

## **Two bonus questions included: Ethical issues from collection and conclusions**

### **Ethical Issues Arising from the Collection of Data:**

The ethical issues related to this dataset – given how moral and politicised questions of economic inequality and their geneses are – are multifarious.

Firstly, this dataset inherently lends itself to expedient interpretations of economic inequality as emerging from the duration of one's education, without necessarily taking heed of why people may have received the lower-level education they did. While incorporating all the variables which may prove underlying causes of economic inequality – such as race, level of educational attainment before tertiary education, type of school attended before university (i.e. charter vs public vs private), geographical location, access to social services, residential status (e.g. undocumented immigrant vs. citizen) – would necessarily be unwieldy, this still remains an ethical quandary for the manner in which the data was collected, because it risks omitting the actual undergirding causes of economic inequality which may underlie even level of university education by allowing us to generate a series of superficially convincing correlations between university education level and future earnings of a child with respect to their parent's earnings. This data would necessarily be different for, for example, the African American community, who are locked more profoundly into intergenerational cycles of poverty and sometimes implicitly precluded from higher education – we lose the salience of this observation when race is not taken into account.

Secondly, we are beset with the ethical issue that there are inequalities between how much data was collected from each income percentile. While this may simply be a symptom of the

comparative underrepresentation, for example, of extremely low income students at elite schools, this nevertheless threatens to distort our observations in virtue of the variable sample sizes.

Finally, the way meaningful distinctions of level of university education are created is implicated in ethical considerations. For example, the fact that the Ivy-League category of data takes precedence over even highly selective schools reflects prima-facie biases about the inherent value of an Ivy-League education, and it is by no means apparent that an Ivy-League education ought to be the top educational category beyond such social presumptions. This dataset therefore threatens to perpetuate the underlying assumptions which potentially lead to, for example, the significantly higher mean incomes of Ivy-League students across all income percentiles compared to any other educational tier.

### **Ethical Issues Arising from the Analysis of Data:**

Our project shed light on a series of issues that can arise when pulling conclusions from the analysis of a data set.

The first conclusion that we came to upon analyzing this data is that your parent's income percentile can have a non-negligible impact on your future socioeconomic standing. Indeed, when analyzing the distribution of incomes among Ivy League students, we noticed a relatively strong correlation between their future incomes and their parent's standing in the economic ladder. Even though attending Ivy League institutions led to a much higher average income, the relative standing of students relative to their peers still seemed to be correlated to parental income. This dispels the idea that education in and of itself is a complete equalizing factor, since this discrepancy was noticed while comparing students with very similar educational backgrounds (every student in the comparison attended an Ivy League or Elite American College).

A second ethical issue we observed was that Ivy League students had significantly higher incomes than all other groups, including those students who attended highly selective public and private colleges. The actual difference in educational value and skills acquired seems marginal when comparing Ivy League students to those from other top colleges that aren't Ivy +, which seems to indicate that a large part of this income differential stems from signaling. Economists like Bryan Caplan have highlighted how much of the value of an education stems from the signal it conveys to employers, and our data analysis seems to be in line with this conclusion. This yet again puts into doubt how effective education can be as an equalizing

factor, since it is not merely the acquisition of skills that are useful in the labor market that has an impact on future outcomes; prestige and signaling are also key factors.

In essence, our data analysis shows that education doesn't provide as much economic mobility as one would expect, since signaling and prestige are also important contributors to future income, and that heredity and parental income have a tangible impacts on child earnings. This is of ethical importance because education is often touted as the ultimate economic equalizer, but our analysis shows that while it is certainly a powerful force, there are caveats that must be taken into account when assessing the full impact of education on economic mobility.

one-page document that discusses ethical issues related to conclusions from analysis of data ((breaking into two categories, economic mobility, heredity of wealth, etc.))

#5. Team consists exactly of two members