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Parents, Personality and Media Preferences

Abstract

In this article, we elaborate on how media preferences are related to personality traits and parental socialization practices. Employing representative data for the Netherlands in 1998 (N=1.714), we first find that of the psychological traits, openness to experience is a substantial predictor of the interest in serious content within the media; open personalities favor complex content, on television and in books. Furthermore, popular reading is fancied relatively often by conscientious people, whereas emotionally instable and friendly personalities seem to prefer popular programs on television significantly more. Second, our results underscore the importance of measuring parental media socialization practices. Using retrospective information on the situation in the parental home during a person's upbringing, we find that imitation of preferences occurs for all media consumption activities. For instance, if parents liked popular television programs, this results in a corresponding preference of their children for popular programs, controlled for relevant other predictors. The same goes for popular and serious reading, and for serious television watching. So, the idea of a modeling of media preferences by parents finds support. Third, our analyses clearly show that an investigation of media audiences must differentiate between contents. In predicting media preferences we noticed that content similarities are more evident than medium similarities.

Introduction: distinct media contents, distinct audiences

In media research, studying television viewing and book reading as universal activities is common practice (Beentjes & Van der Voort, 1989; Knulst & Kraaykamp, 1998). Accordingly, researchers have mainly examined television and the printed media as opposites. Most studies, then, picture television viewing as a passive and relaxing time passing, whereas they typify book reading as an activity that requires concentration and information processing (Barwise & Ehrenberg, 1988; Knulst & Kraaykamp, 1998). Scholars in cultivation theory have stressed the dissimilarities between television viewing and book reading as well. From this notion, it follows that differences between types of television programs are largely irrelevant, because all television messages stem from a mass production system designed to attract the largest

possible, most general audience (Gerbner et al. 1986; Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). This implies that we may expect social differentiation between heavy and light viewers, but hardly or no social differentiation among viewers of different program types. From the uses and gratification approach (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Rosengren & Windahl, 1989) another starting point is to focus on content differences within the media. Research on media consumption then accentuates that people select media content matching their individual qualities. Thus, an investigation of media audiences should differentiate between, for instance, popular content and serious content in different media.

We here advocate the latter position. To explain media preferences, we think it is not only important to allow for the media to differ, but also to differentiate among media contents. For television viewing, empirical research clearly supports this view, for it established variation in program preferences according to age, gender and educational level (Espe & Seiwert, 1986; Bonfadelli, 1993; VandenBulck, 1995; VanEijck & VanRees, 2000); the higher educated fancy information-based programs the most, whereas the lower educated are over represented among those enjoying entertainment and films. Dutch research on book reading, by Kraaykamp & Dijkstra (1999) that accounts for content differences, also comes up with interesting results. The public of complex book genres is socially very different from the public of relatively simple genres; especially the higher educated and those socialized in a literate home environment are found to favor complex reading materials.

Our study addresses the general question: who favors popular television and popular reading, and who favors serious television and serious reading? In doing so, we can investigate social differentiation in media usage, and social differentiation in content preferences. This position fits well into a 'uses and gratification' approach in which it is stated that preferences for specific media and/or specific contents result from an individual's psychological and social attributes (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Rosengren & Windahl, 1989). Therefore, the explanatory aspects in our study refer to first, personality traits of media consumers, and second to media socialization practices during adolescence in the parental home. Our research question reads: To what extents do personality traits and parental socialization practices explain differentiation in media preferences? To answer this question, we employ information on 1.714 respondents and their parents from a nationally representative sample of the Dutch population.

In a study on psychological and socialization aspects of media consumption addressing educational differentiation is important. The association between education and media consumption is well established (Espe & Seiwert, 1986; VandenBulck, 1995; Kraaykamp & Dijkstra, 1999; Roe, 2000). We think there are at least two reasons why the higher educated are found to fancy complex media contents. First, in the higher levels of education students learn how to process complex information (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Subsequently, they are trained in dealing with serious and straining media

contents, and will therefore enjoy these more than lower educated. Second, and to our question more relevant, we think that achieving a high level of education is partly due to an initial selection process on psychological attributes and parental background characteristics. Stated differently, people who attain higher education are already different when they start at school. Indeed, previous research affirmed that a person's social and psychological background matters in explaining school success; people reaching for the higher levels of education share a more open and conscientious personality (Wolfe & Johnson, 1995), and are raised in parental homes with sufficient cultural and material resources (DeGraaf, 1986). Consequently, in a study on media preferences, we may have to recognize that the effects of psychological characteristics and parental socialization features run indirectly via a person's educational qualifications.

Theoretical insights: two lines of research

Personality traits and media preferences

As a first line of research, we consider psychological factors in the explanation of media preferences. To identify individual differences in personality, psychologists largely agreed in employing so-called basic personality traits (McCrae & John, 1993). These traits affect a person's preferences on several domains. Empirical research often employs in a description of personality, the so-called 'Big Five'. This measurement resulting from psychological research since the 1980s, suggests that personality can be caught in five main factors (Costa & McCrae, 1988; Digman, 1990). In this article, we advance this five-factor model in explaining media preferences. The five traits that we distinguish are extroversion, emotional instability, openness to experience, conscientiousness and friendliness.

Extroversion. In line with common notions extroversion is often associated with an outgoing, cheery, and sociable personality. Extroverts favor sensory stimulation, because they suffer from low levels of arousal (Costa & McCrae, 1988; Finn, 1997). External stimulation through experiences therefore is essential to extrovert individuals. Consequently, we particularly expect extroverts to favor outgoing activities over media consumption, for this provides more direct social contact and stimulation. Empirical research confirms this point of view (Finn, 1997); extroverts score low on television watching, radio listening and reading for pleasure. Although extroverts score low on media consumption, we presume that extroverts appreciate serious media content over popular content. Serious content deals with complex and unconventional information, and thus has more arousal potential (Ganzeboom 1982; Kraaykamp & Dijkstra, 1999). A first hypothesis reads: An extrovert person, (a) will spend less time on reading and less time on television viewing, and (b) will spend more time on serious media content and less time on popular media content, than an introvert person.

Emotional instability. Emotionally instable persons are characterized as anxious and nervous (Finn, 1997), and experiencing feelings of loneliness and depression (Conway & Rubin, 1991). For people with these attributes gaining positive social affect is hard. Yet, we may expect that the media serve as a countervailing source for affect, and besides can provide distraction from tension and stress. Accordingly, we suppose that for emotionally instable people media consumption is an appealing escapist alternative to distract them from the negative strains of being anxious and lonely (Conway & Rubin, 1991). We expect that television provides distraction over reading, since it is less stimulating and requires little involvement (Barwise & Ehrenberg, 1988). Finn (1997) indeed reports small but positive effects of emotional instability on television viewing and negative effects on reading (see also Canary & Spitzberg, 1993). Besides, we expect that popular media content is more appealing to emotionally instable people than serious content; entertaining and relaxing media expressions offer more tension reduction opportunities than serious media expressions. So, our second hypothesis is: An emotionally instable person, (a) will spend less time on reading and more time on television viewing, and (b) will spend less time on serious media content and more time on popular media content, than an emotionally stable person.

Openness to experiences. In explaining media preferences openness to experiences is the most promising personality trait. In general openness refers to a desire for variety, intellectual stimulation and aesthetic experiences (Costa & McCrae, 1988; Conway & Rubin, 1991). These needs are best satisfied by reading materials in a comparison with television programs. An argument for this is given by Barwise & Ehrenberg (1988), who accentuate the low involvement and less interactive format of television watching. Empirical research confirms this and reports significant negative effects of openness on television viewing and positive effects on pleasure reading (Finn, 1997). Moreover, we expect that open personalities favor serious media content over popular media expressions. For instance, literature is characterized by its complexity and unconventional content (Kraaykamp & Dijkstra, 1999). Thus, it needs openness with its consumers to be appreciated. The third hypothesis states: A person open to experiences, (a) will spend more time on reading and less time on television viewing, and (b) will spend more time on serious media content and less time on popular media content, than a person closed to experiences.

Conscientiousness. Conscientious and neat individuals are goal-directed, disciplined, and express a will to achieve. Research has shown that conscientious persons particularly score high on job performance. From the literature, we cannot find a clear argument to predict a relation with book reading or watching television (Finn, 1997). However, some common notions may lead us to expect that conscientious people will prefer popular media content somewhat more. Predictability and a structured format typify both popular books and popular television programs. We think that these features appeal to

a disciplined and conscientious person. Our fourth hypothesis is formulated as: A conscientious person, (a) will spend as much time on reading and television viewing, and (b) will spend less time on serious media content and more time on popular media content, as/than an unconscientious person.

Friendliness. Social compassion and eagerness to help others best portray a friendly personality. Interpersonal communication for a friendly person is essential. Thus in choosing within the recreational field, media consumption is not one of the most obvious choices. Getting into personal contact while consuming media content is hardly possible. Finn (1997) showed that friendliness is positively associated with frequent conversation and not with media consumption. Accordingly, hypothesis five is: A friendly person, (a) will spend less time on reading and television viewing, and (b) will spend less time on serious and popular media content, than an unfriendly person.

Parental socialization and media preferences

Considering a second line of research, we aim at an understanding of socialization practices in the explanation of media preferences. If media consumption is considered as a representation of underlying media competencies as the uses and gratification approach implies, the question arises how individuals acquire these competencies? Rosengren (1994) argues that socialization provides in intellectual, emotional, social and material resources. Thus, an obvious source for competency on the use of media is the parental socialization during childhood. For apparent reasons media research that acknowledges actual socialization practices is scarce; it is simply very hard to collect retrospective information on the situation in the parental home. Most empirical research that incorporates family influences concentrates on children that still live with their parents (Johnsson-Smaragdi, 1994; Roe, 2000). Most of these studies conclude that the parental example is effective; heavy-viewer parents socialize their offspring into heavy-viewer children, and early television experiences continue to be influential later in childhood. In this article, we discuss two aspects of the parental background: the social status of parents, and the actual media preferences of parents.

Parental social status: material wealth at home. Several sociological studies confirm the idea that the intergenerational transmission of preferences is related to parental social status (Bourdieu, 1984; Mohr & DiMaggio, 1995; Kraaykamp & Nieuwebeerta, 2000). This research presupposes that regular taste display of parents exemplifies the 'correct' taste to their children. In media research, Roe (1992; 2000) points at a similar process of 'anticipatory socialization'. In this line of reasoning, it is relevant that in high status groups cultural expressions such as literature, art and theater plays are respected. Entertaining and relaxing media products foremost receive negative esteem. Hence, we may assume that people who spring from high status origins will value book reading over television viewing. And, they will prefer artistic and informative content to popular media expressions.

Current empirical research underscores that parental social status is relevant in explaining recreational choices. Roe (2000) established that father's occupational position negatively affects children's amount of television viewing. However, once he controlled for parental television usage these status effects did not persist. Kraaykamp & Nieuwbeerta (2000) reported similar results for high culture participation; status effects became insignificant when they took the actual parental cultural preferences into account (also Leseman & DeJong, 1998). In this article, we will use a person's socialization in a wealthy family as an indicator of parental social status. We presume that a high status position of parents is better described by the material wealth at home than by father's occupation. Our sixth hypothesis reads as follows: A person from a wealthy parental family, (a) will spend more time on reading and less on television viewing, and (b) will spend more time on serious media content and less time on popular media content than a person from a poor parental family.

Parental media socialization: actual parental preferences. A second aspect of the socialization practices of parents emphasizes the role of the actual parental example. We then presume that a parental taste for media expressions is propagated straightaway onto their children.

Sociological research on life-style differentiation has frequently studied high culture participation (Bourdieu, 1984; Mohr & DiMaggio, 1995; Kraaykamp & Nieuwbeerta, 2000). Most studies consider a cultural socialization in the parental home as a common practice to aim for an intergenerational transmission of cultural preferences; culturally active parents give their offspring the competency to enjoy high culture themselves. Usually we observe this socialization in cultural preferences as a manner to confirm social boundaries (Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, it is essential that this socialization refers to high cultural tastes, for this helps to sustain existing social cleavages. Applied to media preferences, this would lead to the expectation that especially a taste for literature is transmitted over generations. Reading literature is perceived as an activity that requires concentration and information processing, and therefore contributes to the enhancement of a person's cultural competency. Moreover, we may expect that a parental socialization in the valuing of serious television programs is effective as well. Differences in audio-visual competency with respect to information, history and the arts can also result in a confirmation of class boundaries. So, our seventh hypothesis states that: A person socialized with serious media contents at home, (a) will spend more time on reading and less on television viewing, and (b) will spend more time on serious media content and less on popular media content than a person not socialized with serious media contents at home.

A related notion of media socialization explicitly addresses the practice of 'learning by observation' in the parental home. Children become conscious of their parents' attitudes on media expressions. These attitudes are discussed, communicated, and eventually taken over. This idea of modeling emphasizes

that a child consciously or unconsciously imitates parental behavior; a child will tend to behave as parents behave (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Johnsson-Smaragdi, 1994; Leseman & DeJong, 1998). This approach acknowledges the above-mentioned status value of cultural objects, but stresses that pure imitation of parental behavior by learning is most important. So, this idea of modeling implies that not only high culture preferences are reproduced over generations (expressed in hypothesis 7), but popular preferences as well. In a study on media consumption this leads to the expectation that children from parental homes where they exemplify entertaining and relaxing media content, will prefer watching television to book reading, and popular content to serious content.

This focus on a parental socialization in popular tastes has mainly received attention in media research. Several studies acknowledge that television usage of parents affects a child's media preferences (Johnsson-Smaragdi, 1994; Roe, 2000). An important drawback of most studies is that they concentrate on children living in the parental home, and fail to study lasting effects of a popular socialization over the life-course. Reading research on the imitation of popular preferences is relatively scarce. An exception here is a study by Kraaykamp & Kalmijn (1995) on romantic fiction reading in the Netherlands. They found that romantic fiction reading among women is highly dependent on their mothers' romantic reading. This leads us to expect in hypothesis eight that: A person socialized with popular media contents at home, (a) will spend less time on reading and more on television viewing, and (b) will spend less time on serious media content and more time on popular media content than a person not socialized with popular media contents at home.

Data and measurements

In this article, we use data from the Family Survey Dutch Population of 1998 (FSDP-1998: DeGraaf, DeGraaf & Kraaykamp, 1999). The FSDP-1998 contains information on a nationally representative sample of the Dutch population, aged between 18 and 65 year (N=2.027). It reached a contact rate of 91 percent, a cooperation rate of 54.4 percent, and an overall response rate of (54.4*0.91=) 49.5 percent. These data hold information on several issues, varying from educational careers, psychological traits, family formation, to several types of cultural and media consumption of the respondent and his or her parents. Respondents of at least 25 years of age are selected (N=1.813), because it then is most likely that they finished their educational career. After a deletion of cases with missing values on any of the variables (5.5%), the working file consists of 1.714 respondents. Some basic statistics of the measurements are presented in Appendix 1. All variables are rearranged between 0 and 1, to simplify a comparison of unstandardized effects in regression analysis.

To test our hypotheses on parental socialization and personality trait effects we use four dependent variables. First, we consider literary reading

versus romantic fiction reading. We presume that these genres reflect the most prominent content differences (see Kraaykamp & Dijkstra, 1999). *Popular book reading* refers to romantic novel reading, and the reading of family and regional novels, measured on a 3-point scale (1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often). Similarly, for *serious book reading*, we asked if a respondent reads Dutch literature, translated literature, and literature in English or French. For both measurements, we have calculated a respondent's average score, and standardized this score between 0 and 1 (subtracting 1 and dividing by 2).

Second, to study distinctions with respect to television content, informative and artistic programs are distinguished from entertainment and films (see Espe & Seiwert, 1986; VanderBulck, 1995; Van Eijck & Van Rees, 2000). This distinction is supported by a confirmatory factor-analysis. Our measurement of popular *television watching* consists of (almost) never (1), sometimes (2), or often (3) watching entertainment (quizzes and shows), and films and series. *Serious television watching* refers to a respondent's viewing behavior with respect to informative programs (news and actualities) and artistic programs (on art, high culture and classical concerts). To construct scales, we calculated averages across the two items and standardized the scores between 0 and 1.

All models contain seven control variables. *Gender* is coded 0 for women, and 1 for men. A respondent's *cohort of birth* is represented by five dummy variables, ranging from 'born before 1935' to 'born after 1965'. *Urbanization* is represented by an ordinal measurement with five categories (1=highly urbanized to 5=rural). As stated above, this variable is rearranged between 0 and 1 (subtracting 1 and dividing by 4). To measure *religious affiliation*, we have assigned 1 to people who said to be non-religious, and 0 to religious people (Catholic, Protestant, Dutch reformed, or other religion). Three variables measure time allocation aspects. First, respondents living with a *partner* are coded 1, and respondent living without a partner are coded 0. Second, people were asked if there were *children at home*, and whether these children were more than 12 years of age. All three answer possibilities are represented by a dummy variable. Third, time pressure due to the number of *hours in paid labor* is measured by three dummy variables, that indicate respectively, less than 12 hours, 12 to 35 hours, and more than 35 hours per week working in paid labor.

In this study *personality* traits are measured with the Dutch version of the 'Big Five' (Gerris, 1998). This standardized scale consists of 30 7-point items (1=totally disagree to 7=totally agree) referring to personal attributes. Each of the five personality traits is represented by six of these items. The reliability of the scores on these separate scales is relatively high, respectively for extroversion $\alpha = .86$, for emotional instability $\alpha = .83$, for openness to experience $\alpha = .80$, for conscientiousness $\alpha = .88$ and for friendliness $\alpha = .84$. To construct scales, we took the averages across the subsequent six items and standardized the scores between 0 and 1.

Parental material wealth is represented by a measure of 13 indicators of the material situation in the parental home at the time a respondent was about age 15. These indicators referred to owning: car, video-camera, freezer, dishwasher, VCR, antique furniture, piano (mechanic), violin/cello, modern art objects, classic art objects, paid housekeeper, paid nanny and paid gardener. The reliability of the resulting scale was sufficient ($\alpha = .65$). Again, we calculated the average score across the 13 items. For 3.0 percent of the respondents the median score is imputed because of missing observations.

Our measurements on parental reading and parental television viewing are largely comparable to the variables on a respondent's media preferences. Respondents reported on a 3-point scale (1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often) whether their parents read various book genres at the time they were about age 15. *Parental popular reading* is represented by the average score of both father and mother on the reading of romantic fiction novels. *Parental serious reading* refers to father's and mother's reading of literature in Dutch and/or reading literature in a foreign language. To construct scales, we took the average scores. Both measures were standardized between 0 and 1 (subtracting 1, and dividing by 2).

With respect to parental television watching, we also used respondent reports. *Parental popular TV-watching* is measured by the scores on a 3-point scale (1=almost never, 2=sometimes, 3=often) showing whether parents watched entertainment (quizzes and shows) and films and series. *Parental serious TV-watching* considers the parental preferences for informative (news and actualities) and artistic programs (on art, high culture and classical concerts). For both measurements of parental television behavior, we assigned 1 to parents of respondents born before 1953. For those respondents, parental television socialization is assumed to be nonexistent, because the major breakthrough of television in the Netherlands is in the late 1960s. Again, we took the average scores to represent parental TV-watching, and standardized both measures between 0 and 1 (subtracting 1, and dividing by 2).

Educational attainment is measured as the highest level of completed education. In the questionnaire, one question with eight answer possibilities was presented. We rearranged these categories into four dummy variables, representing primary education (LO), lower secondary education (LBO, MAVO), higher secondary education (MBO, HAVO, VWO) and tertiary education (HBO, WO).

Analyses

A description of media consumption differences

We start our analyses with a description of differences in media consumption for the essential explanatory aspects. To do so, for the personality traits and parental socialization variables, we look at respondents from the upper half of the subsequent scales. The figures 1 and 2 show average deviations from the mean consumption score for respondents from the upper half of a personality

trait and socialization measure. Figure 3 displays deviations from the mean score for the four educational groups.

First, differences for the five personality traits are presented in Figure 1. Generally, the deviations appear small. Yet, it is interesting to observe that similarities between comparable contents in different media stand out more prominent than similarities within a medium. Popular media content is appreciated mostly among friendly and emotionally instable personalities. Additionally, for popular book reading we find that individuals who score low on openness and high on conscientiousness are over represented. For serious reading and serious television programs, we conclude that in particular openness to experiences is a relevant personal quality.

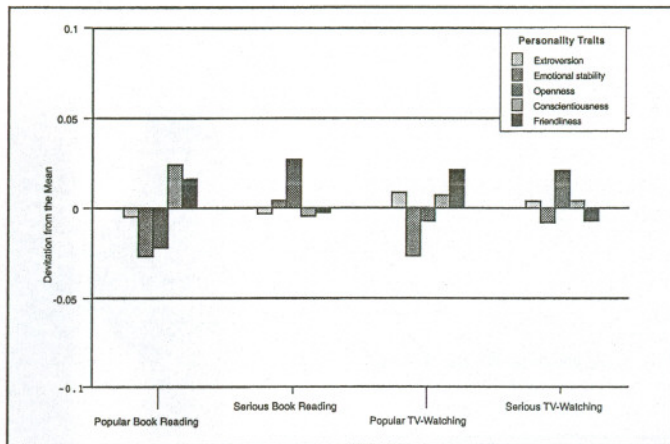


Figure 1: Deviation from the Mean Score for Personality Traits (Top Half Scale Values) Regarding Book Reading and Television Watching

Second, Figure 2 shows the deviations for parental socialization aspects. Here, the differences in media consumption come out much larger than for the personality traits. Again, it looks as if content similarities are more evident than medium similarities. Moreover, it shows that for each consumption pattern the corresponding parental example is particularly influential. For popular reading a father or mother who reads popular books is most effective, and for serious television viewing a corresponding parental preference for serious programs on television is important. This underscores the idea of modeling; children seem to (un)consciously imitate the media behavior of their parents.

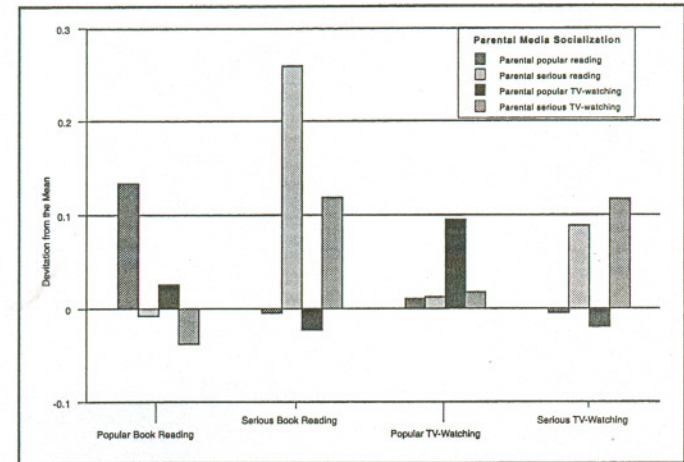


Figure 2: Deviation from the Mean Score for Parental Media Preferences (Top Half Scale Values) Regarding Book Reading and Television Watching

Third, educational differentiation in media consumption is depicted in Figure 3. Again, the resemblance between serious content on television and in books is remarkable; respondents with a college degree are over represented. A notable difference between popular content on television and in books is observed for the lower educated; those with primary education only fancy popular content on television highly, but score remarkably low when it comes to popular book reading. The public of popular books mainly consists of people that attained lower secondary education. A possible explanation for this phenomenon is that book reading requires a certain amount of literacy to appreciate it.

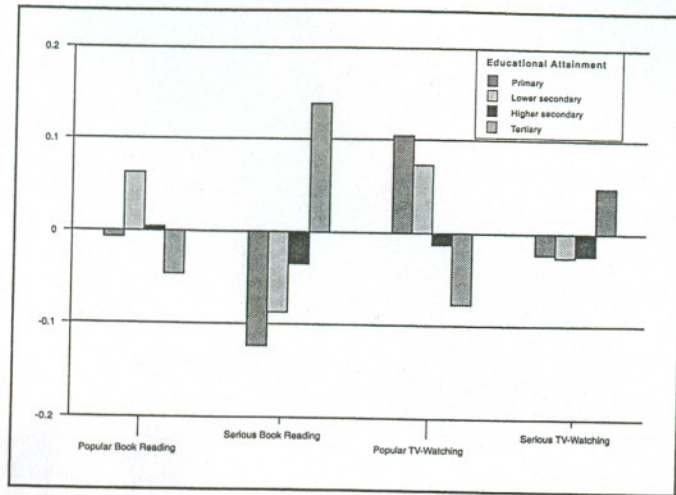


Figure 3: Deviation from the Mean Score for Educational Groups Regarding Book Reading And Television Watching

Multivariate analyses

To answer our research question, we present three OLS regression models for each media expression in Table 1 and 2. The coefficients we report are unstandardized, which enables us to interpret changes in the dependent variables (book reading and television watching) in terms of the scale in which an independent variable is measured. Since all independent characteristics are standardized between 0 and 1, unstandardized coefficients express the maximum change in Y that may be expected. For each media expression, Model A reflects a baseline model with controls included. Model B introduces the influences of the five personality traits and the parental socialization aspects, whereas Model C incorporates the effects of educational attainment. This makes it possible to investigate direct and indirect (via education) effects of these personality traits and parental socialization aspects.

Table 1: Regression Analysis of Popular and Serious Book Reading on Personality Traits, Parental Socialization and Socio-Economic Position, Dutch Adult Population, 1998

	Unstandardized Coefficients					
	Popular Book Reading (0-1)			Serious Book Reading (0-1)		
	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model A	Model B	Model C
Control variables						
Gender (0/1: 1=male)	-.196***	-.192***	-.189***	-.053***	-.067***	-.077***
Cohort						
<1935	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
1935-1945	.004	.007	.006	-.003	-.001	-.004
1945-1955	.025	.022	.020	-.025	-.026	-.028
1955-1965	.029	.020	.015	-.062*	-.070**	-.058**
>1965	.037	.018	.012	-.108***	-.114***	-.093***
Urbanization (0-1)	.001	.002	-.002	-.126***	-.084***	-.071***
Religious affiliation (0/1: 1=none)	-.065***	-.062***	-.059***	.030**	.012	.009
Partner (0/1: 1=yes)	.064**	.057**	.054*	-.020	-.003	-.007
Children at home						
no kids	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
kids under 12 years	-.009	-.015	-.017	-.047**	-.032*	-.022
kids over 12 years	.032	.033	.031	-.081***	-.058***	-.012
Hours at work						
less than 12 hours	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
12 to 35 hours	-.055***	-.049**	-.046**	-.071***	-.057***	-.023
more than 35 hours	-.054***	-.055***	-.055***	.019	.013	.006
Personality traits						
Extroversion (0-1)		-.028	-.028		-.028	-.016
Emotional stability (0-1)		-.016	-.017		.044**	.022
Openness (0-1)		-.035	-.034		.111***	.084***
Conscientiousness (0-1)		.053**	.054**		.006	-.001
Friendliness (0-1)		.041	.041		-.061***	-.043**
Parental socialization						
Parental material wealth (0-1)		-.036	-.031		.122***	.066*
Parental popular reading (0-1)		.152***	.151***		.032	.006
Parental serious reading (0-1)		-.022	-.016		.326***	.244***
Parental popular TV-watching (0-1)		.022	.022		.005	.010
Parental serious TV-watching (0-1)		.011	.012		-.005	-.003
Socio-economic position						
Educational attainment						
primary			ref.			ref.
lower secondary			.069***			.043**
higher secondary			.042*			.096***
tertiary			.025			.227***
Constant	.240***	.221***	.188***	.342***	.203***	.117***
R-square (adjusted)	22.2%	24.4%	25.0%	10.1%	25.0%	37.5%

Source Family-survey-Dutch population 1998 (N=1.714). Significance * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001.

Table 1 shows the regression models for popular and serious book reading. The results from the Models A, clearly point at reading as a female activity; women not only read more romantic fiction ($b=-.196$) than men, but also read more literature ($b=-.053$). Next, popular reading has its attraction for people from all cohorts, whereas literary reading is most appealing to the older cohorts. However, it must be stated that cohort effects here cannot be separated from age effects (Knulst & Kraaykamp, 1998). Furthermore, religious people seem to fancy romantic fiction more and literature somewhat less than non-religious people. Married and cohabiting respondents prefer popular fiction reading more than singles. A surprising result is that literary readers to a larger extent are found in urbanized areas. This may be a consequence of the greater accessibility of libraries and bookshops in urban areas. Of the time allocation aspects, children living at home particularly work out negatively for literary reading, whereas labor restrictions are more influential on popular reading; romantic fiction is especially attractive for those inactive on the labor market (house wives and unemployed).

Model B depicts the effects of personality and socialization on book reading. For the personality traits a clear distinction between popular and serious reading arises. As predicted, mainly conscientious individuals spend much time on romantic fiction reading ($b=.053$). So, the structured format of popular books particularly may be appealing to a neat and disciplined person. Openness is the important personality trait in the explanation of literary reading; the appreciation of open personalities for intellectual and aesthetic stimulation leads to a preference for complex book reading ($b=.111$). Additionally, it seems that the complexity of literature provides too much stimulation for emotionally instable personalities; they favor literature significantly less than emotionally stable individuals. Also as hypothesized is the effect of friendliness on serious book reading; unfriendly individuals prefer literature to a larger extent than friendly individuals. Probably, satisfying their preference for interpersonal contact by reading literature is difficult for friendly personalities.

When it comes to the effects of parental media socialization, we conclude that the modeling principle is supported. Respondents who became familiar with popular fiction during their childhood because their parents read it, favor popular fiction to a much larger extent than respondents without an actual parental role model ($b=.152$). So, imitation of popular reading preferences is established. Literary reading also is dependent on parental stimulation; respondents who grew up with parents who preferred literature are more likely to read literature themselves. Furthermore, the idea that literary reading is associated with a high social status position is supported by the effect of the parental material situation during a child's upbringing; children raised in wealthy families more often fancy literature than children raised in poor families, whatever the actual parental preferences may be.

The question that now arises is, to what extent the effects of personality and parental socialization are (in-)direct? As stated earlier, educational attain-

ment may be dependent on personality traits and parental socialization, and thus may partly interpret the variance in book reading associated with these aspects. With Model C, we introduce educational attainment in our explanation. The results show that education is an important explanatory feature. Particularly, individuals with lower secondary education seem to fancy romantic reading, whereas the lowest and highest educational groups like romantic fiction to a lesser extent. Moreover, it is shown that all personality effects and socialization effects on popular reading can be referred to as direct effects. None of the presented effects decline because of the introduction of a person's educational qualifications.

Educational attainment is extremely important in explaining serious book reading; respondents with tertiary education favor literature to a much larger extent than lower educated respondents. Additionally, for serious reading the effects of personality are partly interpreted by the introduction of educational qualifications; 50% of the effect of emotional stability is indirect, 24% of the openness effect, and 30% of the friendliness effect. The parental socialization effects run partially indirect as well; 46% of the parental wealth effect runs through education, and 25% of the imitation effect of parental literary reading. Although part of the variance associated with personality and parental socialization is interpreted by the effect of educational attainment, our results clearly suggest that introducing personality traits and parental socialization aspects adds to our understanding of reading preferences. Besides, it illustrates that analyzing literary book reading without taking personality and socialization into consideration overestimates the role of education.

Table 2: Regression Analysis of Popular and Serious Television Viewing on Personality Traits, Parental Socialization and Socio-Economic Position, Dutch Adult Population, 1998

	Unstandardized Coefficients					
	Popular TV-Watching (0-1)			Serious TV-Watching (0-1)		
	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model A	Model B	Model C
Control variables						
Gender (0/1: 1=male)	-.055***	-.033***	-.027***	-.017***	-.021***	-.024***
Cohort						
<1935	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
1935-1945	-.031	-.029	-.028	-.007	-.006	-.008
1945-1955	-.010	-.023	-.021	-.078***	-.092***	-.093***
1955-1965	.035	-.016	-.019	-.097***	-.160***	-.157***
>1965	.092**	-.025	.021	-.052**	-.226***	-.220***
Urbanization (0-1)	.016	-.013	-.016	-.126***	-.033*	-.029
Religious affiliation (0/1: 1=none)	.015	.004	.007	.016	.007	.006
Partner (0/1: 1=yes)	.036	.024	.027	.019	.027	.025
Children at home						
no kids	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
kids under 12 years	-.005	-.022	-.029	-.034*	-.032*	-.028
kids over 12 years	.045	.041	.008	.012	.005	.022
Hours at work						
less than 12 hours	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
12 to 35 hours	-.076***	-.067***	-.038*	.048**	.044**	.032*
more than 35 hours	-.059**	-.054**	-.037*	.013	.009	.002
Personality traits						
Extroversion (0-1)		.049	.037		.009	.013
Emotional stability (0-1)		-.091***	-.075***		-.004	-.012
Openness (0-1)		-.054*	-.031		.099***	.089***
Conscientiousness (0-1)		-.009	-.003		.002	-.000
Friendliness (0-1)		.093***	.078***		-.022	-.015
Parental socialization						
Parental material wealth (0-1)		-.013	.022		.103**	.083*
Parental popular reading (0-1)		.049	.075*		.033	.022
Parental serious reading (0-1)		-.070*	-.020		.098***	.069*
Parental popular TV-watching (0-1)		.122***	.118***		.032	.034*
Parental serious TV-watching (0-1)		.013	.018		.102***	.103***
Socio-economic position						
Educational attainment						
primary			ref.			ref.
lower secondary			-.032			.021
higher secondary			-.124**			.041*
tertiary			-.166***			.086***
Constant	.494***	.517***	.590***	.699***	.606***	.571***
R-square (adjusted)	3.7%	8.1%	12.3%	5.8%	10.2%	11.4%

Source Family-survey-Dutch population 1998 (N=1.714). Significance * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001.

In Table 2 the regression models of popular and serious television viewing are presented. From Model A, we conclude that entertaining television content is fancied by women slightly more than by men ($b=-.055$). In contrast, informative and artistic content on television is equally liked by both sexes. We also find that popular television is attractive for people from all birth cohorts, whereas serious content is predominantly preferred by older cohorts. This resembles our result for serious reading; the young are less interested in news, actualities and art than the old. From our data, however, we cannot tell if this points at an aging phenomenon (people get interested in serious content when they grow older), or at a cohort mechanism (people raised in a period with an increased focus on entertaining alternatives become less interested in serious content). Next, the time allocation measure associated with workload affects the preference for popular content on television negatively, but for serious television content positively. A possible explanation is that time spend on popular television programs is easier to cut on when time pressure is felt. Children less than twelve years of age living at home slightly restrict watching news and artistic programs. Maybe, in this situation parents and children watch popular programs designed for young viewers together.

Again, in Model B personality and socialization aspects are included. Similar to book reading, a clear distinction between popular and serious content comes forward. The results suggest that in particular emotionally instable and friendly individuals prefer popular television programs. This confirms our expectation that emotionally instable persons prefer relatively simple content, probably because of the tension reduction opportunities. The positive effect of friendliness on popular television watching, however, is somewhat harder to understand. Our expectation holds that friendly individuals especially aim at interpersonal contact in their leisure time. This need hardly can be satisfied by media consumption. Nevertheless, perhaps the focus on interpersonal empathy of many popular television programs (soaps and amusement shows), leads to this preference. As with serious reading, openness is the most important personality factor for the liking of serious content on television, as well ($b=.099$). So, it may be concluded that a strive for intellectual stimulation leads to a preference for complex contents in all media.

Additionally, parental socialization is relevant for television program tastes. In Model B, particularly imitation seems to occur with respect to the transmission of popular preferences. A respondent who experienced parental preferences for popular programs during adolescence is more likely to favor amusement programs and shows nowadays ($b=.122$). Our analysis also confirms the view that serious content on television is associated with high social status, since the effect of parental wealth is significant; respondents who grew up in wealthy families are more attracted to serious content on television than respondents from poor families. Besides, parental interest in serious content on both media enlarges a preference for art, news and actualities on television later in life. So, both parental serious watching and parental

serious reading are influential in explaining preferences for serious programs on television. Hence, we may conclude that not only direct imitation of parental preferences occurs, but a reproduction of serious content preferences regardless of the medium.

Model C sheds light on the issue to what extent these effects are direct effects of personality and socialization, or indirect effects via educational attainment. Again, it shows that educational qualifications are extremely important in explaining media preferences. Especially, low educated individuals fancy popular programs on television. In contrast with book reading, a prominent division is established between people with lower secondary education and less, and people with higher secondary education and more; the higher educated clearly display a dislike for popular television content. Additionally, we conclude that most of the influences of personality and parental socialization are direct; after the introduction of educational attainment the effect for emotional stability only declines with 18%, and the effect of friendliness with 33%. The effect of parental popular watching only diminishes with 3%. This underscores that popular socialization practices mainly work directly by imitation.

Educational attainment is a substantial predictor in the explanation of serious television viewing as well; the higher educated are most attracted to information-based programs on television. Introducing educational attainment in Model C reduces the effect of openness slightly with about 10%. Also, most of the effect of parental socialization is direct; the imitation effect of parental serious watching does not diminish, and the parental serious reading effect only declines with 30%. Finally, 19% of the effect of parental material wealth runs indirect. Our results illustrate that including parental socialization aspects and personality traits leads to a better understanding of media preferences than a model with educational attainment only. Differently from serious book reading, taking personality and socialization into account for television viewing hardly influences the effect of education.

Conclusion and discussion

In this study, we elaborated on how media preferences are related to personality traits and parental media socialization practices. In analyzing media preferences, we felt it was essential to emphasize that media consumers select content and not just media. In doing so, we build on the uses and gratification research tradition. In this notion it is acknowledged that individuals differ in their social and psychological attributes, and that the media may hold various contents. Media behavior, therefore, is realized in a match of individual and content characteristics. The actual research question we addressed, reads: who favors popular television and popular book reading, and who favors serious television and serious book reading? To test our hypotheses on the effects of psychological traits and parental socialization practices, we employed representative data from the Netherlands on 1.714 respondents of 25 years and over.

To begin, we found that openness to experience is a decisive psychological trait to predict a preference for serious content in the media; open personalities fancy complex content in books, but also on television. It is most striking that the effect of openness is of the same magnitude for literary reading as for watching serious television programs. This confirms the expectation that in general media differentiation is less important than content differentiation. With respect to popular media preferences the picture seems less clear. Popular fiction readers are over represented among conscientious personalities, whereas popular television is mostly fancied by emotionally instable and friendly persons.

Additionally, our analyses stressed the importance of parental socialization practices in explaining media preferences. Using retrospective information on the situation in a respondents' parental home, we concluded that imitation of preferences occurs for all media expressions. For instance, with respect to popular reading, parents who exemplify a taste for popular fiction during a child's upbringing are important role models. The same imitation process is established for serious reading, and for popular and serious television watching. Yet, the magnitude of the effect of a literary socialization on serious reading is much larger than the imitation effects of the other activities; it is almost twice as high. Again, this supports our decision to allow differentiation in content between the media. Moreover, we would like to accentuate that these imitation effects are determined while controlling for all other socialization variables, the personality traits and several controls. Hence, we conclude that the principle of a modeling of preferences by parents finds strong support.

Finally, we investigated to what extent the effects of personality and parental socialization are direct effects. For it might be that educational qualifications are partly dependent on the personality traits and parental socialization practices, and thus interpret part of the variance in media consumption. Our analyses confirmed for literary reading that the effects of personality and parental socialization are partially interpreted by the introduction of educational attainment. Thus, analyzing literary book reading without taken personality and socialization into account overestimates the role of education. But, for popular reading and television watching the effects of personality and socialization predominantly are direct; they are hardly influenced by a person's educational qualifications.

Our findings lead to three more general conclusions. First, it is preferable that an investigation of media audiences differentiates between contents. More specifically, in predicting media preferences we find that content similarities are more prominent than medium similarities. Perhaps, future research could therefore concentrate on an elaboration of content variation. If it is possible to allow for more distinct media contents, this might lead to a more complete picture of the individual motives to fancy certain media expressions. Another interesting research subject lies with the competition between television and

book reading. This study has established that especially the audiences of serious and popular media contents differ. A future study on the competition between serious content on television and serious content in books therefore looks promising. For instance, an interesting question is if the higher educated from the younger cohorts prefer serious content on television, whereas the higher educated from the older cohorts cling to their preference for serious content in books?

Second, research on media consumption hardly ever includes personality aspects. This may be regarded as a serious drawback, because from the uses and gratification approach it is advocated that next to social background aspects, psychological attributes are relevant. Of course, there are apparent reasons why scholars ignored personality; establishing personality traits in a population survey is difficult. Most studies that did incorporate personality traits employed experimental designs. However, recent developments in social psychology have resulted in a standardized measurement of personality applicable in large-scale surveys. The application of this instrument in our study looks promising. Although the net effects of the personality traits are relatively small compared to the effects of parental socialization, for each of the four media expressions we distinguished that at least one trait significantly contributes to the explanation. Perhaps, in future research the impact of personality aspects can be enlarged by concentrating on concrete book genres or television programs. Since individual genres are more homogenous with respect to their content than the broad categories applied here (serious versus popular), it might be that specific traits have more predictive power.

Third, most studies on media socialization focussed on children living in the parental home, and disregarded the effects of the parental example later in life. Here, we have examined what a parental media socialization means for adults who have left the parental home. We concluded that parental socialization practices are meaningful for the intergenerational transmission of media tastes. Application of the idea of imitation, therefore, looks very promising if we want to investigate media consumption. Hence, it is preferable for a media study on parental background effects to incorporate actual measures of parental media socialization practices.

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Appendix 1. Descriptive statistics, Dutch adult population, 1998.

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Dependent variables				
Popular book reading	0	1	.166	.253
Serious book reading	0	1	.178	.209
Popular TV-watching	0	1	.497	.261
Serious TV-watching	0	1	.608	.223
Control variables				
Gender	0	1	.498	.500
Cohort				
<1935	0	1	.085	.278
1935-1945	0	1	.161	.368
1945-1955	0	1	.243	.429
1955-1965	0	1	.331	.471
>1965	0	1	.181	.385
Urbanization	0	1	.490	.321
Religious affiliation	0	1	.544	.498
Partner	0	1	.922	.268
Children at home				
no kids	0	1	.215	.411
kids under 12 years	0	1	.387	.487
kids over 12 years	0	1	.398	.490
Hours at work				
less than 12 hours	0	1	.355	.479
12 to 35 hours	0	1	.207	.405
more than 35 hours	0	1	.429	.495
Personality traits				
Extroversion	0	1	.521	.290
Emotional stability	0	1	.525	.291
Openness	0	1	.522	.289
Conscientiousness	0	1	.523	.293
Friendliness	0	1	.536	.294
Parental socialization				
Parental material wealth	0	1	.179	.166
Parental popular reading	0	1	.163	.212
Parental serious reading	0	1	.152	.198
Parental popular TV-watching	0	1	.214	.348
Parental serious TV-watching	0	1	.245	.277
Socio-economic position				
Educational attainment				
primary	0	1	.122	.316
lower secondary	0	1	.228	.419
higher secondary	0	1	.338	.473
tertiary	0	1	.322	.467

Source: Family-survey-Dutch population 1998 (N=1.714).