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Parental Cultural Capital and Educational Attainment in the Netherlands: A Refinement of the Cultural Capital Perspective

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In this article, the authors report on their research on which aspects of parental cultural resources affect educational attainment and distinguish between parental beaux arts participation and parental reading behavior. Using representative data for the Netherlands in 1992 ($N = 1,653$), they found that parental reading behavior, not parental beaux arts participation, affects children's educational attainment. The authors also examine the validity of two alternative theories on the interaction of parents' educational background and their cultural capital (distinguishing between parental reading and beaux arts participation): Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory and DiMaggio's cultural mobility theory. The data provide support for the cultural mobility hypothesis with respect to parental reading behavior; that is, parental reading is effective in predicting success in school, especially for children whose parents have low levels of education.

There is no doubt that in modern Western societies, social origin still determines a person's educational career to a large extent. There is more disagreement, however, on whether the impact of parental social background on school success is declining. Most studies in this field have reported a stable, rather than a decreasing, association between parents' socioeconomic characteristics and offspring's educational success. In a comparative volume on historical developments in the effects of family background on educational attainment, Shavit and Blossfeld (1993) found that stability could be established in 11 out of 13 countries. Only for Sweden and the Netherlands, the country

we focus on in this article, a historical analysis revealed a steady decline in the impact of father's educational attainment and occupational position on children's educational success for both men and women (P. M. De Graaf and Ganzeboom 1993; Erikson and Jonsson 1996).

BACKGROUND

Cultural Capital and Educational Success

It is tempting to relate the declining effect of family background on offsprings' educa-

tional careers in the Netherlands to a decreasing relevance of parental financial resources. Since the 1950s, Dutch social policy has aimed to reduce financial barriers by making education largely free of cost. However, financial resources are not the only kind of parental resources that offer an explanation of the relationship between parental social background and children's educational outcomes. Sociological explanations for the association between family background and children's educational success generally refer to the importance of parental economic and cultural capital (P. M. De Graaf 1986). The economic capital hypothesis argues that well-to-do parents are able to offer their children access to more privileged, better schools and extracurricular activities. Furthermore, it is likely that youngsters from high-income families can afford the opportunity costs that are involved in extended educational careers and tend to invest more time and effort in schooling (Boudon 1974). But it takes more than financial resources to do well in school. The cultural capital hypothesis, formulated by Bourdieu (1973) (see also Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Swartz 1997), suggests that the effect of families' social origin on educational attainment is also due to a greater quantity of cultural resources of privileged parents, which helps their children master the curriculum that is pervasive in schools.

Cultural resources can be defined as familiarity with the conceptual codes that underlie a specific culture with its major artistic and normative manifestations. According to Lamont and Lareau (1988), cultural capital can be seen as institutionalized; that is, it consists of widely shared high-status cultural signals (such as behaviors, tastes, and attitudes) that are used for social and cultural exclusion (see also Farkas 1996; Lareau and Horvat 1999; Swidler 1986). So, dominant status groups and social classes use their power to maintain and create structural conditions to protect their interests. Accordingly, schools are fashioned to guarantee the success of students from these privileged groups. Students who hold the dominant linguistic styles, aesthetic preferences, and styles of interaction (*habitus*) are positively sanctioned by their teachers. These cultural elements of family life facilitate compliance with the requests

of higher education (Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997; Lareau 1987).

Cultural capital theory usually refers to the importance of socialization into highbrow activities, like interest in art and classical music, theater and museum attendance, and reading literature. The theory holds that children who are not familiar with this kind of socialization will experience school as a hostile environment. They simply lack the skills, habits, and styles that are rewarded at the higher educational levels. As a consequence, they will refrain from higher education (self-selection), and if they participate in higher education, they will not attain the expected results (indirect exclusion) or may not be recognized by teachers (teacher selection) (Kalmijn and Kraaykamp 1996; Lamont and Lareau 1988).

In one of the first empirical studies on the effects of cultural capital on educational attainment, DiMaggio (1982) indeed found that cultural resources enhance educational outcomes (grades in high school) even when the influence of prior ability and father's education is taken into account. For boys, the effect of cultural capital is strongest in the lower social classes. (We will come back to this interaction effect between gender and cultural capital later.) DiMaggio and Mohr (1985) ascertained that cultural resources have a positive net effect on the postsecondary educational attainment of men and women in the United States and that the effects are stronger than the effects of father's educational attainment and the effects of former high school grades. An important drawback of both studies, however, is that cultural capital was measured through the students' cultural interests, not through the parents' cultural resources. Therefore, it is unclear whether the measured cultural resources of students are to be interpreted as causally prior to outcomes in schooling (P. M. De Graaf 1986). Although DiMaggio's findings as such are of considerable interest, they do not explain the effects of social origin on a person's educational career.

A more appropriate way to measure cultural capital is through parental behavior with respect to cultural tastes and preferences. Parental behavior offers a stronger measurement of cultural capital because it is unlikely

that it will be affected by children’s educational success. In this tradition, several researchers have found positive effects of parental cultural capital on children’s educational attainment (Crook 1997; P. M. De Graaf 1986; Ganzeboom, P. M. De Graaf, and Robert 1990; Kalmijn and Kraaykamp 1996; Niehof 1997; Teachman 1987). These findings suggest that Bourdieu’s cultural capital hypothesis is not far fetched. **Not only parental economic resources, but parental cultural resources matter in children’s educational careers.** Consequently, if parents develop compensating strategies against a policy that aims to eliminate financial barriers, the Dutch educational system will not automatically give way to more social mobility. When the Dutch educational system rewards high-brow cultural elements of family life, such as linguistic styles, aesthetic preferences, and styles of interaction (habitus), social background can remain an important factor in predicting educational outcomes.

Dutch Educational System

To acquire an accurate picture of the mechanisms that link parental economic and cultural resources to educational attainment in the Netherlands, one has to be familiar with certain properties of the Dutch educational system.¹ As Figure 1 illustrates, the Dutch educational system, which consists of various tracks through which students develop their educational careers, is complex. After primary education, at age 12, children and their parents face an important transition. Advised by their primary schools, they have to select the type and level of secondary education. Since children are relatively young at this crucial time, it is likely that their decisions are strongly influenced by their parents. Thus, it is no wonder that for the transition to secondary education, the largest contribution of family background characteristics could be established (P. M. De Graaf and Ganzeboom 1993; Niehof 1997). Family background effects in later stages of children’s educational careers are smaller because of selection effects, the resulting

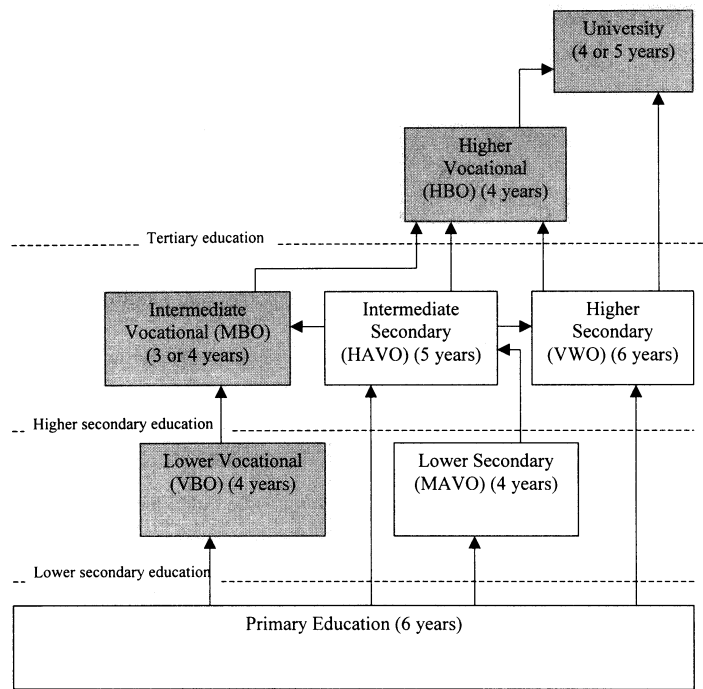


Figure 1. The Dutch Educational System

Note: The types of education in the gray boxes are specialized programs and those in the white boxes are general educational programs.

homogeneity with regard to ability and social class within the different tracks, and the decreasing influence of parents as children get older (Mare 1982). Indeed, research has shown that in the Netherlands, the effects of parents' socioeconomic background on the transition from secondary to tertiary education is small, especially for the more recent cohorts (P. M. De Graaf and Ganzeboom 1993).

As a result of the specific conditions of the Dutch educational system, it is not likely that the economic capital hypothesis will make a major contribution to explanations of family background effects on educational attainment. Primary education and four years of secondary education are largely free of cost. For the higher levels of schooling, children from low-income families are financially supported by governmental subsidizes, whereas children from high-income families receive only limited grants. In addition, the number of private schools is negligible. This situation reflects the consequences of the egalitarian Dutch social policy since the 1950s, whose aim has been to eliminate financial barriers to education for low-income groups. Since the major impact of family background in the Netherlands is in the transition from primary to secondary education, which is largely free of cost, parental finances seem far from decisive.

Several features of the Dutch educational system make the cultural capital hypothesis a more promising explanation. Cultural capital has several aspects. One way to distinguish among them is to disengage concepts in which the emphasis is on highbrow cultural capital that expresses the cultural clash between high- and low-status groups (Lamont and Lareau 1988; Lareau and Horvat 1999) and those in which the emphasis is on cognitive cultural skills (Farkas 1996). The first notion focuses on the degree to which high-status cultural signals (such as behaviors, tastes, and attitudes) at the higher levels of education are mechanisms for social and cultural exclusion. Several countries differ in their institutionalization of highbrow cultural aspects as a part of the standard curriculum of higher education. In countries like Italy and France, art history and philosophy are relatively important fields in school, whereas in the Netherlands, Britain, and the United States,

their importance is much weaker. As a consequence, we would expect that if high-status taste and disposition is the vital aspect of cultural capital, parental cultural capital would not be that relevant in the Netherlands.

The second notion holds that the most important element of cultural capital is socializing cognitive qualities, especially reading habits and linguistic skills (Farkas 1996). This notion may be especially important in the Netherlands because of the emphasis on teaching languages in the curriculum of secondary schools. This focus on linguistic traits in schooling stems from the relatively small number of people who actually read and write Dutch (there are about 16 million inhabitants in the Netherlands). In the Dutch school system, after primary education (junior vocational training and general secondary education), each student is required to take at least two foreign languages. Previous knowledge of cognitive and linguistic traits may be perceived as concrete examples of specific cultural skills that are relevant in school. This specific feature of the Dutch educational system seems to offer an important opportunity to disentangle the aforementioned two mechanisms behind the working of cultural capital for educational attainment. In this respect, it is important to mention that reading, especially reading books in their original languages, is relatively popular in the Netherlands; 27 percent of the Dutch population does so (authors' calculations of the Netherlands Family Survey; see Ultee and Ganzeboom 1993). If parents' skills and habits determine the early cognitive skills of children, they may enhance children's success in school (Farkas 1996). Thus, a cultural climate at home in which a positive attitude toward reading (in Dutch and other languages) prevails may further a child's educational career.

Research Questions: Two Refinements

Earlier research made clear that parental cultural capital has strong effects on offspring's educational attainment in the Netherlands (P. M. De Graaf 1986; Niehof 1997). In this article, we investigate exactly *how* parental cul-

tural capital makes its contribution. For this purpose, we elaborate on previous empirical studies in two ways.

First, we emphasize two distinct aspects of parental cultural capital—participation in beaux arts and reading behavior. As was mentioned earlier, most scholars who investigate the impact of parental cultural capital concentrate on parents' highbrow cultural activities, such as attendance at theaters, museums, classical music concerts, and art exhibitions and galleries and reading books. Together, these indicators of cultural capital make up the "classical operationalization" of cultural capital, which is based on the work of Bourdieu (1984). Indeed, it has been well documented that cultural lifestyle elements are strongly transmitted from one generation to the next (N. De Graaf and P. M. De Graaf 1988; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Kraaykamp and Nieuwbeerta 2000). Therefore, we can safely assume that parental involvement in highbrow cultural activities and parents' knowledge of the beaux arts enhances children's familiarity with specific cultural dispositions and tastes. And if the control over these cultural dispositions is rewarded in the educational system, the cultural reproduction explanation of social inequality in educational stratification seems to be valid.

Although most studies underscore the general importance of parental cultural capital in transmitting inequalities over generations, it remains vague how the transmission of cultural codes, measured by parents' participation in cultural activities, furthers a child's educational career (Lamont and Lareau 1988). Why exactly is cultural capital important? The narrative account of the mechanism holds that children with more cultural capital communicate more easily with teachers; are not startled by what they learn in school or by art and literature; and, in general, do not experience a school's cultural climate as hostile (Farkas 1996; Lareau 1987). However, the classical operationalization of cultural capital provides no direct measurement of this cultural clash, and one may argue that cultural capital is a container concept that picks up more than just a taste for highbrow culture. A better test of the hypothesis is possible if we can be more specific

about the content of the cultural dispositions that are rewarded in higher education.

In this respect, it is important to consider the relevant aspects of cultural capital in the context of a nation's educational system. We argued earlier that parental participation in beaux arts may be the most important element in the cultural capital explanation in France, as Bourdieu's (1973) argument implies, but that we do not expect it to be as relevant in the Netherlands. It is not likely that children whose parents do not participate extensively in the beaux arts experience the cultural climate in Dutch schools as hostile. Rather, the educational system in the Netherlands simply does not reward qualities related to such participation. Since this cultural-clash effect is not supported in the Netherlands, as argued, why, then, is there an effect of parental cultural capital, as established by earlier research (P. M. De Graaf 1989; Niehof 1997)?

We assume that the effects of parental cultural capital on children's educational attainment can be explained by the passing on of specific cultural dispositions, indicated by familiarity with dominant highbrow cultural tastes (Bourdieu 1973), on the one hand, and the intergenerational transmission of linguistic and cognitive skills in a more general sense, on the other hand (Farkas 1996; Teachman 1987). The mastery of dominant cultural codes is closely linked to Bourdieu's idea that habitus is the mechanism behind the effect of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1984) conceived of habitus as a system of shared dispositions that generates perceptions, appreciations, and actions. The transmission of linguistic and cognitive abilities could be interpreted in terms of habitus as well, but we prefer to consider it as the transmission of specific human capital from one generation to the next. Indeed, familiarity with reading will help children do well in school because they are not shocked by cultural practices at school that they have not learned to deal with at home. What seems more important, however, is that reading materials are essential in a learning environment. Thus, linguistic and cognitive skills acquired at home may make a large contribution to a child's human capital and thereby educational success. Again, we

do not argue that the habitus explanation is unimportant; rather, we contend that specific differences between national educational systems make the habitus explanation or the cognitive skills explanation the more important one. We hypothesize that the latter explanation will be more appropriate in the Netherlands.

Most studies that have investigated the effects of parental cultural capital have included indicators of both beaux arts participation and reading. Only Crook's (1997) study of the effects of parental cultural practices in Australia divided cultural capital into parental highbrow-status taste (attendance at museums, theaters, and art exhibitions) and parental verbal and reading abilities (reading behavior). Crook concluded that, for Australia, it is parental reading habits and a home climate in which reading is emphasized, not the intergenerational transmission of highbrow taste, that has a positive impact on a person's educational career. In short, it is not so much the mastery of highbrow cultural codes, but linguistic and reading skills, that provides an advantage at higher levels of schooling. A drawback of Crook's research, however, is the unique supply-side circumstances in Australia: Most beaux arts facilities are located in major southeastern municipalities, whereas reading materials are available throughout the country. Therefore, Crook's results should be interpreted with caution. Here, we address the importance of this refinement for the Netherlands, where beaux arts and reading facilities are spread all over the country.

Our second contribution is in the theoretical problem introduced by DiMaggio (1982) in writing on the impact of cultural capital on high school students' grades. Does cultural capital work especially in favor of children from high socioeconomic backgrounds, and does it explain these children's outstanding opportunities? According to this hypothesis, introduced by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and called cultural reproduction theory, preferences, attitudes, and behaviors that are dominant in the higher social classes are rewarded by the school system and thus reproduce social inequalities.

An alternative view of the workings of cul-

tural capital, labeled cultural mobility theory (DiMaggio 1982), holds that cultural capital also serves as a path to mobility for children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, whereas it does not bring additional advantages for children of high socioeconomic origins. DiMaggio found that male students whose fathers have low or medium levels of education especially profit from their cultural capital. Empirical support for mobility theory was also found by Teachman, Paasch, and Carver (1997) in relation to social capital, defined as parent-to-school connections and parent-to-child connections. Teachman et al. indicated that social capital interacts with parents' educational background in the prediction of school failure (dropping out); in other words, parents can overcome the negative effects associated with low levels of education by their social capital.

That cultural capital can be profitable for less privileged groups was underscored by Kalmijn and Kraaykamp (1996), who showed that cultural capital explains part of the black-white convergence in schooling in the United States. In contrast, Aschaffenburg and Maas (1997) concluded, for the transition from high school to college, that children from advantaged social backgrounds profit more from their cultural capital (their own participation in cultural classes) than do children from lower social backgrounds. However, both theoretical notions have not been tested simultaneously using information on parental cultural capital to explain educational attainment. In this article, we test the two hypotheses using data on educational attainment in the Netherlands.

HYPOTHESES

Participation in Highbrow Culture or Reading Climate?

Bourdieu's main hypothesis is that parental cultural capital provides children with the symbolic power that enables them to master the cultural codes of higher levels of education. The mastery of the "right" cultural dispositions is grounds for social inclusion or exclusion at school (Lareau and Horvat 1999). In empirical research, the indicators of this

theoretical concept generally concern highbrow cultural activities, and accordingly the specific hypothesis is as follows:

1a. Parental participation in highbrow cultural activities, like attendance at theaters, concerts, and museums, positively affects children's educational attainment.

Although this kind of parental cultural capital helps children do well in school, the present operational definition may function as a "black box" that contains parental resources, some of which have little to do with the mastery of cultural codes. Therefore, in line with Katz, Shavit, and N. De Graaf (1993) and Crook (1997), we suggest that in operationalizing parental cultural capital, beaux arts participation must be disentangled from reading characteristics and linguistic skills. More specifically, it is expected that the resources transmitted as a result of parental participation in highbrow culture foster social inclusion in higher levels of education.

With respect to parental reading, a somewhat different picture emerges. We assume that parents who read frequently not only set the norm for their children, but exhibit more human capital and therefore can enhance their offspring's linguistic and cognitive skills. Accordingly, parents with an affinity for reading may improve the learning process in the family (Teachman 1987). Moreover, we expect that children who are encouraged to read outside school will have an advantage in school (Hanson and Farrell 1995; Mercy and Steelman 1982). Reading skills and familiarity with literature are believed to have a positive influence on the skills needed to master the vocabulary and grammar of the Dutch language and, what is important in Dutch higher education, foreign languages as well.

According to the sociology of literature, there are four factors by which parents enhance their children's reading abilities: material provisions (having books at home, borrowing books from the public library, and giving books as gifts), parental activities (reading at home, stimulating children to read, and maintaining peace and quiet at home), parental attitudes (values attached to children's reading and reading and writing as evident activities at home), and interactions

within the family (reading to children, showing interest in children's reading, and telling stories) (Kraaykamp and Dijkstra 1999; Van Peer 1991). Consequently, parents who stimulate their children to read will improve the children's linguistic and cognitive skills—capacities that are rewarded in higher education as well. Furthermore, parents who read frequently are likely to have better verbal and linguistic skills than parents who do not and thus are likely to be better able to help their children cope with scholastic demands. In sum, we hypothesize that parents who read books (1) have better linguistic skills and are more able to pass on knowledge to their children and (2) contribute to a cultural home climate that sets an example for their children. Thus, our next hypothesis is this:

1b. Parental reading behavior positively affects children's educational attainment more than does parental participation in beaux arts activities.

Obviously, parental reading behavior and participation in highbrow culture will be strongly associated. As a consequence, any research that applies the traditional operationalization of cultural capital, in which parental reading behavior and beaux arts participation are intertwined, cannot distinguish between Hypothesis 1a and Hypothesis 1b. The appropriate design is to include parental reading habits and parental beaux art participation separately but simultaneously in one analytic model. In the empirical part of this article, we present Dutch retrospective life-course data on both aspects of parental cultural capital to test which hypothesis is supported in the Netherlands and to distinguish between Bourdieu's emphasis on cultural capital as an indicator of habitus or symbolic power and our emphasis on cultural capital as an indicator of linguistic and cognitive skills gained from parents and an indicator of a stimulating home environment for reading.

Cultural Reproduction or Cultural Mobility?

Are parental cultural resources more profitable for children from lower or higher socioeconomic backgrounds? DiMaggio

(1982) first introduced the distinction between these perspectives. Cultural reproduction theory (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; see also Lamont and Lareau 1988) argues that parental cultural capital is especially favorable for children from high social backgrounds. Children who do not have the appropriate socialization, because of their lower social backgrounds, will not gain as much from parental cultural capital as will children who do have the appropriate socialization (Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997). This assumption leads to the following interaction hypothesis:

2a. The impact of parental cultural capital is stronger for children from higher social origins than for children from lower social origins.

We formulated one additional hypothesis, which focuses on the transmission of social inequality through parental cultural capital and clarifies the content of cultural reproduction theory:

3a. Parental cultural capital mediates the effects of parental social origin on educational attainment.

In contrast to social reproduction theory, cultural mobility theory contends that the interaction between parental socioeconomic background and parental cultural capital is negative, which implies that children from low social backgrounds profit from parental cultural capital (Hypothesis 2b), which serves as an extra asset for these children. Consequently, cultural mobility theory predicts that parental cultural capital cannot mediate the effects of parental social origin and leads to the following hypotheses:

2b. The impact of parental cultural capital is stronger for children from lower social origins than for children from higher social origins.

3b. The effects of parental cultural capital are additional to the effects of parental social origin on educational attainment.

DiMaggio's (1982) research offers support for cultural mobility theory, especially for boys, but his findings must be viewed in light of some serious limitations of the applied data and modeling. In the Project Talent data on

U.S. high school students (Flanagan 1964), only information on the students' own cultural interests, not on parents' cultural capital, is available. However, it is likely that students' cultural practices are affected by their school success, which may lead to a confounding of the effects of parental social background and cultural capital on school success. But there is another reason to be reluctant to accept DiMaggio's finding that cultural capital does not mediate the effects of parental social origin in the United States. DiMaggio's crucial model controls for intellectual ability, which is measured by a vocabulary test, but it is likely that a student's vocabulary is affected by his or her specific measurement of cultural capital because a student's interest in literary reading is also reflected in this measure. Thus, the vocabulary test score probably picks up some of the effect of cultural capital on educational attainment. Consequently, the effects of both cultural capital and parental social origin would be biased. A more detailed analysis of DiMaggio's data may show whether the support for cultural mobility theory is sustained when the focus is only on the effects of cultural capital.

However, in general, we expect that cultural mobility theory offers a better understanding of how parental cultural capital works than does cultural reproduction theory. Parents from the higher social strata offer their children many privileges because they have completed higher education and because at least one of them is working in a higher segment of the labor market (Coleman 1988). Not all these parents will offer their children a highbrow cultural environment, since they may prefer other leisure activities or may not have the time to be involved in cultural activities. Consequently, there is no deterministic relationship between social background and participation in highbrow culture (Kalmijn and Kraaykamp 1996).

We assume that children of high social origins keep many of their privileges even when their parents do not participate in high culture. Following Coleman's (1988) argument on social capital, these parents offer, apart from good financial conditions, the social resources connected to their high educational and occupational status positions.

Furthermore, highly educated parents move in social circles in which extended educational careers are the norm and children of relatives, friends, and colleagues also attain higher levels of education. This social environment provides not only educational standards, but information on good colleges and universities and how to prepare children for them. Thus, highly educated parents, on average, are insiders in the field of education, whether they participate in high culture or not.

For parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds, the picture seems somewhat different. On average, their social circles support them to a lesser extent with regard to high educational standards and knowledge about the educational systems. Consequently, parents from low social origins are relative outsiders in the educational field. Giving these conditions, we expect that their cultural capital can be valuable in the educational careers of their children because it will narrow the gap between the home environment and school. For children from low social backgrounds, having parents who go to museums and the theater and are interested in reading books ultimately results in the acquisition of competencies and skills that are rewarded in school.

In this article, we use Dutch data to test the claims of these cultural reproduction and cultural mobility hypotheses. We expect that cultural mobility theory has additional value in a country, such as the Netherlands, in which education is virtually free of direct costs. Moreover, in the Netherlands, it seems common that children of highly educated parents are less likely to fail in school than are children of parents with less education. Parental aspirations often are enough to make children proceed to higher education. In such a case, it must be doubted that parental cultural resources can produce additional advantages for children from high social backgrounds. In contrast, parents from the lower social strata do not seem to have the same ambitions for their children to attain the highest level of education possible and so their children may be hampered in the race for high educational credentials. Especially, for these children, having parents with highbrow cultural interests may be an advantage in the educational system. It may increase parental

aspirations and it may bring the home and school closer to each other.

DATA AND VARIABLES

To test our hypotheses, we used data from the Netherlands Family Survey, 1992–93 (Ultee and Ganzeboom 1993), which had a two-stage representative sample design. The first step consisted of a division of the Netherlands into four regions: the North, East, West, and South. Within these regions, municipalities were proportionately sampled within strata defined by degree of urbanization. Within each of the sampled municipalities, a sample of residents aged 18–64 was randomly drawn from the population registry. Since in nonsingle households, both spouses were interviewed independently, the result was a data set with information on 1,800 respondents—1,000 “original” (sampled) respondents and 800 spouses.

The overall response rate in the survey was 43 percent. About 10 percent of the nonresponse rate of 57 percent was due to not finding the respondents at home (after three attempts), and the remaining 47 percent was due to refusals to be interviewed. Thus, 53 percent of the eligible respondents were not willing to participate, which unfortunately is a normal situation in the Netherlands today. Another reason why the refusal rate was high was that both spouses were to be interviewed independently in one session. We have to assume that the nature of the relationships among our variables, as expressed in the covariance matrix, would not be affected by the considerable nonresponse. That the educational distribution of the respondents in this survey accurately reflects the educational distribution of the Dutch population indicates that it is unlikely that the nonresponse rate would have important implications for our results, especially because it is not likely that a correlational approach, like ours, would be affected by selective nonresponses.

To ascertain that the respondents had finished their educational careers, we selected respondents aged 25 and older only, which resulted in an initial data set of 1,653 respondents. Table 1 presents some basic statistics

Table 1. Description of All Variables

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Valid Cases
Years of education	11.77	3.22	5	21	1,479
Parental years of education (average of father and mother)	8.48	2.80	5	21	1,479
Father's occupational status (ISEI)	43.78	16.45	10	88	1,479
Parental financial resources	.50	.29	0	1	1,479
Parental cultural capital	.50	.29	0	1	1,479
Parental beaux arts participation	.50	.29	0	1	1,479
Parental reading behavior	.50	.29	0	1	1,479
Women	.51	.50	0	1	1,479
Cohort	50.09	11.26	15	68	1,479
Broken family	.08	.27	0	1	1,479

Source: Ultee and Ganzeboom (1993).

Note: We included only those respondents in the analysis for whom we had information on their own and their parents' educational attainment, on at least 2 (out of 5) indicators of both parental beaux arts participation and parental reading behavior, and on at least 5 (out of 20) indicators of financial resources. Thus, we estimated our models with 1,479 out of 1,800 cases (82 percent).

on all the variables used in our analyses. The variables were coded as follows:

Educational attainment was measured as the highest level of education. To get an appropriate interval scale, we applied a standard recoding procedure for years of education: 5 = primary education (not finished: LO), 6 = primary education (with diploma: LO), 9 = junior vocational training (LBO), 10 = junior general secondary education (MAVO), 11 = senior general secondary education (HAVO), 12 = senior vocational training (MBO), 13 = preuniversity education (VWO), 15 = vocational colleges (HBO), 17 = university degree, and 21 = Ph.D. Our measure of educational attainment was the average of the years of education in the highest educational level finished and the years of education in the highest level ever enrolled in (for most respondents, the same number of years). Thus, we also took into account years of education that are not captured by a diploma, but have proved to be valuable in the labor market.

*Parental educational attainment—the average years of schooling “completed” by both parents—*was measured using the highest

level of educational attainment finished because no information on school enrollments without diplomas was available for the parents. Several tests showed that using either the average educational level of both parents or a maximization of parental educational attainment would not alter the results.

Father's occupational status was measured using the International Socio-Economic Index (ISEI) of Occupational Status (Ganzeboom, P. M. De Graaf, and Treiman 1992). We used retrospective information on father's occupation when the respondent was 15 years old, that is, in the educational system. For the few cases in which this information was not available, we applied scores on father's last occupational position. Mean values for missing observations in father's ISEI were imputed in 2.5 percent of the cases.

Parental financial resources were represented by a within-cohort standardized measure (within 10-year birth cohorts) of 18 indicators of the material situation in the parental home at the time the respondent was about age 15: 1, parents owned house; 2, respondent had own bedroom; 3, house had heated bedrooms; 4, the family took frequent holidays; 5,

the family went skiing; 6–15, the home had a telephone, car, refrigerator, washing machine, clothes dryer, dishwasher, camera, television, central heating, and antique furniture; 16, the parents hired a cleaning woman; 17, the parents owned stock; and 18, the parents owned bonds. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of the resulting scale was a notable .85. We computed the number of items present in the parental household and then calculated percentile scores within each birth cohort. This procedure ensured that our measure of financial resources represented the relative financial position of a respondent's parents within the relevant birth cohort and avoided the problem that some indicators were not appropriate in older periods because they were not present in those days.

Parental cultural capital consisted of 10 items, 5 of which referred to beaux arts participation and 5 to reading habits. The respondents reported, on a 3-point scale (1 = never, 2 = at least once a year, and 3 = more than once a year), whether their parents, when the respondents were around age 15, attended (1) art museums, (2) historical museums, (3) opera or ballet performances, (4) classical music concerts, and (5) theatrical performances (plays or cabarets). The respondents also reported, on a 3-point scale (1 = never, 2 = at least once a year, and 3 = more than once a year), whether their parents read, at about the same time, (1) regional or historical novels; (2) thrillers, science fiction, or war novels; (3) Dutch literature; (4) translated literature; and (5) literature in a foreign language. The reliability coefficient of this more or less traditional operationalization of parental cultural capital with 10 items was alpha = .84. We calculated the mean score of these 10 indicators and again computed the percentile scores within the 10-year birth cohorts to control for supply-side developments in cultural facilities during the last half of the 20th century.

In addition to the traditional scale for parental cultural capital, we constructed two specific scales for parental beaux arts participation and parental reading behavior,² each of which included the relevant five items just listed. For both parental beaux arts participation and parental reading behavior, we com-

puted the within-cohort rankings of the mean scores. The reliability coefficients of the two subscales (alpha = .80 for beaux arts participation and alpha = .73 for reading behavior) were somewhat lower than the reliability coefficient of the full scale.

To show that the parental cultural indicators were not affected by biased recall accuracy, we also used separate interviews with the parents of a selected group of respondents ($n = 390$), which enabled us to compare the respondents' reports on parental beaux arts participation and reading behavior with the reports by the parents themselves. Two findings are important. First, parental reports and respondents' reports on previous parental beaux arts participation and reading were only moderately correlated (both $r = .37$). Second, when parental reports were regressed on the respondents' reports and respondents' own present cultural practices, the respondents' cultural practices had no significant effect. To conclude, the retrospective measurement of parental cultural resources is moderately reliable (reliability coefficient is .6), but not biased, and therefore the results of the analysis were not biased in the direction of one of the two aspects of parental cultural capital.

All the models included three control variables.³ *Gender* was measured by a dummy variable *women*. *Cohort* was birth cohort, measured continuously from 1915 to 1968. *Broken family* was an indicator of being raised in a single-parent family.

Table 2 shows how the selected parental resources are related to parental social background. We distinguished three levels of social origin, based on parental educational attainment.⁴ About 54 percent of the parents had a low social background—only primary or some vocational training (fewer than 8 years of education). About 34 percent of the parents had a middle social background (between 8 and 12 years of education)—secondary general schooling or middle-level vocational training. Some 11 percent of the parents had completed higher education (more than 12 years of education), defined as a high social background.

Table 2 shows that parental resources are moderately to strongly connected with

Table 2. Parental Resources (Average Percentile Score), by Parental Educational Attainment

Resources	Parental Years of Education			Correlation with Parental Education
	Fewer than 8 Years (Low Level)	8–12 Years (Middle Level)	More than 12 Years (High Level)	
Parental financial resources (0–1)	.40	.58	.78	.49
Parental cultural capital (0–1)	.41	.56	.82	.47
Parental beaux arts participation (0–1)	.43	.54	.78	.38
Parental reading behavior (0–1)	.42	.55	.78	.43
Percentage	54.6	34.4	11.0	100.0
Number	807	510	162	1,479

Source: Ultee and Ganzeboom (1993).

parental social background. However, the correlation coefficients indicate far from perfect relationships. Apparently, there are substantial differences, but not a complete segregation, between the resources of parents with high and low social backgrounds. A correlation coefficient of only $r = .38$ between parental educational attainment and beaux arts participation means that many highly educated parents do not visit theaters and concert halls, whereas many parents with low levels of education do.

ANALYSIS

Beaux Arts Participation or Reading Behavior?

In Table 3, we present estimates of three ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression models regarding the effects of our different scales of parental cultural capital on children’s level of schooling. Model I, our baseline model, includes only parental social background and control variables as predictors for educational attainment. It produces the expected estimates of gender and birth cohort, although the expected negative effect of growing up in a single-parent family is not significant. We confirm again that in the Netherlands, parental education is a considerably more powerful predictor of children’s success in

school than is father’s occupational status (P. M. De Graaf and Ganzeboom 1993). This finding suggests that cultural resources are indeed relevant for educational attainment in the Netherlands.

Model II of Table 3 adds parental cultural capital and parental financial resources to the model. The inclusion of these two explanatory concepts increases the proportion of explained variance from 25.6 percent to 30.5 percent and offers a substantial interpretation of the social background effects. We can interpret the effect of parental educational attainment by $(.36-.24)/.36 = 33$ percent and can explain the effect of father’s occupational status for $(.14-.06)/.14 = 57$ percent. The effect of parental cultural capital (.20) is larger than the effect of parental financial resources (.13). The difference between these two effects is statistically significant ($t = 2.7$), which adds to the evidence that cultural explanations for educational inequalities are more appropriate than financial explanations in the Netherlands.⁵

So far, we have replicated earlier results on the effects of parental resources in the Netherlands. Now, we focus on the distinction between Hypothesis 1a, which reflects Bourdieu’s point of view that parental cultural capital represents familiarity with the dominant cultural codes, measured by participation in and affinity with formal highbrow culture, and Hypothesis 1b, which expresses the idea

Table 3. Standardized and Unstandardized Coefficients from the Regression of Years of Education on Parental Resources

	Educational Attainment					
	I		II		III	
	b	β	b	β	b	β
Cohort (birth year–1900)	.031 (.007)	.11**	.040 (.006)	.14**	.042 (.007)	.15**
Women (0–1)	-.862 (.145)	-.13**	-.856 (.140)	-.13**	-.839 (.139)	-.13**
Broken home (0–1)	-.580 (.265)	-.05*	-.411 (.257)	-.03	-.447 (.256)	-.04
Parental education (in years)	.426 (.032)	.36**	.272 (.034)	.24**	.278 (.034)	.24**
Father’s ISEI (10–88)	.027 (.005)	.14**	.012 (.005)	.06*	.013 (.005)	.06*
Parental financial resources (0–1)			1.445 (.294)	.13**	1.519 (.296)	.14**
Parental cultural capital (0–1)			2.276 (.287)	.20**		
Parental beaux arts participation (0–1)					.483 (.299)	.04
Parental reading behavior (0–1)					1.894 (.296)	.17**
Intercept	5.991 (.376)		5.517 (.367)		5.309 (.380)	
Adjusted R ²	25.6%		30.5%		30.3%	

Source: Ultee and Ganzeboom (1993).
**p* < .05, ** *p* < .01 (two-tailed test).

that the most important aspect of parents’ cultural capital is the linguistic and cognitive skills reflected by parental reading behavior. For this purpose, in the last model (Model III) of Table 3, we divided the traditional scale of parental cultural capital into two subscales: parental beaux arts participation and parental reading behavior. The corresponding estimates offer strong support for Hypothesis 1b and practically no support for Hypothesis 1a. The effect of parental reading behavior is about four times as large as the effect of parental beaux arts participation, and the effect of parental beaux arts participation is not significant. Moreover, the effects of

parental beaux arts participation and parental reading behavior differ significantly (*t* = 4.9). The division of the full scale of parental cultural capital into two subscales increased our understanding of the contents of the workings of cultural capital, but the model fit, as expressed by the proportion of explained variance, did not improve because of our measurement procedure, in which the same 10 items used for the full scale were used for the two subscales, in two groups of 5 items. Because the 10 items are strongly associated, this procedure necessarily produces two subscales with lower reliability coefficients than the reliability coefficient of the full scale. The

inherent increase in attenuation leads to a decrease in the proportion of explained variance. However, this methodological oddity should not distract attention from our main conclusion, that insight into the workings of parental cultural capital can be improved substantially by focusing on parental reading habits. In the Netherlands, children seem to benefit more from their parents' linguistic and cognitive skills, as measured by the scale on reading behavior, than from their parents' participation in highbrow cultural activities.

Cultural Reproduction or Cultural Mobility?

We have concluded that a substantial part of the effects of parental social background can be explained by explicit measures of parental financial and cultural resources. We now turn our attention to our second issue, whether parental cultural capital is an intermediate agent of the effects of parental social background, as conceived by Bourdieu, or whether the effects of parental cultural capital are stronger or weaker for children from high or low social origins. Table 4 shows the appropriate regression models. These models are based on Models II and III of Table 3, to which are added interaction effects between parental educational attainment, as the major indicator of parental socioeconomic background, and parental resources. According to cultural reproduction theory (Hypotheses 2a and 2b), the interaction between parental education and parental cultural capital on children's educational attainment should be positive; that is, only children from high social backgrounds would benefit from a culturally rich home environment. However, according to cultural mobility theory (Hypotheses 3a and 3b), the interaction effect between parental education and cultural capital should be negative; that is, the effects of parental resources would be smaller for children from high socioeconomic origins.

Model IV shows that the interaction effect of parental educational attainment with the full scale of cultural capital is strong and that the direction of the interaction effect is in favor of cultural mobility theory: Children from low socioeconomic backgrounds take advantage of

parental cultural capital when it is available. Initially, we also included the interaction between parental education and parental financial resources in the model, but since this interaction effect was insignificant and the two interaction terms are strongly intercorrelated, we chose not to include this interaction term in the final model. In Model V, we repeated the interaction analysis, but again replaced the full scale of parental cultural capital with the two subscales of parental beaux arts participation and reading behavior. Therefore, initially Model V included three interaction terms. Again, we report only the significant interaction effects. The estimates of Model V confirm that parental reading behavior has larger effects than parental beaux arts participation. Moreover, the only significant interaction term in the model is the interaction between parental educational attainment and parental reading. From regression Model III, we already learned that children from low social origins take advantage of parental cultural capital, and here we again see that the working component is parental reading skills and capacities. This is an important refinement of the cultural mobility hypothesis. That is, reading by parents in the lower social strata, rather than participation in beaux arts activities, is a key to their children's greater educational success.

Table 5 gives accessible information on the magnitude of the reported interaction effects between parental socioeconomic background and resources. To do so, we computed children's average years of educational attainment for each combination of parental educational attainment and resources (in thirds). Moreover, within the three levels of parental education, we calculated the correlation coefficient between the parental resources (in thirds) and their children's level of schooling.

Although the figures in Table 5 are based on bivariate calculations, they clearly illustrate the effect of cultural mobility. First, the correlation coefficients between parental cultural resources and children's educational attainment are the highest for children of parents with low levels of education. With respect to parental financial resources, no such interaction effects are visible. Second, both for the full scale of parental cultural capital and for the scale of parental reading behavior, there is

Table 4. Effects of the Interaction Between Parental Educational Attainment and Parental Resources on Years of Education; Unstandardized Coefficients

	Educational Attainment	
	IV	V
Cohort (birth year–1900)	.038** (.006)	.041** (.007)
Women (0–1)	-.859** (.139)	-.848** (.140)
Broken home (0–1)	-.400 (.256)	-.416 (.257)
Parental education (years)	.500** (.068)	.472** (.065)
Father's ISEI (10–88)	.013* (.005)	.013* (.005)
Parental financial resources (0–1)	1.400** (.293)	1.447** (.296)
Parental cultural capital (0–1)	5.213** (.808)	
Parental beaux arts participation (0–1)		.563 (.299)
Parental reading behavior (0–1)		4.563** (.800)
Parental education * parental financial resources	—	—
Parental education * parental capital	-.348** (.090)	
Parental education * parental beaux arts participation		—
Parental education * parental reading behavior		-.314** (.087)
Intercept	3.811 (.571)	3.743 (.578)
Adjusted R^2	31.2%	30.8%

Source: Ultee and Ganzeboom (1993).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed test).

a cutting point between the highest level of parental education, on the one hand, and the middle and lowest levels of parental education, on the other hand. The cultural resources of highly educated parents do not further children's educational attainment at all, whereas for parents in the two lowest educational categories, they do.

Our results do not particularly support

Bourdieu's cultural reproduction theory. In Dutch society, cultural capital hardly matters for children of highly educated parents, whether it is measured in the classical way à la Bourdieu or by parental reading behavior. On the other hand, Table 5 clearly indicates that children from high socioeconomic backgrounds do much better in school than do children from lower socioeconomic back-

Table 5. Average Years of Education, by Parental Educational Attainment and Parental Resources

Parental Years of Education	Parental Financial Resources			Pearson's Correlation
	Lowest Third	Middle Third	Highest Third	
Fewer than 8 years (low, 54.8%)	10.0	10.9	11.7	.23
8-12 years (middle, 34.3%)	11.8	12.4	13.2	.22
More than 12 years (high, 10.9%)	14.3	13.6	14.9	.19
Parental Cultural Capital				
Fewer than 8 years (low, 54.8%)	9.8	10.8	12.0	.28
8-12 years (middle, 34.3%)	11.6	12.5	13.3	.26
More than 12 years (high, 10.9%)	14.6	14.5	14.7	.02
Parental Beaux Arts Participation				
Fewer than 8 years (low, 54.8%)	10.7	10.0	11.9	.13
8-12 years (middle, 34.3%)	12.1	12.5	13.2	.19
More than 12 years (high, 10.9%)	15.2	14.8	14.6	-.03
Parental Reading Behavior				
Fewer than 8 years (low, 54.8%)	9.8	11.1	11.8	.25
8-12 years (middle, 34.3%)	11.5	12.9	13.1	.25
More than 12 years (high, 10.9%)	15.5	13.3	14.8	.03

Source: Ultee and Ganzeboom (1993).

grounds, even when their parents hardly read books and hardly participate in highbrow culture. Although children from low socioeconomic backgrounds do take advantage of their parents' cultural resources (especially their reading behavior), they generally do worse than children from high socioeconomic backgrounds. Table 5 shows that those with much cultural capital and low socioeconomic backgrounds are only able to reach the educational level of those with the combination of a middle level socioeconomic background and hardly any cultural capital. However, those from low- and middle-level socioeconomic backgrounds, irrespective of their cultural capital, do not catch up with those from high socioeconomic backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

Bourdieu's classical cultural reproduction theory argues that parents' involvement in high-

brow cultural activities and knowledge of the beaux arts promote children's mastery of valued cultural codes and further children's educational careers. Our findings shed new light on both social and cultural reproduction.

First, in the Netherlands, it is much less parents' mastery of highbrow cultural codes than parental reading behavior that brings advantages in children's educational careers. We can think of two possible explanations for this finding, which can be labeled the "educational skills" and the "educational affinity" explanations. First, parents who read frequently have linguistic and cognitive skills that were rewarded in school and can pass these educational skills on to their offspring. More specifically, they provide their children with a stimulating learning environment at home and act as examples for their children. In addition, parents who read frequently have more cultural literacy and are probably better informed on how their children's functioning in school can be improved. Also, the availability of books and other reading

materials at home is helpful to children's scholastic performance. In the Dutch educational curriculum, with its emphasis on foreign languages, this help may be of special value.

Second, parents who read more frequently not only have more educational skills at their disposal, but they add to a cultural home environment that has an affinity with and resembles the cultural school climate. This explanation is much more in Bourdieu's line of reasoning. It holds that it is not so much the skills of parents who read frequently, but the cultural connection that makes for the positive impact of having parents who read, so that children who are used to having books and to reading at home are not startled by common reading practices at school. Unfortunately, with our data, we were not able to disentangle these two explanations for the effects of parental reading behavior. Future research should provide an answer.

Our second major finding is that differences in parental cultural capital, measured either by the classical Bourdieu indicators or parental reading habits, are more important for children from lower and middle socioeconomic backgrounds and less important for children from high socioeconomic backgrounds. In contrast to the core implication of Bourdieu's reproduction theory, parental cultural capital seems to be of additional help especially for children from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Our results suggest that children from higher social origins do well at school and that the cultural habits of their parents do not contribute that much to their success. It is tempting to argue that children's very enrollment in higher educational levels indicates that parents have educational skills and an affinity with the educational system, but if one accepted this argument, the whole logic of cultural reproduction theory would be lost. When one argues that children of high socioeconomic backgrounds do well in school because they are so close to society's dominant culture, one cannot refrain from direct measurement of this cultural connection. Assuming explicitly that a high socioeconomic position and a cultured home environment are the same is begging the question. This is the reason why it is important to find direct measures of parental cultural capi-

tal. Such cultural capital only partially functions as a reproduction channel for high-status parents and functions as a compensating resource for parents who lack schooling themselves. Parents can partly compensate for a low or middle level of schooling by offering their children a favorable reading climate, but this reading climate does not matter when parents have higher educational levels. The contrast with Bourdieu's core hypothesis is striking because the hypothesis implies that children from high-status backgrounds do so well at school because their parents are at home in the cultural system.

Will the effects of family background on educational attainment continue to decrease in the Netherlands? Our results show that the impact of financial resources on educational careers is considerably smaller than the impact of parental cultural resources. If the role of financial resources has indeed become weak in the Netherlands, the financial dimension can hardly contribute to a further decrease in the effects of family background. With respect to the cultural dimension, we can foresee several scenarios. One scenario may be that decreasing attention to reading among those with low educational levels (Knulst and Kraaykamp 1997) will ensure that educational inequalities between children from different socioeconomic backgrounds will increase. Over time, fewer children of low-status parents will possess cognitive and linguistic skills assured by the parental home as a compensating resource.

Another scenario may be that the cultural gap between home and school will decrease simply because formal cultural codes are becoming less important in scholastic achievement. In the past two decades, a reduction of social inequality in several domains in the Netherlands has led to the democratization of cultural tastes and habits, which has undermined the esteem of highbrow cultural objects, skills, and values. A continuation of this process could lead to a further decrease in the effects of family background in the Netherlands. However, even though English has become the lingua franca of the Western world, it is unlikely that the Dutch language will lose its position as the primary language in the Netherlands. As long as the Dutch language is

primary, training in native and nonnative languages must remain a major subject at school, and a home environment that stimulates reading and linguistic skills will retain its advantages.

NOTES

1. In terms of Bourdieu's (1984) theory, one could interpret the Dutch educational system as the specific "field" or "domain" in which parental cultural resources (skills, habits, and styles) are effective.

2. Bourdieu (1984) pointed to museum visits as a basis for a "quasi-scholastic disposition," in contrast to going to the theater and the opera, which have more explicitly social expressive elements. This argument could imply that besides parental reading behavior, going to art museums enhances children's school performance more than do cultural activities like theater and opera visits. However, unlike reading, a visit to a museum is not a solitary activity. Furthermore, a factor analysis revealed that parental museum visits do not form a separate dimension of cultural capital.

3. It would be preferable to control for retrospective scholastic ability as well, since this ability may partly interpret the effects of parental cultural capital on educational attainment. Unfortunately, we did not have such measures in our cross-sectional data set. DiMaggio's (1982) research, however, showed that cultural resources indeed enhance educational outcomes even when prior ability is taken into account.

4. Here, and in other tables, we do not use father's ISEI as an indicator for parental social background because, as we stated earlier (see also P. M. De Graaf and Ganzeboom 1993), in the Netherlands parental educational attainment is the dominant dimension of social origin in children's educational careers.

5. Model II is the final model of Niehof's (1997) analysis of the same data. With some different methodology, we largely arrived at the same empirical results. We diverted from Niehof's methodological approach in three ways. First, we did not apply a pair-wise deletion of missing values, as Niehof did, which results in a data set with 168 fewer cases.

Second, unlike Niehof, we calculated within-cohort percentile scores of parental resources. Third, we applied OLS regression analysis, whereas Niehof applied LISREL analysis. A comparison of the findings shows that the same effect of cultural resources was estimated (standardized effects of .16 reported by Niehof and of .20 reported by us). However, Niehof found a larger effect of financial resources (standardized effect of .17 reported by Niehof and of .13 reported by us).

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