

The Romance of College Attendance:  
Higher Education Stratification and Mate Selection\*

Richard Arum  
New York University

Josipa Roksa  
University of Virginia

Michelle J. Budig  
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

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ABSTRACT

Educational achievement has increasingly replaced ascriptive social background as a factor structuring marital choice and generating homogamous unions (Mare 1991, Kalmijn 1998). Analyzing data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, we examine a particular aspect of this larger phenomenon by focusing on the extent to which institutional stratification across colleges historically contributed to social inequality through spousal selection. We demonstrate that one-third of college graduates who married/cohabitated with an individual with similar educational attainment married/cohabitated with someone who attended colleges with identical institutional characteristics. We also find that college stratification structured marital choices regarding the social and economic resources partners bring to marriage or cohabitating unions: women's more elite college attendance was associated with marrying/cohabitating with a man with higher subsequent annual income; while men's more elite college attendance was associated with marrying/cohabitating with a woman from more privileged social origins.

While most Americans still do not attain any post-secondary degrees, recent cohorts are increasingly involved with institutions of higher education and over one-fourth of the population has a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). Although sociological examination of educational stratification has traditionally focused on high schools (e.g., Gamoran and Mare 1989; Alexander, Natriello and Pallas 1989; Oakes 1985), studies of social stratification in tertiary education have proliferated over the past decade (e.g., Arum and Hout 1998; Dougherty 2001; Shavit, Arum and Gamoran 2007). Sources of post-secondary institutional variation include factors such as institutional prestige, resources per student, and the academic selectivity of student bodies (for a review, see Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). Perceptions of the importance of these differences in colleges are large enough for elite colleges to impose significantly higher tuition for access to their educational programs and credentials. For example, tuition and fees at a typical ivy-league school currently cost approximately seven times the costs of in-state tuition and fees at an average public university.<sup>1</sup>

Although many parents are more than willing to pay for access to elite education, existing research has identified only moderate labor market benefits, net of social background, associated with individuals attending higher status post-secondary institutions relative to the large and significant returns attached to simply attaining a year of college education in general (e.g., Astin 1993; Brewer and Ehrenberg 1996; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). Most research on the effects of college stratification, however, has focused on respondents' occupational and educational outcomes. Since gains in these areas are modest, why – other than perhaps a taste for conspicuous consumption – have parents been willing to pay increasingly high costs for access to elite post-secondary education?<sup>2</sup>

Our research explores an alternative outcome, other than labor market returns, that could

potentially be implicated in this social phenomenon. The returns associated with access to more prestigious colleges might largely occur not in outcomes associated with the labor market, but instead in affecting another generative process central to the production of social inequality: the matching process within marriage markets. Blau and Duncan (1967) argued more than forty years ago that social stratification researchers should recognize the importance of mate selection and examine "how matches get made" (p. 346). Research in this area, however, is largely restricted to identifying assortative mating in terms of associations between husband and wife's years of education or class background (Mare 1990, Kalmijn 1991a). Left unexplored by researchers is the possibility that stratification across colleges also significantly structures marriage market outcomes. In particular, attendance at more elite colleges could increase the ability of individuals to select spouses who are positively endowed with characteristics associated with either higher achievement or ascriptive status. Such a role in the process of mate selection would create significant additional incentives for enrollment at more elite colleges.

We take advantage of the availability of unique data to explore this topic. In the mid-1970s, the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) asked respondents not only for information on years of education, labor market experience and family background of respondent and spouse, but also gathered information on the actual post-secondary institutions both husband and wife attended. With these data we can identify the manner in which mate selection was affected by college settings in ways contributing to social inequality. Although the data cover only cohorts entering higher education prior to the second-wave of the feminist movement, without availability of more recent nationally representative data, they offer a unique perspective on historical marital patterns and raise a new set of questions for researchers interested in understanding stratification processes in the United States.

## COLLEGE STRATIFICATION AND MARRIAGE MARKETS

Social stratification researchers have long recognized that mate selection affects life course trajectories. Researchers have explored how assortative mating occurs along various dimensions including race, religion, educational attainment and class background (e.g., Becker 1976; also for literature review see Kalmijn 1998). Sociologists have specifically emphasized how individuals choose spouses on the basis of achievement and ascriptive characteristics - i.e., for traditional social stratification researchers, along the dimensions of educational attainment and social class background respectively (e.g., Blau and Duncan 1967). Recent research on various advanced economies has suggested that educational background has an increasing influence on marriage formation while ascriptive class background and religion are decreasing in significance (Blossfeld and Timm 2003; Mare 1991; Kalmijn 1991a, 1991b; Ultee and Luijkz 1990). In addition, schools, and colleges in particular, have been identified as efficient “local marriage markets” fostering marital homogamy more so than neighborhoods or workplaces (Kalmijn 1998).

Homogamy based on either individual ascriptive or achievement characteristics will tend to foster and promote social inequality. College attendance contributes to this outcome by not only delaying the onset of marriage (Thornton, Axinn and Teachman 1995) but by increasing the likelihood of marrying a spouse who possesses improved life chances (i.e., an individual who is college educated). In this way, educational attainment increases social inequality by affecting life chances both directly through improving labor market outcomes and indirectly through increasing the likelihood of choosing a mate who brings greater social or economic resources to a marital union.

The educational homogamy literature, however, has failed to consider how the stratification of post-secondary institutions potentially contributes to the process of mate selection. Neglect of this topic partially stems from an assumption that social relationships in college are transitory: college students have been argued to be engaged in dating, not mating. Willard Waller's research on "The Rating and Dating Complex" at Pennsylvania State University in the 1930s is characteristic of such an assumption. Waller (1937:728) argued that:

Whether we approve or not, courtship practices today allow for a great deal of pure thrill-seeking. Dancing, petting, necking, the automobile, the amusement park, and a whole range of institutions and practices permit or facilitate thrill-seeking behavior. These practices, which are connected with a great range of the institutions of commercialized recreation, make of courtship an amusement and a release of organic tensions. The value judgment which many lay persons and even some trained sociologists pass upon thrill-seeking arises from the organizational mores of the family – from the fact that energy is dissipated in thrills which is supposed to do the work of the world, i.e., to get people safely married.

While Waller argued that dating in college was primarily based on students' campus-based prestige and popularity, other research has also demonstrated the role of social class (e.g., Whitbeck and Hoyt 1994; Reiss 1965; Rogers and Havens 1960).

Although unexamined in a systematic fashion, variation in the type of college attended is likely to affect choice of marital partners for several reasons. First, attendance at college coincides with a period in the life cycle when (initial) partner selection often occurs – particularly for the cohorts under historical examination here. Physical proximity of romantic candidates produces an unmediated structuring of marriage market outcomes: i.e., individuals often marry not only spouses with similar educational attainment, but individuals from the *same* college who they have met in the course of their educational careers. College stratification thus likely increases the probability that if mate selection during college occurs, it operates in ways that increase sorting along similar dimensions that have governed allocation of scarce

educational resources and thereby serves to exacerbate patterns of social inequality. Second, college attendance produces enduring social relationships that contribute to structural segmentation and stratification in adult social networks (Granovetter 1973). Differences in these adult social networks may partially determine who one comes into contact with and thus is able to consider as a prospective mate subsequent to college graduation.

In addition, college stratification affects marital selection by providing graduates with different types of cultural capital. DiMaggio and Mohr (1985) demonstrate that variation in cultural capital is related to mate selection. Different college experiences likely produce differences in cultural tastes and resources. In some settings, college football or basketball are widely embraced as sacred community rites; in other collegial environments, spectator sports virtually do not exist, but normative pressures are present that encourage students to spend time in museums, art galleries, used book stores or coffee shops. These cultural differences, in turn, may affect one's access to potential mates, regardless of whether the match actually was made in college. As Bourdieu aptly noted in *Distinction* (1984: 241): "The social sense is guided by the system of mutually reinforcing and infinitely redundant signs of which each body is the bearer – clothing, pronunciation, bearing, posture, manners... are the basis of 'antipathies' or 'sympathies' ... Taste is what brings together things and people that go together."

Colleges are uniquely well positioned to affect the process of mate selection, because they are formally and explicitly designed both to produce cultural status and to promote social environments intended to enhance opportunities for the type of social interactions conducive to the flourishing of romantic attachment. DiMaggio and Mohr (1985: 1234) describe marital selection as a process involving "participation in a status culture that emerges in face-to-face interaction." This status culture allows individuals with "shared cultural resources to develop

the intimacy required for relationships to ripen into marriage.” Common interests and involvement with similar cultural activities, such as colleges stratified along various dimensions, provide individuals with “an area of rapport, a common universe of discourse or arena of interaction” (Waller and Hill 1951: 176-7). Colleges our settings that potentially facilitate what Swidler (2001) terms a “culture of love,” where individuals are able “to link their life strategies to the institutional structure marriage provides.” Swidler argues that “in order to marry, individuals must develop certain cultural, psychological and even cognitive equipments.” We believe that colleges are ideal settings for the cultivation of individual sentiments conducive to choosing and defining another individual as “the uniquely right ‘one’” (Swidler 2001:131).

While the educational homogamy literature has ignored differentiation in higher education largely due to a lack of intellectual curiosity about variation in these social patterns, another significant and noteworthy cause of the dearth of research on college marriage markets is related to the limited availability of data to address the topic. Data from the U.S. Census and Current Population Surveys, which are frequently used in this research tradition, lack institutional level information. Even educational surveys, which provide detailed information about the colleges that respondents have attended, do not provide the same information for spouses. To our knowledge, the only nationally representative dataset that includes characteristics of post-secondary institutions for both partners in marital unions or cohabitating is the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), and it does so only for two survey years in the mid-1970s. With access to nationally representative data limited, research has largely been based on case studies of particular cohorts from specific, unique and ungeneralizable school settings: Katchadourian and Boli (1994: 175), for example, found that ten years after college graduation, 17 percent of the Stanford class of 1981 who were married had met as

undergraduates at the college (10 percent of the sample overall).

## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN COLLEGE EFFECTS ON MARRIAGE MARKET OUTCOMES

Over the course of the twentieth century, women have gained increased access to higher education. In addition, college educated women have dramatically increased their labor market participation and earnings relative to both earlier cohorts and men (Blau 1998). Our sample is uniquely positioned in this century of change, because it includes those who completed post-secondary education approximately between 1942 and 1973. The educational opportunities and cultural expectations of women's roles in our sample were only in latter years significantly affected by the liberalizing impact of the second wave of the feminist movement. However, the PSID is the only source of nationally representative data with specific college information for both the respondent and spouse. Thus it is the only dataset that can assess fully the effect of college stratification on marital choices at a particular historic period in the United States. While stratification processes change over time, we can still learn from the past, especially when we have no means of examining the present with existing data.

Gender differences in marriage market behavior were elaborately theorized and explored by Gary Becker (1976; 1981). According to Becker, individuals enter and remain in marriages only when such unions serve to optimize individual well-being. One way to maximize individual well-being in a dyadic relationship is to choose to pair with another individual whose resources and/or abilities are complementary to one's own. In a society where men traditionally earned significantly more than women, men's and women's marriage market behaviors were likely significantly different and structurally related to gender differences in individuals' comparative advantage (England and Budig 1998). Glass ceilings, occupational segregation,

academic degrees in fields with lower earnings, and hiring discrimination limited women's employment opportunities and earnings in the period under investigation (England 1992; McCall 2000; Nelson and Bridges 1999). Due to these disadvantages and social norms regarding motherhood, women were more likely to disrupt employment for childrearing and less likely to work full-time. All of these factors significantly reduced women's comparative advantage in the U.S. labor market for cohorts entering college prior to the mid-1970s.

Consequently, Becker argued that women will attempt to select spouses with higher earnings, whereas men will select partners with "higher non-market productivity." In Becker's view, women's non-market productivity is reflected by ascriptive characteristics such as being "beautiful, charming and talented (Becker 1976: 215),"<sup>3</sup> as well as the ability to raise a child successfully (Becker 1981). In addition to being chauvinistically limited, this theory of marriage market behavior ignored from the standpoint of stratification research a significant component of resources that individuals bring to the process of marital formation: social class background.<sup>4</sup> Individuals from privileged social classes have greater access to economic, social and cultural resources throughout their life-courses net of their own personal achievement. While social class background is a potential resource for both men and women in the marriage market, given women's reduced earning potential and reduced employment opportunities of the pre-1970 cohort, it may have played a greater role in men's mate selection historically, than in women's. Thus while attainment of elite higher education access might be considered a resource for both men and women, gender differences likely produce variation in how this resource would be deployed in association with attracting partners possessing desirable ascriptive or achievement characteristics.

In the context of structural constraints women faced in the pre-1970 era in access to

occupational opportunities, college stratification is likely to have different effects by gender on marriage market outcomes. We advance the following formal hypothesis: *Women who attend more elite colleges will have a greater likelihood of marrying men with higher achievement; men who attend elite colleges will have an increased likelihood of marrying women with greater ascriptive resources.* To the extent that elite college attendance improves one's position in marriage markets, women who have attended these institutions will choose partners who have higher earnings on average; men, however, will select partners with "higher non-market productivity". As stratification researchers, we expect selection along the dimension of "higher non-market productivity" to reflect in particular choice of spousal partners who carry more privileged social origins into the union.

## DATA AND METHODS

We explore the degree to which college stratification is related to marriage market outcomes of men and women by examining data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). PSID is a longitudinal survey begun in 1968 with a sample of 4,800 families. As members left core sample families to form their own families, individuals were included in follow-up surveys, increasing the number of families surveyed over the years. We limit our sample to heads of households and their spouses in 1975 or 1976 who were between the ages of 25 to 55 and had completed college. In our analysis we include cohabitation in our definition of marriage and cohabitating partners in our definition of spouses. The central focus of the PSID data is economic and demographic, including detailed information on socio-economic background, educational attainment, and employment outcomes for all members of the family unit. Equally critical to our interests, the PSID provides institutional characteristics of colleges

attended by respondents and their spouses in two survey years (1975 and 1976), which allows examination of the effects of college stratification on marital selection.

We operationalize college stratification by constructing a composite measure based on average freshmen college entrance examination score, expenditures per student, and a prestige ranking of the post-secondary institution reported.<sup>5</sup> Correlations between these three measures are high, producing similar results, regardless of whether the composite measure or any of the separate measures are used.<sup>6</sup> Our measure implicitly assumes a hierarchical ordering of institutions along a continuum – unfortunately, our sample size is not sufficiently large enough to allow investigation of more discreet categorical distinctions, such as whether an individual was enrolled at an ivy league or elite institution *per se*. If husband and wife have matching scores on all three of these measures, we assign individuals to a *spouse same college characteristics* marital choice category. While it is probable, given the dispersion of data values on these institutional characteristics that individuals assigned to this category actually attended the *same* institution, we are unable to determine definitively that such was the case.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout subsequent discussion of our statistical analyses, colleges and universities that are at least one standard deviation above the mean are referred to as “elite”, “highly selective”, “prestigious” or “higher status”; while those at least one standard deviation below the mean are referred to as “non-selective”, “non-prestigious” or “lower status”. Although these terms clearly represent different aspects of institutional characteristics, they are highly correlated and our college stratification measure incorporates each of them, thus justifying our use of the terms interchangeably to facilitate the rhetorical presentation of results. Again, however, we emphasize that our operationalization of college stratification is continuous as opposed to categorical in character. The appendix provides detailed information on coding of all variables

used in the analysis.

Our analysis proceeds in several steps, presenting descriptive findings on marital/cohabitation status and spousal educational characteristics, before examining a series of regression models on a set of dependent variables designed to capture the multi-dimensional effects of college stratification on individuals' marital choices and spousal characteristics. All analyses are done separately by gender. In addition to standard control variables (such as race, family economic background, SEI score of father's occupation, highest parental education, and residential location), we include an additional set of variables for characteristics known to affect marital choice (i.e., age, religion and immigrant status). Missing values for a range of control variables (financial origins, father's occupation, parental education, regional and residential location) were dealt with by using the mean substitution method: substituting means for the missing values and assigning dummy variables to the model (coded 1 when a substitution was made). Estimated probabilities of outcomes discussed in the text are calculated with all other variables set at their means. We present detailed descriptive statistics and further identification of variable coding in the appendix.

We present two sets of regression models estimating how college stratification is associated with the characteristics of an individual's spouse with sample sizes varying across models as a function of the differing sampling frames employed. First, we use multinomial logistic regression to model the effects of college stratification and other covariates on the relative likelihoods of a) an individual being married/cohabitating with an individual who was not a college graduate compared to either b) the individual not being married/cohabitating or c) being married/cohabitating with an individual who possessed a college degree. Second, for individuals whose spouse or cohabitating partners reported college attendance, we present results

from an OLS regression analysis on factors associated with a standardized measure of college stratification associated with the post-secondary institution that the spouse attended.

We further explore the role of college stratification in the determination of spousal socio-economic resources by presenting three additional regressions focusing on characteristics of the spouse's parents (as the family background of one's partner can affect the social, cultural and material resources he or she is able to draw on in a marriage) as well as the current earnings of the spouse. In this final set of analyses, we show results from a logistic regression predicting whether a spouse's financial origins were described as "wealthy" instead of "average" or "poor". In addition, we provide estimates from a logistic regression predicting whether either of a spouse's parents were college graduates. Lastly, for individuals whose spouses report earnings, we present an OLS regression on a spouse's average logged individual annual income over the three years following the report of information on the college attended (1975-1977).

A cautionary note is needed before we proceed to the discussion of results. Analyses in this paper rely on observational data and are designed primarily to provide descriptive identification of the associations between college stratification and marriage market outcomes. For example, spousal income may affect the likelihood that the couple stays together, and at the same time, marriage formation may influence spousal income. Our measure of spouse's income, therefore, may be both a cause and a consequence of marital union. Nevertheless, associations between college stratification and spousal income are still of inherent interest as the modeling captures (albeit imperfectly) the economic resources a spouse or partner brings into the union as a result of labor market activity. Although we do not identify causal mechanisms in our analyses, we make an important contribution to the literature by illuminating previously ignored associations between college stratification and marriage market outcomes. This is the first step

in understanding the role of college stratification in assortive mating, which necessarily precedes specification of causal mechanisms, a challenge that remains to be addressed in future research.

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics on marital/cohabitation status and spousal educational characteristics by gender for two different cohorts in the sample: individuals born 1920-1935 and those born 1936-1950. Female college graduates were more likely than male college graduates to not be living with a spouse or cohabitating with a partner (22.7 percent of female college graduates relative to 15.5 percent of male college graduates;  $t=2.42$ ). There is a significant difference in male college graduates independent living status across the two cohorts, although this is likely partially related to delayed age of marital formation in the sample, with the likelihood of residing independently increasing from 7.5 percent to 19.2 percent from the older to the younger cohorts ( $t=3.74$ ). Both male and female college graduates, who were either married or cohabitating, were likely living with someone who attended college. Strikingly, we found that significant numbers of college graduates (18 percent of men and 24 percent of women) were married to individuals from colleges with the same institutional characteristics as they themselves attended; given our interest in processes underlying educational homogamy, it is worth noting that this corresponds to slightly more than one-third of college educated homogamous pairs having attended colleges with the same characteristics. In addition, we found that across the two historic cohorts examined, the likelihood of being married or cohabitating with someone who attended a college with similar institutional characteristics was actually increasing. While the gender differences across cohorts are not significant, pooled male and female analysis indicates a significant increase in the percentage of college graduates

marrying/cohabitating with someone who attended a college with the same characteristics ( $t=2.38$ ).

[Table 1 about here]

Men and women college graduates significantly differed, however, on their willingness to marry or cohabit with an individual with no college experience: 29.3 percent of married/cohabitating male college graduates had spouses who were not college graduates, compared to 10.0 percent of married female college graduates ( $t=7.00$ ).<sup>8</sup> Relative to men, college-educated women were more likely to live alone rather than to be married or cohabitating with an individual who was not college educated. For both men and women the likelihood of residing in a union with an individual who was not college educated was lower among the younger cohort ( $t=2.72$  for a pooled male and female analysis). We conducted a set of supplementary analyses (results not shown) to further investigate these patterns.<sup>9</sup>

Table 2 identifies how college stratification and other factors are associated with marital/cohabitation status and the educational characteristics of spouses (Columns 1ab and 3ab). College stratification is unrelated to the likelihood that either a man or a woman will marry a spouse who is a college graduate, compared to being in a relationship with an individual without a college education. College stratification, however, is related to the likelihood that a female college graduate will choose to live alone as opposed to marrying or cohabitating with someone who is not college educated (Column 3a). Women attending higher status colleges either accumulate resources or develop tastes that increase the likelihood that they will choose to live independently rather than to enter a union with an individual with less education than themselves. The negative coefficient for age suggests that younger male and female college graduates are more likely living independently.

[Table 2 about here]

Table 2 also presents results examining factors associated with the institutional characteristics of the college the spouse attended for respondents who reported a spouse or partner with such characteristics. College stratification of respondent and marital partner are strongly associated with each other, suggesting that individuals who attend prestigious institutions tend to marry spouses from similar institutions.<sup>10</sup> Table 2 also indicates that women and men from more privileged social origins are more likely to marry or cohabitate with individuals from highly selective undergraduate institutions: women from wealthy family origins and men whose fathers held higher status occupations, and whom were married or cohabitating with a college educated partner, were more likely to be in a union with an individual who attended a higher status college.

Table 3 reports results from a series of regression analyses identifying how college stratification was associated with variation in a spouse or cohabitating partner's social origins – i.e., the likelihood that an individual would "marry into a good family" – as well as the spouse or partner's labor market success. While women's elite college attendance was associated with marrying or cohabitating with a man with higher subsequent annual income (Column 6), men's elite college attendance was associated with marrying or cohabitating with women of more privileged social origins (Columns 1 and 2). Male college graduates from highly selective colleges were more likely to marry/cohabitate with a woman from a wealthy family: a man who attended a highly selective college had a 19 percent greater likelihood of marrying or cohabitating with a woman from a wealthy background than did his counterpart with similar characteristics who attended a non-selective college (31 percent compared to 12 percent respectively).

[Table 3 about here]

Men attending prestigious colleges also were also more likely to marry/cohabitate with a woman from a highly educated family. A man who attended a prestigious college had a 27 percent probability of marrying or cohabitating with a woman who had a college educated parent, while a man who attended a non-prestigious college had only an 18 percent probability of the same outcome. It is likely that "marrying into" families with higher social status conferred upon male elite college graduates useful social and economic rewards that enhanced their own life-chances as well as the life-chances of any children that the romantic union might have produced.

The last column of Table 3 shows that women attending prestigious colleges married or cohabitated with spouses who had significantly higher subsequent annual incomes: their spouses or partners had approximately 14 percent higher annual earnings than spouses or partners of women who attended non-prestigious colleges. Women who graduated from more elite colleges were thus likely to marry/cohabitate with individuals who subsequently provided significantly greater access to material resources through their labor market success.

## CONCLUSION

The results from this study demonstrate that attendance at elite colleges structures individuals' non-occupational life chances through increasing the likelihood of ultimately being married to socially privileged spouses. Our hypothesis was largely supported. As predicted, women's elite college attendance was associated with marrying a man with higher subsequent annual income, and men's elite college attendance was associated with marrying a woman from more privileged social origins.

Identification of gender differences in preferences for achievement and ascriptive characteristics provides a challenge to earlier sociological examinations of marital formation that has emphasized their homogamous character. In prior work both Mare (1990) and Kalmijn (1991a) identified estimates of ascriptive and achievement based homogamy on the assumption of gender-neutral matching preferences. While our research does not offer a direct empirical challenge to the central findings of Mare and Kalmijn's earlier estimates of change over time in ascriptive and achievement based homogamous characteristics, our findings do suggest the possibility that the fit of their models might be improved by eliminating the assumption that the sorting process is gender neutral.

Since educational characteristics of the marriage market affect the extent of educational homogamy (Lewis and Oppenheimer 2000; Rockwell 1976), we reiterate the earlier stated qualification that our findings are based on the experience of cohorts of college graduates who completed their post-secondary education between 1942 and 1973. Given changes in college completion, marital patterns, fertility, and women's labor force participation, the overall results and gender differences identified here may well be particular to the cohorts examined. In previous decades when middle class women had lower rates of labor market participation, men with more elite educational training had incentives to marry women with greater ascriptive resources, and women had incentives to choose men with higher individual achievement and related occupational prospects. Today, higher rates of women's labor market participation, particularly in professional and managerial occupations, likely produce more gender neutral structuring of material incentives for marriage market selection. However, due to glass ceilings, occupational segregation, academic preparation in non-economically rewarding subject matter, or other factors, women are still under-represented in positions with the highest levels of

earnings (Kaufman 2002, England 1992). In addition, Oppenheimer (1988; 1997) has convincingly challenged the thesis that women's increased labor market participation and earnings have discouraged marriage formation and encouraged marital instability. Thus, while it is likely that the effects of education on marital choice are becoming more gender neutral, this possibility remains to be empirically assessed.

Notably, educational homogamy and the importance of cultural characteristics in partner selection have increased over time (Kalmijn 1994; Rockwell 1976). Also, schools today provide the main arena for marital homogamy, even more so than workplaces, neighborhoods, common family networks, and voluntary associations (Kalmijn, 1998; Kalmijn and Flap 2001). Together these findings imply that the association between college stratification and marital outcomes may be stronger today than in the past. Such a conclusion is also consistent with our finding in Table 1 that college graduates in the more recent cohort examined were more likely married/cohabitating with an individual who attended a college with similar institutional characteristics than in the earlier cohort. In addition, research on cohabitating couples, which have become increasingly common, provides inconclusive evidence regarding the prevalence of educational homogamy in cohabitating as opposed to married couples (see Blackwell and Lichter 2000; Qian and Preston 1993; Schoen and Weinick 1993). Therefore, it may be that the marital patterns we have identified are becoming more gender neutral, but that the effects of college stratification on marital selection will have in general persisted. Unfortunately, patterns for current cohorts remain only hypotheses since no nationally representative data is currently available to empirically identify these patterns.

Following our findings of the effect of college stratification on marital selection in earlier cohorts and conflicting hypotheses about recent trends, we believe it worthwhile for national

studies to extend their surveys to address spousal educational characteristics beyond years of education completed. If national studies, which already collect detailed information on respondent's education, included additional questions about spousal education, researchers could explore the extent to which the patterns we identified have changed or persisted over time.

Marital markets constitute themselves as active features of social stratification processes, and mechanisms of their functioning thus have consequences for both intergenerational and intra-generational inequality. Following Blau and Duncan (1967: 346), we therefore note the pressing need for more focused and comprehensive examination of this subject by demographers and social stratification scholars.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Calculated from Digest of Education Statistics 2001, Table 317, and Ivy-league university websites. See also Clotfelter (1996).

<sup>2</sup> While in 1990 tuition and fees at elite college were approximately 700 percent higher than those at a public university, in 1976 the difference was significantly less: Harvard was 600 percent higher; Duke, 475 percent; and the University of Chicago, 510 percent (calculated from Clotfelter 1996, Table 3A.5 and Digest of Education Statistics 1995, Table 306).

<sup>3</sup> On the role of physical appearances in mate selection, see also Stevens, Owens and Schaefer 1990, and Murstein 1976.

<sup>4</sup> For an alternative critique and explanation of marital assortative mating, see Oppenheimer 1988.

<sup>5</sup> One standard deviation on the expenditures per student variable implies an approximate doubling of educational investment from the 1975 average of around \$2,100.

<sup>6</sup> Pearson correlation coefficients are as follows (\*\*\*)  $p < 0.001$ ):

	PEER CLIMATE	RESOURCES	PRESTIGE
COLLEGE STRATIFICATION	0.86***	0.87***	0.91***
PRESTIGE	0.77***	0.70***	
RESOURCES	0.56***		

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<sup>7</sup> Assignment to *spouse same college characteristics* variable is based on matching data on three separate measures, we did not have access to data with the actual name of college to check our assignment. Although data values were quite detailed on test score and expenditures, a small percentage of our respondents with identical values on these three variables likely did not actually attend the same college institution.

<sup>8</sup> This gender difference in the descriptive data is partially attributable to the fact that in earlier historical cohorts men had a greater likely of marrying a non-college educated women, given that earlier in the century women had lower rates of post-secondary educational attainment relative to men.

<sup>9</sup> First, we established that college stratification was not associated with significant delaying of age of first marriage. Exposure to elite education therefore itself might increase an individual's ability to locate and attract a broader range of possible partners. This variation in college attended and spousal selection, however, could also reflect variation in the size of colleges. In addition, college stratification has affects on the likelihood that an individual will never marry or will end his/her marriage in a divorce. Seven percent of men and nine percent of women who attended highly selective colleges never married compared to only three percent of men and women who attended non-selective colleges. While individuals at elite colleges might be choosing to pursue career goals at the expense of marriage, this effect could also reflect the greater acceptance of alternative lifestyles other than traditional heterosexual marriages in these educational settings. Elite college attendance has contrary effects on male and female likelihood

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of having a first marriage end in divorce: female college graduates were much more likely to have their first marital union end in divorce when they were educated in highly selective colleges, while college selectivity had no effect on men's likelihood of divorce. Women who attended highly selective colleges had a 37 percent probability of experiencing divorce while women who attended non-selective colleges had only a 15 percent likelihood of the same outcome. This greater propensity for divorce is possibly a result of female elite college graduate's willingness to leave marriages based on their calculation that their acquired credentials would provide increased opportunities for economic resources outside of marriage. Variation in the likelihood of divorce could also be related to marital dynamics produced by the different types of spousal matches associated with more elite education identified in subsequent sections.

Although college stratification has no effect on individual's likelihood of never marrying, social origins affect the likelihood of marriage formation for both women and men. In addition, social origins influence men's likelihood of having their first marriage end in divorce.

<sup>10</sup> Weaker but similar patterns of positive associations are found when marital couples who attended the same college were excluded from the analysis. The coefficients and standard errors for these regressions for men and women respectively were: 0.279 (0.075) and 0.165 (0.136). That is, homogamy along the dimension of college stratification was present regardless of whether the actual match occurred at the post-secondary institution attended.

Table 1. Cross Tabulations of Spousal Educational Characteristics for Two Cohorts of College Graduates Age 25-55 in 1975 (Panel Study of Income Dynamics)

**A. Male College Graduates:**

	No <u>Spouse</u>	Spouse Different College <u>Characteristics</u>	Spouse Same College <u>Characteristics</u>	Spouse Did Not <u>Attend College</u>	<u>N</u>
Cohort born 1936-1950	19.2% <sup>a</sup>	35.0%	20.0%	25.9% <sup>b</sup>	315
Cohort born 1920-1935	7.5% <sup>ab</sup>	42.1%	13.5%	36.9% <sup>b</sup>	143
All	15.5% <sup>b</sup>	37.2%	18.0% <sup>b</sup>	29.3% <sup>b</sup>	458

**B. Female College Graduates:**

	No <u>Spouse</u>	Spouse Different College <u>Characteristics</u>	Spouse Same College <u>Characteristics</u>	Spouse Did Not <u>Attend College</u>	<u>N</u>
Cohort born 1936-1950	22.1%	42.6%	26.6%	8.6% <sup>b</sup>	211
Cohort born 1920-1935	23.9% <sup>b</sup>	43.7%	18.7%	13.6% <sup>b</sup>	82
All	22.7% <sup>b</sup>	42.9%	24.4% <sup>b</sup>	10.0% <sup>b</sup>	293

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<sup>a</sup> percentage cohort difference statistically significant ( $p < .05$ )

<sup>b</sup> percentage gender difference statistically significant ( $p < .05$ )

Table 2: Results from a Multinomial Logistic Regression Predicting Spousal College Attainment or Non-Marital/Cohabitation Status and an O.L.S. Regression Predicting Spousal College Stratification Score of Male and Female College Graduates<sup>1</sup>

	Male College Graduates			Female College Graduates		
	No Spouse (1A)	College Grad. Spouse (1B)	Spouse College Strat. (2)	No Spouse (3A)	College Grad. Spouse (3B)	Spouse College Strat. (4)
<i>School variation</i>						
<b>College Stratification</b>	<b>0.194</b> <b>(0.173)</b>	<b>-0.053</b> <b>(0.139)</b>	<b>0.483**</b> <b>(0.056)</b>	<b>0.845*</b> <b>(0.405)</b>	<b>0.109</b> <b>(0.373)</b>	<b>0.497**</b> <b>(0.081)</b>
<i>Individual characteristics</i>						
Age	-0.093** (0.023)	0.017 (0.014)	-0.004 (0.007)	-0.064* (0.028)	-0.050* (0.025)	0.015* (0.007)
African-American	0.637 (1.014)	0.184 (0.807)	-0.888* (0.426)	-0.316 (1.009)	-0.161 (0.911)	-0.221 (0.400)
Catholic	-0.751 (0.503)	-0.353 (0.321)	-0.282 (0.144)	2.262 (1.277)	1.302 (1.235)	-0.064 (0.179)
Protestant	-0.270 (0.434)	-0.297 (0.301)	-0.081 (0.133)	-0.656 (0.591)	-0.806 (0.506)	0.200 (0.144)
<i>Social origins</i>						
Origins wealthy	0.215 (0.497)	0.524 (0.381)	-0.271 (0.157)	-0.932 (0.908)	-1.146 (0.825)	0.455* (0.218)
Origins average	-0.511 (0.483)	0.045 (0.318)	-0.267 (0.145)	-0.100 (0.716)	-0.176 (0.657)	0.111 (0.170)
Father's occupation	0.005 (0.014)	0.006 (0.009)	0.009* (0.004)	0.009 (0.021)	0.023 (0.019)	-0.002 (0.005)
Parent's education	-0.043 (0.070)	0.082 (0.043)	-0.002 (0.020)	-0.097 (0.116)	0.02482 (0.103)	0.076 (0.026)
Rural origins	-0.870 (0.579)	0.259 (0.366)	-0.425* (0.173)	-1.730* (0.809)	-2.085** (0.709)	-0.018 (0.224)
Suburban origins	-0.688 (0.431)	0.235 (0.294)	-0.160 (0.128)	-0.622 (0.705)	0.670 (0.642)	-0.191 (0.145)
Northeast	-0.704 (0.514)	-0.033 (0.328)	-0.064 (0.145)	0.278 (0.786)	0.434 (0.721)	0.264 (0.169)
South	-0.134 (0.497)	-0.287 (0.339)	-0.345* (0.153)	0.965 (0.693)	0.584 (0.605)	0.141 (0.175)
West	0.073 (0.534)	-0.230 (0.400)	0.127 (0.184)	0.947 (1.168)	1.099 (1.064)	0.146 (0.219)
Immigrant	-1.364 (1.219)	-0.384 (0.616)	-0.096 (0.432)	-a-	-a-	2.352 (2.211)
Intercept	3.940** (1.341)	0.022 (0.901)	0.393 (0.409)	5.321** (2.027)	3.858* (1.819)	-0.569 (0.454)
R2	0.087		0.390	0.190		0.375
N	458		244	293		185

\*p<.05; \*\*p<0.01

.a = insufficient cases to estimate

<sup>1</sup> = Column 1, 3, 5 and 7 are logistic regressions with R<sup>2</sup> referring to McFadden's Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> measure.

Table 3: Results from a Set of Logistic Regression Models Predicting Spousal Parental Characteristics and an O.L.S. Regression Predicting Spousal Earnings of Male and Female College Graduates<sup>1</sup>

	Male College Graduates			Female College Graduates		
	Spouse Family Wealthy	Spouse Parent's Col. Grad.	Spouse Income 1975-77	Spouse Family Wealthy	Spouse Parent's Col. Grad.	Spouse Income 1975-77
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>School variation</i>						
<b>College Stratification</b>	<b>0.612**</b> <b>(0.200)</b>	<b>0.262*</b> <b>(0.131)</b>	<b>0.001</b> <b>(0.084)</b>	<b>-0.212</b> <b>(0.290)</b>	<b>0.015</b> <b>(0.206)</b>	<b>0.143*</b> <b>(0.062)</b>
<i>Individual characteristics</i>						
Age	-0.009 (0.022)	-0.038* (0.016)	-0.001 (0.011)	-0.019 (0.022)	-0.028 (0.019)	0.010 (0.006)
African-American	-0.822 (1.586)	-0.021 (1.203)	-0.302 (0.716)	-0.497 (0.810)	0.852 (0.799)	0.133 (0.255)
Catholic	0.279 (0.443)	0.580 (0.324)	0.051 (0.231)	-1.044* (0.522)	-0.885 (0.539)	0.094 (0.140)
Protestant	0.193 (0.404)	-0.487 (0.327)	0.227 (0.207)	-0.384 (0.403)	0.527 (0.360)	-0.046 (0.111)
<i>Social origins</i>						
Origins wealthy	1.446** (0.535)	0.184 (0.388)	0.046 (0.257)	1.064 (0.660)	0.225 (0.578)	-0.187 (0.171)
Origins average	0.444 (0.510)	0.017 (0.354)	-7.106* (0.222)	0.547 (0.526)	0.123 (0.468)	-3.234 (0.135)
Father's occupation	-0.008 (0.013)	0.005 (0.010)	0.167 (0.007)	0.010 (0.013)	0.012 (0.012)	0.120 (0.004)
Parent's education	0.035 (0.059)	0.057 (0.048)	0.472 (0.031)	0.020 (0.069)	0.008 (0.074)	-0.004 (0.021)
Rural origins	0.324 (0.573)	0.257 (0.427)	1.220 (0.280)	0.567 (0.665)	-0.707 (0.545)	-1.836 (0.166)
Suburban origins	0.041 (0.383)	0.415 (0.299)	-0.871 (0.206)	0.571 (0.404)	-0.816* (0.386)	-6.896* (0.114)
Northeast	0.157 (0.424)	-0.552 (0.349)	1.036 (0.233)	0.859 (0.505)	0.116 (0.444)	0.643 (0.131)
South	0.340 (0.448)	-0.218 (0.376)	-0.646 (0.255)	0.260 (0.469)	0.234 (0.446)	-5.317 (0.135)
West	0.157 (0.560)	0.379 (0.406)	-2.628 (0.305)	0.429 (0.657)	0.795 (0.565)	2.640 (0.173)
Immigrant	-0.578 (0.880)	-0.254 (0.669)	-7.958 (0.457)	2.413 (1.612)	-2.072 (12.640)	10.692 (0.556)
Intercept	-2.393 (1.428)	-0.979 (0.980)	8.509** (0.655)	-2.087 (1.407)	-0.638 (1.200)	10.363** (0.369)
R2	0.107	0.093	0.052	0.113	0.088	0.245
N	329	399	269	223	231	209

\* p<.05; \*\* p<.01

<sup>1</sup> = Columns 1-2 and 4-5 are results from logistic regressions; columns 3 and 6 are O.L.S. regressions.

For logistic regressions R<sup>2</sup> refers to McFadden's Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> measure.

Table A-1. Descriptive Statistics of College Graduates Age 25-55 in 1975 (Panel Study of Income Dynamics)

	<b>Men</b>			<b>Women</b>		
	Mean	S.D.	N	Mean	S.D.	N
<i>Individual characteristics</i>						
Age	36.913	9.318	458	35.959	9.426	293
African-American	0.018	0.139	458	0.051	0.228	293
Catholic	0.234	0.436	458	0.200	0.413	293
Protestant	0.319	0.480	458	0.333	0.486	293
<i>Social origins</i>						
Origins wealthy	0.291	0.468	458	0.183	0.399	293
Origins average	0.436	0.511	458	0.498	0.516	293
Father's occupation	36.086	15.204	458	40.480	18.089	293
Parent's education	12.223	3.316	458	13.312	3.029	293
Rural	0.179	0.395	458	0.172	0.390	293
Suburban	0.353	0.492	458	0.355	0.493	293
Northeast	0.292	0.468	458	0.276	0.461	293
South	0.217	0.424	458	0.245	0.444	293
West	0.125	0.341	458	0.093	0.299	293
Immigrant	0.035	0.189	458	0.012	0.114	293
<i>School variation</i>						
College stratification	0.000	1.000	458	0.000	1.000	293
<i>Dependent variables</i>						
Marital/cohabitation status			458			293
No spouse	0.155	0.363		0.227	0.419	
College graduate spouse	0.552	0.498		0.673	0.470	
Spouse non-college graduate	0.293	0.456		0.299	0.456	
Spouse same college characteristics	0.180	0.395	458	0.244	0.443	293
Spousal college stratification	0.000	1.000	244	0.000	1.000	185
Spousal individual income (1975-1977)	8.810	1.389	269	10.511	0.731	209
Spousal family origins wealthy	0.164	0.370	329	0.297	0.457	223
Spousal parent college graduate	0.223	0.420	399	0.250	0.441	231

Table A-2: Description of Variable Coding

*Dependent Variables*

Marital/cohabitation status	Categorical variable coded for spouse/cohabitation: none reported, spouse college graduate, spouse non college graduate.
Spouse same college characteristics	Dummy variable (coded 1) if respondent and spouse college characteristics match.
Spouse college graduate	Dummy variable (coded 1) if respondent's spouse is a college graduate
Spousal college stratification	Standardized score of the quality of the college attended by the respondent's spouse, indexed on prestige of college, expenditures per student, and average incoming student test score
Spousal individual income (1975-77)	Natural log of respondent's spouse's wage averaged across three years, 1975, 1976, 1977
Spouse wealthy family origins	Dummy variable (coded 1) is spouse's family origins reported as wealthy.
Spousal parent college graduate	Dummy variable (coded 1) if respondent's spouse's father graduated from college

*School Variation*

College stratification	Standardized score indexed on prestige of college, expenditures per student, and average incoming student test score
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*Individual Characteristics*

Age	Age (in years) of respondent
African American	Dummy variable (coded 1) for African Americans
Catholic	Dummy variable (coded 1) for Catholics
Protestant	Dummy variable (coded 1) for Protestants

*Social Origins*

Origins wealthy	Dummy variable (coded 1) if subjective reports of wealthy origins.
Origins average	Dummy variable (coded 1) if subjective reports of average origins.
Father's occupation	Prestige score of respondent's father's occupation based on Duncan SEI scores of equivalent 1980 occupations
Parents' education	Respondent's mother's or father's highest years of education
Rural origins	Dummy variable (coded 1) if origin family lived in a rural region
Suburban origins	Dummy variable (coded 1) if origin family lived in a suburb
Northeast	Percentage of time in Northeast region (Central region omitted).
South	Percentage of time in southern region (Central region omitted)
West	Percentage of time in western region (Central region omitted)
Immigrant	Dummy variable (coded 1) if respondent is an immigrant to the United States