

The Hispanic Health Paradox

The “Hispanic Health Paradox” refers to the finding that Hispanics in the United States tend to have relatively low mortality and better health than one might expect. The long-standing worry, however, has been that various data artifacts might exaggerate the health of Hispanics and create the misleading appearance of a paradox.

Using new methods that reduce some of these problems, Fernando Riosmena, Rebecca Wong, and Alberto Palloni show that the paradox is likely real, although it mainly takes on a “weak form.” That is, the authors don’t find that Mexican immigrants are typically more healthy than non-Hispanic whites (the “strong form” paradox), but they do find that a health advantage appears when Mexican immigrants are compared with non-Hispanic whites of similar socioeconomic standing (the “weak form” paradox).

Why are immigrants more healthy? Although many causes are likely driving this result, the effects of various types of selection emerge most clearly, including (a) the tendency of healthier Mexicans to emigrate to the United States, and (b) the tendency of less healthy immigrants to return to Mexico. If such selective forces prove to be dominant, the paradox mainly becomes a culling story about how the United States attracts healthy people and expels less healthy ones.

Riosmena, F., Wong, R. & Palloni, A. 2013. “Migration Selection, Protection, and Acculturation in Health: A Binational Perspective on Older Adults.” *Demography* 50 (3), pp. 1039–64.
<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2F13524-012-0178-9>

A Newly Democratic Elite?

In recent years, there have been growing concerns that social mobility may be declining in the United States, indeed even President Obama has expressed just such worries. Although there are many studies of mobility among the general population, we don’t know as much about mobility among the very wealthy. How much mobility is there into the ranks of the super-rich?

Using data from *Forbes* magazine on the 400 wealthiest individuals in the United States, Steven Kaplan and Joshua Rauh find that the super-rich are not quite as exclusive as they once were. Whereas 60 percent of the super-rich in 1982 had super-rich parents, only 32 percent in 2011 had such rarefied origins. Are the new super-rich now drawn from poor or middle-class families? Of course not! Rather, there’s just a slight downward drift in their origins, with some of the slots once filled by the children of the super-rich instead being filled by children from moderately wealthy backgrounds. The upshot: The new super-rich are becoming a slightly more democratic class.

Kaplan, S. N. & Rauh, J. 2013. “It’s the Market: The Broad-Based Rise in the Return to Top Talent.” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27 (3), pp. 35–56. <http://www.aeaweb.org/articles.php?doi=10.1257/jep.27.3.35>

Caring about Polarization

The ongoing polarization of the U.S. job structure has to count as one of the most famous social science facts of our time. But what accounts for polarization? Although it’s often argued that computerization and related technological changes are behind the rising demand for high-wage jobs and the deskilling of middle-wage jobs, the evidence for this account is still incomplete.

Using the Current Population Survey, Rachel Dwyer shows that the expansion of care work (e.g., child care, teaching, health care) over the last 25 years contributed to 60 percent of the job growth in the bottom wage quintile, 40 percent in the fourth quintile, and 20 percent in the top quintile. In large measure, the story of polarization is accordingly a story of the expansion of care work, a story that depends less on technological change than the rise of the healthcare industry, the takeoff in female labor force participation, and the consequent need to outsource care.

Dwyer, R. E. 2013. “The Care Economy: Gender, Economic Restructuring, and Job Polarization in the U.S. Labor Market.” *American Sociological Review* 78 (3), pp. 390–416.
<http://asr.sagepub.com/content/78/3/390>