

SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES IN CHILDHOOD COGNITIVE TEST SCORES ACROSS THREE COHORTS

Tackling Socio-Economic Inequalities in Childhood Test Scores

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Cognitive Test Scores



- ‘Individuals differ from one another in their ability to understand complex ideas, to adapt effectively to the environment, to learn from experience, to engage in various forms of reasoning, to overcome obstacles by taking thought.’ (Neisser et al., 1995, p. 77)

Cognitive Test Scores

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- Previous research consistently reports a relationship between parental socioeconomic positions and children's cognitive ability test scores.
- Children from more advantaged families generally perform better on cognitive ability tests.

Cognitive Test Scores

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- Cognitive ability test scores in childhood are widely found to be associated with later educational attainment and occupational positions in adulthood.
- Cognitive ability test scores are also associated with health and wellbeing.

Our Research



- National Child Development Study (NCDS)
 - A systematic sample of babies born in 1958
- British Cohort Study (BCS)
 - A systematic sample of babies born in 1970
- Millennium Cohort Study (MCS)
 - A complex sample of babies born in 2000/02

Change over time...

- The Flynn Effect:
 - The sustained increase in average cognitive test scores over time.

Change over time...

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- Nutrition
- Education
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Change over time...

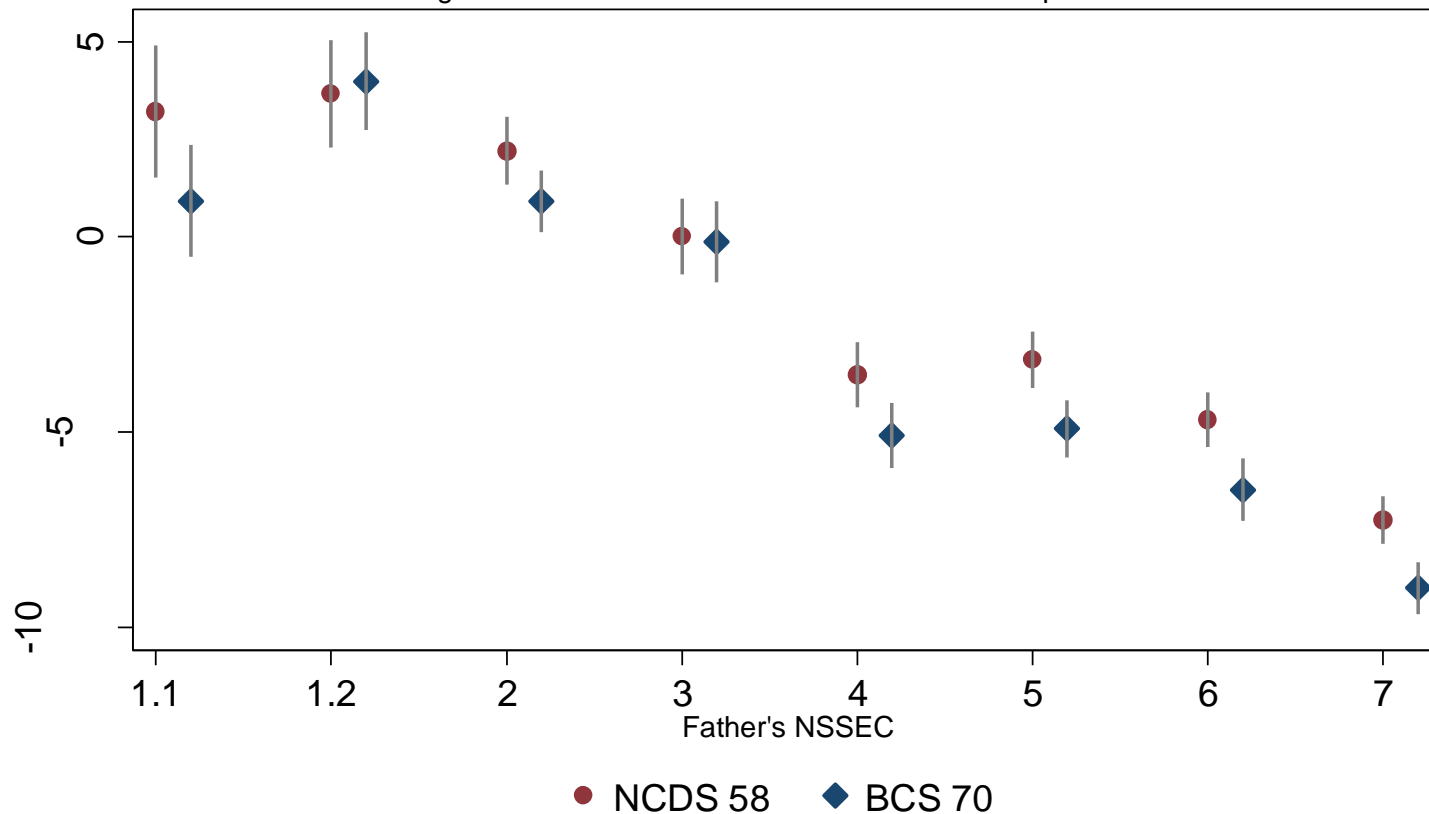
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- Advantaged parents have multiple strategies at their disposal to maintain the advantage of their children.
- Less advantaged social class groups may also have an antagonistic relationship with dominant cultures and different linguistic cultures.
- The entrenched cultural resources and cultural practices of social class groups may also act to maintain inequalities in children's cognitive test scores.

- How did social class inequalities in general ability test scores change between 1969 and 1980?

Predictions of General Ability Test Score by Father's Social Class

OLS Regression Coefficients and Quasi-Variance Comparison Intervals



Data: 1958 National Child Development Study (n=9,846) and 1970 British Cohort Study (n=9,204).
Note: Model also contains Sex and Parent's Highest Education, Adjusted R-Squared = 0.12.

- Studies from multiple countries have shown that average cognitive test scores have been increasing since cognitive test scores were first developed.
- A peculiarity of the Flynn effect is that gains in average scores are not uniform across cognitive sub-tests.

Sad

Happy

Worried

Change over time...

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We are comparing minds that ‘were adapted to one cognitive environment with those whose minds are adapted to another cognitive environment’.

(Flynn 2012)



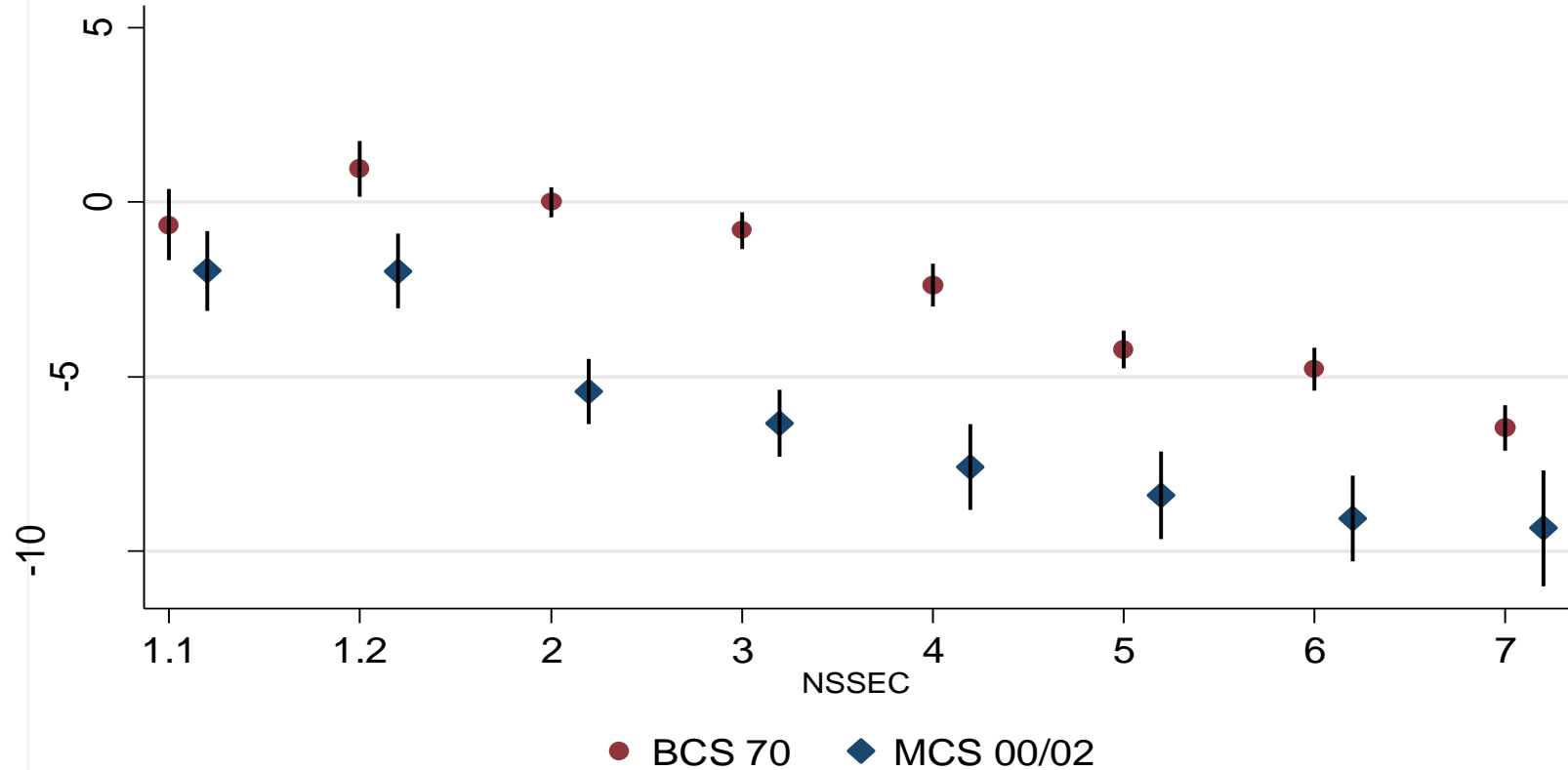
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(Flynn 2012)

- How did social class inequalities in similarities test scores change between 1980 and 2010/11?

Social Class by Cohort Interaction

OLS Regression Coefficients and Quasi-Variance Comparison Intervals



Outcome: Similarities Test Score taken at age 10/11, standardised within cohort.
Data: Pooled data, 1970 British Cohort Study (n=9,910), Millennium Cohort Study (n=11,308).
Note: Model also controls for Sex and Parent's Highest Education, R-Squared = 0.11.

Conclusion

- We have compared socio-economic inequalities in cognitive test scores for cohorts of children born in 1958, 1970 and 2000/02.
- Social divisions open up early on in the lifecourse.
- Socio-economic inequalities in cognitive test performance are large and persistent.

Thank You

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