The Intersection of Economic, Social and Cultural Capital: How Family Socioeconomic Status is Moderated by Family Structure for Children’s Education

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ABSTRACT

The dramatic changes in family formation and dissolution over the last fifty years have the potential to alter social mobility processes in the U.S. Using data on a cohort who came of age during this era of demographic change from the National Education Longitudinal Study, I examine whether the effect of parents’ socioeconomic status (SES) for children’s educational outcomes varies by family structure. Across multiple measures of educational achievement and attainment, children in single mother families experience lower returns to increases in parents’ SES relative to children in two biological parent families. At the bottom of the socioeconomic distribution, however, this weaker intergenerational transmission translates into greater achievements and attainments among children in single mother families relative to those with two biological parents. The manuscript then investigates how this moderation unfolds by investigating whether family structure moderates the association between family SES and parents’ educational expectations, parental control, and the likelihood parents utilize the “concerted cultivation” parenting style, a form of cultural capital.