



Parent–child leisure activities and cultural capital in the United Kingdom: The gendered effects of education and social class



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ABSTRACT

This article uses data on couples from the 2000 UK Time Use Survey ($N = 610$) to analyze how social position influences parents' leisure activities with children. The study is the first using representative data to investigate this fundamental question to understand social inequalities in family life and children's life chances. Results reveal that social position intersects with gender in influencing parent–child leisure activities with implications on children's cultural capital. Three are the main findings: (1) social position has significant positive effects on cultural activities with children and negative on parent–child television watching among mothers, but moderate differences are observed for fathers; (2) father–child leisure is strongly influenced by the spouse's social position, but not mother–child leisure; (3) education and social class show complex differences in affecting parent–child leisure, suggesting that future studies should include these two variables when analyzing parent–child time and family life.

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1. Introduction

In this study I use data from the 2000 UK Time Use Survey (UKTUS) to analyze how parents of different levels of education and social classes spend time with children in leisure activities with cultural capital implications. Studying how parent–child shared leisure varies across socioeconomic groups is not only crucial to understand daily family relations (Bianchi et al., 2006; Craig and Mullan, 2012; Nock and Kingston, 1988), but also to better understand children's life chances and the reproduction of social inequality (Lareau, 2003). My study is the first in offering rich quantitative evidence on how parents of different social backgrounds engage in distinct leisure activities with children with implications for their cultural capital and future life chances.

Social stratification scholars posit that privileged parents transmit social advantage through the family. Children from privileged backgrounds typically acquire the 'elite culture' associated with schooling and labor market chances, which is substantially explained by children's accumulation of 'embodied' cultural capital through family life (Bodovski and Farkas, 2008; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; De Graaf et al., 2000; Farkas, 2003; Kraaykamp and Van Eijck, 2010; Lareau, 2003). Scholars also stressed the role of gender, namely that privileged mothers are the key actors in transmitting social advantage, as they are the main organizers of child-related activities (Hays, 1996; Reay, 1998). Further, studies on cultural consumption posited that men, but especially women, with high socioeconomic resources disproportionately engage in 'highbrow' cultural practices (Bihagen and Katz-Gerro, 2000). Overall, previous studies suggest that privileged fathers, and particularly mothers,

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participate in cultural-typed leisure activities with their offspring that create inequalities in children's schooling and employment chances.

The existing literature, however, has provided insufficient evidence on how parents of different social backgrounds participate in leisure activities with children. To my knowledge, only two studies (Altintas, 2012; Lareau, 2003), both with American data, have analyzed this question. Lareau (2003) offered rich ethnographic evidence showing that parents' social class, and especially mothers', affects children's socialization in leisure routines that promote their skills and life chances. Lareau (2003) provided rich empirical evidence, but raised the question of whether her results can be extrapolated to the general population. Altintas' (2012) quantitative study partly complemented Lareau's study. She found that parental education is negatively associated with parents' time watching television with children in the United States. However, Altintas (2012) did not study other specific leisure activities with key cultural capital implications, like parent-child shared time going to museums, theatres, or libraries, as well as their home-based cultural activities. Altogether, new studies on new countries are needed to better understand how parents of different social backgrounds share time with children in cultural-typed leisure activities.

My study makes three main contributions. First, I adopt a novel *multidimensional* approach using rich quantitative time use data to analyze how parent-child shared leisure differs by social position. I focus on three distinct leisure activities, namely (i) 'out-of-home cultural activities', 'home-based cultural activities', and 'watching television'. These activities provide detailed evidence on how parent-child shared leisure differs across socioeconomic groups. Parents who often spend time with children in 'highbrow' cultural activities, either 'home-based' (i.e., reading books) or 'out-of-home' (i.e., theatres, visiting museums, going to libraries), can – directly or indirectly – transmit cultural capital to children that affect their schooling and labor market chances (DiMaggio, 1982; Kraaykamp and Van Eijck, 2010). By contrast, parents' "excessive" time watching television with children is associated with children's leisure socialization in activities with negative implications on their schooling outcomes and cultural capital (Bianchi and Robinson, 1997; Notten and Kraaykamp, 2010). Overall, studying how parents engage in these three leisure categories with children provides new rich evidence on how social stratification operates in the family.

Second, I investigate how *gender* influences the way social position is associated to parents' leisure with children. Mothers disproportionately combine leisure with child care activities, reflecting gendered behaviors in the home (Bianchi et al., 2006). Also, previous studies imply that privileged mothers are the main agents of social reproduction. This fact is explained by mothers' active engagement in cultural family leisure practices, arranging also husbands' time with children (Hays, 1996), as well as through their participation (with children) in 'elite' forms of cultural consumption (Bihagen and Katz-Gerro, 2000). My study is innovative in analyzing gender differences, not only in how parents' leisure with children is influenced by their social position, but also by the spouse's social position. This approach contributes to a better understanding of how gender and social position intersect in ways that affect the reproduction of social inequality.

Third, the present study is the first that analyzes the influence of *education* 'and' *social class* on parents' time with children. Education and social class are two interrelated variables, but have also different implications for social stratification. Education better captures human capital and credentials, while social class provides more specific information on individuals' material resources, occupation, and social status (Crompton, 2010; Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992). This means that these two variables might have distinct effects on parent-child shared activities. Yet, previous quantitative studies omitted the analysis of how social class influences parent-child time, and only looked at educational inequalities in parents' time use (e.g., Bianchi et al., 2006). Therefore, the look at different measures of social position to analyze parents' time with children permits to better understand which factors influence social inequalities across families and children.

2. Literature review

Parents' leisure activities with children promote family solidarity and intergenerational relations (Bianchi et al., 2006; Craig and Mullan, 2012), but also affect children's socialization and life chances (Lareau, 2003). Consequently, the way parents engage in cultural-related activities with children is relevant to identify the mechanisms behind the reproduction of social inequality. Research on the United Kingdom (Sullivan, 2001), Denmark (Jæger and Holm, 2007), the Netherlands (De Graaf et al., 2000; Van de Werfhorst and Hofstede, 2007), and the United States (Bodovski and Farkas, 2008; DiMaggio, 1982), found important socioeconomic differences in children's family access to the 'elite' cultural capital linked to schooling and labor market outcomes. This raises the question of how parents of different social backgrounds share time with children in daily leisure practices with cultural capital implications.

The study of Bourdieu (1984) on *cultural capital* provides an important theoretical framework to study socioeconomic differences in parent-child shared leisure. Bourdieu (1984) argued that parents transfer material and non-material resources to their offspring through the possession of three forms of capital: cultural, economic, and social. Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu, plays a determinant role in social reproduction. Cultural capital, for Bourdieu, is expressed in three basic ways; 'embodied' (i.e. cultural knowledge, linguistic skills), 'institutionalized' (i.e. educational diplomas), and 'objectified' (i.e. books, dictionaries, pictures). The notion of 'embodied' cultural capital seems particularly crucial to study parent-child leisure, since it implies that children's *habitus*, namely the lifestyles, values, and dispositions acquired in daily practices, is strongly determined by parent-child shared time.

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