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Linking Social and Spatial Mobility in Immigrant Incorporation

It has been increasingly realized that prospects for immigrant incorporation are contingent on where immigrants are located within the U.S.[1] There are several theoretical implications of this realization for assessments of immigrant economic progress. First, comparisons of immigrant/native wage gaps should take into account the different residential patterns of immigrants and natives in the United States. Second, immigrants' decisions on where to locate and whether or not to move should be related to the different opportunities available in different labor markets. This paper seeks to ascertain 1) the extent to which immigrant-native wage differentials are the product of the differing internal geography of immigrant and native-born groups in the U.S. and 2) the extent to which immigrants' wages are sensitive to the selectivity of internal migration. As such, this paper attempts to re-focus some of the discussion on immigrant economic incorporation with an understanding of how the geography of immigrants and natives in the U.S. matters both for immigrant incorporation, and our discussions of these processes. In this paper, I first weight wage regressions by relative shares of immigrant and native-born groups by major metropolitan area in order to determine the extent to which geography plays a part in the wage gaps between immigrants and natives. Second, the importance of internal mobility in determining wage outcomes is assessed through a two-stage Heckman model which examines the selectivity of internal migration in determining labor market outcomes.

I am informed by both spatial assimilation and labor market inequality perspectives. Much interest in immigration studies has focused in two main areas: 1) the

[1] See, for example, the contributors to Waldinger, 2001.

residential mobility and resulting concentration or dispersion of the foreign-born population, and 2) the socioeconomic mobility and social integration of the foreign-born. These two concerns have been considered inextricably linked via theories of spatial assimilation (DeWind and Kasinitz 1997). Thus, the concern of immigration theorists has often been one of where immigrants are locating, and how this is related to the process of integration. Spatial assimilation theory, as articulated by Massey(1985), posited that as immigrants experienced cultural adaptation and gained socioeconomic status they would move from highly-concentrated central city locations to less ethnically-isolated suburbs. As a result of this move, they would experience further acculturation and provide opportunities for structural assimilation for their children, mainly through proximity to the native-born. In this classical articulation, spatial assimilation is very much a local process. I suggest, however, that spatial assimilation can inform research on immigrant mobility and settlement on other scales. Logan and Alba's locational attainment models (Alba and Logan 1992, Logan et al 1996), for example, could certainly be extended to an inter-metropolitan level, such that immigrants evaluate how their individual characteristics might translate into different labor market outcomes in different contexts when making a choice of where to locate, and whether or not to move. Spatial mobility may in fact be central to social mobility for immigrants as well as for natives, especially if much of the wage gap between immigrants and natives is due to immigrants' concentration in some of the most unequal metropolitan labor markets (Clark 2001, Ellis 2001).

I first construct a series of log wage regressions for 25-64 year-old men in the labor force and with positive hours and wages data from the 2000 PUMS. The first model compares Mexican-born and U.S.-born individuals, and includes covariates on education, U.S. employment experience, age, marital status, and time in the U.S. (for immigrants only). The sample is then geographically weighted such that U.S.-born individuals have the same geographic distribution as Mexican-born individuals. The models are weighted, then, by relative shares of immigrant and native-born groups by major metropolitan area in order to determine the extent to which geography plays a part in the wage gaps between immigrants and natives. The process is repeated for comparison of native-born and Chinese-born individuals, and for women in each case.

Comparison of the uniformly-weighted models with the geo-weighted models shows that the difference in wages between immigrants and natives is abated when their different residential distributions are taken into account. More interestingly, changes in the parameter estimates on covariates are interpretable in terms of the different payoffs to individual characteristics – payoffs that accrue differently to natives and immigrants in large part because of where they live.

The different residential geographies of natives and immigrants are in large part the product of internal migration. In keeping with the preceding discussion of spatial assimilation approaches, I attempt to determine whether inter-metropolitan migration is associated with wage outcomes. Having said this, it is expected that both absolute and relative wages are affected by the selectivity of migration, such that those immigrants who move are those who are most likely to gain from their mobility. As such, I utilize a two-stage Heckman model (Heckman and Sedlacek 1990) to examine the selectivity of internal migration in determining labor market outcomes. This is necessary in order to correct from the bias accruing to connections between spatial and social mobility in which large numbers of the sample do not move, and in which the decision to move is likely dependent on the expectation that there are wage returns to doing so. I suspect that these models will demonstrate a strong selectivity component. Moreover, they provide a provisional means of assessing the payoffs to migrating versus staying in place for immigrants with similar characteristics. Because I suspect that immigrants' relative position in labor markets may be at least as important as their absolute position, I also estimate models in which the dependent variable is a measure of relative position vis-à-vis natives in the second-stage mobility models.[2] This second part of this paper then, allows investigation of whether there are payoffs in terms of economic mobility to spatial mobility, in line with an expanded spatial assimilation approach. Additionally, the selectivity component provides an initial foray into how immigrants respond to labor markets in which they may have considerably different opportunities, both in terms of absolute wages and relative position.

[2] The relative wage covariate is estimated by subtracting a ratio of the overall distribution of the immigrant group's wages to native-born white wages (at origin) from the same ratio at destination. Ratios of overall group distributions of wages are evaluated rather than mean wages in order to better examine group labor market opportunities. Native-born whites are used as the reference wage distribution in that they are likely to have the highest overall wage level across metropolitan areas.

Spatial assimilation theorists have advanced understanding of the relationships between immigrant mobility and locational attainment at intra-metropolitan scales. However, much of the concern with immigrant incorporation has been concerned with how immigrants fare economically when compared with the native-born both in and across metropolitan areas. Questions of whether or not immigrants are "catching up with" natives should take into account the distinctive geographies of immigrant and native settlement, as well as the internal migration that effects residential patterns, and immigrant responses to differently racialized labor markets that provide very different opportunities to immigrants and natives. In this paper, I explore connections between social and spatial mobility for immigrants in the U.S., hoping to further discussions of immigrant incorporation with considerations of contextual inequality.

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