be more continuous, and societal differences in these policies create societal differences in the structure of women’s careers over the life course

This link between social welfare policies and women’s careers has been extensively documented by RC28 researchers since 1990 (Allmendinger, Brückner, & Brückner, 1991; Blossfeld & Hakim, 1996; Blossfeld & Wittig, 1994; DiPrete & McManus, 2000; DiPrete et al., 2003; Henz, 2002; Shea, 1996; Stier, 1993; Stier & Lewin-Epstein, 1996, 1997; Stier, Lewin-Epstein &

Braun, 2001; Trappe & Rosenfeld, 1998). Women’s careers are more continuous in countries that provide the highest support for working mothers (Stier, Lewin-Epstein, & Braun, 2001), but policies which successfully reduce the incompatibility between work and family do not necessarily reduce the mother’s economic dependence on her male partner (Stier & Mandel, 2003).

(13) Strong welfare states smooth the dynamics of the socioeconomic life course by buffering the impact of mobility events

The dynamics of this effect are implicit in the motivating idea—“social insurance.” Without insurance, disruptions to workers’ careers lead to more desperation in job searches. Seekers tend to satisfice when they should be maximizing, i.e., they tend to take the first acceptable job they find instead of searching more extensively for a better one. Insurance provides the sustenance job seekers need in order to search long enough to achieve an optimal outcome (DiPrete, 2002; Fritzell and Henz, 1999; Heady, Krause, & Muffels, 1999; McManus & DiPrete, 2000). Generous unemployment benefits reduce the career consequences of unemployment (Gangl, 2004). Some RC28 researchers have examined the impact of pension policies on the socioeconomic impact of retirement, and the heterogeneity of this impact by gender and ethnicity (Ginn, 2001; Levanon, 2004), but the impact of welfare states on stratification at older ages has been an under-researched topic in the RC28. More broadly comparative studies of the buffering impact of social welfare policies on mobility events have begun to appear at RC28 meetings (Nicaise, Groenez, Adelman, Simon, & Middleton, 2004), but the work is too new to support firm generalizations at this time.

(14) Welfare states and labor markets affect occupational mobility via their impact on the process of vacancy creation in the labor market

Researchers in the “third generation” of stratification research focused on structural mobility as it was represented by the marginals of the mobility table. As we have noted above, the power of this approach greatly enhanced the ability of stratification research to account for differences in absolute class or occupational mobility between two points in time. Underlying these origin and destination marginal distributions, however is a dynamic process of vacancy creation and destruction at the level of jobs. Welfare state and labor market differences have powerful effects on the dynamics of job creation and destruction, and these effects in turn produce differences in the process of social mobility between different employment statuses, jobs, occupations, and industries.

Firm-level changes in labor demand drive structural change at the industry level and, in turn, job mobility (DiPrete, Maurin, Goux, & Tåhlin, 2001). Economic expansion and the contraction of industries both induced job mobility in the U.S. (DiPrete, 1993; Harrison, 1988; Shin, 2003). Other “flexible” labor markets, e.g., Sweden, show similar patterns of response to structural contraction of occupations and industries; contractions generate cross-industry and occupational mobility. However in Germany, where barriers to mobility are high, shutdowns mainly result in labor force exits (DiPrete, de Graaf, Luijkx, Tåhlin, & Blossfeld, 1997). Similarly, comparatively high employment protection reduces rates of vacancy creation in higher status jobs by keeping dismissal rates low; it also reduces the rate of upward mobility in the early career (Gangl, 2004). In Japan, high barriers to inter-firm mobility exist and hiring is done at the lowest level of the organization (Ishida, 2000) with the primary exception being the small foreign-owned firm sector of the labor market (Ono, 2004). The characteristics of the Japanese labor market would imply that structural expansion and contraction would have their primary effect at the entry level, but this hypothesis has not to our knowledge yet been tested by RC28 researchers.

Flexible labor markets also facilitate the use of fixed-term contracts that increase job mobility at lower skill levels. Workers exit from the labor market and reenter quickly until they finally manage to cross the barrier between fixed and indefinite term contract jobs. High rates of fixed term contracts, in turn, are produced by differences in the structure of labor costs in a society and the role of the state in the economy (Ko, 1998; DiPrete, Maurin, Goux, & Quesnell-Vallee, 2006; see also Maurin, Goux, & Pochet, 2001).

These results should sensitize stratification researchers to the fact that institutional differences between countries are often expressed via the job and vacancy structures that produce the marginals of mobility tables. Hence, cross-national studies of vacancy creation and destruction hold the potential of identifying institutional sources of stratification beyond what can be uncovered via the patterns of association in mobility tables.

Historical changes in the structure of vacancies, whether caused by smooth or transformative social change of either a political, military, or economic character has been a major concern in the study of mobility trends. Most notably, the career experiences of different West German cohorts depended on the labor market conditions they encountered when they first entered the work force, specifically including the impacts of World War II

on the vacancy structure (Blossfeld, 1987a, 1987b). East German cohorts experienced similar war-related dislocations (Solga, 1994). Nonetheless, different post-war histories produced differences in mobility between East and West Germany (Solga, Aschaffenberg, & Mayer, 1995; Uunk, Mayer, & Mayer, 1997). Similar results have been found for Hungary and the Netherlands (de Graaf & Luijkx, 1993; de Graaf & Ultee, 2001; Robert, 2002) and in comparative analysis across the entire set of datasets contained in the International Stratification and Mobility File (Ganzeboom & Treiman, 2000).

(15) State intervention in the mobility process has created historical periods (typically of limited duration) where particular groups or classes defined by occupation, employment status or political party membership were favored or disfavored in the mobility process. These interventions into the mobility process typically created persisting differences in the subsequent life chances of the affected cohorts

State effects on mobility are not limited to the effects of social welfare programs. Particularly in socialist countries, states have periodically intervened in the mobility process in order to favor or disfavor certain groups. A large body of research by RC28 members shows distinctive mobility patterns that appear to be the result of state policy by socialist governments. Typically, policies favoring or disfavoring particular classes are strongest at the outset and then fade or disappear completely. This pattern has been found for Poland (Marks, Zagorski, & Ganzeboom, 1995), for North Vietnam (Hsiang-Hui & Nguyen, 2000), for East Germany (Solga, 1994), for China (Deng & Treiman, 1994; Lin, 1993; Verhoeven, Jansen, & Dessens, 2003; Wu, 2001; Zhao & Zhou, 2001) for the former Soviet Union (Gerber, 1997) and for a large set of socialist countries (Ganzeboom et al., 1989; Ganzeboom, 1994; Hanley & Treiman, 2001).

(16) Welfare states affect mobility rates, gender differences, and discrimination in their role as employer

Capitalist states also intervene in the labor market. Foremost states are big employers. In that role, they discriminate less than private-sector employers do. American civil service hiring and promotion policies offered opportunities to minorities that were lacking in the private sector in the pre- and early civil rights era (DiPrete, 1989). The state sector in Taiwan discriminated against women less than private sector employers did (Chang, 1991). Public sector employment in Israel has been more favorable to educated and female Arabs than the private sector (Lewin-Epstein & Semyonov, 1993), and public sector employment in the South African homelands was more favorable to blacks than private-sector

employment in those areas was (Powell & Buchmann, 2002). Whether similar advantages exist for minorities in Canada, England, the Netherlands, Germany, France, and other western European countries is – perhaps surprisingly – a question that has not been addressed by RC28 researchers, at least so far as we have been able to tell from our examination of the historical record.

RC28 members have also examined the impact of state policies on recruitment and career mobility in non-socialist societies. Many RC28 researchers have demonstrated that strong welfare states increase the size of the public service sector when public services include traditionally female tasks related to the care of children or the elderly. Esping-Andersen (1990, 1992), Bianco (1992), Blossfeld (1992), Tählin (1993), Jacobs (1993), Becker (1994), Lewin-Epstein and Semyonov (1993), Robert and Bukodi (2004), Cheung and Chan (2002), and Mandel and Semynov (2003) have all demonstrated this relationship and explored the differing stratification consequences that arise from the growth of the service sector.

Given the connection between sector and gender occupational segregation, many of these studies also address the issue of gender equality. As Mandel and Semynov (2003) note in their recent comparison of 23 countries, however, gender interacts with the wage structure. In particular, public service employment of women increased gender segregation but that impact was offset in most instances by the smaller gender gap in wages that result from strong welfare states' effectiveness in reducing overall earnings inequality. Their finding demonstrates the importance of studying multiple outcomes when comparing levels of gender stratification across societies.

(17) Welfare state and labor market structures affect social mobility via their impact on the size of the self-employment sector

This finding has been substantiated in several papers including Kraus (1992), McManus (1997), Luber et al. (2000), Shavit and Yuchtman-Yaar (2000), Model, Martens, Silberman, and Veenman (2000), Robert and Bukodi (2004), Ishida (2001), Sandefur and Park (2002), and other contributions to the edited volume on self-employment by Arum and Müller (2002).

2.3. Family

(18) Family disruption generates downward mobility both over the life course and across generations

Rates of family disruption have risen dramatically. Their impact has been the source of occasional study

in the RC28, both in terms of intergenerational and life course consequences. Furthermore, the vulnerability of both women and men presumably varies by country according to the level of dependence on her husband, social welfare laws that provide for her assistance, the fertility rate, and her own human capital. Some of this work has been done in the RC28 (DiPrete & McManus, 2000; Henz & Jonsson, 2000; McManus & DiPrete, 2001; Poortman, 1998), but most of it has been done by family demographers who do not as a rule attend RC28 meetings. The research findings make clear that union dissolution is a disruptive life course event for women and also often for men. The comparative pattern of these disruptions, however, is not yet fully clear.

The impact of disruption on intergenerational processes is also a topic repeatedly addressed by RC28 researchers (Beller, 2003; Biblarz & Raftery, 1993; Dronkers, 1994; Gzhler, 1996; Jonsson & Gzhler, 1995; Kelley et al., 1995; Traag, Dronkers, & Vallet, 2000). Here also, the research makes clear that family disruption has negative consequences for social mobility. Ignoring its effects biases estimates of other important relationships (Beller, 2003). Again, however, we still do not know a great deal about the temporal or cross-national pattern of variation in these effects.

(19) Marital homogamy is found in every country. However, there is considerable heterogeneity both in the extent of homogamy and in country-specific trends

Homogamy is one of the most popular themes of the RC28, having been the subject of presentations by Hendricks, Lammers, and Ultee (1991), Jones and Luijkx (1992), Uunk, Ganzeboom, and Robert (1992), Tsai (1993), Barbagli, Savioli, and Schizzerotto (1993), Uunk and Ultee (1994), Jones (1994), Ultee and Luijkx (1995), Arber (1996), Smits, Ultee, and Lammers (1994), Smits (1996), Mare (1997), Shirahase (1998), Henz and Sundström (1998), de Graaf and Ultee (1999), Lu and Wong (1998), Yeh (1998), Stier and Shavit (1999), Birkelund, Hansen, and Helda (2000), Halpin and Chang (2000), Gunduz-Hosgor and Smits (2000), Henz and Jonsson (2000), Xie (2001), Park and Smits (2002), and Schwartz and Mare (2003). Given the very large number of research papers presented on this subject, we found it surprisingly difficult to formulate generalizations either about trends or about systematic variation across countries. Perhaps this reflects our limitations, or perhaps it reflects the inherently idiosyncratic nature of homogamy. We suspect, however, that this is an area that ripe for more systematic collectively organized projects to document and publicize

the underlying regularities both over time and across countries.

2.4. *Persistent themes but uncertain generalizations*

The above generalizations do not begin to exhaust the research productivity of the RC28. Committee meetings have often been sites for interesting, and even outstanding papers that do not cohere with other committee work to produce generalizations that can rightfully be attributed (at least in significant part) to the RC28. In other cases, particular themes have attracted large numbers of RC28 contributions, with many excellent papers that have been of keen interest to the RC28 community, but where the findings do not easily generalize beyond specific countries or specific periods. Race and ethnicity, for example, have been regular topics (we count 72 presentations in the past 23 years where the words “race” or “ethnicity” appear in the title or abstract) of research presentations at the RC28. Included in these papers are a comprehensive set of analyses of the ethnic labor markets of Israel, several papers on Canada, a moderate-size set of papers that focus on the U.S., and occasional papers on England, India, Taiwan, Brazil, South Africa, and Sweden. Given the importance of the topic, we hope that more systematic comparative analyses of race and ethnicity become a high priority for the RC28 in coming years.

3. Conclusion

This exercise looked to the past 50 years of research to see how far we have come as a research committee and a research community. It is time now to turn to the future. As we move forward into the new century, we note several significant differences between the research committee of the past and the present. RC28 was launched by a group of scholars with a single agenda. We have a larger, more diverse group of colleagues now. A single agenda is inappropriate. But we share much, perhaps most significantly intellectual heritage crafted in living memory, mostly by researchers who are still active today, and codified here.

We also share a commitment to data quality. Both in survey data and direct observations we demand representative samples, comparable measures, and full disclosure of the details of the research. Good data make empirical generalizations reliable. And, as we have shown, reliable empirical generalizations are the foundation of RC28’s intellectual contribution.

We also share a commitment to testable hypotheses. RC28 members have time and again responded to the assertions of scholars who claim to have found some-

thing by testing the limits of those claims against data, usually data from an ever-broader array of nations. This gives focus to a collection of scholars pursuing an ever-growing list of topics. For the future, this generalization gleaned from the archives of past presentations, is a hint to researchers who have replicated results in a variety of settings to frame their results in a way that invites further replication, extension, and testing. The key to successful agenda-setting of this sort is a combination of compelling initial observations and a clear statement of the kinds of data that would be relevant for extension and testing. For example, the original formulation of the FJH hypothesis by Featherman, Jones, and Hauser (1975) specified three scope conditions: (1) “genotypical” mobility patterns, i.e., the association between origins and destinations in a mobility table, not total mobility; (2) societies with a market economy; and (3) nuclear family systems. The reasons for #2 and #3 were not specified by the authors, but they anticipated two qualifications that became important in further work. Political interventions in labor markets and disruptions in family structure matter for mobility and changes in either change the association between origins and destinations. The FJH was productive mainly because #1 was so specific, but it continues to inspire research because #2 and #3 point to interesting independent variables.

RC28 probably needs two agendas for the future. As Yossi Shavit pointed out at the Libourne meeting in 2000, we have very little to say to policy-makers. Our work looks inward to the academic concerns of the community of scholars that makes up the RC. An attempt to translate even a few of the 19 generalizations we discussed into guides for social policy would be very valuable. Or it might be impossible. If RC28’s work does not translate into recommendations to policy, we ought to figure out how to get ourselves from the generalizations spelled out here to the ideas with practical value.

We also need to listen for the topics we do not hear discussed. Our agenda for the future will, for the most part, resemble the past. But we could profit from a list of the things we are not doing. That is not to say that we are an all-purpose research committee. We should not lose focus on the central issues of inequality and opportunity. Nevertheless, we have strongly emphasized some issues to the neglect of others. An inventory of what we have neglected can help ensure that our emphasis is right.

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