

## Chapter 2

# Intergenerational Transfers of Advantage: Parents' Education and Children's Educational and Employment Outcomes in Alberta<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Sociologists have been studying patterns of status attainment in the United States (e.g., Sewell, Haller & Ohelndorf, 1970) and Canada (e.g., Boyd, Pineo & Porter, 1981) for many decades, asking why some people obtain more education and, in turn, higher status occupations than others. This research tradition has revealed consistent patterns of **intergenerational transmission of advantage**, that is, a strong tendency for the children of more educated parents (with higher status occupations) to themselves acquire more education and, hence, better jobs (Potter and Roksa, 2013).

This paper examines the links between parents' and children's social standing in Alberta in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a time when postsecondary educational opportunities in the province were expanding and the economy was very strong, offering many employment opportunities to young people. Data from a seven-year longitudinal survey of Alberta high school graduates are analyzed to see if patterns of intergenerational transfer of advantage are altered in such a context.

Following the lead of previous researchers, we focus on university education but also ask

whether a trades-related postsecondary education provides an alternative pathway to employment success in a provincial economy dominated by resource extraction industries (particularly the oil and natural gas industries). In discussing the data patterns, we draw on a vocabulary of concepts developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to describe patterns of cultural reproduction of social inequalities or, in other words, the intergenerational transmission of advantage.

### **“Getting Ahead” in Canada**

A century ago, only a tiny minority of young Canadians – typically men, and those from the wealthiest families – went on to college or university after completing high school. Most young people did not finish high school, since this was required for few jobs. But by the 1980s, Canada’s occupational structure had changed dramatically (Krahn, Hughes & Lowe, 2015), and typical advice to teenagers from parents and teachers had become “get a good education if you want to get ahead in life.” This was good advice indeed since, today, on average, those with a college or university education earn considerably more from their jobs (Boothby & Drewes 2006; Frenette, 2014).

The rapid expansion of Canada’s postsecondary educational system in the post-WWII era (Davies & Guppy, 2006) meant that university and college education was now more accessible to young people from working class and lower middle class families. Even so, one of the strongest predictors of a young person completing university continues to be whether one or both of her or his parents had acquired a university degree. For example, a recent national study of 25 to 39 year old Canadians revealed that 56 percent of those from families where at least one parent had finished university had themselves acquired a degree. In contrast, only 23 percent of similar age Canadians from families where neither parent had a degree had personally completed university

(Turcotte, 2011). Thus, we continue to see the inter-generational transfer of educational advantages in Canada. In turn, young people with university degrees are more likely to get better jobs (Krahn et al., 2015).

University-educated (and typically more affluent) parents pass along advantages to their children in various ways (Davies & Guppy, 2006; Mueller, 2008). They can more easily pay for their children to attend college or university but also, much earlier, for tutoring that can improve a child's chances of getting accepted into a better-resourced elementary or secondary school (Lee & Burkam, 2002). In addition, children of university-educated parents are more likely to have completed academic (non-vocational) high school programs that are required for university entrance (Taylor & Krahn, 2009), no doubt because their parents, with greater knowledge of how the education system works (Lareau, 2003), insisted that they do so. University-educated parents also instill higher educational and occupational aspirations in their children (Krahn, 2009), and serve as useful role models and information sources.

Vocational postsecondary education (technical school training or apprenticeships), however, has generally been under-valued in Canada (Lyons, Randhawa & Paulson, 1991). Shuetze (2003: 71) calls it the "poor cousin" of academic (i.e., university) education, noting that (middle class) parents and high school teachers typically encourage young people to choose university (or a community college) over vocational training. At the same time, because they do not have the advantages of their middle class peers, working class youth are more frequently "streamed" into high school vocational programs (Taylor & Krahn, 2009) that close doors into university and open doors into postsecondary technical training. If they do want to continue their education, working class youth might also choose vocational postsecondary training because it costs less and is less foreign to them (Lehmann, 2014).

Because of the more limited appeal of vocational education to most Canadian youth, and because Canadian employers have been reluctant to invest in training for their employees (McKenna, 2013), Canada has relied heavily on immigration for skilled trades workers (Lyons et al., 1991). In contrast, countries like Germany have an extensive vocational educational system (particularly apprenticeships) tightly integrated with industry needs for employees (Heinz, 2003; Lehmann, 2007a), leading to higher occupational status for the skilled trades.

Workers with skilled trades certification (e.g., carpenters, electricians, pipefitters), a subset of those with any type of vocational postsecondary training, account for less than 10 percent of total employment in Canada today (Pyper, 2008). In Alberta, the trades comprise a higher proportion of total employment (15%). Most workers in the skilled trades are men. While some workers with postsecondary vocational training can earn high salaries in some settings, national Census data from 1981 to 2001 show that the “earnings premium” for trades certification (compared to only a high school education) was not as large as was the earnings advantage received by workers with a college diploma (Boothby & Drewes, 2006). For example, in 2000, for 25 to 34 year old male workers, those with trades training earned 15 percent more than those with only high school education while those with a college diploma earned 19 percent more. For 25 to 34 year old women, the earnings premiums for trades and community college training were 5 percent and 20 percent, respectively. The earnings premium in 2000 for young workers with a university degree (compared to only high school education) was much higher, 52 percent for men and 61 percent for women.

Along with parents’ education, a number of other factors shape postsecondary educational attainment in Canada and, through it, labour market outcomes. Until a few decades ago, women were less likely than men to complete university. Today women are more likely to

attend and complete university (Turcotte, 2011). Nevertheless, young women continue to be over-represented in traditional “female” university programs such as education, nursing and the humanities which, on average, lead to lower paying jobs compared to the jobs (e.g., in science or engineering) typically obtained by university-educated men (Davies & Guppy, 2006; Krahn et al., 2015). Women are also less likely than men to obtain technical postsecondary qualifications which also lead to higher-paying employment in some settings.

Previous research has highlighted problems faced by rural youth seeking a university or college education (Looker & Dwyer, 1998; Andres & Looker, 2001; Mueller, 2008). Unlike their urban counterparts who might have several postsecondary options in their community, rural youth typically must leave home to continue their education, making the transition more difficult and costly. This problem is not as severe in provinces where community colleges have been established in smaller urban centres (Frenette, 2003).

Aboriginal youth face the most barriers to acquiring a good education (Davies & Guppy, 1998). They are more likely to have grown up in poor families and also more likely to be living in smaller rural communities or Indian reserves, far from any postsecondary institutions. As a result, in 2011, only 10 percent of working age (25 to 64) Aboriginal Canadians had acquired a university degree, compared to 26 percent of the rest of the population (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2013). Consequently, Aboriginal youth would have many fewer family and community members who might be educational role models and information sources.

Immigrant youth, who also frequently face discrimination, language barriers, and problems of low income, tend to have higher than average postsecondary educational goals (Krahn & Taylor, 2005). They are also more likely than native-born Canadians to attend and complete university (Abada, Hou & Ram, 2009). In part, this is because immigrant parents, often

very well-educated but still under-employed (Krahn, Derwing, Mulder & Wilkinson, 2000), strongly encourage their children to obtain a postsecondary education (Taylor & Krahn, 2013).

### **Cultural Reproduction and Inherited Advantage: Bourdieu's Key Concepts**

Pierre Bourdieu wrote extensively about how social hierarchies are reproduced. He paid close attention to people's everyday social lives, and the cultural practices these involve, including those in schools and universities; (Bourdieu, 1980; 1984; 1988). He developed some useful theoretical concepts to help people think about their own personal situation so that they might have "some means of doing what they do, and living what they live, a little bit better" (Bourdieu, 2007:113). He thought of his concepts as tools for strategically thinking about one's position in the world and how to navigate it effectively. Sociologists have found Bourdieu's concepts particularly useful for interpreting processes of **cultural reproduction** and the transmission of advantage across generations.

Bourdieu imagined that life was much like a game played on a field (like rugby), with players positioned according to how they had individually accumulated different forms of capital (Grenfell, 2008). He envisioned an over-arching **field of power**, a social space, upon which individuals accumulate and exchange economic (money), social (useful relationships with other people), and symbolic capital (of which there are many types including cultural, intellectual, and scientific) in order to move to a more desirable position. Of course, people can play at many games and each game has its own field where certain **forms of capital** are more or less valuable.

One option is to go to university and play that game and the various smaller games it offers, like the sociology game, or engineering game. Getting through university requires that one have particular economic and symbolic capital in order to do well. Overall, people invest in

university because they realize that it will create symbolic capital (a degree) that can then be used to acquire a more advantageous position on the field of power such as a higher status and better paying job.

A key question is how people learn to play these games and use their different forms of capital effectively? As Bourdieu explained, a child is born into a particular time, place, and position on the field of power—those of its parents. As the child grows up, she or he becomes accustomed to certain types of clothing, food, and recreation, along with many other specific cultural (lifestyle) practices. For example, wealthier parents with higher levels of education may read to their children more often, use a wider selection of words in conversations, and expose their children to a variety of experiences such as international travel and the fine arts (Sullivan, 2001). When it is time for the child to go to school, sit still in a desk, and respond to teachers' questions, the ability to do so may come more naturally. The child will have a predisposition to academic schooling and feel comfortable with the context and challenges it presents.

This predisposition is what Bourdieu called **habitus** (Bourdieu, 1980; Maton, 2008). Habitus is an embodied sense of what one should do and how one should do it, and therefore directs how people engage with the world. A habitus that is well suited for a particular field involves a well-developed understanding of the game that is being played and how different forms of capital can be used to accomplish goals. Returning to the example of the child from the more advantaged family, one can see some elements of habitus. The child is comfortable sitting still (embodied experience), is versatile at listening and speaking with teachers (using cultural capital such as words, and knowledge of the fine arts and the larger world effectively), and takes the schooling game seriously. Moreover, habitus is shaped by practice. Over time, the child becomes more adept at playing the schooling game. Growing up in a particular position on the

field and developing a particular habitus does not mean that one's choices are always predetermined. While habitus describes a degree of structural constraint for an individual person, Bourdieu meant to demonstrate that it is also generative and can shift over time. Children are not exact copies of their parents. They are exposed to different experiences and different fields, and grow up in a different time and context (a different field of power) and, perhaps, even in a different place. While a young person's interests and choices are shaped through interactions with their parents and in their community, an individual might nevertheless take an interest and choose to get involved in games (e.g., attending university) their parents had never imagined, even though they might not be as adept at these games as other more advantaged peers (Lehmann, 2007b; 2014).

Bourdieu's theory and concepts help us to better understand how patterns of intergenerational transfer of advantage are maintained, but it is also important to note that he was writing about France, a country with a very different cultural and educational history than Canada, at least four decades ago. As Davies and Rizk (2014) observe in a review of how Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital has been studied over the years, among other significant changes in the North American educational field we have seen a substantial expansion of the postsecondary education system. There is now room for more people to play the higher education game. What effect has this had on postsecondary educational opportunities, and subsequent career outcomes, for young people from less advantaged backgrounds?

Along with changing over time, the postsecondary educational field also differs across space. In Alberta and British Columbia, for example, postsecondary systems allow young people to move relatively easily from the college system into the university system, and vice versa (Andres & Krahn, 1999). Furthermore, even though university education has typically been



valued more than a technical postsecondary education (Davies & Guppy, 2006), there are likely locales in which unique industrial structures offer employment opportunities that might favour a technical over a university postsecondary education.

This chapter focuses on Alberta at the turn of this century, and asks whether long-standing patterns of intergenerational transfer of advantage are still observed in a province where improving access to higher education has been a government priority, and where unemployment rates have typically been low and the demand for young workers with technical training has been high for the past several decades? In addition, we highlight differences in educational attainment and employment outcomes in early adulthood on the basis of gender, urban-rural background, immigrant status, visible minority status, and Aboriginal status.

### **Getting Educated and Finding Work in Alberta**

Over the past 60 years, Alberta's economy has shifted from a heavy reliance on agriculture (and to a lesser extent, forestry) to an equally heavy reliance on the oil and gas industries. In the past several decades, massive development of oil sands deposits around Fort McMurray (in the north-central part of the province) and large gas field developments in various regions, has led to rapid population growth in mid-sized cities in regions where the oil and gas industries dominate, but also in the province's two major cities, Calgary and Edmonton. Unemployment rates in the province have generally been low, and average incomes, particularly in the oil and gas industries, have been relatively high. As a result, the province has experienced extensive in-migration, from other provinces and from other countries. Fort McMurray, which has grown even faster than other urban centres (Dorow & O'Shaughnessy, 2013), is often described as Canada's second largest Newfoundland city because of the thousands of former Newfoundland residents now

living and working there! But alongside wealth and opportunity, there are also groups which have not benefitted nearly as much. As in other provinces, recent immigrants (Krahn et al., 2000) and members of First Nations (Luffman & Sussman, 2007) experience much higher levels of unemployment and underemployment.

Alberta was one of the first provinces to improve access to post-secondary education by opening community colleges in smaller urban centres (e.g., Lethbridge Junior College, Canada's first "community college," was opened in 1957) and by eliminating barriers to the transfer of academic credits between colleges, technical schools, and universities (Andres & Krahn, 1999). In the early 1970s, Athabasca University began to experiment with "distance learning" programs that allowed students across the province to enroll in university courses. In the last several decades, Alberta has also provided financial incentives to postsecondary institutions to add new programs and to attract students from previously under-represented geographical areas and population sub-groups. In addition, it has given degree-granting status to a number of public (e.g., Mount Royal University in Calgary) and private (e.g., Concordia University College in Edmonton) colleges.<sup>2</sup> The emphasis on improving access has been driven, not so much by a desire to reduce social inequality (although that might be a by-product), but to promote economic growth (Taylor, 2001; Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education, 2014). Consequently, a strong emphasis on skills training and vocational education characterizes the province's secondary and postsecondary systems (Taylor, 2001; Titley, 2005).

When our study was completed (1996-2003), Alberta had four universities (University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of Lethbridge, Athabasca University), fourteen publicly-funded colleges in urban centres of various sizes (including three in communities with fewer than 7000 residents), two large technical institutes (one in Edmonton and one in Calgary),

and nine private university colleges (eight with religious affiliations). In this chapter, we ask whether traditional patterns of intergenerational transfer of advantage through the postsecondary system are still found in a province where access to postsecondary education has been substantially improved and employment opportunities have been more abundant. We also ask whether, in a setting where demand for workers with trades-related education has been high, vocational (trades-related) education offers an alternative (to university) pathway into well-paying jobs. We then return to Bourdieu's theoretical framework to discuss our findings.

## **Research Methods**

In late spring of 1996, 2,691 Grade 12 students (18 years old, on average) in 58 Alberta high schools completed questionnaires asking about their educational and work experiences and aspirations (Krahn & Hudson, 2006). The sample of schools was representative of the population with two exceptions; a small minority of Alberta youth (about 5 percent) graduating from private high schools and schools on First Nations were not sampled. Seventy-three percent of the study participants provided contact information so that they could be re-interviewed in the future.

Seven years later, in 2003, 1218 Time 1 respondents (now 25 years old, on average) completed a follow-up survey (96% by telephone, 4% by mail),<sup>3</sup> resulting in a response rate of 45 percent (62% of those who provided contact information at Time 1). Older respondents (19 or older in 1996), as well as immigrant, visible minority, and disabled youth were less likely to respond in 2003. Time 2 response rates did not differ by gender, region of the province, community size, family background, or respondents' school and work experiences. The 2003 sample was weighted to make it representative of the 1996 Alberta high school graduating class in terms of school size, community size, and school district (Krahn & Hudson, 2006).

The 2003 sample (N = 1,218) contained slightly more females than males. One in ten

(9%) Time 2 respondents were immigrants (born outside of Canada), 14 percent self-identified as a member of a visible minority group, and 4 percent stated that they were of Aboriginal origin. One-third (34%) were from families where at least one parent had a university degree. By age 25, four out of ten study participants were married (24%) or co-habiting (14%), and 16 percent had become parents. Thirty percent of Time 2 participants were currently enrolled in a postsecondary program; some were continuing in advanced programs while others had returned to college or university after some years away.

## **Findings**

### **Postsecondary Educational Attainment by Age 25**

A large majority (60%) of Time 2 respondents had acquired a postsecondary educational credential (university degree, college or technical school diploma, apprenticeship) by 2003 (Table 1). This high level of postsecondary attainment suggests that the Alberta government's efforts to improve access to postsecondary education have been relatively successful. In fact, 88 percent of Time 2 respondents had started some kind of postsecondary program; about two-thirds had completed the program (Krahn & Hudson, 2006).

Almost one-third (32%) of Time 2 respondents had acquired a university degree, 15% had obtained a community college diploma, the same proportion had received a technical school diploma, and 4% had completed an apprenticeship (Table 1).<sup>4</sup> Overall, women (65%) were significantly more likely than men (55%) to have acquired a postsecondary credential.<sup>5</sup> Women were more likely to have received a community college diploma or a university degree while men were more likely to have completed an apprenticeship.

Table 1.1

	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
Obtained any postsecondary credential #	65%	55%	60%
Completed an apprenticeship #	2%	7%	4%
Received a technical school diploma	13%	16%	15%
Received a community college diploma #	19%	10%	15%
Obtained a bachelor's degree #	37%	27%	32%
<b>(N)</b>	<b>645</b>	<b>573</b>	<b>1218</b>

\* Weighted estimates; sub-sample sizes vary slightly across dependent variables because of differing levels of non-response.  
# Gender differences are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

We now turn to a multivariate analysis of the factors, in addition to gender, that determined who acquired a technical postsecondary education (i.e., they received a technical school diploma and/or completed an apprenticeship). Multivariate analyses take into account the degree to which some factors that might influence an outcome such as educational attainment may be correlated with others. For example, immigrant youth are more likely to live in large cities, while Aboriginal youth are less likely to do so. A multivariate analysis adjusts the findings so the unique effect of each factor is highlighted.<sup>6</sup>

Along with gender differences, our multivariate analyses revealed that study participants whose parents (at least one) had completed university, and those who had themselves completed an academic (rather than vocational) high school program, were less likely to have acquired a technical postsecondary education. Those who were living in a major city (Edmonton or Calgary) when completing high school were more likely to have obtained a technical

postsecondary credential, perhaps a result of their easier access to the province's two large technical colleges.

Compared to completion of a technical postsecondary program, a larger number of factors were associated with the acquisition of a university degree by age 25. As already noted, women were more likely to have completed a university degree. So too were members of visible minority groups. In stark contrast, Aboriginal respondents were one-tenth as likely as non-Aboriginals to have completed university. Sample members living in Edmonton and Calgary in 1996 were no more likely to have completed university than were those from elsewhere in the province.

Study participants whose parents (at least one) had completed university were three times more likely to have done so themselves, compared to their peers whose parents were not university educated. The effect of having completed a high school academic program was even stronger. These study participants were six times more likely than vocational program graduates to have acquired a university degree by age 25.

### **Employment Outcomes by Age 25**

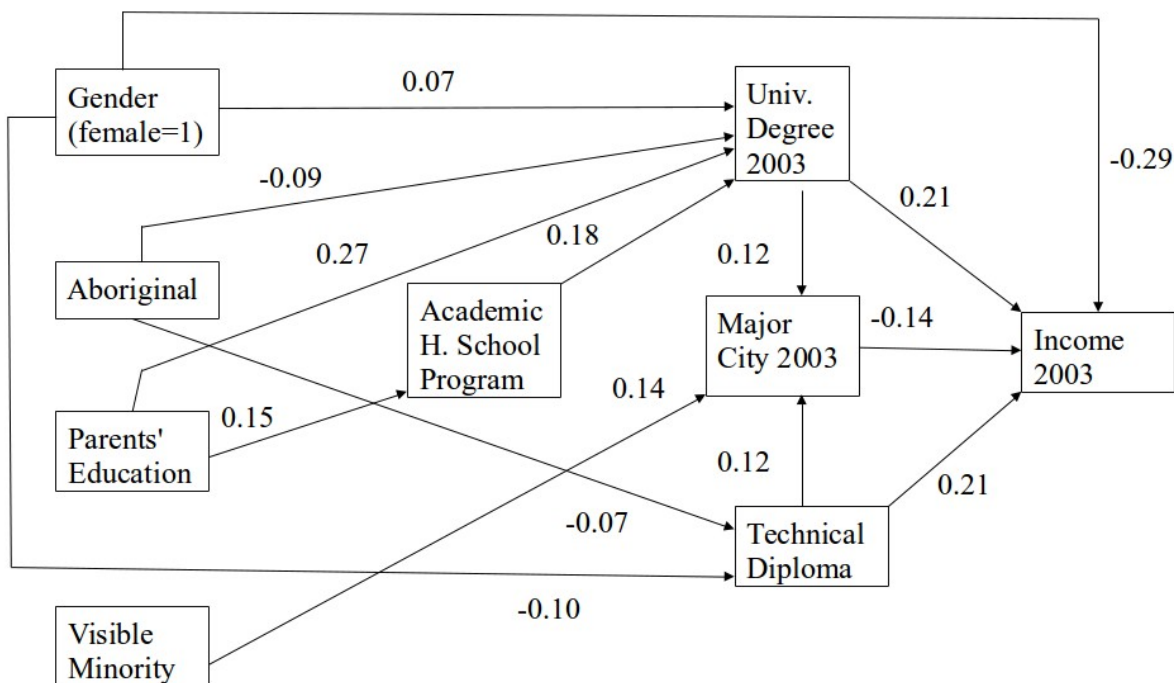
At age 25, 85% of the sample members were holding one or more jobs, 6% were unemployed, and 9% were not working or looking for a job (i.e., they were out of the labour force). In our analysis of the monthly income (before taxes) that employed respondents received from their main jobs, we exclude any current students since many students work in low-paying part-time "student jobs" that would not be valid indicators of the income they could expect to receive after graduating. This reduces our sample to 855 employed non-students. Their average monthly income was \$2953. Female sample members were earning significantly less (\$2412), on average, than were male study participants (\$3478).

Our multivariate statistical model (Figure 1) looks complicated but actually is quite easy to understand. The path diagram brings together all of the important (statistically significant) factors that influenced the earnings of the 855 employed (non-student) study participants.<sup>7</sup> The arrows (paths) indicate the causal direction of the statistical relationship (e.g., parents' education has an effect on children's education, not vice versa). The size of the path coefficients (called Beta, or  $\beta$ ) tells us about the strength of the effect (e.g., a  $\beta$  of .30 is twice as strong as a  $\beta$  of .15). The sign of the coefficient shows whether the statistical relationship is positive (e.g., higher parents' education  $\square$  higher children's education) or negative (e.g., live in a larger city  $\square$  lower income).

Figure 1 clearly illustrates the strong impact, both directly and indirectly, of parents' education on their child's income at 25 years of age. Children of university-educated parents are more likely to complete an academic high school program ( $\beta = .15$ ) which, in turn, means they are more likely to obtain a university degree ( $\beta = .18$ ). Along with this indirect effect, we also see a strong direct effect ( $\beta = .27$ ) of parental university education on their child's acquisition of a university degree. And, as previous research has shown, university degree holders earn more money, on average ( $\beta = .21$ ), than people with only a high school education.

Figure 1.1

## Ascribed and Achieved Determinants of 2003 Income



Previous research also leads us to expect that women are more likely to have acquired a university degree ( $\beta = .07$ ). Even so, at age 25, women earn substantially less than men ( $\beta = -.29$ ), because of the types of jobs they typically hold and a greater likelihood of working part-time. Somewhat surprisingly, given previous research, visible minority youth are no more or less likely to have completed university, controlling on the other variables in this model. Even so, visible minority status has a negative effect on income, indirectly as a result of being more likely to live in a major city at age 25 ( $\beta = -.14$ ). Aboriginal youth face a double disadvantage. Aboriginal status has negative effects both on acquiring a university degree ( $\beta = -.09$ ) and on



getting a technical diploma ( $\beta = -.07$ ), both of which, in turn, are strong predictors of higher income at age 25.

Figure 1 also highlights two unusual findings that previous research would not have led us to expect. First, a technical postsecondary credential and a university degree have similar impacts on income at age 25 ( $\beta = .21$ ). In real dollar terms (not shown in Figure 1), however, controlling on all the other variables in the model, having technical diploma by age 25 translates into an additional \$1035 per month (before taxes), compared to an additional \$869 per month for having completed university. Second, while incomes are generally higher in larger urban centres (Beckstead, Brown, Guo & Newbold, 2010), we find that living in a major city (Edmonton or Calgary) at age 25 is associated with a lower income ( $\beta = -.14$ ) compared to living elsewhere in the province.

## **Discussion**

We observed an unusually high level of postsecondary educational attainment within this cohort of Alberta high school graduates. By age 25, six out of ten had obtained some type of postsecondary credential, suggesting that the Alberta government's efforts to increase access to higher education have had some success. University education was most popular (32% had received a degree), followed by a technical (trades-related) education (19%). Interestingly, and unlike previous research, in the resource-driven Alberta economy, young people with technical training were enjoying a higher (dollar) return to their education by age 25 than those who had completed university. Related to this, study participants living in Edmonton or Calgary, the province's largest urban centres, were earning less than those who worked elsewhere. Young women's educational attainment (more university and less technical training compared to men) and earnings (lower than men), however, reflected patterns observed elsewhere.

Given the high level of access to postsecondary education, do we see evidence of a decline in the intergenerational transfer of advantage? For university education, the answer is no. Children of university-educated parents were still more likely to complete high school academic programs and, consequently, more likely to acquire a university degree. We also observed a direct effect of parental education on children's university education, likely reflecting the greater ability of university-educated parents to pay for their children's education. A university degree, in turn, translated into significantly higher earnings at age 25. In this particular provincial setting, however, the acquisition of a technical postsecondary credential offered an alternative pathway to higher earnings, at least by age 25. Children of university-educated parents, however, were no more or less likely to acquire technical training.<sup>8</sup> What stands out most, perhaps, is the double disadvantage faced by Aboriginal high school graduates who were less likely to go to university and also less likely to acquire a technical postsecondary education. Aboriginal youth were being left behind in both the university and technical training races to higher earnings and career success.

Thinking about the data patterns as Bourdieu might, we can describe the province of Alberta during this particular time period as a unique field of power with alternative pathways to career success that may not be available elsewhere or in other eras. While university degrees still provide strong symbolic capital that can be converted into higher earnings, in Alberta a technical postsecondary education also helps develop unique skill sets that are particularly valuable in specific resource extraction (e.g., oil and gas) and related (e.g., construction) industries. Children of university-educated parents grow up with an academically-oriented habitus that prepares them for competition on a field where having the capacity to succeed, first in an academic high school program and then, later, in university, leads to future employment success. However, a working

class habitus may not disadvantage young people as much in this provincial setting as it may elsewhere. In fact, growing up in a family where one or both parents are employed in the trades might lead children to develop a habitus more suited to success in the natural resource-based Alberta labour market.

That women receive lower income than men, on average, is not a new finding, but it is useful to examine it from Bourdieu's perspective (Fowler, 2003). A "female" habitus (social psychologists might call this a process of "socialization"), shaped in one's family of origin with traditions of caring and less dominant roles for women, may re-exert itself in the postsecondary education system and labour market when women make gendered career choices. In turn, women continue to be under-represented in higher paying skilled trades and upper-level management and professional positions, and over-represented in "caring" occupations (e.g., childcare, eldercare) which pay considerably less. Also, within any workplace there is a tacit arena of gendered games being played that involve a combination of subjectively and structurally defined stakes and rules (Williams and Dempsey, 2014). Such micro-power games typically advantage men to the detriment of women's income and career progress. Furthermore, women are also under much greater pressure to balance home and (paid) work responsibilities (Milan, Keown & Urquijo, 2011), leading them to place more emphasis on the former, with the result being more limited career success. All of these processes help explain why women continue to report lower average incomes than men, even though young women today are more likely to complete university. Women are also less likely to complete trades-related postsecondary educations (Boothby & Drewes, 2006) so, while this pathway to income success exists in Alberta today, it is still infrequently followed by young women.

Another important finding is the disadvantaged situation of Aboriginal high school

graduates who, regardless of their parents' education, are much less likely to acquire a university degree or technical diploma. People of Aboriginal status in Canada have a unique and unfortunate history, and there are many structural and cultural factors that help explain their less advantaged educational and employment situation. The history of colonization and the residential school system, the last of which only closed in 1996 (Woods, 2013), did substantial damage to Aboriginal cultures and tore many families apart. For a variety of related reasons, unemployment and poverty rates have been much higher for Aboriginal households (Luffman and Sussman, 2007). As a result, many young Aboriginal Albertans may have grown up in a family environment where parents were less able to provide them with the material and cultural advantages enjoyed by middle-class non-Aboriginal youth. In Bourdieu's language, Aboriginal youth completing high school may have a habitus that is not very well-suited for participation in postsecondary education. Their parents are also often less able to provide the economic capital required to pay for postsecondary education and the social capital (contacts and networks) that will lead to success in the postsecondary field of power. Moreover, and similar to the gender related micro-power games that disadvantage women, micro-power games related to race may also disadvantage Aboriginal people in schools and work places.

We conclude with a few observations about vocational postsecondary education. In general, compared to university degrees, technical diplomas and apprenticeships have had a lower "earnings premium" in Canada (Boothby and Drewes, 2006). In Alberta, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this has not been the case, at least for younger workers. We wonder whether the same findings would be observed in other provinces (e.g., Newfoundland, Saskatchewan) that have experienced natural resource-driven economic booms? Also, with the global collapse of oil prices that began in late 2014, we may no longer see such

patterns in Alberta. Furthermore, when our study participants are 50 or 60 years old, will the earnings of those with a technical postsecondary education still be higher than the income of those who completed university? Technical training may be very valuable in a specific place and time (e.g., the oil sands of Alberta in the first decades of this century) while training in more general skills might be useful in a wider range of situations. As Heinz (2003) notes, university credentials, less focused in their scope than technical credentials, may be more portable. It is also possible that, over the long term, university credentials are more likely to lead to jobs in industries (e.g., government, health, education) where pay is generally higher, promotions and fringe benefits more extensive, pensions more common and, to some extent, job security is greater.

We make these comparisons, recognizing that they appear to have a university bias, which is not our intention. Compared to university education, technical diplomas and apprenticeships have historically had lower status in Canada. This is unfortunate, in our opinion, because the demand for skilled trades workers will continue in Canada. Furthermore, we recognize that working in the trades can be highly satisfying for many young people (including from university-educated families) who don't necessarily enjoy more academic pursuits (Lehmann, 2007a). At the same time, we believe that there are aspects of a broad "liberal arts" university education (e.g., an emphasis on critical thinking, on citizenship, and on openness to other ideas and cultures) that would benefit all young people. We need to seek ways to "bridge the gap" between vocational and academic education (Axelrod, Anisef & Lin, 2003), in high schools and in postsecondary institutions, so that all young people, regardless of their backgrounds and disposition, can improved their career opportunities while also broadening their experiences.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> A draft of this chapter was presented at the Annual Meetings of the Canadian Sociological Association in Ottawa in 2015. Parts of the chapter were discussed by Krahn and Hudson (2006).

<sup>2</sup> Titley (2005) observes that, while the Alberta government opened many new colleges and gave degree-granting status to some established colleges, it did not provide adequate operating grants to allow post-secondary institutions to deliver high quality programs.

<sup>3</sup> Data collection methods used at Time 1 (1996) and Time 2 (2003) were approved by a University of Alberta Research Ethics Board.

<sup>4</sup> These four types of post-secondary credentials total to more than 20% since a small number of study participants had acquired more than one credential by age 25.

<sup>5</sup> Here, and in the following discussion, we comment on only those differences between groups that were statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). This means that, with a sample of this size, differences this large would occur by chance alone less than 5% of the time.

<sup>6</sup> In this particular analysis, we employed logistic regression techniques. Detailed tables are available from the authors.

<sup>7</sup> Seventeen percent ( $n = 147$ ) of the 855 employed non-students in our Time 2 sample did not report their income, a typical finding in survey research. We employed Full Information Maximum Likelihood estimation (FIML) techniques (Allison, 2003) to estimate these missing data. Further information on the structural equation model is available from the authors.

<sup>8</sup> If we had included in our model a variable measuring whether or not parents of study participants had acquired a technical postsecondary credential, we likely would have seen a

significant effect on the likelihood of their child acquiring technical postsecondary training. Unfortunately, information provided by study participants at age 18 about their parents' technical education was not sufficiently reliable for us to use it in our analysis.

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## **Glossary**

**Intergenerational transfer of advantage:** a process whereby the economic advantages and cultural tools for success in a particular society are inherited by children; similar to **cultural reproduction**

**Field of power:** a social-cultural space upon which individuals interact and compete with one another for success, and on which various cultural practices and symbolic resources serve as forms of capital.

**Forms of capital:** along with economic capital (e.g., money), within a society (on a particular field of power), individuals and families have differing amounts of cultural capital (e.g., ways of speaking or dressing), symbolic capital (e.g., a university degree), and social capital (e.g., exclusive social networks); different forms of capital (e.g., time and money) can be invested to obtain other forms (e.g., a university degree).

**Habitus:** an embodied disposition, formed over time in relation to a field, that can structure

individual human practices, but also generate creative possibilities.

### Critical Study Questions

1. What are some of the ways in which your own decision to attend college or university were shaped by your family and community experiences?
2. Can some of Pierre Bourdieu's key theoretical concepts help you understand your own educational experiences?
3. What are some of the unique employment opportunities in your city or region? How well do local high schools and postsecondary institutions prepare youth for these opportunities?
4. Do you think vocational (technical) education has lower status than college or university education? Is this a problem, and if it is, what could be done about it?

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