

**Working Paper No. 77, 2015**

**Globalization, Class and Gender Inequalities  
in Mexican Higher Education**

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**Working Paper Series**



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Author Villa Lever, Lorenza 2015: "Globalization, Class and Gender Inequalities in Mexican Higher Education", **desiguALdades.net** Working Paper Series 77, Berlin: **desiguALdades.net** International Research Network on Interdependent Inequalities in Latin America.

The paper was produced by Lorenza Villa Lever who is a Fellow in Phase II of **desiguALdades.net** and co-organizer of the 5th **desiguALdades.net** Summer School, **Social Mobility and Interdependent Inequalities: A New Agenda for Research in Social Inequalities**, in Mexico City, at the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales (IIS), Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), March 16-20, 2015.

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# Globalization, Class and Gender Inequalities in Mexican Higher Education

Lorenza Villa Lever

## Abstract

This paper focuses on the way in which socioeconomic, educational and gender inequalities are reproduced in Mexico and how certain mechanisms facilitate or hinder young people's social mobility. Despite the efforts of various countries to promote schooling and increase spending on education, the structural conditions of social stratification have been reproduced in education, and this type of segmentation has produced a hierarchical fragmentation of higher education institutions. In order to observe the asymmetries in the distribution of resources and in the social positions that young people occupy, as well as the role played by the students' perceptions of their personal situation compared with that of their parents, in the development of ability to reach the goals they desire and value, this paper will analyze survey data concerning three types of mobility: mobility of economic wellbeing, educational mobility and subjective mobility. This analysis finds that there is a strong relationship between the hierarchical fragmentation of higher education, class inequalities and gender, and that the relationship between gender and class remains an invisible inequality.

**Keywords:** higher education | class and gender | Mexico

## Biographical Notes

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## 1. Introduction

Higher education has redefined institutional spaces for the generation of knowledge within the context of economic globalization, calling for greater competitiveness among universities. One of the paradigmatic answers to such demands is the Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education,<sup>1</sup> whose main objective is to build the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) with two aims in mind: restructuring the system of European universities,<sup>2</sup> and raising the degree of competitiveness of European universities, whose main role would be to give support to so-called economies of knowledge based on the production of knowledge and the formation of highly qualified human resources.

The Bologna Process, as well as initiatives of multilateral organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, have set today's trends in higher education throughout the world, seeking a privileged space for research, promoting a culture of exchange of scientific, technological knowledge, students and professors, degrees and credits, and introducing efforts toward more equitable growth in enrollment, quality, financing, etc.. These changes, linked to globalization processes, have had an impact on systems of higher education and have produced asymmetries in its development since, based on said transformations, some universities had proved capable of answering to the so-called knowledge society, while others have concentrated on answering the specific needs of the local market (Alcántara 2006).

Against this backdrop, four aspects of this transformation within Latin America will be analyzed: the increase in enrollment in higher education, the distribution of this enrollment by social strata and gender, the process of institutional segmentation which comes along with this growth process, and the perception the students have of this situation as compared to the perception of their parents.

To this end, three concepts will be explored: social mobility, which is due to the changes taking place for individuals of both sexes in a given society, in relation to a

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1 Signed by 29 European countries in 1999.

2 In reality, what has become known as the Bologna Process was begun already in 1998 when the Ministers of Education of Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom signed the Sorbonne Process (1998), whose content was similar to that of the Bologna Process. By 2010 the Bologna Process had the support of 45 countries, not all of which are members of the European Union. For more information see Verger Planells (2011).

person's starting point in economic distribution (Vélez et al. 2012: 27),<sup>3</sup> as well as in the differentiated distribution among the various kinds of university institutions, and interdependent inequality, which considers the economic distribution in relation to the asymmetry between individual's or group's positions within a determined context (Costa 2011: 21).

The work is based on the supposition that to the degree that children's wellbeing depends on the socioeconomic origin of their families, there will be a greater reduction in the real freedom of that society as a whole (Sen 2000), and thus, more limitations for individuals coming from underprivileged households to achieve the life they are hoping for. In other words, the better situated parents are in the social structure, the less intergenerational mobility will take place. Conversely, the more independent an offspring's endeavor and talent is from the social status of the parents, the more movement will exist between generations (Daude 2012: 37).

While education and the educational system have traditionally been spaces for individual social mobility, they have also acted as social barriers, because at the same time they legitimize discrimination and justify social differences based on the value given to the reached schooling level. In other words, education is also a political field that produces a discourse in which social mobility plays a central role in creating an equalitarian future (Bourdieu 1987 [1979]).

The present paper is organized in three parts. In the first part I present the problem of social mobility in Latin America, the next part shows the results of empirical research carried out with students in Mexico, and in the last part some of the conclusions are presented.

## **2. Social Mobility in Latin America and Mexico**

It is a well-known fact that the region of Latin America and the Caribbean has one of the lowest indices of income distribution in the world. The concentration of wealth along with its counterparts, high poverty levels and high unemployment and underemployment indices, constitute a challenge for many countries in the region. In

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3 There are two types of social mobility: intergenerational mobility means a change in position, in relation to the original household, and refers to changes in the socioeconomic position throughout one's lifecycle. We may also talk about horizontal mobility or changes in an individual's position within the same socioeconomic stratum, and vertical mobility when an individual passes from one stratum to another, this being either upwards or downwards. Finally, we can talk about absolute mobility which refers to transformations within the class structure, and mobility related to the cases in which one's position on the socioeconomic scale is different from that of his original household. Mobility may be analyzed on the macro level, which is among countries and regions, or on the micro level, among individuals (Vélez et al. 2012: 34-35).

spite of this, it is also widely observed that countries such as Mexico have undergone absolute upward mobility, meaning that the indicators of well-being have improved in the overall economic distribution, even while levels of social mobility remain relatively low. This demonstrates the high degree of stratification of Mexico's society and the strong barriers to mobility which must be overcome by underprivileged sectors (Vélez et al. 2012: 14).

In general we can see an increase in the rates of school enrollment in many regions of the world. Nevertheless, this increase has not been the same in every society, depending on the degree of wealth and development of each country. In Latin America, while the resources dedicated to education and attendance have increased, it is still more common for children from households on the upper end of the social scale to finish secondary education and university studies, than those coming from underprivileged households (Daude 2012: 37). In other words, higher education is segmented by social strata, in that it is difficult for children who come from underprivileged households, and even from the middle class, to break the barrier of secondary education, and when they do manage, they are directed towards different kinds of universities, depending on the social strata to which they belong.

A recent paper on education, middle classes and social mobility in Latin America compares three social groups from different countries: the underprivileged, the middle class and the upper class. Among other things, it compares cohorts of those between 61 and 65 years of age and those between 21 and 30 years of age, and shows that in most Latin American countries, the average numbers of years of schooling increases as people rise in the social structure: the average for underprivileged groups barely finished primary school; the middle class group does not have enough average schooling to finish secondary school, while only the upper class has finished the years necessary for entering higher education (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Years of Schooling by Income Groups and Age Cohorts in Selected Latin American Countries**

Country	Income Category	Avg. 25-65	Age Range					
			14-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-65
Argentina	Disadvantaged	9.11	8.94	10.17	9.44	9.24	8.22	7.51
	Middle Class	9.73	9.73	11.13	10.45	9.65	8.33	7.58
	Affluent	12.64	10.69	13.10	13.42	12.64	11.70	10.83
Bolivia	Disadvantaged	4.08	7.71	6.62	4.63	3.59	2.91	1.78
	Middle Class	6.91	8.89	9.30	7.69	6.37	4.44	3.38
	Affluent	10.65	9.62	12.43	11.35	10.41	8.71	7.76
Brazil	Disadvantaged	4.65	7.19	6.59	5.01	4.11	3.01	2.45
	Middle Class	6.61	8.69	9.08	7.47	6.26	4.33	2.91
	Affluent	11.61	10.48	13.13	12.38	11.51	10.15	8.64
Chile	Disadvantaged	7.10	9.69	9.69	8.11	7.14	5.29	4.01
	Middle Class	8.58	10.17	11.10	9.72	8.54	6.67	5.15
	Affluent	11.70	10.78	13.39	12.67	11.66	10.32	8.66
Colombia	Disadvantaged	4.42	7.50	6.54	4.91	4.21	3.08	2.81
	Middle Class	6.28	8.57	8.42	6.97	5.98	4.33	3.37
	Affluent	10.80	10.00	11.96	11.73	10.50	9.35	7.51
Costa Rica	Disadvantaged	6.21	6.36	6.79	6.57	6.87	5.65	4.92
	Middle Class	6.60	6.57	7.00	6.68	6.93	6.22	5.65
	Affluent	10.94	8.08	11.34	10.43	11.20	10.95	10.79
Ecuador	Disadvantaged	7.79	9.72	9.31	8.53	7.61	6.71	4.69
	Middle Class	9.46	10.34	11.26	10.19	9.21	7.87	6.04
	Affluent	12.52	11.02	13.48	13.32	12.47	11.34	10.32
Mexico	Disadvantaged	4.93	7.98	6.95	5.66	4.59	2.89	2.12
	Middle Class	7.67	9.03	9.52	8.59	7.53	5.45	4.30
	Affluent	12.08	10.17	12.90	12.82	12.19	10.73	9.27
Peru	Disadvantaged	4.51	7.65	7.02	5.46	3.57	2.46	1.79
	Middle Class	8.00	9.15	10.43	8.82	7.23	5.30	3.60
	Affluent	12.12	10.32	13.10	12.90	11.73	10.16	8.69

Source: OECD, 2010: 130, Table 3.1 (used with permission).

In other words, despite the efforts of various countries to promote schooling and increase spending on education, the increase in coverage has not been equitable for all social groups, producing a structural barrier to young peoples' entering and finishing secondary and university education. The result shown is that the structural conditions in education by social strata have instead been reproduced.

Such inequity is reinforced by a growing global trend of the commodification of higher education, as a result of which there is strong interference of economic and private interests in higher education, which is now seen as a field for investment and business. This trend produces a mixture of actors. We see the participation of privately-owned educational institutions in advanced higher education, mainly focused on the wealthiest households, while lower income sectors and middle classes must fight for the few places in the public education system, or must instead seek a place in a private higher education institution (HEI) of lower academic quality for which they must pay. One result of this trend of higher education commodification is closely linked to the differentiation between institutions of a high level of academic development with national and international roles that foster research and postgraduate studies and are oriented toward the requirements of the scholarly community, and on the other hand the teaching-training and professional institutions that focus on teaching to satisfy local demand for its graduates. This type of segmentation produces a hierarchical fragmentation of institutions, which supposes they can be differentiated in terms of the level of academic development achieved, and this in turn prevents various social groups from having access to the same knowledge and social networks that enable differential access to the labor market. For this reason, it is another element that limits or facilitates social mobility, depending on the case (Daude 2012: 34-37).

Mexico is no stranger to this context of commodification that characterizes the changes to the field of education in the region. In Mexico, the expansion of higher education over the last thirty years seems to have benefited mainly those people from a high-status social background, which has resulted in a strong asymmetry not only in the distribution of education but also in the intergenerational reproduction and increased persistence of wealth. This is a result of the global system that is reflected in a polarization of the quality of the education system, which at the national level is translated into a hierarchical fragmentation of HEIs through national standards and rules governing the distribution of actors in different positions and that guide their action.

As Florencia Torche states:

While in the United States and Sweden a little more than a third of the people from the wealthiest fifth percentile of the population remain in that percentile, in Mexico the number reaches 59%. This figure is also high in Chile, where 46% of those from the upper fifth percentile remain there. In Mexico there is also greater intergenerational reproduction of poverty, and the latter significantly surpasses Chile's figures. The proportion of people from the lowest fifth percentile who

remain at this level is about 40% in the United States, 34% in Chile and only 26% in Sweden, while reaching 48% in Mexico (Torche n.d.: 23).

Moreover, extended descending mobility, from the wealthiest fifth percentile to the poorest, is almost non-existent in Mexico (0.17%) compared with 4% in Chile, 11% in Sweden and 10% in the United States, and Mexico also has a poor record in extended ascending mobility, which only reaches 4%, compared with 5% in Chile, 10% in the United States and 16% in Sweden indicating that it is very difficult to overcome the lowest barrier (Torche n.d.: 23). This also leads us to believe that in Mexico the socioeconomic position of one's parents is a determining factor for opportunities of well-being of the offspring, especially when referring to upward mobility, continuance and the conclusion of higher education for young people of college age. Therefore, persistent intergenerational reproduction of poverty hinders education mobility of young people and reinforces the unequal inclusion of those from underprivileged households.

### **3. Social Mobility and Inequality of Positions in Mexico**

The following results of the survey provide an answer to the question of how inequalities observed in the context of Latin America are expressed in Mexico, or in other words how individuals are affected by the higher education system and its incremental fragmentation. The survey was administered to university students in their final year of studies,<sup>4</sup> in order to analyze the way in which socioeconomic, educational and gender inequality are reproduced in Mexico and how certain mechanisms facilitate or hinder the young people's mobility. This survey was conducted in order to observe the degree of freedom or actions they possess for overcoming the asymmetries in the distribution of resources and in the social positions the young people occupy, as well as the role played by the students' perceptions of their personal situation compared with that of their parents, in the development of abilities for reaching the goals they desire and value.

Before going into details of the analysis, it is first necessary to explain the context. Our work was carried out in six universities in Mexico City in 2012, three public and three private institutions, which were selected based on their academic characteristics. Said selection resulted in classifying the public and private universities as high, medium or low in their academic development as shown in Table 2. It seeks to locate the HEIs studied on a scale of academic development, using a measure of academic development to indicate the strengths or weaknesses of the HEIs which combines

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4 Research survey financed by CONACYT, Registry No. 181677. For this research a questionnaire was given to 329 students in the last year of their undergraduate studies at 6 universities, 3 public and 3 private, with three levels of academic development: high, medium and low.

three dimensions: (1) the characteristics of the institution, (2) the types of academic personnel they host, and (3) the number of accredited programs at their disposal. Three ideal types of university institutions have been defined to investigate the value given by agents to the institutions in their decisions, in order to analyze how institutional characteristics are involved in explaining the options students choose.<sup>5</sup>

The universities with low academic development are generally small, focus on undergraduate studies, do not conduct research nor disseminate knowledge and they tend to be isolated institutions, market-oriented, lacking educational philosophies upon which their course offerings are based. All teachers are usually paid hourly wages, and they have a limited infrastructure. They do not have any established selection mechanisms for admission, the only limit is the capacity of the classrooms, so they welcome all applicants who have completed the certificate from the previous schooling level, or in the case of private universities, all who have the economic capacity to pay the tuition. It is common for this type of HEI to focus on the cheapest areas such as administrative sciences, communication sciences, social sciences, law or psychology.

The universities with average academic development have educational philosophies under development that they intend to consolidate, their infrastructure is adequate, the full-time academic staff is barely one-fifth of the total staff, they offer bachelor and master degrees, and have services accessible for the middle sectors of the population. Their academic eligibility requirements are less demanding than those with a high level of academic development, and in the case of those that are private, costs are lower than the ones mentioned before. In general, these institutions are more geared towards training and usually little or no research and dissemination of knowledge is carried out in them.

Universities with high academic development have their own identity reflected in an educational philosophy, an enrollment of around ten thousand students or more, and wide academic diversity, since they offer undergraduate, masters and doctoral degrees in various academic disciplines. Their admission policies are restrictive, they have the appropriate infrastructure and services for their educational offer and they conduct research and disseminate knowledge. Their academic organization is complex, and a significant proportion of their staff is full-time faculty. When their financing is private they are more oriented toward the most favored economic classes, i.e. the ones who can afford the high costs of tuition.

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5 These types of academic development are based on the classifications made by Muñoz Izquierdo (2004) and de Rubio Oca (2006).

**Table 2: Degree of Academic Development of the Universities in this Study**<sup>6</sup>

	High academic development		Medium academic development		Low academic development	
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private
Type of financing	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private
Number of teaching staff	27,361	1,977	5,809	694	880	30
Percentage of full-time teaching staff	18.4%	24.0%	60.8%	0.0%	92.3%	0.0%
Percentage of teaching staff paid by the hour	80.7%	74.2%	12.2%	100.0%	3.6%	100.0%
Number of students enrolled	199,535	20,255	51,935	4,517	11,305	190
Affiliated high school	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Number of academic programs	323	217	145	19	56	5
Number of areas of research/ teaching	6	4	5	3	3	2
Entrance exam	Institution	CENEVAL	Institution	Institution	Lottery	None
Grade average required for admission	7	8	6	6	6	7
Belongs to a network	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Affiliates of the National System of Researchers (% of All Affiliates)	3,583 (20.8%)	102 (0.6%)	861 (5.2%)	0 (0.0%)	79 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)
Number of journals produced	29	1	2	0	1	0
Belongs to the National Program of Quality Graduate Programs	134	10	58	0	0	0
Certified by the Inter-institutional Committees for the Evaluation of Higher Education	55	25	Process Pending	0	0	0
Certified by Council for the Accreditation of Higher Education	37	35	Process Pending	0	0	0
Monthly cost (pesos)		\$13,581	\$200	\$1,700	\$0	\$1,810
Total cost for the degree course (pesos)	\$1	\$535,500	\$3,200	\$81,600	\$0	\$86,880

Source: Own elaboration.

For the purpose of studying intergenerational mobility, the data will be analyzed concerning three types of mobility: mobility of economic wellbeing, educational mobility

<sup>6</sup> In the broader research work these dimensions are analyzed using 20 indicators. For space reasons, in this paper they were reduced to the ones presented in Table 2.

and subjective mobility that is mobility based on perceptions. All of these categories of analysis also include a gender perspective.

### 3.1 Mobility of Economic Wellbeing

**Table 3: University Students in Sample by Strata of Family Income and University Type**

	Degree of University Development						Total (% of All Universities)
	High		Medium		Low		
Family Income	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	
Low	49 29.3%	3 1.8%	21 12.6%	10 6.0%	70 41.9%	14 8.4%	167 100% (50.8%)
Middle	35 29.4%	28 23.5%	16 13.4%	18 15.1%	11 9.2%	11 9.2%	119 100% (36.2%)
Upper	6 14.0%	32 74.4%	2 4.7%	2 4.7%	0 0.0%	1 2.3%	43 100% (13.1%)
Total	90 27.4%	63 19.1%	39 11.9%	30 9.1%	81 24.6%	26 7.9%	329 100.0% (100.0%)

Source: Own elaboration.

Mobility of economic wellbeing is measured based on the family income (the combined income of mother and father) of university students' households, since this is related with the socioeconomic position the family holds within society. Family income has been divided into three strata:<sup>7</sup> Table 3 shows how university students responding

<sup>7</sup> Income and equivalent amounts in US Dollars (USD, at exchange rates current as of time of survey) for the three income strata are: low, up to \$8000 pesos (USD 615 ); middle, from \$8,001 to \$22,000 pesos (USD 616 to USD 1,692) and upper, over \$22,000 pesos (over USD 1,692 ).

to the survey were distributed into low (50.8%), middle (36.2%), and upper (13.1%)<sup>8</sup> income groups.

If the distribution of students from households of high, medium and low family income is compared to the distribution of students among the different types of universities, according to their academic development, it can be said that:

- (1) Most students that come from low income households are concentrated in public universities with low academic development (41.9) and to a lesser extent on public universities with high (29.3) and medium (12.6) academic development.
- (2) The students that come from a medium income household tend to attend the two types of universities with high academic development (Public 29.4% and Private 23.5%) and to a lesser extent at universities with medium academic development (Public 13.4% and Private 15.1%).
- (3) Finally, the students from high income households are highly concentrated in private universities with high academic development (74.4%).

The correlation between the level of students' family income and the level of academic development of the universities where they study reveals a segmented university system, which suggests a tendency to remain in the original social position or what may be called social immobility.

The majority of students from households with low family incomes who attend university go to public universities, mainly those of low academic development, and also to private universities with low academic development. Students from the middle strata preferably study at private institutions with medium academic development while those from households with high upper incomes are concentrated in private universities with high academic development (see Table 3).

The correlation between the level of students' family income and the level of academic development of the universities in which they study reveals a segmented university system which suggests a tendency to remain in the original position or what may be called social immobility.

If we analyze the distribution of students by the family income of their households, type of university and add the variable of gender, we can see that in general there are more

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<sup>8</sup> While the sample does not have the same distribution across all categories as in the general population, it is interesting to point out the fact that the majority of the surveyed students come from households with low socioeconomic levels, which is based on the segmentation of the universities and the consequential differentiated distribution of the students, based on the position of their household.

females (57.9%) than males (44.6%) from the lower social strata who attend university and more males (15.8%) than females (9.9%) who come from households with high family incomes (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Percentage of Students by Strata of Family Income, Gender and University**

Gender	Family Income	Degree of Academic Development						All Universities
		High		Medium		Low		
		Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	
Male	Low	33	1	11	5	24	5	79
		41.80	1.30	13.90	6.30	30.40	6.30	44.6
	Middle	28	15	8	10	5	4	70
		40.00	21.40	11.40	14.30	7.10	5.70	39.5
	Upper	5	21	0	1	0	1	28
		17.90	75.00	0.00	3.60	0.00	3.60	15.8
Female	Low	16	2	10	5	46	9	88
		18.20	2.30	11.40	5.70	52.30	10.20	57.9
	Middle	7	13	8	8	6	7	49
		14.30	26.50	16.30	16.30	12.20	14.30	32.2
	Upper	1	11	2	1	0	0	15
		6.70	73.30	13.30	6.70	0.00	0.00	9.9

Source: Own elaboration.

When the variable of gender is added, we may observe that:

- (1) The students from low income households, both men and women are concentrated in public universities. Males are mainly in the one with high academic development (41.8%) and somewhat less present in the public university with low academic development (30.4%); while slightly more than half of the women (52.3%) study at the public university with low academic development and less than a fifth in the one with high academic development.
- (2) Males from median income households in this survey were attending mainly universities with high academic development, preferably in the public one. The largest percentage of women from this social stratum study at the private university with high academic development, but they may also be found in other types of public and private universities.
- (3) The majority of male and female students from high income households study at the high academic development private university and are not found in low academic development universities.

The findings above suggest that upward social mobility will be more difficult, especially for females, and that their income will remain precarious, as their access to knowledge

is limited and their social networks will be of a lower quality. This means that the quality of education, along with the social networks to which they have access, would be considered to add opportunities and therefore indicate the possibility of upward mobility for some females in relation to their original position. The findings presented above, however, show that, males have more opportunities than females to remain in their privileged position of origin (see Table 4).

### 3.2 Educational Mobility

Educational mobility is measured in this survey based on the education of the parents of the students surveyed. The hypothesis is that there is a strong association between social origin and educational outcome. As was seen for Latin America, and specifically for Mexico, the possibility of moving from an educational category other than the one of origin is less than the possibility of remaining in that original category. However, given the fact that all of the students surveyed were finishing their last semester of college, another hypothesis would be that in a segmented society such as Mexico's, the placing of students in a certain type of university presupposes unequal inclusion, based not only on the economic resources of the family, but also on the level of education of the parents and the gender of the student, thus deepening the individual's advantages and/or disadvantages. Based on the data from the empirical research we carried out, we may observe that: In general, the years of schooling of the father are usually more than those of the mother. A little over half of the parents of the students surveyed have a high level of education, that is undergraduate or graduate degrees.

The homogeneity of the data on fathers and mothers suggests a similarity of schooling between the two (see Table 5).

**Table 5: Percentage of Students by Schooling of their Father and Mother**

Schooling	Father	Mother
<b>High</b> <b>(at least undergraduate degree)</b>	55.3	51.7
<b>Low</b> <b>(less than undergraduate degree)</b>	44.7	48.3
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0

Source: Own elaboration.

But a closer look at the schooling of the parents of the students responding to the survey shows that it differs by gender (see Table 6):

- More mothers of female students have only primary school studies (28.2%).
- There is a larger percentage of fathers than mothers who have finished college. The number of female students' mothers in this position (4.6%) is fewer than half the number of mothers of boys (9.6%), although there are more mothers than fathers who studied shorter programs.
- The fathers (24.3%) and mothers (17.5%) of boys have a higher percentage of undergraduate studies completed when compared to the fathers (11.8%) and mothers (13.8%) of girls.

**Table 6: Percentage of Students by Highest Level of Schooling Reached by Father and Mother, Differentiated by Student's Gender<sup>9</sup>**

Schooling	Male Students		Female Students	
	Father	Mother	Father	Mother
<b>Finished Primary School</b>	15.8	19.7	14.5	28.2
<b>Finished Secondary School</b>	10.2	13.0	11.8	13.8
<b>Finished High School</b>	9.6	9.6	7.9	4.6
<b>Finished Short Program (Junior College)</b>	4.0	12.4	6.6	15.1
<b>Finished College</b>	24.3	17.5	11.8	13.8
<b>Finished Graduate Degree</b>	6.3	3.4	7.2	4.0

Source: Own elaboration.

The sons and daughters of mothers and fathers with high levels of schooling, preferably study at universities with high academic development. Almost all of the student respondents, both female and male, who are in the high academic development private university, have a father (100% and 97.3%)<sup>10</sup> and mother (92.3% and 100%) with high levels of schooling. This percentage descends to a little over half for students in the high academic development public university (father: 66.7% and 62.1%; mother: 66.7% and 57.6%). These proportions decrease as the academic development of the

<sup>9</sup> The total is not 100% because we omitted the data for parents who did not complete any given level.

<sup>10</sup> When two percentages appear within parenthesis, the first always refers to female students and the second to male students.

institutions descends. In the latter cases, the difference in percentiles between genders is not very significant (see Table 7).

**Table 7: Percentage of Students by Level of Schooling of Fathers and Mothers, by University and by Gender (%)**

Student's Gender	Parents' Schooling		Universities by Degree Academic Development						Total
			High		Medium		Low		
			Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	
Male	Father	Low	37.9	2.7	57.9	43.8	79.3	70.0	41.8
		High	62.1	97.3	42.1	56.2	20.7	30.0	58.2
Female	Father	Low	33.3	0.0	65.0	42.9	71.2	56.2	48.0
		High	66.7	100.0	35.0	57.1	28.8	43.8	52.0
Male	Mother	Low	42.4	0.0	57.9	37.5	89.7	70.0	44.1
		High	57.6	100.0	42.1	62.5	10.3	30.0	55.9
Female	Mother	Low	33.3	7.7	55.0	42.9	86.5	56.2	53.3
		High	66.7	92.3	45.0	57.1	13.5	43.8	46.7

Source: Own elaboration.

Almost two thirds of the students in the public university with low academic development have a father and mother with low levels of schooling. These percentages are lower among students at the public university with medium level academic development (see Table 7).

In conclusion, we can say that the level of schooling of the father and mother are an important factor, not only in determining whether a young person will study, as seen in the analysis in the section on Latin America, but also for defining the kind of institution these young people will have access to, which may presuppose unequal inclusion.

That is to say, there is a positive relationship between parents' schooling and the kind of institution in which their children study, since:

The higher the level of parents' schooling, the more probable it is that their children will study at a university with high academic development, mainly a private university. The lower the level of parents' schooling, the more probable it is that their children will study at a university with low academic development, mainly a public university.

### **3.3 Subjective Mobility or Perceptions of Mobility**

Subjective mobility or the perception of mobility is related to the way a person sees its own position. Three types of subjective mobility were studied: a person's perception of his or her socioeconomic position, of his or her working position and of his or her perception of his or her position of prestige. However, there are not very marked differences between these.

In general, it can be said that the young people's perception of socioeconomic, labor and prestige mobility<sup>11</sup> tends to be upwards:

- The majority of students in all of the universities hope to reach a higher position than their parents. In fact, the lower the family income and level of schooling of the parents, the higher the expectations of the students who are finishing college in relation to their positions of labor, socioeconomic position and prestige in relation to those of their parents, and vice versa. In other words, higher education serves a political function, by reinforcing the belief in an egalitarian and promising future in which the implications of a person's original position is not important for social mobility.
- The most important differences are seen between students at the different kinds of universities. It may be stated that the lower the academic development of a university is, the more students there are with high levels of socioeconomic, labor and prestige expectations and vice versa. Only in the institutions with the highest level of academic development are there students who think that compared to their parents, when they finish their studies, they will attain a lower level than their parents. Likewise, there are twice as many students in the high academic development private university, as in the other institutions, who believe that they will maintain the same position their parents have, which may be explained because

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<sup>11</sup> The idea that students have of their parents' labor and socioeconomic situations does not differ significantly, even when comparing the level of schooling of the father and mother, nor when adding the factor of family income by households, which makes sense since wages or salary and schooling tend to be related.

these are students whose parents belong to the economic elite and have reached very high socioeconomic and labor positions.

- Upon analyzing the perceptions by gender, there are some differences which are worth mentioning: among those students who come from high income households, two thirds of the females and one third of the males believe they will reach a higher socioeconomic, labor and prestige position than their parents. While none of the males from low income households thought they would have a lower labor position than their parents, among females there was a small percentage who thought they would.

## 4. Conclusions

From this study, we can conclude that there are several mechanisms of inequality which impede or hamper social mobility through the education system:

- The changes linked to globalization processes have had an impact on systems of higher education and have produced asymmetries from one region and country to another, and specifically those focused on higher education, which have a fundamental impact on the capacity to respond to requirements and challenges of development based on knowledge. The data on average schooling in different countries of Latin America shows that education is linked to social stratum, which in many regions and countries has had an important influence on the distribution of education, and has reinforced the permanence of social stratification and the barriers to social mobility, especially for the more disadvantaged groups. Class differences continue to divide societies into different groups, understood on the one hand as inequality in the distribution of material and symbolic resources to which individuals may accede, and on the other, as asymmetries of positions among individuals belonging to the different social groups.
- In a segmented society like Mexico's, class differences have a direct impact on the entering of students into a certain kind of university, which results in unequal inclusion, based not only on the economic resources of the family, but also on the level of schooling of the parents and gender of the student. The combination of the socioeconomic position and education of the parents, along with the gender of the child, potentially deepens individual advantages and/or disadvantages. This occurs because there is a direct relationship between the income level of a student's family and the highest level of schooling the parents finished and the level of economic development of the universities where the children study, showing a university system which reinforces permanence in the original position and promotes social immobility.

The opportunities for young girls from low income households to study at a university are mainly found in universities with low academic development, which implies reinforcement of the precariousness of the family's income through access only to lower quality knowledge and social networks. This leads to difficulties in upward mobility in relation to their starting position. On the other extreme, the high academic development private universities take in more men than women coming from high income households, which grant the males, preferably, the possibility of remaining in their privileged original position on the basis of social status and corresponding wealth alone.

Most of the students from all of the universities aspire to reach socioeconomic, labor and prestige positions which are higher than those obtained by their parents. It has been shown that the lower the family income and the lower the parents' level of schooling, the higher a student's expectations of completing his or her higher education are. Similarly, the lower the academic development of the universities, the higher the socioeconomic, labor and prestige expectations of the students are. That is to say, the precariousness of resources in the household of a student points the student in the direction of universities, which offer lower standards of training, but at the same time create a belief in an egalitarian or at least more promising future.

All of these inequalities, visible at the micro level, could be analyzed at the global level if there were comparable data. One of the greatest difficulties in making comparative analysis is that there is wide disagreement about how best to build reliable cross-national databases which utilize categories that allow for analyzing inequalities and their interdependence.

To sum up, there is a strong relationship between the hierarchical fragmentation of higher education, class inequalities and gender. As they interweave, they add important mechanisms that reinforce inequalities and create asymmetries in the opportunities for knowledge and access to networks of various qualities. That is, the opportunities of education for children depend to a significant degree on the position that the family of origin has in society, where the effort and personal talent seem to have a very limited role, therefore lower class women preferably attend private universities of low academic development, while upper-class males place themselves in the best universities. The relationship between gender and class remains an invisible inequality.

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