What harm can TV do?

A study of the effects of media socialization in the parental home on educational attainment.

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**Abstract**

In this article we shed some more light on the intergenerational transmission of cultural resources by analyzing the long term effects of parental media socialization on educational attainment. We employed the Family Survey Dutch Population of 1998, 2000 and 200 and by estimating multilevel models we were able to distinguish between family-specific (socialization) effects and individual effects. Our study reveals that, next to parental social background and family composition, parental media socialization plays an additional and significant role within the intergenerational transmission of parental resources. Parental serious TV preferences and popular reading preferences both positively affect a person’s educational attainment. But parental popular reading is more beneficial for children from lower educated parents than for children from higher educated parent. These findings indicate that media preferences reflect both aspects of cognitive competency and social status. However, parental popular television preferences negatively affect educational success, referring to a cultural clash between low-brow family TV preferences and school culture. Furthermore, parent-child interaction on reading skills mediates the effect of parental popular reading preferences and parental serious television preferences on children’s educational success. Parental active mediation on children’s television use is not relevant for their children’s educational success. Within parental media socialization activities, parental popular television behavior and reading mediation seem to be overriding in affecting a person’s school success.
1. Introduction

Research on children’s television consumption shows that television exposure is connected to aggressiveness, obesity, risk behavior and negatively affects a child’s cognitive development and/or educational success (Zimmerman & Christakis, 2005; Hancox, Milne & Poulton, 2005; Sharif & Sargent, 2007). In other words, TV consumption seems to harm children’s school performance and overall well-being. On the other hand, some studies report positive effects of TV-consumption on children’s cognitive competency (Huston & Wright, 1994; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006). Children who watch educational television can improve their linguistic and cognitive skills (Crawley, Anderson, Wilder, Williams & Santomero, 1999; Wright, Huston, Murphy, St. Peters, Pinon, Scantlin & Kotler, 2001). Therefore, by stimulating appropriate and rewarding television use, parents might alter the possible harmful effects of children’s media exposure and turn TV consumption into a advantageous activity (Sharif & Sargent, 2007). In addition to these inconclusive findings about children and TV consumption, promoting literacy skills in the parental home is found to be an overall positive factor for a child’s development and school success (Bus, IJzendoorn & Pelligrini, 1995; Kraaykamp, 2003). It appears that parental media socialization, that is parents guiding there children’s reading skills and television consumption either intentionally or unintentionally, may affect their offspring’s educational achievement, both in a negative and in a positive way.

There is a long tradition of social stratification research on the effects of parental resources and socialization activities on their children’s school success. One of the dominant and persistent predictors of educational achievement are parental cultural resources (DiMaggio, 1982; Bourdieu, 1984). When it comes to parental cultural assets and the intergenerational transmission of this family-specific cultural capital, an often tested and corroborated presumption is Bourdieu’s cultural reproduction theory. From this cultural reproduction theory it follows that parental cultural capital strongly affects a child’s educational success (Bourdieu, 1984). Parental cultural dispositions benefit school success, whereas a lack of parental cultural resources may more or less harm a persons’ school career (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996). Although parents’ cultural behaviour and preferences seem to play an important role in the cultural reproduction process, research so far has not been able to point out exactly how this mechanism works. How exactly do parental
preferences influence their children’s school success? The question remains whether in the transmission of parental cultural preferences, it is the parental cognitive competency or parental social status that plays a dominant role. By studying parental media preferences and parental-child interaction on media consumption, we expect to shed some more light on this reproduction process. Our general research question is therefore as follows: *To what extent can parental media socialization activities explain differences in educational attainment?*

Our research is innovative for several reasons. First, we hypothesize that parental high-brow (serious) media socialization enhances a person’s educational attainment, and parental low-brow (popular) media socialization harms educational careers. In this way, we split up the overall conception of cultural capital into ‘beneficial’ and ‘negative’ cultural resources and we can distinguish between the effects of parental competencies and status or class-specific effects. Second, we separate parental socialization that takes place by setting an example, that is parents’ media preferences and habits, from parental media socialization that takes place by instruction, such as parent-child interaction on media consumption. Third, previous research on parental media socialization mainly concerns children still living with their parents, especially within communication research. However, we will focus on the long-term effects of parental media socialization, and so we study children who no longer live in the parental home. Fourth, we apply multilevel modelling to Dutch sibling data, which enables us to distinguish between family-specific (socialization) effects and individual effects. We make use of the Family Survey Dutch Population (FSDP) 1998/2000/2003 (De Graaf, De Graaf, Kraaykamp & Ultee, 1998, 2000, 2003). The focus point of our study is the outcome of intergenerational transmission of media competencies (i.e. reproduction of parental media-related capital) and its effects on school success. By studying the effects of family-specific media socialization activities on educational attainment in adult life, we believe we can obtain more insight in the parental role in transmitting resources.
2. Theoretical background

2.1 Cultural capital, cultural reproduction

In the social sciences there is a large body of theoretical and empirical research which exemplifies that parental resources are a dominant factor for predicting the well-being and success of children (Boudon, 1974; De Graaf, De Graaf & Kraaykamp, 2000). Parents furnish their children with skills, competencies and resources, but this parental socialization differs both in quality and quantity among social groups. From Bourdieu’s cultural reproduction theory it follows that in particular cultural resources are transmitted over generations. According to Bourdieu, this reproduction process takes place mainly through education and/or the educational system. First, the school system rewards children with more elite cultural competencies. The school curriculum itself is based on high brow culture, so children from culturally competent parents are more familiar with school culture and therefore better equipped to follow the school programme. The educational system presupposes the possession of cultural assets, and in this way selection takes place by the school system itself. Second, children from parents with less cultural capital feel that they do not really fit in with school culture. They are not familiar with the school programme, and consequently self-selection will take place. One might speak of a cultural conflict or clash between a child’s family-specific traditions or status and the school culture (Farkas, 1996; Lareau, 1987, 2003). So, parental cultural capital can influence children’s school success, both positively and negatively, but it remains quite unclear how exactly high culture is helpful in school.

Although in stratification sociology the concept of cultural capital is widespread, scholars in this field of research are more or less equivocal about the exact definition of cultural capital. In this study we elaborate on previous research which makes a distinction between cultural capital as a symbol of social status or class-specific habitus and cultural capital as an indication of cognitive competency or human capital (Farkas, 1996; De Graaf, De Graaf & Kraaykamp, 2000). Within the cultural reproduction process, especially in relation to children’s school success, parental cultural capital can play a twofold role. First, from the status-approach follows that parental cultural capital refers to a class-specific habitus that confirms social boundaries (i.e. social exclusion). From this point of view, cultural capital can both enhance and lower a person’s social status, depending on the specific status of the
cultural activity that is participated in. Second, from the cognitive--approach follows that parents gain more cognitive skills, competency and expertise via specific cultural behaviour, which will benefit school-related (cognitive) socialization activities within the parental home. Because we want to distinguish between the effects of parental cognitive competencies and status or class-specific effects, we split up the overall conception of cultural capital into ‘beneficial’ (i.e. high-brow and high-cognitive) and ‘negative’ (i.e. low-brow) cultural (media-related) resources. In order to find out how exactly parental cultural assets or preferences (i.e. cultural capital) can be advantageous or damaging for a child’s school success, we presume that focusing on a specific type of parental cultural resources, such as parental media competency, might help.

2.2 Parental media preferences

Parental media preferences contain cognitive components to some extent, depending on the content of what is preferred, and can be divided in high-status and low-status preferences. With ‘serious media preferences’ we refer to the consumption of, and familiarity with, high-brow media content such as literary reading and watching informative television programs. These serious media preferences generate cognitive and linguistic skills and competency, are rewarded at school and match school culture. Both in terms of status and cognitive development, parents watching informative and cultural television programs and/or reading literature may enhance their children’s educational success. Parents set the right example by exposing their children to high-brow media preferences, which will result in a more successful school career for their offspring. Our hypothesis then reads: parental serious reading and serious television preferences enhance a person’s educational attainment.

The importance and positive effect of parental high-brow media skills on a person’s educational success might on the other hand indicate that parental low-brow media socialization causes children to perform less successfully at school. First, ‘popular media preferences’, as we will name these parental low-brow media preferences, have a negative image, are not rewarded by school teachers and do not match with the school culture and curriculum. This means that parents preferring popular media are less familiar with school culture and probably feel more restrained in their communication with teachers, than parents with high-brow media competencies (Entwisle, Alexander & Olson, 1997). In this way, in terms of a
cultural clash or status conflict, parental popular media preferences can hamper or even harm their children’s school career (Elchardus & Siongers, 2003). As follows from the status-approach, our hypothesis reads as follows: *parental popular reading and television preferences will harm a person’s school success.*

Second, from a more cognitive competency related point of view, parental popular media preferences will not enrich children with beneficial skills or competencies. A parental preference for entertaining and relaxing media products is not likely to enlarge a person’s capability to do well at school. Popular media content does not increase a person’s cognitive competency or cognitive skills, whereas serious media content is believed or found to do so (Koolstra, van der Voort & van der Kamp, 1997; Elchardus & Siongers, 2003). On average, popular media content has a low educational value whereas more informative and cultural media content enlarges a person’s cultural and cognitive abilities. Consequently, parental popular TV preferences will not affect their children’s school success, because these preferences do not stimulate their children’s cognitive development. Therefore, as follows from the cognitive-approach, we hypothesize that: *parental popular TV preferences do not affect a person’s school success.* With regard to parental popular reading, our expectancies are somewhat different. Reading in general is a cognitive activity, and thus contributes to a person’s cognitive skills. Parents enrolled in reading, despite the content of what is read, in any case are likely to set a more beneficial example than parents who do not read at all. So, from the cognitive-approach we hypothesize that *parental popular reading preferences enhance a person’s school success.*

### 2.3 Parent-child media interaction

Previous studies have shown that when it comes to (media) socialization in the parental home, not only the parental set example is of importance, but also active parental guidance plays an decisive role (Austin, 1993, 2001; Barkin et al., 2006). Next to the parental preferences or the parental set example we expect parental mediation or active parent-child interaction on media use to play a role within the cultural reproduction process. Research on cultural reproduction hardly recognizes the importance of active parent-child interaction when it comes to cultural participation and cultural competency. By including parental media mediation, next to parental media preferences, we think we can give more insight in the reproduction process.
In general, that is in the media itself and by the majority of people (public opinion), television viewing is not regarded as a positive or beneficial activity for children. From a theoretical point of view, as follows from the displacement theory, popular (entertainment) television consumption might absorb time that could otherwise be spent on more educational activities, such as reading or homework (Wiecha, Sobol, Peterson & Gortmaker, 2001; Hancox, Milne & Poulton, 2005; Sharif & Sargent, 2006). Watching television, especially entertainment or popular TV, makes few intellectual demands, resulting in cognitive or mental laziness and lack of interest in school (Salomon 1984; Koolstra & van der Voort, 1996). Therefore, we can claim that by restricting time spent on (popular) TV, parents induce their children’s cognitive development and school success. Additionally, mediation does not merely imply restriction, but also directs to stimulation and motivation of specific media content (Sharif & Sargent, 2006). Children’s viewing of informative programs is found to positively affect school readiness (Wright, Huston, Murphy, St. Peters, Pinon, Scantlin & Kotler, 2001). Besides, parents can guide their children’s television consumption and cognitive development by explaining what is shown on TV and by discussing the content of TV programs (Valkenburg, P.M., M. Krcmar, A.L. Peeters & N.M. Marseille 1999; Barkin et al. 2006). Parental guidance on TV consumption will lead their children to obtain beneficial TV habits on the one hand, and more school-related skills on the other hand. We therefore hypothesize that parental television mediation enhances a person’s educational attainment.

Although the possible benefits of parental TV mediation are becoming more eminent, governmental policies on parental television socialization are not yet widespread. In contrast, for reading socialization the guidelines are clear. In most modern societies parents and educators of young children are strongly advised to stimulate children’s reading abilities. Book reading might increase language growth, interest in book reading, reading achievement and information about the world (Bus, Van IJzendoorn & Pelligrini, 1995; Leseman & de Jong, 1998; Kraaykamp, 2003). Although the availability of reading materials in the parental home is of importance, Sulzby and Teale (1991) found that parental support is most effective when it comes to children’s reading achievement. Literary skills are essential for educational success, and by means of reading mediation parents can successfully enhance their children’s educational achievement (Bus, IJzendoorn & Pelligrini, 1995; Jordan, 2005). We hypothesize that reading mediation in early childhood has a long lasting effect on
educational success. *We expect that parental reading mediation enhances a person's educational attainment.*

In cultural reproduction research, primarily the parental cultural preferences are studied. Not only do we expect that, next to parental preferences (i.e. the parental role model), active parent-child interaction plays a significant role when it comes to cultural consumption. We even presume that parental mediation can mediate the effect of parental cultural preferences on a child's cultural consumption for a great part. By taking into account parental media mediation within the reproduction process, we might refine our perception of the actual transmission of cultural preferences. In our study we have concrete measures of parental mediation activities, making it possible to study the extent to which parental cultural (media) preferences indeed cause more active guidance and commitment in introducing children to the cultural domain.

As we stated above, parents with ‘beneficial’ (i.e. high-brow and/or cognitive stimulating) media preferences are more cognitively trained and subsequently are more aware of the possible benefits of specific media resources and media content. These parents also tend to be better informed about their children’s development, and are better equipped to educate them than lower educated parents. Research on media socialization indicates that parental media preferences predict parent-child interaction on media use for a substantial part (Notten & Kraaykamp, 2007, working paper). Parents mediate their children’s media use in order to offer them an activity they enjoy themselves, to teach them to use media to their advantage, or at least to prevent their children from harmful effects of the specific media sources or types (Barkin et al., 2006). In this way, media mediation might give a child a long-lasting advantage, even in his or her school career. Therefore, we hypothesize that parental media mediation mediates the effect of parental (serious) media preferences on a person’s educational attainment.

### 2.4 Interactions media socialization and social background

From DiMaggio (1982) cultural mobility theory follows that parental cultural capital has a more pronounced positive effect on school success for children from lower status families than for children from higher social backgrounds. In this line of reasoning we can also expect parental media socialization to affect educational success different along the family-specific social status. Especially children from less
resourceful households will profit from the cognitive competency and status aspects of parental advantageous (serious and/or cognitive enhancing) media preferences. We therefore hypothesize that: for persons from lower social backgrounds, parental advantageous (serious and/or cognitive stimulating) television and reading preferences enhance school success more successfully than for persons from higher social background. On the other hand, lower status parents are less equipped to deal with the negative effects of television exposure and consumption. Our hypothesis then reads: for persons from lower social backgrounds, parental popular media preferences harm school success more severely than for persons from higher social background.

Research on the short term effects of television exposure has established that watching educational TV programs is especially fruitful for children from lower social backgrounds (Wright et al., 2001; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006). Therefore, we expect the effects of parental media mediation to differ between children from different social backgrounds. Our hypothesis reads as follows: for persons from lower social backgrounds, parental media mediation enhances a person’s school success more effectively than for persons with a higher social background.

3. Data and Measurements

To test our hypotheses we employ three waves of the Family Survey Dutch Population (FSDP), conducted in 1998, 2000 and 2003 (De Graaf et al., 1998, 2000, 2003). The FSDP combines face-to-face and written interviews, and is held among a nationally representative sample of the Dutch population aged between 18 and 70. A major quality of the FSDP is that next to a primary respondent, the partner is interviewed. Since the actual socialization of primary respondents and partners took place independently, we chose to include them both as individual respondents. Furthermore, we included all siblings of the respondents and partners. In the FSDP 2000 and 2003 both the respondent and partner gave information about all of their sibling. In 1998 from all siblings of the respondent and partner, three siblings are randomly selected and included in the dataset. In this way, educational data are available for all children within a specific family. The actual number of primary respondents and partners in the three surveys was 2,029 in 1998, 1,561 in 2000 and
2,714 in 2003. Combining the three waves and including the siblings resulted in a total number of 21272 respondents. In this study we will refer to primary respondents, partners and siblings as respondents. The FSDP holds information on several aspects of the individual life course. For this article, educational attainment and the retrospective questions on childhood (media-related) experiences, social background and family composition were especially useful.

We selected respondents (primary, partners and siblings) aged 25 years and older to ensure that people have completed their schooling and reached their final educational level (94.8% respondents). To account for the fact that a respondent’s socialization has been completed we also removed individuals living with (at least one of) their parents (1.5% respondents). In the Netherlands television was introduced around 1955. For respondents born before 1955 a parental television-related socialization obviously has no meaning, therefore we removed respondents born before 1955. Additionally, respondents who reported that there was no television set in the parental home during childhood are not selected. The resulting hierarchical data files include individual respondents on the lowest level (N= 7938) and the family of origins on the second or higher level (N=3135).

### 3.1 Dependent variable and method

The dependent variable educational level is measured as the final educational attainment of the respondent in ten categories. To obtain an appropriate interval scale, we applied a standard recoding procedure for the minimum number of years required to obtain the educational level concerned: from 6 (primary education) to 20 years (PhD).

### 3.2 Independent variables

#### 3.2.1 Parental media socialization

The central independent variables are the parental media socialization variables. We distinguished two types of media: reading and watching television. For both media types we focused on parental media preferences (content) and parental mediation

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1 We have information whether the siblings are living with their parents if the corresponding primary respondent or partner is still living at the parental home. Therefore, it is possible that our dataset contains a marginal proportion of siblings still living with their parents at the time of interview.
activities. Altogether we distinguish four variables which refer to parental media socialization at the time the respondent was between ages 5 and 15.

*Parental TV preferences* are divided in serious TV preferences and popular TV preferences. We measured *parental serious TV preferences* by taking the mean of the following two items: (a) did the parents watch informative programs, and (b) watched the parents informative cultural (art) programs when the respondent was 15 years old. The variable was standardized by ranking the scores from 0 to 1 ($M=0.50$, $SD=0.27$). *Parental popular TV preferences* are measured by four statements on parental consumption of popular television content: watched the parents (a) films or series (b) shows, quizzes (c) sports and/or (d) soaps when the respondent was 15 years old. A scale was constructed by taking the mean of the scores of the four items ($\alpha = .5$). The variable was standardized by ranking the scores from 0 to 1 ($M=0.50$, $SD=0.29$).

We measured *parental reading preferences* by two scales; a scale which indicates parental serious reading and a second scale for parental popular reading. We measured *parental serious reading* separately for fathers and mothers with two questions; (a) did the father/mother read Dutch or translated literature when the respondent was 15 years old and (b) did the father/mother read novels in a foreign language when the respondent was 15 years old. Answer categories were (0) never, (1) sometimes and (2) often. For the father as well as the mother we first took the sum of scores on both questions and then constructed the variable of parental literary reading by taking the mean score of the two summed variables. The variable is standardized through a ranking procedure and ranges from 0 to 1 ($M=0.50$, $SD=0.28$). *Parental popular reading* is measured separately for fathers and mothers with three items; (a) did the father/mother read detectives when the respondent was 15 years, (b) did the father/mother read popular (semi) scientific literature and (c) did the father/mother read romantic novels when the respondent was 15 years old. Answer categories were (0) never, (1) sometimes and (2) often. For measuring father’s as well as mother’s popular reading score, we first took the mean score on all three questions for father and mother separately. Then we constructed the variable of parental popular reading by taking the mean score of father’s and mother’s popular reading score. The variable is standardized through a ranking procedure and ranges from 0 to 1 ($M=0.50$, $SD=0.28$).

*Parental television mediation* is probed in the FSDP 2003 only, and is represented by a measure of nine indicators of parental television mediation activities for the time
the respondent was between 5 and 12 years old. These indicators represent three forms of family specific mediation: restrictive mediation, co-viewing, and strategic or instructive mediation (Austin, 2001; Valkenburg et al., 1999). Because the majority of parents combine mediation strategies and coviewing is not per se a positive mediation style (Nathanson, 1999; Austin, 2001; Barkin, Edward, Richardson, Klinepeter, Finch and Krcmar, 2006), we only made use of the restrictive and strategic mediation items. Restrictive mediation is measured as: (a) parents limited hours TV consumption (b) parents decided what to watch (c) parents had a specific TV time table. Strategic TV mediation contains the following items: (g) my parents discussed with me why something seen on television was wrong; (h) in our family television programs were discussed often; (i) my parents helped me understand what I saw on TV. Respondents reported on all TV mediation variables a 4-point scale ranging from (0) entirely not true to (3) entirely true. We constructed a television mediation scale by taking the mean of the six aforementioned variables (α = .7) and standardized the variable by ranking it between 0 and 1 (M=0.50, SD=0.29).

Parental reading mediation is measured by five statements on the following parent-child reading activities: (a) as a toddler I was read to by one of my parents; (b) for my birthday/Christmas/Sinterklaas I got books as a present; (c) books were recommended by my parents; (d) in the family home we discussed the books I read; (e) my parents were interested in what I was reading. Answer categories were (0) never, (1) sometimes and (2) often. A scale was constructed by taking the mean of the scores of the five items (α = .8). The variable was standardized by ranking the scores from 0 to 1 (M=0.50 , SD=0.29).

3.2.1 Parental social background

Studies repeatedly reveal that parental social background is a dominant predictor when it comes to parental socialization activities, parental media (cultural) preferences and a person’s educational attainment (Van Eijck, 1997; De Graaf, De Graaf & Kraaykamp, 2000). Therefore, we have to take into account the respondent’s parental social background. *Parental educational level* is measured as the minimum number of years required to obtain the educational level concerned, and ranges from 6 (primary school) to 20 years (PhD). To construct parental educational level we took the maximum of the father’s and mother’s completed education. We measured *parental occupational status* by taking the maximum of the father’s and
mother’s occupational status based on the ISEI score (Ganzeboom, De Graaf & Treiman, 1992); it ranges between 10 and 90. This occupational status score refers to the situation when the respondent was 15 years old.

3.2.2 Family composition

Research points out that family composition affects both educational attainment and (media) socialization in the parental home (Blake, 1981; Coleman, 1988; Sandefur, Melanahan & Wojtekiewicz, 1992; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn & Kebanov, 1994; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2005; Barkin et al., 2006). Therefore, we have to control for family composition in the study undertaken. We take into account four family compositional factors; mother’s age at childbirth, parental divorce during the respondent’s childhood, the working status of the mother during childhood and the family size.

*Mother’s age at childbirth* refers to the age of the mother in the year the respondent was born. To account for influential cases, we excluded outliers (0.3%) and rounded still exceptionally young mothers up to the age of 16 and older mothers are topped down to the age of 45. In the questionnaire it was asked if the parents were divorced, and on what year. We constructed a *parental divorce* variable that indicated whether the parents of a respondent were divorced in the formative years (age 0-15), with answer categories (0) no parental divorce (1) parental divorce. This means that our dataset not only contains full siblings, but there might also be a diminutive number of half- or step-siblings included. We reduced this proportion by removing siblings born after the year the parents of the primary respondent or partner were divorced (0.5%). Two questions were used to measure if a respondent had a *working mother*, namely: (a) was your mother employed for at least one year during preschool?; (b) was your mother employed for at least one year during primary school? We constructed a variable that indicates whether the mother was (0) non-working or (1) working during childhood. *Family size* represents the number of siblings, including the respondent. We leveled it down to a maximum of eight siblings (15% of the respondents).

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2 Only the FSDP 1998 has information on half- and stepsiblings: after calculating it appears that 3.9% of all siblings is not a full biological sibling. Selecting siblings born after the divorce, leaves 3.2% of the siblings a half- or stepsibling. Selecting only households were the parents did not divorce during the formative years resulted in 3.8% half siblings. On base of these results we decided to remove the respondents born after the divorce. In total 95% of the respondents has parents that are not divorced at all, 3.5% of the respondents reported a parental divorce during childhood.
We included *gender* and *birth cohort* as general control variables. Gender indicates that the respondent (child) is a (0) male or (1) female. Birth cohort is a continuous variable ranging from 1955 to 1978, and indicates the birth cohort of the respondent (child). Respondents with a missing score on one of the selected independent variables were deleted (8.3%). For analyzing the impact of parental media mediation, we selected respondents who did actually experience reading and television mediation\(^3\), resulting in a selection of our data file containing 3343 individual respondents nested in 1288 families. For a detailed description of the variables, see Table 1.

**Table 1 around here**

4. **Analysis & results**

4.1 **Descriptive results**

One of the underlying assumptions of our study is that parental cultural socialization activities, such as parental media preferences and media mediation, vary across parental social background. Figure 1 shows that indeed, parental reading preferences and reading mediation differ along parental educational level. There seems to be a positive linear relationship between parental reading socialization activities and parental educational level.

**Figure 1 about here**

**Figure 2 about here**

In Figure 2 we can see that parental TV socialisation practices also vary across social background. Again, the mean scores of both parental media preferences and media mediation seem to relate in a linear way with parental educational level. But the direction of this relationship is not equal for all socialization activities. Although the parental mean score on serious TV preferences and reading mediation increases with educational level, parental popular TV preferences on the other hand gradually increase.

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\(^3\) Parental television mediation is only questioned in FSDP 2003
decrease over the educational categories. In general, we may conclude that parental media socialization activities differ across parental social background. For the most part, children form higher social origins seem to experience more parental media socialization than children from lower status households. For parental popular TV preferences the inverse conclusion can be drawn.

To formulate a preliminary answer to the question whether parental media socialization affects a person’s educational attainment we present bivariate correlations in Table 2. The results indicate that there is a significant positive association between parental media socialization and a person’s educational attainment, except for parental popular TV preferences. In contrary to all other parental media socialization practices, parental popular TV preferences seem to restrict a person’s educational career. Furthermore, Table 2 reveals that there appears to be a significant bivariate correlation between parental media preferences and parental media mediation.

**Table 2 around here**

### 4.2 Research design

We estimate several multilevel models for parental media preferences and parental media mediation separately. In multilevel models differences among families and differences among individual respondents are estimated at the same moment. By applying multilevel analysis we can establish how much of the total variance of educational attainment can be explained by joined family characteristics of the siblings, and to what extent individual characteristics of these siblings explain a proportion of the total variance.

### 4.3 Results for parental media preferences

Table 3 reveals the results of the estimated models examining the relation between parental media preferences and educational attainment. The first model or baseline model (model 0) is a model without any predictor and estimates the proportion of the total variance that is attributable to family rather than to the individual. The significant intercept indicates that families do differ from each other, on average, on the educational attainment of their children. We calculated the intra-class correlation (ICC) which estimates the non-independence in educational attainment across
individual siblings. With an ICC of .42 we can say that 42% of the total amount of variance in the educational attainment of siblings is accounted for differences in mean educational attainment between families and validates the use of multilevel analysis.

Model one contains respondent’s sex and birth cohort, family compositional factors and the parental social background features. The results of model one indicate that born in a younger cohort has a positive effect on educational attainment. Besides, daughters are less successful in their educational career than sons. The included family compositional features show that an older that having an older mother positively affects a person’s educational attainment. On the other hand, a parental divorce during childhood restricts one’s educational achievement and children form larger families perform poorer in school than children form small households. The mother seems to have no impact on children’s school success. We can conclude that family composition definitely affects children’s educational attainment. Model one also comprises the parental social background. Parental educational level and occupational status both positively affect educational attainment. These results indicate that parental social background is an important factor in predicting a child’s educational success and corroborate previous research findings on this topic. Thereby, we can conclude that indeed parental resources are decisive within socialization activities that can contribute to a child’s school success and are not equally distributed along social groups.

In model two we included parental serious media preferences. Both parental high-brow reading behavior and television viewing positively affect a person’s educational achievement, next to parental social background and family composition. These results corroborate our hypotheses: parents can enhance their children’s school success by setting the right example regarding media consumption. Apparently, parental preferences for serious media content symbolize a social status that is appreciated by teachers and matches school culture. Also, cultural and informative media content seems to increase the parent’s cognitive and cultural competency, resulting in parents who are better equipped to train their children’s cognitive (school-related) abilities. These findings confirm both Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital as an indicator of habitus and the more human-capital perception of cultural capital as a sign of cognitive competency.
We hypothesized to be able to shed some more light on this reproduction process by including parental popular media preferences. Therefore we added the parental popular reading and television preferences in Model 3. Strikingly is the strong and negative effect of parental popular TV preferences. Parents can indeed harm a child’s school career by watching popular or entertainment television programs. This seems to indicate that status or class-specific habitus plays a dominant role here. We might conclude that there is evidence of a cultural clash, between parents who watch popular television programs and the school culture and/or curriculum. This findings is in line with Bourdieu’s theory and the conception of cultural tastes and habits as institutionalized signs of social status. As the results indicate these signs can be successfully used for social exclusion and confirming social boundaries. The second remarkable finding in our third Model is that parental popular reading positively affects educational attainment. This corroborates our hypothesis based on the cognitive-approach: reading generates cognitive and/or cultural (school-related) skills and competency, more or less in spite of the content of what is read. The negative status of this popular media preference, as we hypothesized following Bourdieu, can not be validated with our results. Remarkably is that parental serious reading is no longer significant, but the results might be affected by the correlation (.5) between parental serious and parental popular reading preferences, so we have to be careful in our conclusions. It seems that parents who at least sometimes read are significant more beneficial for a child’s success than non-reading parents. In general, we can conclude that both parental popular media preferences as well as parental serious media preferences affect children’s educational attainment.

In model 4 we tested our interaction hypotheses, and the results indicate that there is a negative interaction between parental educational attainment and parental popular reading preferences. For parents with a higher educational level, parental popular reading preferences are less beneficial for their children’s school success in comparison with parents who obtained a lower educational attainment. Although not presented in Table 3, dividing parental educational level into categories revealed that the interaction effect found in Model 4 is not linear: there is only an significant negative difference in the effect of parental popular reading on children’s school success between parents with a primary educational level and parents with a tertiary educational level.
4.2 **Results for parental media mediation**

Because of restrictions regarding our data set (parental television mediation in only probed in the FSDP 2003), analyzing the role of parental media mediation resulted in a selection of our data file. Therefore, four models estimating the role of parental media mediation are presented in Table 4.

Model 1 contains parental TV mediation next to sex, cohort, parental family composition and parental social background. The results point out that parental TV mediation has a positive but not significant effect on children’s school success. Apparently, parental television mediation is not a fruitful additional tool for parents who want to improve their children’s school success. In Model 2 we add parental reading mediation and it appears that parental stimulation of children’s reading capacities is profitable when it comes to educational achievement. Parents can indeed give their children a lead start in their educational career by guiding their offspring’s reading skills within the parental home, in addition to the effect of parental social background and family composition. The estimation and results of Model 3 are identical to Model 3 in Table 3. In Model 4 all media socialization activities are included; both parental media mediation and parental media preferences. The results indicate that with regard to parental reading socialization, we may conclude that the parental reading behavior is no longer of relevance. It is the parental reading mediation that is overriding when it comes to the effect of reading socialization on educational attainment. This partly corroborates our hypothesis: parental reading mediation mediates the effect of parental serious and popular reading preferences in affecting children’s educational success. For parental television socialization the results are quite different. Although the negative effect of parental popular TV preferences remains significant, the positive effect of parental serious TV preferences seems to be mediated by parental reading mediation. So, even when we control for parent-child interaction on media use, it seems that by setting an example with regard to television content, parents can influence their children’s educational attainment. Apparently, for television use it is not relevant what parents say to their children, but it is the parents own television behavior that is overriding when it comes to the effect of television socialization.
5 Conclusion and discussion

In social stratification research many studies have shown that social origin is a dominant factor in determining a person’s societal success. With regard to the intergenerational transmission of resources in relation to a person’s educational attainment, especially parental cultural resources are found to be a dominant factor (DiMaggio, 1982; Bourdieu, 1984; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; De Graaf, De Graaf & Kraaykamp, 2000). We elaborate on previous research and examine the process of cultural reproduction via two theoretical approaches: (1) cultural preferences are an indicator of social status (Bourdieu 1984, Lareau 1987, 2003) (2) cultural preferences are a substitute for cognitive skills (Farkas, 1996). In this study we focus on the long term effects of a specific form of parental cultural socialization, that is parental media socialization, in order to gain more insight in the reproduction process of parental cultural assets or preferences. By applying multilevel analysis on Dutch sibling data (FSDP 1998, 2000, 2003) we can differentiate between the effects of joined family characteristics of siblings versus the influence of individual characteristics on a person’s educational attainment.

Our results indicate that families differ in the educational success of their offspring and that parental media socialization is an important factor in this intergenerational transmission of inequality. Parents setting ‘the right’ example by preferring serious (i.e. high-brow) TV content, actually enhance their children’s educational attainment. Serious TV content, as in informative and cultural television programs, appears to increase the parent’s cultural competency and seems a status-specific habitus that matches with school culture. This finding confirms both Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital as an indicator of habitus and the more human-capital perception of cultural capital as a sign of cognitive competency. However, our research points out that parents can also set ‘a bad’ example. Parents can indeed harm a child’s school career by watching popular (i.e. entertaining) TV programs en we conclude that there is a cultural clash between these specific families and the more elite school culture. In line with Bourdieu’s theory, television preferences can be successfully used for cultural and social exclusion. On the other hand, parental popular reading positively affects educational attainment. We may conclude that reading generates cognitive and/or cultural (school-related) skills and competency, more or less in spite of the content of what is read. With regard to parental popular
reading preferences, a cultural clash with school culture does not appear. But parental popular reading is more beneficial for children from lower educated parents than for children from higher educated parents.

Next to parental media preferences we also studied parental media mediation activities. Parents-child interaction on reading skills, that parents stimulating and guiding their children’s reading skills, enhances their children school success in spite of social background, and/or family composition. Moreover, parental reading mediation mediates the effect of parental serious and popular reading preferences in affecting children’s educational success. We may conclude that it is the parental reading mediation that is overriding when it comes to the effect of parental reading socialization on educational attainment. For television use it is not relevant what parents say to their children, but it is the parents own television behavior that is overriding in affecting school success.

In our study we successfully differentiated between parent-child interaction and parental role model within the socialization process. Furthermore, the study undertaken proofs that it is fruitful to distinguish between beneficial and harmful cultural resources. We now are more able to set apart outcomes of parental competencies and parental status, both enclosed in the general effect of parental capital. In the process of cultural reproduction, media socialization plays a significant an independent role. Parents enhance or harm their children’s educational career, not only by the reproduction of more ‘traditional’ resources as parental social background, but also by media related skills en competency.

With media consumption and media exposure having an ever growing impact in children’s daily lives, parental media socialization seems to become more important for a child’s development and well-being every day. So, studying the long term effects of parental media socialization on other elements in life would be interesting. For future research it would also be interesting to look more in detail at the separate influence of father’s and mother’s media socialization. And off course, within a few years, it will be possible and imperative to study long term effects of parental internet (digital) socialization.
References


Entwisle, Alexander & Olson, 1997


Wiecha, Sobol, Peterson & Gortmaker, 2001


### Table 1: Descriptives

#### Parental media preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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Note: birthcohort, parental occupational status, mother’s age at childbirth and family size are centered.

#### Parental media mediation (selection Table 4)

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Note: birthcohort, parental occupational status, mother’s age at childbirth and family size are centered.
Figure 1: Parental reading socialization activities

Figure 2: Parental television socialization activities
### Table 2: correlation matrix

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
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<td>B: Parental educational level</td>
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<td>I: Parental reading mediation</td>
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Significance ***p<.001 **p<.01 *p<.05

Table 3: Parameter estimates for 5 multilevel models examining the relation between parental media preferences and educational attainment

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<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
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<td>s.e</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>s.e</td>
<td>b</td>
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<td>12.65</td>
<td>***</td>
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Significance ***p<.001 **p<.01 *p<.05
N level 1 (individual) = 7938 N level 2 (family) = 3135
Table 4: Parameter estimates for 5 multilevel models examining the relation between parental media mediation and educational attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 0</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>s.e</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>s.e</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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<td>12.11 *** 0.14</td>
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<td>12.15 *** 0.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Individual level (level 1)**

**Control variables**
- Sex (0-1): -0.15 0.08 0.06 0.08 0.12 0.15 0.18
- Birthcohort (1964=0): 0.02 * 0.01 0.02 * 0.01 0.02 ** 0.01 0.02 0.01
- Age mother at birth child (29=0): 0.00 0.01 0.00 0.01 0.00 0.01

**Family level (level 2)**

**Control variables**
- Parents divorced (0-1): -0.68 ** 0.23 -0.64 ** 0.23 -0.69 ** 0.23 -0.66 ** 0.23 -0.66 ** 0.23
- Working mother (0-1): -0.05 0.12 -0.05 0.12 -0.07 0.12 -0.07 0.12 -0.07 0.12
- Family size (4=0): -0.23 *** 0.03 -0.21 *** 0.03 -0.23 *** 0.03 -0.21 *** 0.03

**Parental social background**
- Parental educational level (6-20): 0.22 *** 0.02 0.20 *** 0.02 0.19 *** 0.02 0.19 *** 0.02
- Parental occupational status (46=0): 0.02 *** 0.00 0.02 *** 0.00 0.02 *** 0.00 0.02 *** 0.00

**Parental media preferences**
- Parental TV serious TV preferences (0-1): 0.52 ** 0.22 0.38 0.22
- Parental TV popular TV preferences (0-1): -0.68 ** 0.20 -0.65 *** 0.20
- Parental serious reading preferences (0-1): 0.25 0.24 0.04 0.24
- Parental popular reading preferences (0-1): 0.47 * 0.22 0.30 0.22

**Parental media mediation**
- Parental TV mediation (0-1): 0.14 0.19 -0.18 0.19 -0.25 0.21
- Parental reading mediation (0-1): 1.11 *** 0.21 0.92 *** 0.24

**Variance**
- Individual (level 1): 4.37 *** 0.13 4.38 *** 0.13 4.37 *** 0.13 4.38 *** 0.13 4.37 *** 0.13
- Family (level 2): 2.97 *** 0.20 1.66 *** 0.14 1.59 *** 0.14 1.59 *** 0.14 1.55 *** 0.14

**ICC** 0.40

**Deviance (-2LL)**
- 15547.93 15154.91 15315.31 15129.09 15112.23

Significance ***p<.001 **p<.01 *p<.05
Source: FSDP 2003
N level 1 (individual) = 3318  N level 2 (family) =1278