FAMILY MEDIA MATTERS: UNRAVELING THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF READING AND TELEVISION TASTES

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ABSTRACT: In this study, the authors scrutinize the intergenerational transmission of book reading and television viewing behaviors. They examine long-term effects of parents’ social status, parental media example, and media guidance activities during one’s childhood on adult media tastes. Data are employed from the Family Survey of the Dutch Population. By estimating structural equation models, the authors gained more insight into how parental socialization efforts influence children’s book reading and television viewing. Unraveling direct and indirect effects, they found that both parental socioeconomic status and media socialization activities play a major role in the intergenerational transmission of media tastes. Imitation appeared to be the main mechanism underlying the media socialization process. Parental media guidance, both directly and via its effect on children’s school success, partly mediates the imitation process, especially for reading. The current study above all shows that parental media socialization activities do enduringly affect a person’s media taste. Hence, socialization is found to play an indispensable role in the development of both highbrow and lowbrow reading and television tastes.

Keywords: parental media socialization, intergenerational transmission, long-term effects, media tastes

In contemporary societies, media use plays a relevant, perhaps even dominant, role in everyday life. Media, in their many types and forms, are a source of both information and recreation, and media use has become a prime leisure pastime. But not everyone uses the same media sources and content; people differ greatly in their media tastes. Some prefer to spend time reading literary novels, whereas others enjoy watching soap operas on television. Furthermore, these differences are found to be highly associated with a person’s family and social background (see, e.g., Bennett 2006; Kraaykamp 2001; Roe 2000). Media consumption is thus a
class-specific cultural practice and may be seen as a significant factor in expressing social status and confirming social boundaries. A relevant question, therefore, is how differentiation in media taste evolves.

Lifestyle research has repeatedly found a person’s individual characteristics to play a key role when it comes to differentiation in media consumption. For example, higher educated people tend to watch cultural and informative television programs because these best fit their social status and arouse their intellect, whereas lower educated persons are more attracted to entertainment programs (Konig, Rebers, and Westerik 2009; Kuipers 2006; Van Rees and Van Eijck 2003). Other scholars have focused on family background and parental media socialization activities to explain social differentiation in cultural or media tastes (e.g., Kraaykamp 2001). Within the family home, media consumption is a recurrent daily activity and a regular topic of family conversation (Buerkel-Rothfuss and Buerkel 2001; Lull 1988). Hence, parental media socialization offers a highly plausible explanation for the development of specific media tastes.

The current study seeks to gain a better understanding of how an individual’s media taste develops by scrutinizing the intergenerational transmission of media preferences and integrating the lifestyle perspective herein. The first research question reads as follows: To what extent do parental media socialization activities during childhood affect a person’s current media taste? Although cultural reproduction research clearly shows parental socialization activities to be a primary factor in the development of an individual’s cultural and media taste (Katz-Gerro 1999; Kraaykamp 2001; Nagel and Ganzeboom 2002), little is known about how media taste is lastingly transmitted from generation to generation. Hence, this study hopes to reveal how parents actually foster their children’s media taste: via the example they set (through their own media behaviors), via media guidance activities (through parent-child interactions on media), or via parents’ influence on their children’s cultural (i.e., cognitive) competencies. In studying these distinct transmission processes, we will account for differences with respect to parental socioeconomic status. Accordingly, we pose a second, more specific research question: Via what pathways do parental media socialization activities during childhood affect a person’s current media taste?

This study contributes to existing research by focusing explicitly on the role of parents in the development of media tastes, though it also acknowledges the importance of a person’s own characteristics alongside parental media socialization activities. Moreover, the current study enriches the cultural inheritance model by focusing explicitly on the role of distinct parental media socialization activities. We address both direct and indirect long-term effects of parental socioeconomic status, the example parents set in their own use of media, and the media guidance provided by parents on (adult) children’s reading and television viewing tastes. To test our expectations, we apply structural equation modeling (path analysis) on data from the Family Survey of the Dutch Population (De Graaf, De Graaf, Kraaykamp, and Ultee 2003; Kraaykamp, Wolbers, and Ruiter 2009). Our research interest lies in explaining highbrow and lowbrow reading and television tastes for respondents born between 1955 and 1984 (N = 2,539).
THEORY

In our study on the development of media tastes, we differentiate between two media sources, reading and television, and between two types of content, high-brow and lowbrow. Firstly, reading is observed as a socially rewarded leisure activity that generates cognitive and language competencies (Kloosterman, Notten, Tolsma, and Kraaykamp 2011; Leseman and De Jong 1998). But there is surely a difference between highbrow reading and lowbrow reading. Highbrow or serious reading content is associated with more cognitive stimulation and a higher social status compared to the reading of popular books, which may be classified as lowbrow (e.g., Notten and Kraaykamp 2010). Secondly, (excessive) television viewing generally is perceived as a low status activity and as offering little cognitive stimulation (Schmidt, Rich, Rifas-Shiman, Oken, and Taveras 2009). Nonetheless, as with reading, the content of television programs varies (Kuipers 2006; Van Rees and Van Eijck 2003). People can pick informative and cultural programs or watch entertainment programs like soap operas and game shows. Thus, similar to reading, television taste can be categorized as highbrow or lowbrow. Recent research suggests that cultural consumption may be not so clearly demarcated in highbrow versus lowbrow repertoires (Goldberg 2011; Peterson and Kern 1996). Participation in highbrow activities, however, seems to remain socially distinctive, also among the more omnivore cultural consumers in current societies (Katz-Gerro and Jaeger 2011; Purhonen, Gronow, and Rahkonen 2011). And as for television viewing, no omnivore cultural consumers could be discovered in the Netherlands (Konig et al. 2009), suggesting that social boundaries are still demarcated by lowbrow and highbrow television viewing repertoires.

In the process of intergenerational transmission of cultural resources, the attention for parental socioeconomic status is highly relevant (Bourdieu 1984). Bourdieu’s reproduction notion assumes that parents transmit their cultural resources to their children, with high-status parents especially passing on highbrow cultural preferences to the next generation. However, the dominance of parents’ social position in this reproduction process seems to recede when actual parental cultural and media (especially reading) socialization activities are taken into account (De Vries and De Graaf 2008; Kraaykamp 2001; Mohr and DiMaggio 1995; Nagel and Ganzeboom 2002). Research has shown that parental media socialization practices are highly stratified (Notten and Kraaykamp 2009), meaning that children from families with different social backgrounds experience different levels and content of parental media socialization. Generally, and in line with Bourdieu’s reproduction theory, children from higher social backgrounds experience a more beneficial and rewarding media climate in their parental homes (Crook 1997; De Graaf 1986; Elchardus and Siongers 2003; Kloosterman et al. 2011). The focus in the current study is on the actual processes of parental media socialization—that is, on the (in)direct long-term effects of parents’ media example and guidance on their children’s media taste. However, we do include parental socioeconomic status in our research in order to gain more insight into the cultural reproduction process at large. We therefore expect that parental socioeconomic position foremost affects an individual’s current media tastes via parental media socialization activities during childhood.
In line with reproduction theory and sociological studies on cultural socialization, a person’s (i.e., future parent’s) cultural or media taste, or preference, is supposed to be relatively stable from young adulthood (e.g., Bourdieu 1984; Lareau 2003) and gives direction to possible parental cultural practices. In line with these findings, pedagogical and media studies show that parents’ own (media) preferences and values lead to specific parent-child interactions on media use (Darling and Steinberg 1993; Gentile and Walsh 2002; Van der Voort, Nikken, and Van Lil 1992). Therefore, we advocate that parents’ own media preferences—that is, the example parents set in their use of media—precede parental media guidance activities. Figure 1 presents the theoretical model underlying this study.

**Parental Reading and Television Viewing Example: The Imitation Perspective**

In line with social learning theory, intergenerational transmission of cultural and media taste is found to occur through “learning by observation” (Bandura and Walters 1963; Kraaykamp 2001; McLeod and Brown 1976). Parents set an example, foremost unintentionally, and children follow it, imitating their parents’ behavior. For instance, when parents set an example of highbrow television viewing, their children likely develop a preference for highbrow television content as well. Hence, by exposing children to their own daily media behavior, parents familiarize and nurture their children with certain media tastes. This observational or social learning perspective fits nicely with Bourdieu’s cultural reproduction thesis, which also assumes that parents rather automatically socialize their children with specific (cultural) norms and behaviors within the family home (Bourdieu 1984). Following this line of reasoning, we hypothesize that individuals who were socialized with parental highbrow reading and highbrow television viewing during childhood currently read more highbrow books and watch more highbrow television content (Hypothesis 1).

Some scholars have also studied the intergenerational transmission of lowbrow reading and television preferences (e.g., Elchardus and Siongers 2003; Kraaykamp 2001), showing a correlation between parents’ and children’s popular media consumption. It is reasonable to expect that, nonetheless or even though a popular taste is socially and cognitively less rewarding, children whose parents exhibit lowbrow media preferences will tend to imitate those preferences. Following this imitation perspective, we expect that individuals who were socialized with an example of parental lowbrow reading and lowbrow television viewing during childhood currently read more lowbrow books and watch more lowbrow television content (Hypothesis 2).

**Parental Reading and Television Guidance: The Interaction Perspective**

Compared to (unintentionally) setting an example, parents may also socialize their offspring’s media taste more intentionally by providing media guidance (Austin 2001; Leseman and De Jong 1998; Notten and Kraaykamp 2009; Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters, and Marseille 1999). By mediating children’s reading and television viewing behavior—for instance, by reading books aloud or by
Theoretical Model of the Intergenerational Transmission of Media Taste

FIGURE 1

Parental socio-economic status

Parental media example

Parental media guidance

Respondents’ educational level

Respondents’ highbrow and lowbrow media taste

[Diagram showing the relationships between the variables mentioned above]
discussing television programs—parents may actively foster their offspring’s media use and taste. Earlier research, indeed, demonstrates that reading guidance encourages children’s overall reading proficiency (Bus, IJzendoorn, and Pellegrini 1995; Kloosterman et al. 2011) and especially stimulates children’s highbrow reading competencies and interest in more complex reading content (Kraaykamp 2003; Leseman and De Jong 1998). Hence, we hypothesize that individuals who were socialized with parental reading guidance in their childhood currently read more highbrow books (Hypothesis 3). Following this line of reasoning, parents are less likely to intentionally guide their children to become popular book readers. So we expect individuals socialized with parental reading guidance during childhood currently to read fewer lowbrow books (Hypothesis 4). Note that previous empirical research indicates that parental reading guidance might stimulate enjoyment of popular reading content as well (Kraaykamp 2003).

Parental television guidance is often seen as a preventive or protective socialization activity because of the potential harmful effects of (popular) television viewing for children’s development (Buerkel-Rothfuss and Buerkel 2001; Nathanson 1999; Notten and Kraaykamp 2010). The most effective and common parental strategies to foster healthy television habits in children are restrictive guidance, as in setting television rules, and instructive guidance, as in critically discussing television content with children. Children who experience restrictive and instructive parent-child interaction on television viewing time and content have been found to be more modest and critical television viewers (Brown 2001; Buijzen and Valkenburg 2005). Accordingly, we hypothesize that individuals who were socialized with restrictive and instructive parental television guidance during childhood currently watch more highbrow television content (Hypothesis 5) and less lowbrow television content (Hypothesis 6).

A third type of parental television mediation identified in media research is parental co-viewing—that is, parents and children watching television together without (critical) communication about content (Valkenburg et al. 1999). Although research findings are not equivocal, the role of co-viewing for a child’s development tends to be disadvantageous rather than advantageous (Austin 2001; Bersamin et al. 2008; Buerkel-Rothfuss and Buerkel 2001). Co-viewing often merely represents (more) time spent viewing television. Additionally, when parents watch television without commenting, children interpret their parents as approving of all that is shown, including non-stimulating or even detrimental television content (Brown 2001; Nathanson 1999). Thus, in families where co-viewing is the dominant parental guidance strategy, children are not encouraged to become critical or serious television viewers. This study therefore expects individuals who were socialized with parental co-viewing in their childhood to currently watch more lowbrow television content (Hypothesis 7) and less highbrow television content (Hypothesis 8).

**Intergenerational Transmission of Media Taste: Via What Pathways?**

This study assumes that parental media socialization occurs by the example parents set and by the guidance parents offer and that there is a sequential or causal relation between these activities. As such, it elaborates on previous research, which
shows that parents' own cultural preferences and values lead to specific aspirations regarding their children’s cultural development. Consequently, this affects the actual guidance parents provide to their children (Bourdieu 1984; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997; Yaish and Katz-Gerro 2012), also when it comes to media use (e.g., Livingstone 2007; Van der Voort et al. 1992). For instance, parents concerned about television being an empty distraction tend to be more actively involved in their offspring’s television consumption (Barkin et al. 2006; Warren 2003), and parents who themselves are avid readers are more apt to guide their children’s reading practices (Kraaykamp 2003). In general, media guidance aimed at stimulating beneficial media use is a socialization activity most commonly found among parents oriented towards highbrow media consumption (e.g., Gentile and Walsh 2002). Parents preferring popular media content are less proactive in guiding their children to become critical media users (e.g., Notten and Kraaykamp 2009). This leads us to expect that parental media guidance partly mediates the influence of the example parents set in their own media use on their (adult) children’s media taste.

In studying the long-term effects of parental media socialization on the development of an individual’s media taste, we also consider a person’s educational attainment as a potential mediating factor. On the one hand, lifestyle and media research suggest that social inequality in media taste occurs because of differentiation in individual and cultural competencies, often measured by a person’s educational level (Bennett 2006; Ganzeboom 1982; Katz-Gerro 1999; König et al. 2009; Rosengren and Windahl 1989). On the other hand, numerous studies have shown the relevance of parental social background and cultural socialization practices for a person’s educational success (Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997; De Graaf, De Graaf, and Kraaykamp 2000; Sullivan 2001). More specifically, beneficial (i.e., cognitively stimulating and high-status) cultural and media socialization activities, such as parental highbrow television viewing and reading activities, positively affect children’s educational success (Crook 1997; Evans, Kelley, Dikora, and Treiman 2010; Georg 2004; Kloosterman et al. 2011). Furthermore, socializing children with a popular media taste appears to hinder their cognitive development and educational success (Notten and Kraaykamp 2010; Schmidt et al. 2009). Integrating these different perspectives leads to the expectation that children from lower social backgrounds and (thereby) lacking beneficial parental media socialization will tend to attain lower levels of education and end up with lower levels of cultural and media competency, eventually leading to a preference for popular or lowbrow media content. Children from higher status families and whose parents have more beneficial media skills will likely acquire higher levels of education, ultimately resulting in more serious media habits. Thus, with educational success being a result of and a relevant factor in the process of cultural reproduction and media socialization, we expect a person’s own educational level to partly mediate the effects of parental socioeconomic status, parental media example, and media guidance on their own media taste.

Prior research indicates that parents play a more pronounced role than schooling in a person’s cultural socialization (e.g., Nagel and Ganzeboom 2002). Consequently, we expect the effect of parental media socialization to remain significant, even when we control for individual educational level.
DATA AND MEASUREMENTS

Data

To answer our research questions and to test our hypotheses, we use data from two waves of the Family Survey of the Dutch Population (FSDP), a cross-sectional survey of a nationally representative sample of the Dutch population, conducted in 2003 and 2009 (De Graaf et al. 2003; Kraaykamp et al. 2009). The FSDP includes structured face-to-face interviews and self-administered written questionnaires with both primary respondents and their partner (if the primary respondent is married or cohabiting). Because the childhood socialization of the partner most likely took place apart from that of the primary respondent, this study includes each person as an individual respondent. The FSDP dataset contains detailed information on several aspects of an individual’s life course and life situation for respondents between ages 18 and 70. The current study makes use of retrospective questions on childhood in-home media experiences, parental social background and family composition, and the respondent’s own educational career and current media consumption. An occasionally mentioned shortcoming of retrospective reports is that respondents’ recall may be biased by memory effects and social desirability. Previous studies using the FSDP data, however, show hardly or no significant bias due to possible systematic and random error in retrospective measure of parental cultural and media socialization (e.g., De Graaf et al. 2000; De Vries and De Graaf 2008).

Because Dutch television broadcasting took off around 1960, parental television socialization is not deemed feasible for respondents born before 1955. We therefore decided to exclude these respondents as well as respondents who experienced no parental television socialization because they reported having no television in the family home during their youth (together 40.5 percent of the total). To analyze long-term effects of parental media socialization, obviously a respondent’s socialization has to be completed. Therefore, we selected respondents who were not living with either of their parents (99.1 percent of the total) and those older than 25 years at the time of the interview (97.2 percent of the total). After this selection, our dataset was left with 2,695 individuals with birth years between 1955 and 1984, between 25 and 54 years of age.

Measurements

We investigate two types of media use: book reading and television viewing. For both media types, we analyzed the development of “highbrow” and “lowbrow” taste. By defining these rather broad distinctive genres, over time changes in media environments are also taken into account. All variables and scales measuring respondents’ media taste and parental media socialization activities were standardized by the same ranking procedure. Scores were ranked between 0 and 1 in ascending order ($M = 0.50$ for all items) on the basis of the percentage of respondents that answered an item with “never” (smallest value). Thereafter, a percentile score was calculated indicating the percentage of valid observations with an equal or higher value (rank score) on the item or scale concerned (IBM SPSS Statistics 20). In this way, items are scaled in a similar manner, which makes different variables and scales comparable, and problems of non-linearity are taken
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into account. Because our focus is on the intergenerational transmission of media preferences, we made use of conceptually equivalent genres and categories to measure parents’ and respondents’ media consumption.

Parental media example refers to parental book reading and television viewing at the time the respondent was around 15 years old. Respondents reported the frequency with which their parents read five book genres, and factor analyses confirmed a highbrow and lowbrow parental reading dimension. For all items, answer categories were (0) “never”, (1) “sometimes,” and (2) “often.” We constructed parental highbrow book reading by taking the average score of the father’s and mother’s reading of (a) Dutch or translated literature, (b) novels in a foreign language and (c) popular science books. Parental popular book reading was represented by the mean score of both the father’s and mother’s reading of (a) detective, science fiction, and war novels and (b) romantic novels. For television viewing, a confirmative factor analysis on six types of television programs established a highbrow and lowbrow dimension. We measured parental serious television viewing by averaging respondents’ reports of two items: (a) parents watching informative television programs and (b) parents watching cultural-artistic programs. Parental popular television viewing was constructed as the mean of parental viewing of four types of television programs: (a) films and series, (b) game shows, (c) sports, and (d) soap operas. We acknowledge that the genre “films and series” might contain serious content as well. Factor analysis, however, clearly indicated this genre as lowbrow.

Parental reading guidance was measured by taking the mean score of five items on parent-child reading interaction, after standardization: (a) “As a toddler I was read to by one of my parents”; (b) “for my birthday/on Christmas/from Santa Claus I received books as a gift”; (c) “my parents recommended books”; (d) “at home we discussed the books I read”; (e) “my parents were interested in what I was reading” ($\alpha = 0.85$). Answer categories again were (0) “never,” (1) “sometimes,” and (2) “often.” Parental television guidance was measured by respondents’ reports on nine specific parental television guidance activities when the respondent was between 5 and 12 years of age. We performed a confirmatory factor analysis, revealing that the indicators indeed represent the three theoretically expected types of parental television guidance (i.e., television mediation): restrictive guidance, instructive guidance, and co-viewing (Austin 2001; Valkenburg et al. 1999). For the variables on television guidance, answers were given on a 4-point scale ranging from (0) “entirely untrue” to (3) “entirely true.” Restrictive parental television guidance was constructed using three items: (a) “parents limited children’s hours of TV consumption,” (b) “parents decided what the children could watch,” and (c) “parents had a specific TV timetable for the children” ($\alpha = 0.76$). We measured instructive parental television guidance by taking the mean score of the following items: (a) “my parents discussed with me why something seen on television was wrong”; (b) “in our family television programs were often discussed”; and (c) “my parents helped me to understand what I saw on television” ($\alpha = 0.77$). Respondents’ reports on parental television co-viewing refer to three items: (a) “I often watched together with my parents a television show we both liked”; (b) “with my parents I could laugh about something on TV”; and (c) “I often watched together with my parents television programs we both were interested in” ($\alpha = 0.78$). Scales
were created taking average scores and again were standardized between 0 and 1 employing a ranking procedure.

Respondents’ media taste was measured by four distinct types of reading and television consumption as well. Respondents reported on their current consumption of various reading and television genres. Again, answer categories were (0) “never,” (1) “sometimes,” and (2) “often.” Respondents’ highbrow reading was constructed by taking the mean reading frequency of the following genres: (a) Dutch or translated literature, (b) novels in a foreign language, and (c) popular science books. Respondents’ lowbrow reading was represented by a scale averaging the mean reading frequency of (a) detective, science fiction, and war novels and (b) romantic novels. Respondents’ highbrow television viewing was measured as consumption of (a) informative programs and (b) cultural-artistic programs. Respondents’ lowbrow television viewing was constructed as an average score for watching popular programs such as (a) talk shows, (b) crime programs, (c) reality shows, and (d) soap operas.

Respondents’ educational level was measured as the number of years required to obtain the attained educational level ranging from 6 years (primary school) to 21 years (PhD).

We measured parental social background, an important factor in children’s cultural socialization, by parents’ educational level and occupational attainment. To create the variable parental educational level, we used the educational attainment of the highest educated parent, measured as the number of years required to obtain that educational level (6–21 years). We measured parental occupational status by taking the maximum of the father’s and mother’s score on the International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI) (Ganzeboom, de Graaf, and Treiman 1992) when the respondent was 15 years old.

We further included as variables three family compositional factors that have proven to be influential in socialization processes. The first is mother’s age at childbirth, referring to the age of the mother when the respondent was born. Outliers were eliminated by rounding extremely young mothers up to 16 years of age (10 respondents) and topping down extremely old mothers to the age of 45 (9 respondents). The second family compositional factor is having a working mother, measured by two items: (a) “Was your mother employed for at least one year during preschool?” and (b) “Was your mother employed for at least one year during primary school?” This variable thus indicates whether the mother was either (0) non-working or (1) working during the respondent’s childhood. The third family compositional factor is parental divorce, indicating whether a parental divorce was experienced during the respondent’s childhood (between ages 0 and 12), with categories being (0) “no parental divorce” and (1) “parental divorce” (6.2 percent of the total).

Finally, we controlled for respondents’ gender and birth year. Female indicates whether the respondent is (0) male or (1) female, and the variable birth year ranges from 1955 to 1984. Respondents with a missing score on one of these variables were omitted (5.8 percent of all respondents). Our final dataset thus contains 2,539 individuals. Table 1 presents a detailed description of the variables.
Methods and Models

Our aim is to explain differentiation in highbrow and lowbrow media taste by simultaneously analyzing direct and indirect effects of various parental media socialization activities. We therefore applied structural equation modeling using Lisrel 8.8 (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1996). Structural equation modeling enables us to test the entire path model as presented in Figure 1 at once. We estimated two separate (path) models, one for reading taste (Model 1) and another for television taste (Model 2). We included all exogenous and endogenous variables as observed variables in our SEM models. Although not shown in our figures, in both models we allowed for a correlation between the errors of variables within the following groups: parental socioeconomic status indicators, parental media example variables, parental television guidance activities, and the variables measuring respondents’ highbrow and lowbrow media taste. Also, in all our analyses we controlled for family composition and respondents’ sex and birth year. In performing our final analyses, we deleted non-significant paths (βs) from the models. The root

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics of All Variables

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Note: N = 2,539.
mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) indicates a good fit for both the reading and television model (0.033 and 0.026, respectively). Figures 2 and 3 show the results. Tables 2 and 3 present the total, direct, and indirect effects. Bivariate correlations are shown in the Appendix.

RESULTS
Differentiation in Reading Taste and the Underlying Process of Reading Socialization

Figure 2 shows the direct standardized effects (βs) of our structural equation model estimating the intergenerational transmission of reading taste. First, the results clearly confirm social stratification in parental reading socialization activities (see also Notten and Kraaykamp 2009). Parents with a higher educational level and occupational status read more and especially highbrow literature (β = 0.387 and β = 0.147, respectively), and they are more inclined to guide their children’s reading behaviors (β = 0.103 and β = 0.095, respectively). In line with previous research (e.g., De Graaf 1986) we also find that parents’ socioeconomic position, and especially the parental educational level (β = 0.263), is highly influential for a person’s educational attainment. The results also show that respondents’ current reading taste is not directly affected by parents’ socioeconomic position during childhood.

Contrasting with the indirect effects of parental social background, respondents’ current highbrow reading appears to be directly affected by a parental example of highbrow reading during youth (β = 0.203). As expected, children imitate their parents’ literary reading habits, and this socialization effect remains influential later in life. Furthermore, parents’ efforts in guiding their offspring’s reading behavior in childhood result in more highbrow reading in adulthood (β = 0.169), confirming long-term effects of parental reading guidance socialization activities. Respondents’ lowbrow reading frequency is stimulated by an example of parental lowbrow reading during childhood (β = 0.179) and, in contrast to our expectations, also by parental reading guidance (β = 0.145). So children do imitate their parents’ lowbrow reading behaviors, and this socialization effect lasts into adulthood. And though we presumed reading guidance to be a high-status parental socialization activity aimed at transmitting highbrow reading preferences, our results indicate that parental reading guidance stimulates children’s reading in general, more or less regardless of content.

In line with prior studies (e.g., Kraaykamp 2003), our results demonstrate that parents who themselves read are more inclined to guide their children’s reading (Figure 2). This seems especially true for parents with a highbrow reading taste (β = 0.366), though parents preferring popular reading content also actively stimulate their children’s development of reading skills (β = 0.131). Also, parental reading guidance significantly enhances children’s educational success (β = 0.123), which in turn appears to be a relevant stimulating factor for both highbrow (β = 0.319) and, though to a far lesser extent, lowbrow reading (β = 0.052). Consequently, there seem to be two distinct pathways via which the parental reading example in childhood (indirectly) affects a person’s current reading taste: via parental reading guidance and, subsequently, via children’s school success.
Parental educational level → Parental highbrow reading → Parental reading guidance → Respondents’ highbrow reading
Parental educational level → Parental lowbrow reading → Respondents’ lowbrow reading
Parental occupational status → Parental highbrow reading → Parental reading guidance

Note: Coefficients are standardized significant direct effects (βs), and non-significant direct effects (βs) are deleted. Controlled for family composition and respondents’ sex and birth year (not presented). df = 8; Chi-square = 30.259; RMSEA = 0.033; AGFI = 0.979.

FIGURE 2
Structural Equation Model of the Intergenerational Transmission of Reading Taste
Table 2 clearly shows that there is no direct effect of parental educational level and occupational status on an individual’s current reading taste. The influence of parental socioeconomic status is entirely indirect and runs via parent’s reading socialization activities (both example and guidance) and respondents’ educational level. Parents’ educational level indirectly but enduringly affects children’s reading preferences ($\beta = 0.217$), and the total effect of parental occupational status is also significant but far less relevant ($\beta = 0.099$).

When it comes to parents’ reading socialization, the results show that the total effect of an example of parental highbrow reading during childhood ($\beta = 0.279$) on a person’s current highbrow reading is partly indirect ($\beta = 0.076$). For the development of a lowbrow reading taste, the total effect of a parental example of lowbrow reading ($\beta = 0.198$) also consists of a significant indirect component ($\beta = 0.020$). Parental reading guidance and children’s educational level both appear to be relevant factors mediating the parental example. Yet our results seem to indicate that children’s imitation of their parents’ reading habits is the main mechanism underlying the intergenerational transmission of reading taste. We find that 71 percent of the total effect of a parental highbrow reading example on respondents’ current highbrow reading is direct. When it comes to reproducing lowbrow reading preferences, about 88 percent of the effect of a parental example of lowbrow reading is direct. On the whole, the actual process of reading socialization seems virtually identical for highbrow and lowbrow reading.

Note that a person’s current highbrow reading is indirectly affected by a parental example of popular reading during childhood ($\beta = 0.027$), while a parental highbrow reading example also influences a person’s current popular reading taste ($\beta = 0.055$). These findings suggest that, next to content preferences, a positive attitude towards reading in general is also transmitted over generations. Moreover, it seems

**TABLE 2**

Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects of the Intergenerational Transmission of Reading Tastes, Standardized Effects ($\beta$s), and Lisrel Estimates (maximum likelihood)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Respondents’ Highbrow Reading</th>
<th>Respondents’ Lowbrow Reading</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Parental occupational status</td>
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<td>0.099*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental highbrow reading</td>
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<td>0.203*</td>
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<td>Parental lowbrow reading</td>
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<td>0.027*</td>
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<td>Parental reading guidance</td>
<td>0.208*</td>
<td>0.169*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents’ educational level</td>
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<td>0.319*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: $N = 2,539$. df = 8; Chi-square = 30.259; RMSEA = 0.033; AGFI = 0.979.

*$p < 0.05.$
that in predicting highbrow reading habits, the impact of respondents’ educational level outweighs the parental social status and reading socialization effects.

**Differentiation in Television Taste and the Underlying Process of Television Socialization**

Figure 3 shows the SEM results regarding television taste. As with reading socialization, parental television socialization activities also differ between families with different social backgrounds. In line with previous studies (e.g., Van Rees and van Eijck 2003), our results show that parents with a higher educational level and occupational status prefer highbrow television content ($\beta = 0.172$ and $\beta = 0.106$, respectively) and dislike lowbrow TV programs ($\beta = -0.162$ and $\beta = -0.110$, respectively). Also, higher educated parents are more inclined to restrict their children television consumption ($\beta = 0.064$) than lower educated parents. Again, we do find that parents’ socioeconomic position has a significant and direct positive influence on a person’s educational attainment ($\beta = 0.281$ and $\beta = 0.123$, respectively). Remarkably, and in contrast to our expectation, we find a direct effect of parent’s educational level on respondents’ lowbrow TV viewing ($\beta = -0.107$). Apparently, lowbrow television viewing is highly in contrast with the overall norms and behaviors in high status families, resulting in an enduring disfavor of such programs that is not only transmitted by parental television socialization activities.

As we expected, respondents’ highbrow and lowbrow television viewing taste is directly affected by a parental highbrow or lowbrow television example ($\beta = 0.159$ and $\beta = 0.119$, respectively). Apparently, children imitate their parents’ television preferences, and these effects last into adulthood. A person’s television viewing taste is also directly affected by parental television guidance. As we expected, parent-child interaction on television content during childhood—for instance, by discussing television content—seems to result in a preference for highbrow television programs in adulthood ($\beta = 0.100$). Parental co-viewing and television rules in one’s youth appear to have no significant lasting effects when it comes to television viewing taste.

Figure 3 also demonstrates that highbrow media-orientated parents provide more restrictive ($\beta = 0.086$) and instructive ($\beta = 0.241$) television guidance than parents who are less familiar with highbrow television content. Although contrasting our expectations, parents preferring highbrow television programs also frequently co-view television programs with their children ($\beta = 0.113$). This is probably a function of the social character of television viewing. Our results further indicate that parents with a popular television taste co-view more often ($\beta = 0.214$), also more than parents with a highbrow television taste, and are less likely to set rules limiting their children’s television viewing ($\beta = -0.105$). We also find that a parental example of popular television viewing in childhood limits a person’s educational success ($\beta = -0.044$), whereas exposure to parental highbrow television habits enhances school success ($\beta = 0.047$). Furthermore, a higher educational level seems to stimulate a person’s highbrow television viewing ($\beta = 0.276$) and to restrict lowbrow television consumption ($\beta = -0.244$).

Table 3 presents the total, direct, and indirect effects of parental socioeconomic status and television socialization activities on a person’s current television taste.
FIGURE 3

Structural Equation Model of the Intergenerational Transmission of Television Taste

Note: Coefficients are standardized significant direct effects (βs), and non-significant direct effects (βs) are deleted. Controlled for family composition and respondents’ sex and birth year (not presented). df = 19; Chi-square = 51.594; RMSEA = 0.026; AGFI = 0.983.
The effect of parental socioeconomic background on a person’s current highbrow television viewing is totally indirect ($\beta = 0.113$ and $\beta = 0.056$, respectively) and runs via parents’ television socialization activities and respondents’ educational attainment. Yet a respondent’s current lowbrow television taste is affected directly by the parents’ educational level ($\beta = -0.107$) and indirectly ($\beta = -0.091$) via television socialization activities and one’s own educational attainment. This seems in line with the overall negative social value of lowbrow television viewing and the non-educational or undemanding content of these lowbrow TV programs. Note that the parents’ occupational status only indirectly restricts a person’s (lowbrow) television consumption ($\beta = -0.046$).

The total effect of a parental highbrow television example on respondents’ current highbrow television viewing ($\beta = 0.196$) is partly indirect ($\beta = 0.037$), both via parents’ instructive television guidance (i.e., parent-child interaction on television content) and via the positive influence of parental highbrow television viewing on the respondent’s educational level (see Figure 3). A noteworthy finding is that a
highbrow television taste is indirectly negatively affected by a parental example of lowbrow television viewing during childhood ($\beta = -0.012$) via respondents’ school success. This seems to corroborate the unfavorable status of lowbrow television viewing as well as the possible harmful effects of (lowbrow) television exposure for children’s cognitive development. Besides a direct impact of a parental lowbrow television example during childhood on a person’s current lowbrow television taste ($\beta = 0.119$), we find an indirect effect as well ($\beta = 0.011$). Apparently, parents preferring popular television content also pass on their television taste via their children’s educational success.

Concerning the intergenerational transmission of television taste, we conclude that the underlying mechanism differs somewhat regarding content. For the transmission of highbrow television preferences, the effect of the parental television example is dominant. This means that imitation explains most of the parental influence in fostering a serious television taste in children. Instructive parental television guidance is a relevant mediator in the reproduction of highbrow television preferences. Yet in fostering popular television habits, parental television guidance seems irrelevant. Respondents’ educational level appears to be a relevant factor mediating the parental social status and television example for both highbrow and lowbrow television tastes. When it comes to the intergenerational transmission of a lowbrow television taste, the parental example is highly relevant, but the total effect of parents’ educational level ($\beta = -0.198$) appears most influential.

Note that in explaining individual television preferences, one’s own cultural competencies, here measured by educational level, outweigh the effects of parental social background and all parental television socialization activities.

**CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

The first aim of our research was to gain insight into the development of individual media taste by studying the role of parental socioeconomic background, parental media socialization activities, as well as an individual’s cultural competency. The second purpose of this study was to further analyze the actual (reproduction) process by which media taste is intergenerationally transmitted. We proposed that a person’s current reading and television taste develops predominantly through direct imitation of the media example that parents set in a person’s childhood years, but this reproduction or imitation process may also occur less directly, via parental media guidance and respondents’ educational success. To analyze the intergenerational transmission of parental reading and television taste, we used information on childhood experiences (media socialization and family situation) and on current individual characteristics of 2,539 respondents from two waves of the Family Survey of the Dutch Population (De Graaf et al. 2003; Kraaykamp et al. 2009).

Our main conclusion on the intergenerational transmission of media taste is threefold. First, the role of the parental socioeconomic status is highly relevant in the reproduction of media tastes, though for the most part indirect, via parents’ actual media socialization activities and their children’s educational attainment. These findings are in line with prior empirical studies on media consumption and cultural socialization supporting Bourdieu’s cultural reproduction theory (e.g.,
Nagel and Ganzeboom 2002; Van Rees and Van Eijck 2003; Yaish and Katz-Gerro, 2012). Only in the development of lowbrow television tastes does parents’ socio-economic status show a direct influence. Apparently, such a cultural preference totally mismatches with the overall norms and (cognitive) activities in higher educated parental homes. Next, when it comes to the role of parental media socialization activities, our research indicates that the example parents set in their own media use has lasting effects on their (adult) children’s media taste. Parents set a specific reading or television viewing example that children tend to imitate, and this socialization effect remains influential during the rest of these children’s lives. Thirdly, parent-child interaction on media consumption is another relevant factor in the development of an individual’s media taste. Parental reading guidance during childhood proved highly and enduringly relevant in encouraging both lowbrow and highbrow reading. We also found that parental instructive television guidance expressed long-term effects on a person’s current highbrow television taste. In analyzing the actual process by which parental media socialization takes place, we found that the intergenerational transmission of reading and television taste occurs predominantly by direct imitation of parents’ media behaviors. However, in this imitation process, the mediating role of parental guidance and a person’s own educational attainment may not be disregarded.

Certainly this study has limitations. First of all, it makes use of retrospective data, which is sometimes found to be less appropriate because of possible memory bias. Previous research on the same data does not indicate that error in retrospective measures of parental cultural and media socialization activities may significantly affect our results (e.g., De Graaf et al. 2000; De Vries and De Graaf 2008; Notten and Kraaykamp 2010). Yet when studying respondents’ own media consumption we acknowledge that due to possible correlated error between respondents’ and parental media consumption, the direct effects of the parental media example may be slightly overestimated. Future (longitudinal) research might find ways to deal more adequately with these difficult issues. Also, in studying the development of individual media tastes, including other influential socialization agents such as peers or teachers would be interesting. Moreover, instead of analyzing the transmission of rather broad categories of highbrow and lowbrow media tastes, a more detailed distinction within these dimensions could be highly informative as well. To find out whether our main findings relate to media-specific or more general content-related streams, future research could apply our models on other types and content of cultural and media consumption.

The current study shows that the parental media socialization experienced during childhood has long-term consequences for a person’s current television and reading taste. Remarkably, childhood parental television guidance appears to affect a person’s current television taste only modestly. Since children spend a lot of time watching television and parents’ concerns about children’s television exposure are widespread, we expected parental television guidance activities to play a more pronounced role within the media socialization process. Perhaps this research will stimulate further studies to shed more light on the long-term effects of parental media socialization, particularly regarding instructive and restrictive parental television guidance. This could constitute a valuable step towards understanding the long-term impact of parental socialization activities in the use of other digital media.
### APPENDIX

Bivariate Correlations

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Note: $N = 2,539$.

*p < 0.05.*
NOTES

1. The initial number of respondents in the 2003 FSDP was 2,174. The 2009 FSDP initially holds 2,969 respondents.

2. Performing analyses on primary respondents only, as well as applying a multilevel design taking into account the nesting of respondents and partners in a single household, did not interfere with our results.

3. Additional analyses using information of the parents themselves (FSDP 2000, N = 222) enabled us to compare respondents’ reports on their parents’ reading behaviors with the reports by the parents themselves. Regressing parents’ reports and respondents’ reports of parents’ reading example on respondents’ reading preferences revealed virtually the same results. These findings indicate that our retrospective measurements of parental media socialization activities are not significantly biased by recall accuracy. More information is available upon request from the first author.

4. Parents who did not read or watched television during respondents’ childhood, on the condition that there was a television set at home, scored 0 on the parental media example items.

5. Mothers’ reading of Dutch and translated literature loaded on both factors but higher on serious reading. Parents’ reading of detectives, science fiction, and war novel also loaded on both factors but higher on popular reading. On theoretical grounds, mothers’ reading of literature was classified to serious reading, and detective, science fiction, and war novel reading was designated to the popular reading dimension.

6. Sports loaded on both factors but predominantly on the popular dimension.

REFERENCES


ERRATUM


1 Figure 2, upper right-hand text box, p. 695
“Respondents’ educational level” should be “Respondents’ highbrow reading”

2 Figure 2, lower right-hand text box, p. 695
“Respondents’ educational level” should be “Respondents’ lowbrow reading”