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How do parents affect cultural participation of their children?

Testing hypotheses on the importance of parental example and active parental guidance

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 24 January 2014

Received in revised form 11 June 2015

Accepted 18 June 2015

Available online 22 August 2015

Keywords:

Cultural participation

Cultural lifestyles

Intergenerational transmission

Socialization

Structural equation modeling

ABSTRACT

This study examines to what extent, and via what pathways, cultural behaviors are transmitted from one generation to another. Based on social learning theories we expect that, first, parents influence their children's cultural participation by setting a "good" cultural example, and, second, by actively accompanying their children to a theater, museum or concert hall. Besides a direct influence, we expect an indirect effect via the educational performance of the child. We test our hypotheses by applying structural equation models on data from the Family Survey Dutch Population 2009 ($N=2,445$). Our results show that parents affect their children's cultural participation mainly by providing them with active parental guidance. Indirect effects through a child's educational attainment are significant, but appear to be less pronounced.

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1. Introduction

Sociological research has frequently shown that a person's cultural taste is determined by individual characteristics and by aspects of the family of origin (Chan, 2010; Dimaggio & Mukhtar, 2004; Kraaykamp & van Eijck, 2010; Nagel, 2010; Seaman, 2005; Van Hek & Kraaykamp, 2013). Many

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studies illustrate that the higher educated hold a preference for more highbrow forms of culture, such as attending operas and art museums, but surprisingly, they also participate more in middlebrow cultural forms such as pop concerts, visiting historical museums and popular theater shows. Furthermore, women, the elderly, and individuals with a high income and high occupational status participate relatively often in highbrow cultural activities (Bennett et al., 2009; Erickson, 1996; Moore, 1998; Roose, van Eijck, & Lievens, 2012; Scherger, 2009).

In addition to individual characteristics, a person's parental background is of substantial importance in the formation of cultural taste. Children from families with highly educated and well-off parents apparently are more active in the cultural domain than children with low-educated and less affluent parents (Nagel, 2010; Van Eijck, 1997). Research shows that a significant part of this parental influence is passed on through cultural participation of the parents (Kraaykamp & van Eijck, 2010; Nagel & Ganzeboom, 2002; Van Eijck, 1997; Willekens & Lievens, 2014; Yaish & Katz-Gerro, 2012). By intensively taking part into cultural activities parents seem to promote the cultural participation of their children permanently. The question of *how* parents precisely stimulate their children's cultural interest by way of their own cultural participation remains to this day underexposed. In her qualitative study, Banks (2012) unravels some of these processes by studying how American black middle-class parents socialize their children in the fine arts. Her finding that parents actively stimulate their children's cultural appreciation, however, applies to a very specific group and does not provide information about whether these socialization activities have lasting implications for children's cultural participation.

According to Bourdieu, the transmission of elitist or highbrow tastes largely occurs unconsciously: "the correct manner is only acquired in the course of the imperceptible and unconscious learning of a primary upbringing which is simultaneously diffuse and total" (Bourdieu, Darbel, & Schnapper, 1990, p. 65). Bourdieu et al. (1990), however, does not offer explicit arguments about whether this unconscious transmission happens through an active or passive parental cultural socialization. In studies incorporating parent's cultural participation (Kraaykamp & van Eijck, 2010; Yaish & Katz-Gerro, 2012) it is usually unclear whether and to what extent children accompany their parents to the theater or museum. The exact processes of cultural influence and transmission remain, therefore, ambiguous. If parents bring their children with them when visiting cultural venues, this would be a more direct stimulus and explicit encouragement of cultural interest in children. Thus, the development of a highbrow and "good" cultural taste would then be actively stimulated by parents. This issue of giving the right cultural example versus giving an active cultural guidance is analyzed in this article. Our research question reads as follows: *To what extent and by what processes are cultural behaviors intergenerationally transmitted?*

In studying the intergenerational transmission of cultural preferences, it is important to note that we focus on more elite forms of cultural participation, also referred to as "highbrow". Because of its intellectual prestige and complexity, highbrow cultural participation is usually considered more typical for members of higher social classes (Ganzeboom, 1982; Lamont & Fournier, 1992; Lareau & Lamont, 1988). Bourdieu (1984) suggests that cultural preferences can make class differences visible. Bourdieu (1984) speaks of "... the curious sociological effect art produces by dividing the public into two 'antagonistic castes', those who understand and those who do not. This implies that some possess an organ of understanding which others have been denied" (1984, p. 23). Cultural participation would thus signal social differences, perhaps even more so if cultural participation takes place in a public sphere. When cultural activities take place outside the family home, in contrast to indoor activities such as reading books, they are more suited for the signaling function that Bourdieu (1984) describes. Cultural outgoing behavior as a source of leisure is therefore often seen as an indicator of a person's social position (Lareau & Lamont, 1988; Lizardo, 2010; Roose & Vanderstichele, 2010). In this regard, the intergenerational transmission of cultural tastes is of importance because it involves the transfer of class-specific lifestyles and the inequality therein.

Direct intergenerational transmission of cultural participation through imitation, however, seems not very likely when the actual participation occurs outside the home (such as attending concerts and the theater). Especially when parents attend cultural events without their children, the transmission of cultural taste is less obvious. When it comes to parents' cultural activities at home, such as media use, direct cultural socialization through imitation is more obvious. Books are usually read at home,

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