

Rising Wage Inequality and the Effectiveness of Tuition Subsidy Policies: Explorations with a Dynamic General Equilibrium Model of Labor Earnings

based on Heckman, Lochner and Taber, *Review of Economic Dynamics* 1 (1998)

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AEA Continuing Education Program
ASSA Course: Microeconomics of Life Course Inequality
San Francisco, CA, January 5-7, 2016

The Microeconomic Model

The Problem of the Agent: Demographics

- Overlapping Generations Model.

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- Agents live for a_T years.
- Mandatory retirement $a_R \leq a_T$.

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- $R_{s,t}$ is the price at period t of a type- s unit of human capital.

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- K_1 is the initial stock of physical capital.

Agent Solves:

$$V_a(H_{s,a}, K_a, s, \theta, r_t, R_{s,t})$$

$$= \max \left\{ \frac{C_a^\gamma - 1}{\gamma} + \delta V_{a+1}(H_{a+1}, K_{a+1}, s, \theta, r_{t+1}, R_{s,t+1}) \right\}$$

subject to:

$$C_a + K_{a+1} = (1 - \tau) R_{s,t} H_{s,a} (1 - I_a) + (1 + (1 - \tau) r_t) K_a$$

$$H_{s,a+1} = A_s(\theta) (I_a)^{\alpha_s} (H_{s,a})^{\beta_s} + (1 - \sigma) H_{s,a}$$

$$0 < \alpha_s, \beta_s < 1$$

The Euler equations are:

$$(C_a)^{\gamma-1} = \delta (1 + (1 - \tau) r_{t+1}) (C_{a+1})^{\gamma-1}$$

$$\begin{aligned} & (C_a)^{\gamma-1} R_{s,t} H_{s,a} \\ &= \delta (C_{a+1})^{\gamma-1} R_{s,t+1} (1 - I_{a+1}) + \alpha_s A_s(\theta) (I_a)^{\alpha_s-1} (H_{s,a})^{\beta_s} \end{aligned}$$

The initial conditions and Euler equations define solutions to the problem:

$$C_a^* = g_a^C (H_{s,a}, K_a, S, \theta, r_t, R_{s,t})$$

$$I_a^* = g_a^I (H_{s,a}, K_a, S, \theta, r_t, R_{s,t})$$

$$K_a^* = g_a^K (H_{s,a}, K_a, S, \theta, r_t, R_{s,t})$$

Comments:

- 1) The policy functions are age-specific because agents have a finite lifetime (OLG model).
- 2) The policy functions depend on price $R_{s,t}$ and r_t because they vary over time (perfect foresight).

Now, use the policy functions to obtain:

$$V_1(H_{s,1}, K_1, s, \theta, t) = \frac{C_a^{*\gamma} - 1}{\gamma} + \delta V_2\left(A_s(\theta) (I_a^*)^{\alpha_s} (H_{s,a})^{\beta_s} + H_{s,a}, K_a^*, s, \theta, t + 1\right)$$

The agent then decides schooling by solving:

$$s^* = \arg \max_s [V_1(H_{s,1}, K_1, s, \theta, t) - D_s - \varepsilon_s]$$

The Problem of the Firm: Notation

- $\bar{H}_{s,t}$ is the total amount of type- s human capital demanded by the firm at period t .
- K_t is the total amount of physical capital demanded by the firm at period t .
- σ_k is the depreciation of physical capital.

The problem of the firm is:

$$\begin{aligned} & \pi (R_{1,t}, R_{2,t}, r_t) \\ & = \max \{ F (\bar{H}_{1,t}, \bar{H}_{2,t}, K_t) - R_{1,t} \bar{H}_{1,t} - R_{2,t} \bar{H}_{2,t} - (r_t + \sigma_k) \bar{K}_t \} \end{aligned}$$

The first-order conditions are:

$$R_{s,t} = \frac{\partial F (\bar{H}_{1,t}, \bar{H}_{2,t}, \bar{K}_t)}{\partial \bar{H}_{s,t}}, \quad s = 1, 2$$

$$(r_t + \sigma_k) = \frac{\partial F (\bar{H}_{1,t}, \bar{H}_{2,t}, \bar{K}_t)}{\partial \bar{K}_t}$$

The production function F is assumed to be:

$$F(\bar{H}_{1,t}, \bar{H}_{2,t}, \bar{K}_t) \\ = \left\{ a_2 (\bar{K}_t)^{\rho_2} + (1 - a_2) \left[a_1 (\bar{H}_{1,t})^{\rho_1} + (1 - a_1) (\bar{H}_{2,t})^{\rho_1} \right]^{\frac{\rho_2}{\rho_1}} \right\}^{\frac{1}{\rho_2}}$$



Aggregation

- t_c is the year of birth of cohort c .
- $a = t - t_c$ is the age of cohort c at year t .
- $P_{t_c} = \{r_i, R_{1,i}, R_{2,i}\}_{i=t_c}^{t_c+aR}$ is the sequence of prices cohort c will face during working life.
- $N_s(\theta, t_c)$ is the number of agents of type.
- θ in cohort c and schooling level s .



- $H_{s,a}(\theta, P_{t_c})$ is the stock of type- s human capital at age a of an agent of cohort c .
- $K_{s,a}(\theta, P_{t_c})$ is the stock of type- s human capital at age a of an agent of cohort c .

Therefore:

$$\hat{H}_{s,t} = \sum_{t_c=t-a_R}^{t-1} \int N_s(\theta, t_c) H_{s,t-t_c}(\theta, P_{t_c}) (1 - I_{t-t_c}(s, \theta, P_{t_c})) d\Psi(\theta)$$

$$\hat{K}_t = \sum_{t_c=t-a_R}^{t-1} \sum_{s=1}^2 \int N_s(\theta, t_c) K_{t-t_c}(s, \theta, P_{t_c}) d\Psi(\theta)$$



- Earnings of a person age a at time t of cohort c :

$$W(a, t, H_{a,s}(\theta, P_{t_c})) = R_{s,t} H_{a,s}(\theta, P_{t_c}) (1 - I_a(s, \theta, P_{t_c}))$$

- Suppose that for two consecutive ages a and $a + 1$, $I_a(s, \theta, P_{t_c}) = I_{a+1}(s, \theta, P_{t_c}) = 0$.

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{W(a+1, t+1, H_{a+1,s}(\theta, P_{t_c}))}{W(a, t, H_{a,s}(\theta, P_{t_c}))} &= \frac{R_{s,t+1} H_{a+1,s}(\theta, P_{t_c})}{R_{s,t} H_{a,s}(\theta, P_{t_c})} = \\ &= \frac{R_{s,t+1} (1 - \sigma_s) H_{a,s}(\theta, P_{t_c})}{R_{s,t} H_{a,s}(\theta, P_{t_c})} = \frac{R_{s,t+1} (1 - \sigma)}{R_{s,t}} \end{aligned}$$

- We can get the ratio of $\frac{R_{s,t+1}}{R_{s,t}}$ up to a constant. Next step, we show how to get σ .
- We can get σ from microestimates of human capital production function.



- Consider the firm's wage bill of schooling level s at period t :

$$WB_{s,t} = R_{s,t} \bar{H}_{s,t}$$

- Rearranging terms:

$$\frac{WB_{s,t}}{(1-\sigma)^t R_{s,t}} = \frac{\bar{H}_{s,t}}{(1-\sigma)^t}$$

- Thus:

$$\tilde{R}_{s,t} = (1-\sigma)^t R_{s,t}$$

$$\tilde{H}_{s,t} = \frac{\bar{H}_{s,t}}{(1-\sigma)^t}$$

Digression: Identifying the Parameters of Interest: Identifying σ

- Let

$$Q_t = (a_1 (H_{t,1})^{\rho_1} + (1 - a_1) (H_{t,2})^{\rho_1})^{\frac{1}{\rho_1}} . \quad (1)$$

- $\frac{1}{1-\rho_1}$ = elasticity of substitution
- The price R_t^Q of one unit of the basket Q_t is the solution to

$$R_t^Q = \min_{H_{t,1}, H_{t,2}} R_{t,1} H_{t,1} + R_{t,2} H_{t,2}$$

subject to

$$(a_1 (H_{t,1})^{\rho_1} + (1 - a_1) (H_{t,2})^{\rho_1})^{\frac{1}{\rho_1}} = 1 .$$

- The first-order conditions are:

$$R_{t,1} = \lambda (a_1 (H_{t,1})^{\rho_1} + (1 - a_1) (H_{t,2})^{\rho_1})^{\frac{1-\rho_1}{\rho_1}} a_1 (H_{t,1})^{\rho_1-1} \quad (2)$$

$$R_{t,2} = \lambda (a_1 (H_{t,1})^{\rho_1} + (1 - a_1) (H_{t,2})^{\rho_1})^{\frac{1-\rho_1}{\rho_1}} (1 - a_1) (H_{t,2})^{\rho_1-1} \quad (3)$$

- The solution to this problem is well-known:

$$R_t^Q = \left[(a_1)^{\frac{1}{1-\rho_1}} (R_{t,1})^{\frac{\rho_1}{\rho_1-1}} + (1 - a_1)^{\frac{1}{1-\rho_1}} (R_{t,2})^{\frac{\rho_1}{\rho_1-1}} \right]^{\frac{\rho_1-1}{\rho_1}} \quad (4)$$

- The problem of the firm can be recast as:

$$\pi (R_t^Q, r_t) = \max \left\{ [a_2 Q_t^{\rho_2} + (1 - a_2) K_t^{\rho_2}]^{\frac{1}{\rho_2}} - R_t^Q Q_t - r_t K_t \right\}$$

- The first-order conditions are

$$[a_2 (Q_t)^{\rho_2} + (1 - a_2) (K_t)^{\rho_2}]^{\frac{1-\rho_2}{\rho_2}} a_2 (Q_t)^{\rho_2-1} = R_t^Q \quad (5)$$

$$[a_2 Q_t^{\rho_2} + (1 - a_2) K_t^{\rho_2}]^{\frac{1-\rho_2}{\rho_2}} (1 - a_2) (K_t)^{\rho_2-1} = r_t \quad (6)$$

- Taking ratios of (5) and (6) and applying logs it follows that:

$$\log \frac{R_t^Q}{r_t} = \log \left(\frac{a_2}{1 - a_2} \right) + (\rho_2 - 1) \log \left(\frac{Q_t}{K_t} \right) \quad (7)$$

- But note that from (1) and (4) are defined in terms of $H_{s,t}$ and $R_{s,t}$.

- However, we only observe $\tilde{H}_{s,t}$ and $\tilde{R}_{s,t}$. Let \tilde{Q}_t and \tilde{R}_t^Q be defined as in (1) and (4) but based on observables $\tilde{H}_{s,t}$ and $\tilde{R}_{s,t}$:

$$\tilde{Q}_t = \left(a_1 \left(\tilde{H}_{t,1} \right)^{\rho_1} + (1 - a_1) \left(\tilde{H}_{t,2} \right)^{\rho_1} \right)^{\frac{1}{\rho_1}}$$

$$\tilde{R}_t^Q = \left[\left(a_1 \right)^{\frac{1}{1-\rho_1}} \left(\tilde{R}_{t,1} \right)^{\frac{\rho_1}{\rho_1-1}} + (1 - a_1)^{\frac{1}{1-\rho_1}} \left(\tilde{R}_{t,2} \right)^{\frac{\rho_1}{\rho_1-1}} \right]^{\frac{\rho_1-1}{\rho_1}}$$

- It is easy to show that:

$$Q_t = (1 - \sigma)^t \tilde{Q}_t \quad (8)$$

$$R_t^Q = (1 - \sigma)^{-t} \tilde{R}_t^Q \quad (9)$$

- Plugging (8) and (9) into (7) it follows that:

$$\log \frac{\tilde{R}_t^Q}{r_t} = \log \left(\frac{a_2}{1 - a_2} \right) + \rho_2 \log(1 - \sigma) t + (\rho_2 - 1) \log \left(\frac{\tilde{Q}_t}{K_t} \right) \quad (10)$$

- Suppose we run a regression:

$$\log \frac{\tilde{R}_t^Q}{r_t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 t + \beta_2 \log \left(\frac{\tilde{Q}_t}{K_t} \right) + \varepsilon_t$$

- Then we can identify:

$$a_2 = \frac{e^{\beta_0}}{1 + e^{\beta_0}} \quad \rho_2 = 1 + \beta_2 \quad \sigma = 1 - e^{\frac{\beta_1}{1 + \beta_2}}$$

- This assumes no technical progress and is a bad assumption.

- To identify the other parameters of interest, consider the log of the ratio of (3) to (2):

$$\log \frac{R_{t,2}}{R_{t,1}} = \log \left(\frac{1 - a_1}{a_1} \right) + (\rho_1 - 1) \log \left(\frac{H_{t,2}}{H_{t,1}} \right) \quad (11)$$

- Again, note that we do not observe either $R_{t,s}$ or $H_{t,s}$, but only $\tilde{R}_{t,s}$ and $\tilde{H}_{t,s}$.
- Therefore

$$\begin{aligned} \log \frac{\frac{\tilde{R}_{t,2}}{(1-\sigma)^t}}{\frac{\tilde{R}_{t,1}}{(1-\sigma)^t}} &= \log \left(\frac{1 - a_1}{a_1} \right) + (\rho_1 - 1) \log \left(\frac{(1 - \sigma)^t \tilde{H}_{t,2}}{(1 - \sigma)^t \tilde{H}_{t,1}} \right) \Rightarrow \\ \Rightarrow \log \frac{\tilde{R}_{t,2}}{\tilde{R}_{t,1}} &= \log \left(\frac{1 - a_1}{a_1} \right) + (\rho_1 - 1) \log \left(\frac{\tilde{H}_{t,2}}{\tilde{H}_{t,1}} \right). \end{aligned} \quad (12)$$

- This assumes that a_1 is not time varying or, if it is, $\ln\left(\frac{1-a_1}{a_1}\right)$ is not collinear with $\tilde{H}_{t,2}/\tilde{H}_{t,1}$.
- But we can get σ from the production function of human capital.
- We bring this to the macro data.

Estimating the Human Capital Production Function

- We use wage and schooling data on white males from the NLSY.
- We assume that there are four observable θ types which we define according to AFQT quartile.
- We assume that the interest rate is fixed at $r = 0.05$ and that rental rates are fixed and normalized to one.



- For any given (a, θ, S) and any set of parameters π we can calculate the optimal wage

$$w(a, \theta, S; \pi).$$

- We assume that these wages are measured with error and we estimate the parameters, π , using nonlinear least squares, minimizing

$$\sum_{i=1}^N \sum_a (w_{i,a}^* - w(a, \theta, S; \pi))^2,$$

where $w_{i,a}^*$ is the observed wage.

- Given these estimated parameters, we can obtain the present value of earnings for each type as college graduates or high school graduates, \widehat{V}_θ^S .
- We assume that the nonpecuniary tastes for college are normally distributed, so

$$\Pr(\text{Coll} \mid D^S, \theta) = \Phi\left(\frac{(1 - \tau)(V_\theta^2 - V_\theta^1) - D^S + \mu_\theta}{\sigma_\varepsilon}\right)$$

- Using data on state tuition we estimate this model as a probit.

- We take

$$\tau = 0.15 \quad \delta = 0.96 \quad \gamma = 0.10$$

- We calibrate the model to “look like” the NLSY in the original steady state:

$$(1 - \tau) r = 0.05 \quad R^1 = 2.00 \quad R^2 = 2.00$$

- In order to match the capital-output ratio, we need a transfer from old cohorts to young.
- We take an exogenous transfer from a cohort as it retires and give it to a new cohort as it is born.
- This transfer is approximately \$30,000.

- We estimate a nested CES production function allowing for a linear time trend

$$a_3 \left(a_2 \left(a_1 (\bar{H}_t^1)^{\rho_1} + (1 - a_1) (\bar{H}_t^2)^{\rho_1} \right)^{\rho_2 / \rho_1} + (1 - a_2) \bar{K}_t^{\rho_2} \right)^{1 / \rho_2}$$

- We estimate $\rho_1 = 1 - \frac{1}{\sigma} \doteq \frac{1}{3}$ and $\rho_2 = 0$ based on those estimates.
- We calibrate (a_1, a_2, a_3) and the transfer to yield prices (r, R^1, R^2) and a capital-output ratio of 4 in the initial steady state.

Skill-Biased Technical Change

- Unexpected shock resulting in a constant decline in a_1 for 30 years.
- The total decline in the share of low skilled labor is 30% (matching the rate of decline in the data).
- Perfect foresight.
- Transition period of 200 years.



Skill-Biased Technical Change: The Effects of Skill-Biased Technology Change

- Movements in measured wages are different from movements in skill prices, especially for young workers.
- Without intervention, economy converges to a new steady state with lower wage inequality than before the technology change.
- In the long run, society is richer and all types are better off. In the short run, low ability/low skilled workers caught in the transition are worse off.

- In the new steady state, there are more high skilled workers, but human capital per skilled worker is lower.
- During transition periods, cross-section estimates of “returns” to skill are substantially different from the actual returns faced by cohorts making educational decisions.

Tuition Subsidy

- Partial equilibrium analysis ignores the effects of changes in skill quantities on the price of skill.
- As individuals acquire more skill in response to policy change, the returns to skill decline.
- This lowers the proportion of individuals taking advantage of the policy.
- The increase in aggregate skill also affects the earnings of individuals who do not take advantage of the new policy.

- Partial equilibrium analysis fails for two reasons:
 - (1) Overstates the effect of the program on participants.
 - (2) Misses the effect of the program on non-participants
- Accounting for these effects in evaluating policy requires a general equilibrium, structural model of skill formation.

Tuition Subsidy: Example

- \$500 tuition subsidy
- Balance the budget in the steady states.
- Perfect foresight.
- Transition period of 200 years.

Main Findings

- Estimates of college enrollment responses based on cross-section variations in tuition are substantially overstated.
- Individuals who do not change their schooling decision are affected.

Summary

- We develop an empirically-grounded dynamic overlapping generations general-equilibrium model of skill formation with heterogeneous human capital.
- Model roughly consistent with changing wage structure.
- Partial equilibrium program evaluation can be very misleading.
- We distinguish between effects measured in a cross-section and the effects on different cohorts.

Extensions

- Additional tax and subsidy policies.
- Closer link between macro and micro models.
- Relax perfect foresight assumption.
- Incorporate a separate sector for schooling–education requires high skilled labor inputs.

Table 2: Derived parameters for human capital production function and schooling decision (units are thousands of dollars).

Human Capital Production		
	High School ($S = 1$)	College ($S = 2$)
$H^S(1)$	8.042(0.094)	11.117(0.424)
$H^S(2)$	10.0634(0.118)	12.271(0.325)
$H^S(3)$	11.1273(0.155)	12.960(0.272)
$H^S(4)$	10.361(0.234)	15.095(0.323)
Present Value Earnings 1	260.304(3.939)	289.618(12.539)
Present Value Earnings 2	325.966(5.075)	319.302(10.510)
Present Value Earnings 3	360.717(6.352)	337.260(9.510)
Present Value Earnings 4	335.977(8.453)	393.138(11.442)

Table 2 (continued)

College Decision: Attend College if
 $(1 - \tau)V^2(\theta) - D^2 + \varepsilon_i \geq (1 - \tau)V^1(\theta)$
 $\varepsilon_\theta \sim N(\mu_\theta, \sigma_\varepsilon)$

σ_ε (Std. deviation of ε)	22.407(8.425)
Nonpecuniary costs by ability level	
μ_1 (Lowest Ability Quartile)	-53.0190(16.770)
μ_2 (Second Ability Quartile)	-2.8173(12.760)
μ_3 (Third Ability Quartile)	29.7712(11.540)
μ_4 (Highest Ability Quartile)	-28.6494(16.966)

(1) $V^i(\theta)$ is the monetary value of going to schooling level i for a person of AFQT quartile θ .

$i = 1$ for high school; $i = 2$ for college. We assume $\tau_r = \tau_h = \tau$.

(2) ε_θ is the nonpecuniary benefit of attending college for a person of ability quartile θ .

(3) D^2 is the discounted tuition cost of attending college

Table 3: Estimates of aggregate production function estimated from factor demand equations (III-1) and (III-2), 1965–1990, allowing for technical progress through a linear trend (standard errors in parentheses).

Instruments	ρ_1	Implied Elasticity of Substitution (σ_1)	Time Trend	ρ_2	Implied Elasticity of Substitution (σ_2)	Time Trend
OLS (Base Model)	0.306 (0.089)	1.441 (0.185)	0.036 (0.004)	-0.034 (0.200)	0.967 (0.187)	-0.004 (0.007)
Percent Working Pop. < 30 & Defense Percent of GNP	0.209 (0.134)	1.264 (0.215)	0.039 (0.005)	-0.036 (0.200)	0.965 (0.187)	-0.004 (0.007)
Defense Percent of GNP	0.157 (0.125)	1.186 (0.175)	0.041 (0.004)	-0.171 (0.815)	0.854 (0.594)	-0.008 (0.024)
Percent Working Pop. < 30	0.326 (0.182)	1.484 (0.400)	0.036 (0.006)	0.364 (1.150)	1.572 (2.842)	0.007 (0.034)

Table 4: Simulated changes in wages and wage inequality from 1960–1990. Includes the estimated trend in technology and entrance of baby boom cohorts from 1965–80 (multiplied by 100).

Years	Coll. - HS Log Wage Diff.	Mean HS Log Wage		Mean Coll. Log Wage		Std. Deviation of Log Wages		
		Age 25	Age 50	Age 25	Age 50	HS	College	All
1960-70	6.66	-26.98	-9.17	19.41	-2.2	0.06	0.67	2.49
1970-80	-5.33	3.51	-2.32	-8.72	-5.11	2.06	-0.84	0.14
1980-90	11.74	-4.94	-1.74	11.22	-2.72	10.68	-7.87	8.12
1960-90	13.07	-28.4	-13.22	21.91	-10.03	12.8	-8.03	10.75

Figure 1: Predicted vs. actual hourly wages (in 1992 dollars) by AFQT quartile (high school category).

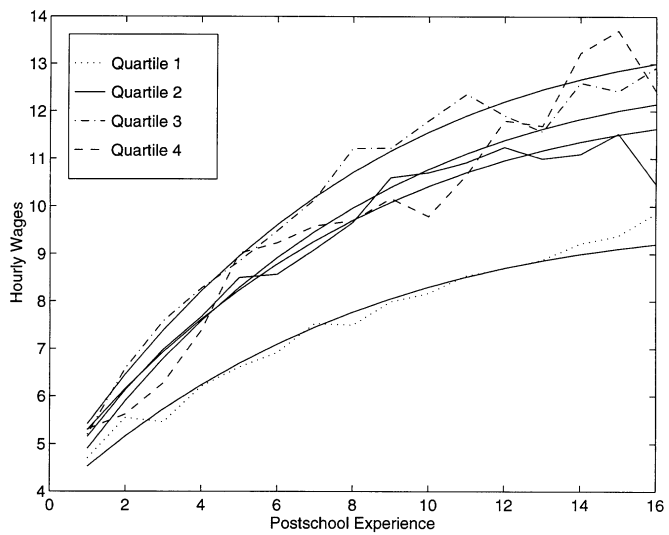


Figure 3A: Comparison of Mincer vs. estimated investment profiles (high school).

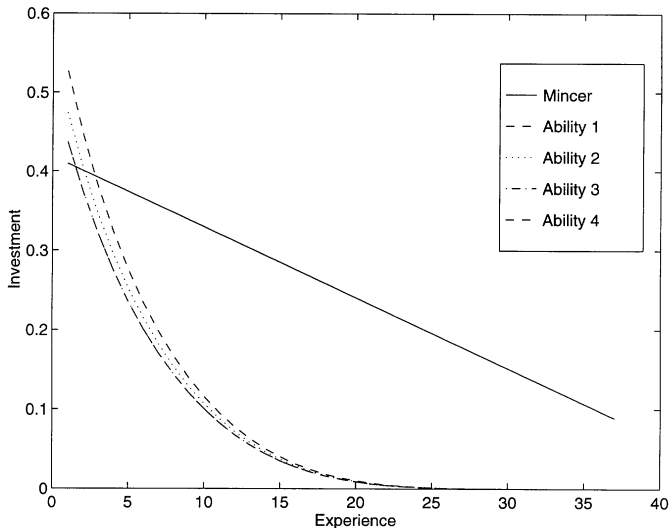


Figure 3B: Comparison of Mincer vs. estimated investment profiles (college).

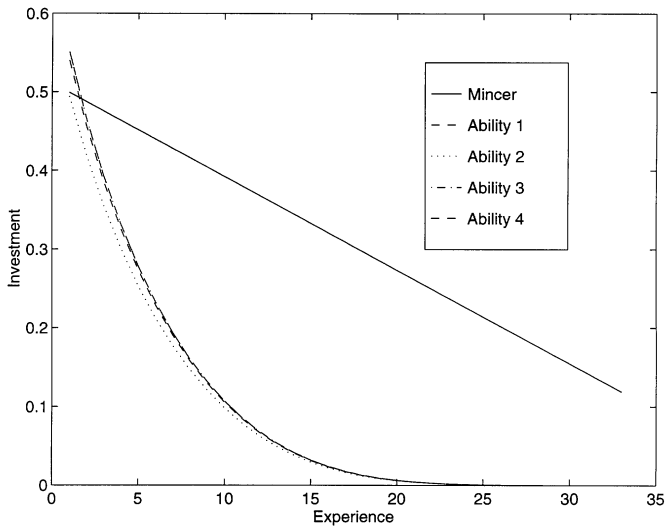
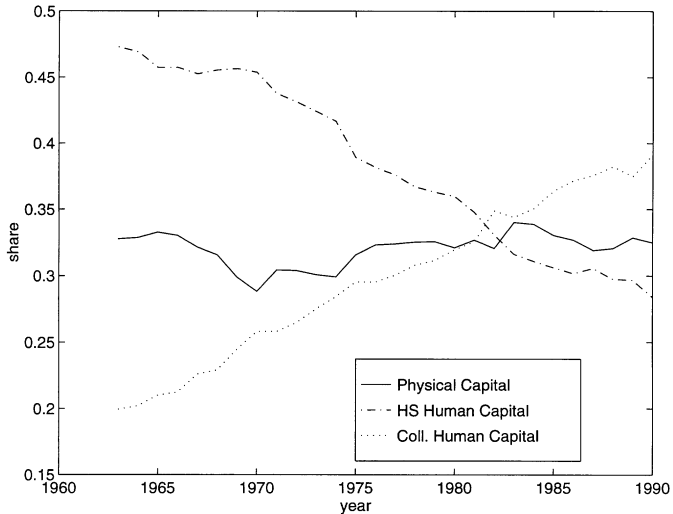


Figure 4: Labor and capital shares over time.



Note: The breakdown of labor's share is based on wages and excludes other forms of compensation.

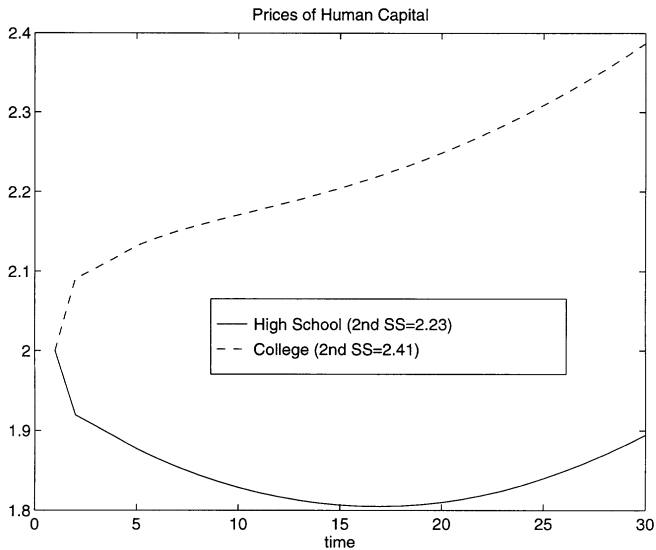
Figure 5: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

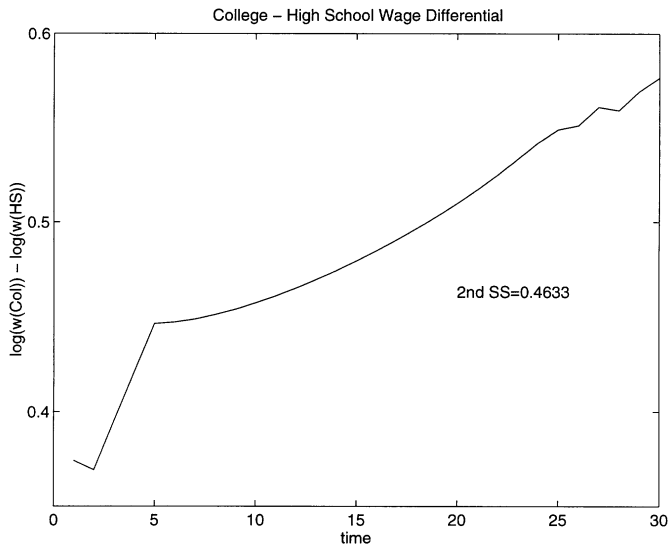
Figure 6: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

Figure 7: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

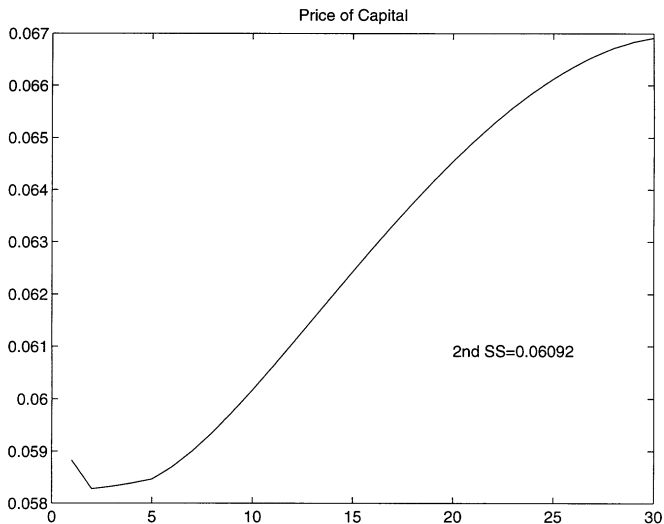
Figure 8: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

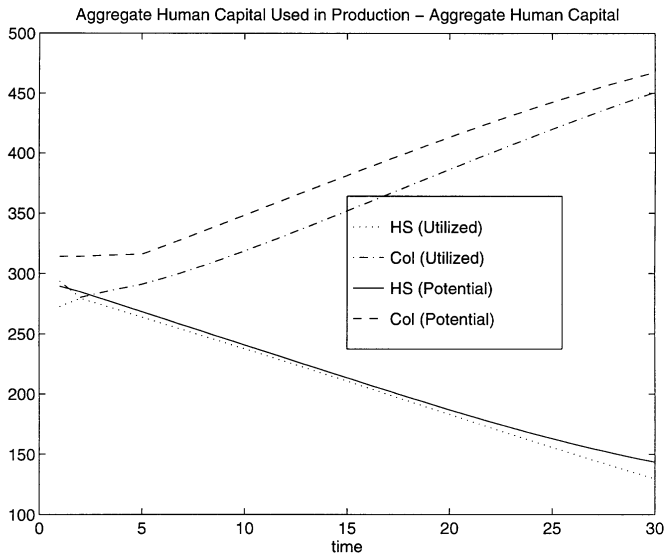
Figure 9: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

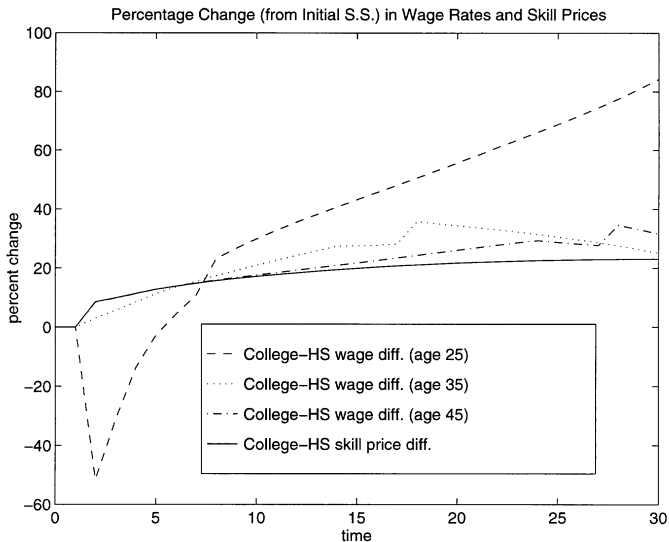
Figure 10: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

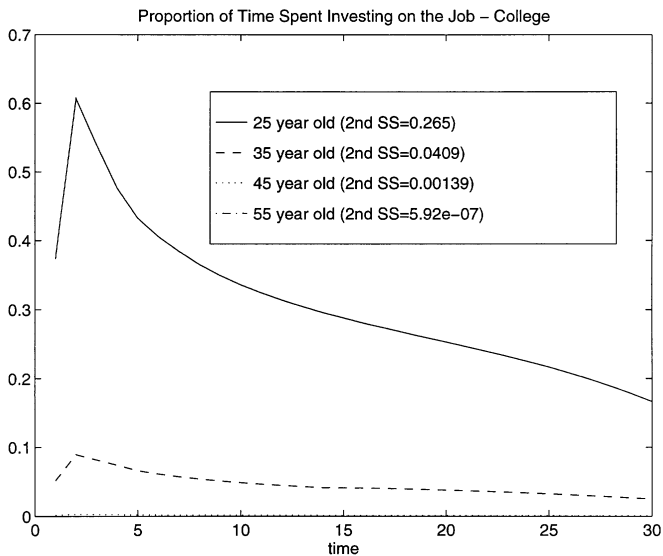
Figure 11A: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

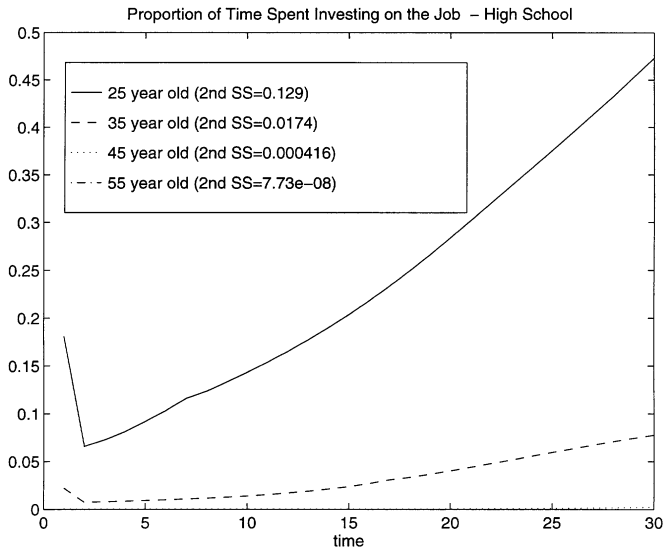
Figure 11B: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

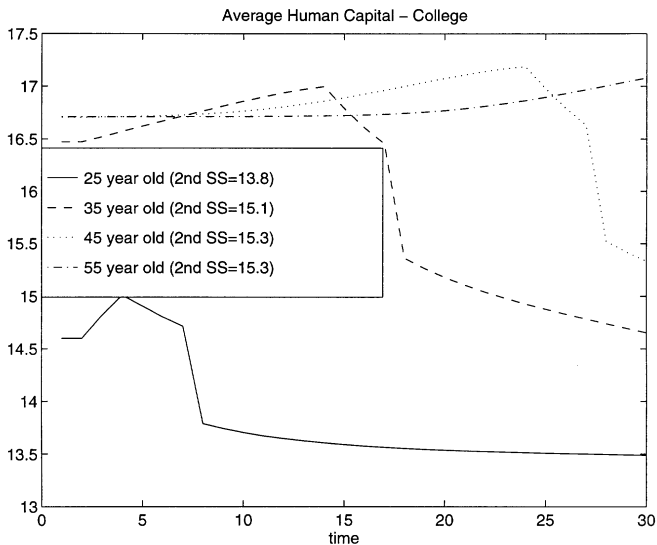
Figure 12A: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

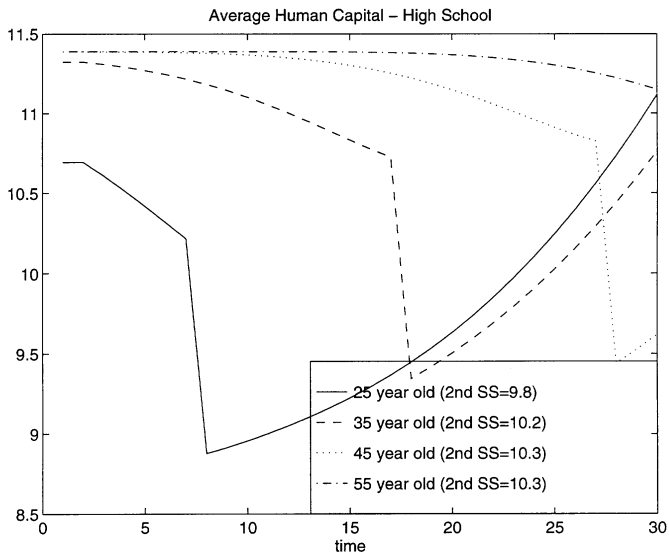
Figure 12B: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

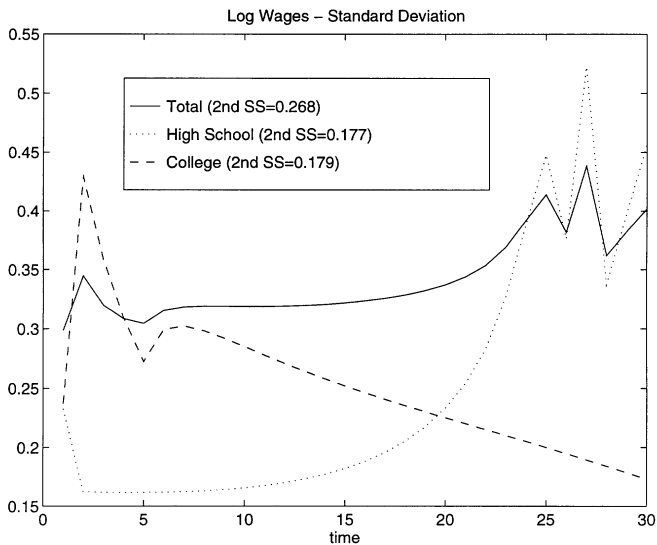
Figure 13: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

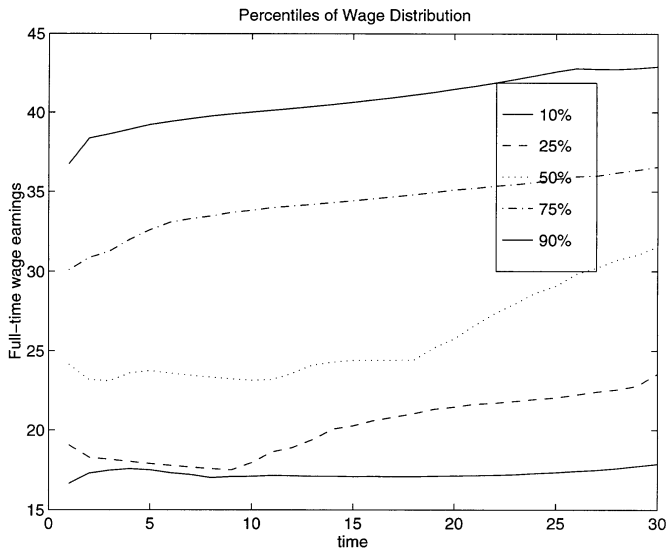
Figure 14: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

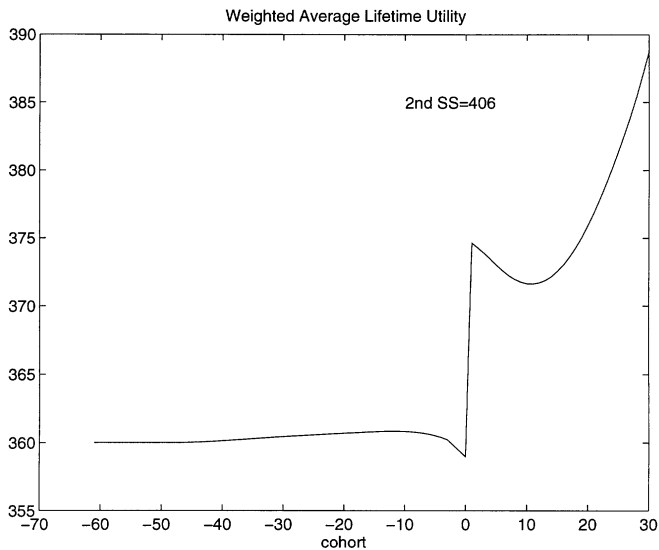
Figure 15A: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

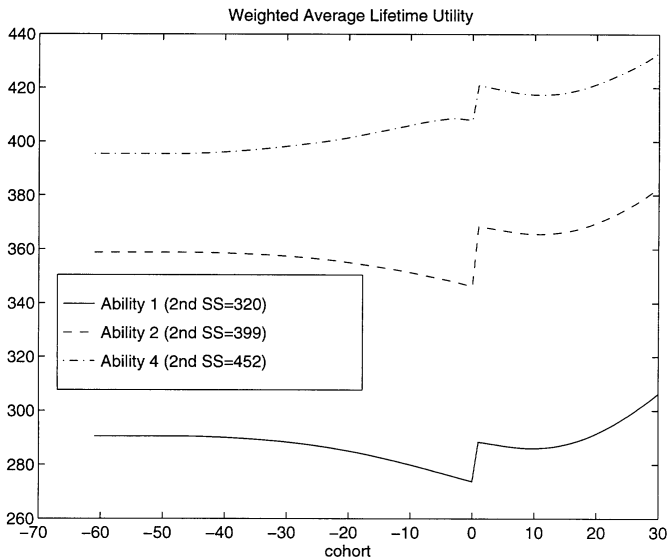
Figure 15B: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

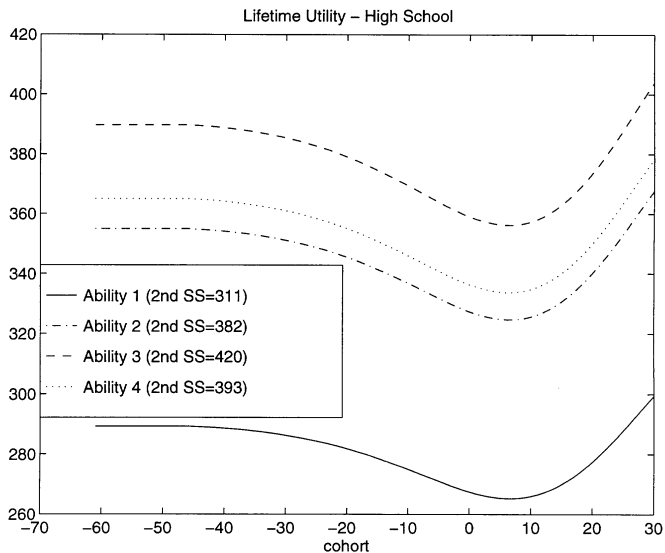
Figure 15C: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

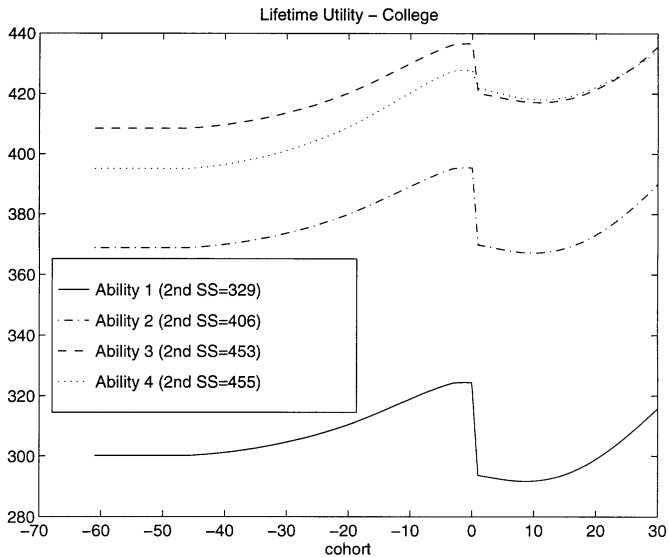
Figure 15D: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

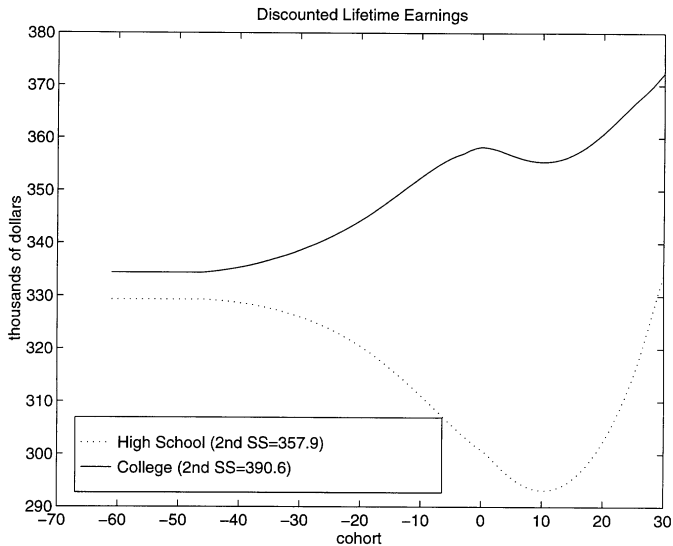
Figure 16: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

Figure 17: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

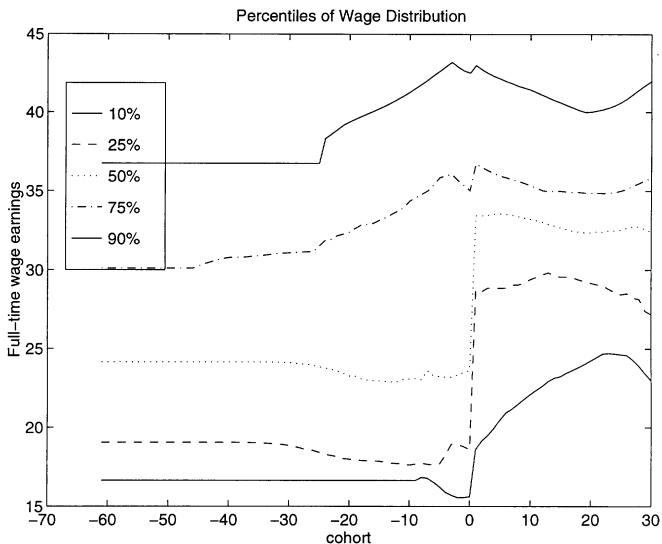
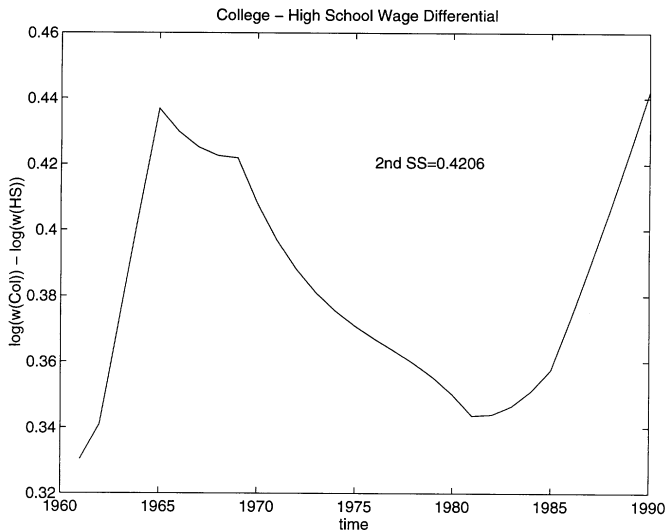
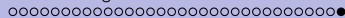
Figure 18: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

Figure 19: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.
Baby boom (expansion of cohort size by 32%) between years 1965–80



Figure 20: Estimated trend in α_1 for 30 years.

Baby boom (expansion of cohort size by 32%) between years 1965–80

