

The transmission of cultural resources as basis for young people's school choices

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the role of the family in the construction of adolescents' choices and life projects examining. The study considers material and symbolic resources as either possibilities or constraints for young people, for whom the intergenerational relationship can be viewed as an opportunity for the transition to adulthood. The aim of this article is to offer a critical review of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, reconstructing the main processes of intergenerational transmission of cultural resources. In particular, through an analysis of a set of qualitative data from the nationwide PRIN study, two ideal types of processes of intergenerational transmission are identified, transversal to all social groups, which are linked to a different understanding of education. On the one hand, we have *education as capital*, that is to say a conception of education as a family patrimony that gives access to rewards and can be accumulated or lost. On the other hand, we have *education as an entitlement* to be fully enjoyed, a real opportunity to develop one's abilities, a space to learn and test out useful skills to navigate complex decision-making processes, and which is the result of an educational style that promotes responsibility-taking.

Keywords: Cultural capital; Cultural consumption; Educational choice; Intergenerational transmission; Increasing/decreasing of cultural capital.

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The transmission of cultural resources: some results from a study in Italian secondary schools

The family represents a strategic relational context within which adolescents' choices and life projects are constructed and defined. Families transmit resources, values, motivations, meanings and experiences to their offspring, thus fostering the new generations' capacity to seize the opportunities offered by the educational system, supporting them in making conscientious choices and in achieving educational results that are relevant and meaningful in terms of their own biography. The aim of the present paper is to offer a set of considerations on the role of the family in the creation of what Dahrendorf (1980) defined "life chances" for the next generation. The concept of "life chances" refers to those opportunities made available from the social context that enable the individual to pursue and fulfil his or her ambitions and desires, but which are, nonetheless inextricably bound to the individual's capacity to both seize and choose such opportunities among different options, and to take part in the diverse relationships, connections and affiliations in which chances emerge. We might say that opportunities are available to all, but only on condition that individuals learn how to recognize and utilize them appropriately (Colombo, 2010).

The role of the family and available resources are analysed in terms of their effect on young people's life chances. The empirical evidence used in the present paper is based on the results of the PRIN study "Life chances and significant adults: Adolescents' educational and professional choices"².

² The PRIN study was carried out between 2005 and 2008. It was funded by the MIUR (Ministry of Education, University and Research) and coordinated by Elena Besozzi. The research methodology included two phases of data collection: in the first year a set of 117 in-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with a sample of 38 students, plus their parents and their teachers, based in five Italian cities (Milan, Turin, Bergamo, Bari, Salerno). In the second year a quantitative enquiry was carried out in the same five municipalities, using a questionnaire administered to a probabilistic sample of 1294 public upper secondary school students enrolled in either a Lyceum, a Technical Institute, or a Professional Institute (Italian vocational schools). A stratified sampling technique was employed, which consisted of extracting only the 2nd and 4th year students from the 41 schools participating in the study. Sections 2 and 3 of the present paper are based on both qualitative and quantitative data from the PRIN study. Section 4 focuses mainly on interview material, which enabled an in-depth investigation of the process of transmission of cultural resources between parents and children. Other articles in this issue draw more upon the quantitative results of the same study (see the articles by Colombo, Scardigno and Merico).

The study, which included both a qualitative and a quantitative phase, was conducted with students aged between 14 and 18 and their parents and teachers (Besozzi, 2009). The specific focus of the present article is the topic of cultural resources that are available to the family and the transmission of these resources to the next generation, as a processes that has an influence on educational choice.

We will take the concept of cultural capital developed by Bourdieu (1979; 1986; with Passeron, 1964; 1970) as our starting point. Laumont and Laureau (1988), in particular, offer a re-reading of the concept that emphasises the importance of the capital metaphor, and reconstruct the various meanings attributed to the notion of cultural capital by the French sociologist. Laumont and Laureau (1988) stress that the concept of capital:

- is predominantly economic in origin and meaning. It is used as a synonym of richness and property and is made up of the different assets owned by an individual, and from which he or she derives an income³;
- is a pre-given but also a dynamic entity, prone to transformations on the basis of the activation or the lack thereof of accumulation and investment mechanisms, or the lack thereof. Consequently, there are specific strategies for augmenting, maintaining or trying to avoid devaluation of one's capital⁴;
- is an individual asset (i.e., the ownership of which generates benefits for individuals) but connected with issues of public interest associated with the degree of distribution of resources;
- can be transmitted from one generation to the next;
- can be inherited from previous generations, but each individual can accumulate new resources autonomously⁵.

In light of these implications, Bourdieu's (1986) suggestion that culture should be given an economic valence as an indicator of social class is particularly significant. What it highlights is the relational nature of the

³ Among the different categories that make up Bourdieu's complex toolbox, the notion of capital is the most indebted to a Marxist approach (Santoro, 2010).

⁴ According to Robson (2009), for example, capitals are not static elements, but rather tend to transform during a person's life course. In the results of his research he stresses that participation in cultural activities during adolescence often evolves into economic capital in adulthood, in the form of potential earnings and professional results.

⁵ Laureau e Weininger (2003), in particular, have considered the question of the transmissibility of capitals.

resource, which exists only as a function of other forms of capital (social, economic) and can be converted into currency, useful relations, and reputation – thus carrying out a fundamental role in the accumulation of power and privileges. The concept of cultural capital is important for our analysis also because it was introduced by Bourdieu as a result of various research experiences (Bourdieu, Passeron, 1964; 1970) as a theoretical hypothesis that would explain the unequal school results of students from different social classes. It is part of the theory of cultural reproduction, which asserts that children's educational paths, typically, tend to reproduce the conditions of the family of origin at the socio-economic, professional and cultural levels⁶.

Placing an emphasis on the role of family social capital in explaining students' educational performance and trajectories, Bourdieu (1979) specifies the multidimensional nature of the concept, which can be measured via⁷: parental educational levels (i.e., the knowledge and the symbolic resources offered by a specific educational route); meanings attributed to education, which develop in relation to a specific ethos that is shared with one's social class and which has a direct influence on educational choices and on the length of one's school career; the lifestyle, cultural practices, good manners and taste that define a typical habitus⁸. According to the French sociologist, moreover, there's a real and actual correspondence between the family's educational background, a specific lifestyle characterized by signs of distinction and differentiation, and

⁶ For an Italian re-reading of the theory of cultural reproduction in relation to the Sociology of Education see Bonichi, 2010.

⁷ Drawing upon Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital, there have been many scholars that have emphasised different aspects of the concept, on the basis of the different results that emerged from various. For example, Di Maggio (1982) and Di Maggio & Mohr (1995) have developed 16 measures of cultural participation, attitudes towards and knowledge of art and literature; Sullivan (2001) made the distinction between activities, cultural knowledge, and language, reflecting on which of these elements can be considered a capital and an investment for school results; more recently, Nagel (2010) has argued, on the basis of empirical data, that cultural practices are more important than parents' educational level in terms of social mobility.

⁸ In other writings, Bourdieu (1986) argues that cultural capital exists in three forms: the *embodied state*, that is to say internal dispositions, qualities, knowledge, taste, which are evident at the level of mental and corporeal schemas; the *objectified state*, in the form of ownership or availability of cultural goods (books, paintings, tools, etc.); the *institutionalized state*, that includes educational qualifications and credentials from a legitimate and recognized institution.

attitudes towards education, that influence students' school choices and results.

The idea of family culture as capital needs to be adequately analysed. Like other forms of capital, family culture can represent an investment, in that it can offer access to rewards and payoffs, but it can also decrease in time. It can also be transmitted. Not everyone, however, is automatically able to pass on the cultural resource they have acquired and the passage is neither linear or automatic, as in the case of an economic or tangible inheritance – or of something obtained *ex novo* by the new generations. Parental cultural capital can become a resource for children only when it translates into parents' capacity and desire to pass on knowledge and habits to their offspring (Brint, 2006), when it is embodied in familial relations, and when cultural capital is integrated with social capital (Coleman, 1990). That is to say, if parents do not help children in their studies, if they do not participate in their children's lives, due to a paucity of internal social capital⁹, even a substantial cultural capital may be irrelevant in children's educational outcomes¹⁰.

Based on these premises, the analysis presented here concerns the characteristics of cultural resources among families of upper secondary school students – i.e., the availability of goods that have an impact on young people's life chances – and the process of transmission of these resources from parents to children, via relationships, affiliations, and meanings that constrain or facilitate young people's potential to use their family's cultural capital in the making of their educational choices and in

⁹ Cf. Lazzarini (2009), who deals with internal and external social capital of those families of students who took part in the PRIN study. According to the author, a weak internal social capital is characteristic of families with divisions and conflict, contrasting visions of the world, misunderstandings and power differentials, and a general lack of trust, collaboration, solidarity, dialogue, psychological and emotional support among the generations.

¹⁰ Goldthorpe (2010), recently, has defined theories of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, Passeron, 1970; Bowles, Gintis, 1976) a "strong vision" of the approach that identifies in the relationship between class and culture the explanation of educational attainment, precisely because, according to these authors, the differences in results are created as a result of unequal supplies of cultural capital that students bring to the educational system, which are maintained because the educational institution transforms these differences in merit. According to Goldthorpe, on the other hand, class differences persist because the (rational) evaluation that families make in terms of costs and benefits has remained the same over time. According to him it's necessary to direct theory towards an analysis of individual action and its consequences (intentional or not), in which subjects are actors who belong to groups with different levels and forms of resources, opportunities, and constraints that the class situation implies.

the realization of their life projects and ambitions¹¹. The analysis draws upon some of the results obtained in the aforementioned research study.

The aim of the investigation was to test a set of research hypotheses on contemporary transformations in the characteristics of families' cultural resources and the mechanisms of intergenerational transmission of cultural capital. These hypotheses were generated bearing in mind the profound cultural changes that have invested knowledge and learning in the last decades¹². Such changes have determined a reformulation of the meaning of education among the new generations, as a result also of a legitimization crisis among traditional educational agencies (Colombo, Giovannini, Landri, 2006). Indeed, there has been a progressive transformation of the meaning of culture: from family inheritance, exclusively related to status, it has increasingly become an opportunity which can be seized by individuals in different contexts (i.e., the family, school, friendship networks, New Media, etc.)

First, we hypothesised that, despite the relational nature of cultural capital (which is often correlated to the socio-economic space occupied by families) there would be a certain discontinuity among the different types of capital, which should emerge in the non-linear nature of young people's choices and life projects. Given a certain lack of correspondence among the different dimensions of cultural capital, our hypotheses set out to critically assess the fact that a certain educational level corresponded to specific cultural practices and value orientations which are distinctive of a particular lifestyle.

Secondly, given that the mechanism of transmission of cultural resources from parents to offspring has suffered radical transformations, we can no longer consider it an automatic transfer of goods from one generation to the next, as was previously the case. In contemporary society, transmission becomes a complex process, the results of which are not always foreseeable, and cultural capital is amenable to augmentation or reduction dynamics as a consequence of the intergenerational transition, which are, in turn, connected to the parent-child educational relationship.

¹¹ Recently, Crompton e Fagan (2010) have reaffirmed the importance of an in-depth study of the mechanisms of transmission of families' internal resources, stressing the central role of the family in reproducing inequalities from one generation to the next.

¹² Some of the most significant changes in the educational realm include the emergence of new actors and a different relationship with time, a more complex relationship between study, work and life projects, the emergence of new modes of learning connected to the use of new media, etc.

These hypotheses become relevant for the exploration of the *link between cultural capital and life chances*, given that what is emphasised is the need to reconstruct adolescents' educational paths and considering that resources, conditions, social limitations and opportunities have an influence on choices and projects. Offering chances, on the family's part, means enabling the very possibility of choice, supporting and partaking in children's decision-making processes, contributing to the development and maturation of adolescents' planning and decision-making skills: all of which depend also on the family's ability to use and pass on available cultural resources. In the analysis that follows, the aim is to identify adolescent's life chances, locating resources, constraints and options that intervene in students' development, as well as the varying degrees of independence of thought among adolescents, who are considered here to be active, dynamic, reflexive actors and competent decision-makers (Archer, 2003; Cesareo & Vaccarini, 2006). Indeed, according to some recent studies, reflexivity represents a key skill for young people in contemporary society, as they are faced with increasingly complex choices and life projects, which can represent an additional element of cultural capital (Threadgold, Nilan, 2009).

Discontinuity between parental level of education and children's educational choices

Among the family's cultural resources, parental level of education refers to the availability of knowledge, skills, experience and tools that indicate the socio-cultural space in which a child is located and which can influence him or her in the definition of life choices and projects. The qualitative interviews conducted in the PRIN study with parents and children¹³ confirm the existence of a link between parents' educational qualifications and children's school choice. Socio-economic constraints, that families belonging to more disadvantaged social classes are subjected to, condition young people and their educational choices, steering them towards professional institutes and a hasty entry into the job market. Conversely, the children of parents with a higher economic and cultural capital

¹³ Interviews were conducted with 11 parents with low cultural resources (up to a professional qualification), 16 parents with medium cultural resources (High school diploma), 11 parents with high cultural resources (degree).

prevalently tend to attend lyceums and are oriented towards more long-term educational routes, generally leading to further education.

The relationship between a family's socio-cultural resources and an adolescent's chances of reaching certain levels of education has been investigated and confirmed in a number of studies (eg., Cobalti, Schizzerotto, 1994; Pisati, 2000; Checchi & Flabbi, 2006; Barone, 2007). This line of research identifies in the family's level of education a predictor of educational choices and results, as well as of the social position that individuals will come to occupy in society. In the present study, however, interviewees tend to stress that parents' level of education is not a resource in itself, but rather becomes an opportunity for children only when it is actually used to choose and develop projects; that is to say, when adolescents can utilize with parents' or family members' educational experience, or when adults are able to use their cultural skills to offer adequate guidance in educational choices.

The analysis of questionnaire data also shows a significant statistical correlation between students' choices/life projects, on the one hand, and parents' educational qualification and family status, on the other.

As the fathers' level of education increases, for instance, children tend to attend lyceums, rather than technical or vocational schools (professional institutes), and manifest a higher propensity towards enrolment in university (see Table 1)¹⁴.

The fact that the link between parental educational levels and children's educational routes is confirmed does not exclude the persistence of exceptions. The qualitative interviews, for instance, reveal some experiences of children's educational mobility relative to their parents'. The first case concerns a student attending a scientific lyceum, whose parents had a low educational level: in his case, it's not merely parental educational qualifications that explain school choice, but rather what emerges is the incidence of other factors that enrich and qualify family cultural resources (i.e., cultural practices, inclinations, and meanings attributed to education).

The second case, on the other hand, is that of the daughter of a Ukrainian woman with a bachelor's degree in Economics but employed in Italy as a sales assistant in a shop: the girl's specific vocational ambitions

¹⁴ Although in the present paper only the interactions with parents' educational level are presented (as this is the specific object of this brief analysis), this data is quite congruent and does not differ from the frequency distributions that take family status into consideration.

and the family's limited financial resources are aspects that have a concrete influence on a downwardly mobile school choice, as do the scarce levels of cultural consumption among foreigners in the host country, the economic needs that have to be met, and adults' limited language skills¹⁵.

Table 1. School choice and adolescents' life projects x Father's educational qualification

	Completed lower secondary school or lower	High School Diploma	Bachelor's Degree	Total
<i>School choice</i>				
Lyceum	33.7	57.3	80.2	52.3
Technical institutes	39.2	26.6	12.1	27.8
Professional institutes	27	16.1	7.8	19.9
Total (N = 1282)	100	100	100	100
<i>Plans after the diploma</i>				
Enrolling in university	38.2	61.1	72.8	54.3
Looking for a job	36.4	20.6	11.2	24.6
Looking after home and family	0.6	0	0	0.3
Undecided	24.8	18.3	15.9	20.8
Total (N = 1279)	100	100	100	100

I chose the scientific [lyceum] because it seemed to be most in keeping with who I am. I mean, given my aptitude for science and mathematics, I chose something in the scientific sector. And I thought that the scientific lyceum would give me good general foundations (student, scientific lyceum, Bergamo, 18)¹⁶.

I attended a vocational school to become an electrician. I liked the idea of working as an electrician. Thinking about it now, I would have preferred to enter the job market with a better education. So I approve of my son's desire to go to university (father, 18).

Originally I was going to make a different choice. I was about to enrol in a lyceum, then I changed my mind because I followed my heart. I discussed the choice with my mother, who wanted me to attend a lyceum, because she said I had potential (student, professional institute, Salerno, 21).

¹⁵ On the role of family cultural capital in the educational paths of young foreigners in the Italian educational system, cf. Besozzi, Colombo, Santagati, 2009; Colombo, Santagati, 2010.

¹⁶ Interviews are numbered 1 to 38, with a correspondence between children and parents. The excerpts are followed by some information regarding adolescents' city of origin and school type.

From the analysis of the quantitative data, moreover, there appear to be *elements of discontinuity*.

1. Among students with scarce cultural and socio-economic resources, approximately 15% of the sample (over 200 subjects) is represented by subjects with a low family educational level who, nonetheless, attend lyceums and plan to carry on to further education. If we consider parental socio-economic status, on the other hand, those who have a low status and attend a lyceum are only 8% of the sample (approximately 100 students). What appears to act as a constraint for the majority of students, therefore, is parental professional condition, in terms of the scarcity of cultural tools available, although, for a part of this group there are degrees of freedom in choices and in ambitions that will enable upward educational mobility.
2. If we consider families with multiple resources, what we find is a greater continuity between the different types of (cultural and economic) capital and children's choices/ambitions, with a tendency to maintain and consolidate a certain social position that has been acquired in time. The percentage of students with parents who have a high level of education and/or status who are attending professional institutes, or that plan to enter the job market after completing upper secondary school education does not exceed 3% of the total sample.

Changes in young people's cultural consumption

Cultural consumption is a significant element to take into account in order to understand the environment in which students construct their educational choices and formulate their life projects¹⁷. Overall, the study confirms the existence of a correspondence between the family's level of education and students' cultural practices. A general tendency towards

¹⁷ The interviews explored habits and cultural practices both among adolescents and their parent. These included: the consumption of television programmes, reading newspapers/magazines, reading books, participation in cultural activities (cinema, theatre, exhibitions, museums, concerts, etc.). Afterwards, the second part of the questionnaire was dedicated to cultural capital and the same dimensions explored in the interviews were considered, adequately transformed into multiple choice questions. Finally, a composite index of the measure of the level of student's cultural consumption was constructed during the analysis of the quantitative data.

scarce cultural consumption emerges on the part of all groups of adolescents, however.

Considering all cultural practices investigated, the attitude towards *reading books* indicates clearly that among families with a high level of education (with children who are lyceum students) there is greater familiarity with the written text. Almost all of these children show a certain interest in reading, as they grew up in homes where many books were available and where parents tend to read a lot.

I don't know how many books I read per year...thirty, forty, it depends on the period. In summer I read loads (student, classical lyceum, Milano, 4)

I love reading, I'm a "book omnivore": I read all sorts of things. Using public transport, I always have a book in my bag. Now I'm reading something my son recommended. We give each other reading tips, for instance if he's had some good book advice at school or vice versa (mother, 4).

I passed on my love for books and what they contain. For me books are sacred and, consequently, I think I passed that on. My son is a "book eater" (mother of scientific lyceum student, Torino, 12).

I tried to find every possible way to get her to love reading. I read her lots of books, we read every night, I told her stories, I would make stories up for her... Now I see that she's beginning to appreciate it, I see she's starting to read better stuff. Then again, ours is a house where there are books also in the bathroom (mother of a scientific lyceum student, Bergamo, 17).

In terms of the consumption of television programmes, in families with multiple cultural resources what emerges is a habit of privileging "topic debate (or journalistic) programmes" as opposed to entertainment programmes, and to use the television sparingly and critically.

Especially when both my father and I are at home in the evenings we watch films or current affairs programmes together. Reality TV hardly makes it into our home (female student, scientific lyceum, Torino, 11).

I much prefer watching topical debate programmes rather than entertainment programmes. I'm more inclined to watch Rai 3 than Italia 1: Italia 1 is one of those channels that is very good at prying onto young people's good faith, manipulating reality extremely well. I wouldn't want my daughter to watch those programmes (father, 11).

I don't watch television very much, there never seems to be anything particularly clever on (male student, scientific lyceum, Torino, 12).

I would say that my children hardly ever watch TV in the evenings. Usually they read, use the computer, or surf the Internet. Usually we read. We don't have a TV in the kitchen, we've only got one for the four of us, but it's not like there's ever anything worth watching on! In the past, when they were younger, I was always present when the TV was switched on, as I tried to act a bit like a "filter". Luckily, in this family no one watches Big Brother, no one watches that kind of rubbish so, as a result, the TV is almost always off (mother, 12).

Almost 43% of the sample answered "a little bit" or "not at all" to the survey question "Do you like reading?", whereas 57% of the sample displays a certain interest towards reading (Table 2). The passion for books rises with the increase in parental educational qualifications, in the same way as the measure of time passed in front of the TV increases with the decrease in family educational level.

Table 2. Do you like reading?" x Father's educational qualification

<i>Interest in reading</i>	<i>Completed lower secondary school or lower</i>	<i>High school Diploma</i>	<i>Bachelor's Degree</i>	<i>Total</i>
Not at all	19.2	13.6	9.5	15.1
A little bit	33.1	26.8	25	28.5
Somewhat	29.1	37	31.9	33.5
Very much	18.8	22.6	33.6	22.8
<i>Total (N = 1282)</i>	100	100	100	100

There are some exceptions, however: approximately 22.2% of the sample is represented by students with a low family cultural capital, who like to read "somewhat" or "very much", whereas 21.3% is made up of children of parents who have completed upper secondary schools or universities who do not like to read ("a little bit" or "not at all"). The analysis of the data thus highlights discontinuity trends between parental educational qualifications and children's cultural practices, which underscore the presence of a fracture between the different dimensions of cultural capital in adolescent biographies.

On one hand, what can be observed is a tendency towards lower-level cultural consumption among students with highly educated parents. There seems to be a progressive reduction of consumption that falls under what we might call "cultural engagement", that is to say consumption that is the expression of elite interests, typical of those young people who tend towards more highbrow intellectual consumption and for whom the influence of the family's cultural background is crucial. The consensus

surrounding television entertainment programmes, the lack of interest for information on TV and in the newspapers, infrequent visits to the cinema, a vision of the theatre as an out-dated and unfamiliar artform, the languishing habit of attending museums, exhibitions or other cultural events, appears to be pervasive and transversal to all levels of socio-professional status and seems to indicate the difficulties of families in transmitting a positive attitude towards distinctive cultural practices.

Usually I watch soaps. For example, when I get home late from school, I eat alone and that's when I watch TV (female student, classical lyceum, Milano, 2).

Every once in awhile we watch a programme that amuses us, for example tonight we're watching "Desperate Housewives" because it amuses us, we saw pieces of "La Pupa e il Secchione", sometimes we watch "Dr House", that kind of thing (mother, classical lyceum student, Milano, 4).

My parents don't want me to watch "Beautiful", "Centro Vetrine", "Uomini e Donne". My father says "Uomini e Donne" is worse than a porn film because it manipulates feeling and emotions and all the stories are fake. I agree, but I watch it mostly for fun (female student, scientific lyceum, Bari, 32).

When I do small chores or I read books my mother gives me some pocket money, because I don't really like to read, even if doing these things is one of my duties. My parents buy 20-30 books a year. Certainly not for me because that would be a complete waste of books (male student, classical lyceum, Salerno, 26).

On the other hand, among those students that can be classified as "deprived" from an economic and cultural standpoint (a group many foreign adolescents belong to) what we find is a tendency towards an increase in the level of family education, via cultural practices, shared with or encouraged by the parents. Some of these kids try to keep up to date with recent events and current affairs, watching the news on TV with their parents and often reading newspapers. In some cases, parents happily buy or recommend books for their children: the interest in reading is generated by the example of family members that, despite lacking high educational levels, have improved their education independently, developing a variety of cultural interests.

I like reading, but during school I read less. Generally I read about ten books per year. If it's raining, I might read in the evening before going to sleep. I read all

sorts of books. If, for school, I have to read also some non-fiction books, I try to find the most interesting ones. The last book I read was *Siddharta* by Hesse. My father had it (male student, scientific lyceum, Bergamo, 18).

I read a lot of books. At the moment I'm reading the *Lunenburg Variation*. I often give the kids advice about what to read because I tend to read quite a bit (father, 18).

In order to have an overall picture of the continuities/discontinuities between parental educational level and adolescents' cultural practices, it's useful to consider the distribution of the Index of Cultural Consumption¹⁸, in order to observe the tendencies among groups with different levels of cultural resources (Table 3).

Table 3. Index of Cultural Consumption x Father's educational qualification

Index of Cultural Consumption	Completed lower secondary school or below	High school Diploma	Bachelor's Degree	Total
Low	61.9	45.8	34.1	48.5
Medium	29.4	38.5	34.9	34.9
High	8.7	15.7	31	16.5
Total (N = 1282)	100	100	100	100

Despite the significant correlation between the two variables, it ought to be highlighted that, among the group of families with the highest educational qualifications, there appears to be a discrepancy between the high educational level and the social space occupied by the parents, on the one hand, and the rather scarce cultural consumption, on the other. For 34.1% of these students, the type of cultural consumption is of a low level and does not appear to be representative or distinctive of their status. This result highlights *the cultural impoverishment of the new generations*. The

¹⁸ The Index of Cultural Consumption is a composite measure that includes the following weighed variables: "do you like reading?"; "how often do you read the following newspapers/magazines?"; "how often do you read the following books?"; "of the following cultural activities, which do you partake in during your spare time? With what frequency?" (Besozzi, 2009). Overall, a low level of consumption indicates scarce interest for books, infrequent and massified reading habits, infrequent cultural activities; a medium level is characterized by an average interest in books, quite frequent and varied reading habits, participation in some cultural activities; a high level indicates lifestyles characterized by a passion for books, high-brow reading habits, and engagement in niche cultural activities.

decline of niche cultural consumption, typical of small groups and influenced by an elevated family background as a trend is confirmed also by the results of the 6th IARD study on young Italians (Cavalli, 2007)¹⁹.

The group with parents who have fewer cultural resources (i.e., did not complete lower secondary school), tends to have a predominantly low level of cultural consumption, with only a small percentage of students (8.7%) who display a high degree of cultural practices. The quantitative data reveals a greater lack of mobility, among social classes with scarce resources, in terms of cultural opportunities seized, despite the fact that a margin of possibility to acquire further cultural tools and begin approaching various cultural offers does, in fact, exist²⁰.

A final element is derived from the analysis of multiple correspondences and from a cluster analysis based on fathers' educational qualification. *Three student profiles* emerged from the analysis, which show a sort of polarization between those who have a multiplicity of cultural opportunities and those who have none, without relevant intermediate conditions. The *first type* of adolescent (with low parental cultural capital) is characterized by the "absence of cultural experiences"²¹. This profile is made up mostly

¹⁹ Since 1983 the IARD Institute has been studying the condition of young Italians with a periodic survey, conducted on a representative national sample of approximately 3,000 young people aged between 15 and 34. Apart from the IARD study, which offers a measure of the changes among Italian youths, there are no other longitudinal studies that look at biographical developments in Italy such as those conducted elsewhere (eg., the Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), the American National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), the British Youth Cohort Study (YCS) and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE), etc.) In general, these studies highlight a correspondence between family background, educational choices and young people's cultural consumption. At the same time they indicate that, in the age of the so-called knowledge society where participation in education is at an all-time high, there is a correspondent trivialisation of culture (Furedi, 2004).

²⁰ Let us remember that there is a substantial coincidence between the distribution of the frequency of the Index of Cultural Consumption and the Index of Family Status. Also, it ought to be said that the discontinuities and the lack of correspondences are a consequence of the proposed perspective that understands family cultural resources to be a dynamic reality that morphs. The Index of Cultural Consumption, in fact, is positively and significantly correlated with the upper secondary school attended (lyceums/technical institutes/professional institutes), with the Index of School Achievement, with the Index of Planning Skills. See below the article by Maurizio Merico.

²¹ In this cluster we find students who don't play a musical instrument, don't read novels and poetry, don't read newspapers, don't listen to pop music, don't like to read at all, never go to the cinema, don't read comics or teenage magazines, go to the high street or to shopping

of girls living in some Northern cities (Bergamo, Torino), with low profile school choices, limited project-development skills, and a distinct vocational ambition. The group appears to be marked by a degree of marginality both in the educational realm and in terms of cultural consumption. The *second profile* of students (with medium family cultural capital) displays “limited cultural opportunities”. For this group school choices and experiences are generally quite positive and there is a general inclination towards further education, but cultural consumption is scarce. The group is characterized by the presence of adolescents from Milano and with non-Italian citizenship, an element that enables us to appreciate the reasons behind the existence of obstacles in accessing more high-profile cultural practices. The *third group* of teenagers (with parents who have completed university, and which includes males from Milan), finally, enjoys “multiple opportunities for cultural consumption”²² and is distinctive in terms of school excellence, a strong ability to develop a long-term life projects, and an inclination to continue further study at university.

Increasing and decreasing cultural capital via different types of school choice

An analysis of families' cultural resources must necessarily include some considerations on how parents pass on these resources and transform them into opportunities for the new generations. Parents and offspring are considered, as aforementioned, as subjects that take on an active, reflexive, and creative role in this process of transmission (Archer, 2007). In order to interpret the processes that determine whether a family's cultural resources are maintained, are augmented or are reduced in the passage from one generation to the next, we have identified – drawing upon the narratives of the parents and adolescents interviewed – two ideal types of intergenerational transmission. The two routes can be distinguished in terms of functions and meanings attributed to education, motivations in school choices, the role of different forms of capital, educational and family styles, interpretations of society. Attention is placed on incongruities

shops every week.

²² The third group of students is characterized by the following cultural practices: reading novels and poetry, playing a musical instrument, surfing the Internet, listening to pop music often, reading national newspapers, comics or teenage magazines; they don't tend to go to the high street or to shopping malls very often.

rather than on correspondences between parents and children, with the aim of understanding the dynamics that generate an increase or a loss of opportunities for the new generation, according to the cultural resources that the family makes available for young people's future choices.

Table 4. How is family cultural capital lost or increased? Two ideal types of intergenerational transmission of cultural meanings

<i>1) Loss of family cultural capital</i>	<i>2) Increase of family cultural capital</i>
Formal value of education	Substantial value of education
Instrumental motivations in school choices	Expressive motivations in school choices
Defence of socio-economic position of family	Primacy of cultural resources
Prevalence of social and economic capital	Emphasis on meanings and tools to reach aims (skills, interests, motivations, passions, etc.)
Emphasis on reaching objectives (grades, promotions, titles, certificates, etc.)	The past as a resource for the present, in relation to the future
The past as a constraint on the future	Non directive educational style (independence, discontinuity, primacy of the subject)
Directive educational style (heteronomy, continuity, passiveness)	Families that promote responsibility
<i>Dyscrasic</i> families	Education as an entitlement and as an opportunity
Education as capital and as a duty	Transformation, re-creation, innovation
Cultural reproduction	

The first column in Table 4 describes a process that leads to the progressive impoverishment of family cultural capital: a phenomenon that takes place among classes with greater available resources. The cultural capital accumulated by these families is evidence of an influent socio-economic position but, at the same time, education takes on the meaning of a status symbol, of a certification with merely formal value to ensure children will later come to occupy a certain position of advantage in society. The motivations surrounding adolescents' secondary school choices are predominantly instrumental and extrinsic, connected to constrictive elements. In this economic-instrumental view of education, the acquisition of a high qualification acts a form of reassurance for the family and enables the defence and conservation of one's socio-economic status. It is primarily economic capital, for these families, that will guarantee security and stability for the next generations. Thus, cultural capital ends up being subordinated to an economic function of providing an immediate "yield" or guaranteeing a stable future revenue.

In this first type of family, children are educated to understand the importance of reaching specific scholastic-professional aims, with the rationale that young people can inherit the good outcomes and results achieved by parents, in a rather "deterministic" logic of reproduction of

socio-cultural positions, in which there is little space for the initiative of the individual subject. Low-profile school choices on the adolescent's part are not seen in a positive light. The past, represented by parents' socio-professional status, becomes the constraint that determines their offspring's future. Teenagers are invited to follow in their parents' steps, emulating their actions and choices, trying to live up to parental expectations, with scarce margins for change (heteronomy). The educational styles adopted by these families often seems to be directive, when not outright authoritarian, as children's dependence on the parents is strong, as is the parental request of continuity in terms of the family's acquisitions. The mechanism of transmission of cultural resources among the generations thus seems to flounder the moment children are confused by parental expectations, especially if there is scarce parental support and participation in children's lives. These are the so-called "*dyscrasic families*" (Lazzarini, 2009), who rely only on their relational networks and on economic resources to ensure a positive future for their children, while showing little attention to the present and to the importance of independence in children's choices.

In these families, education is actually considered to be a form of "capital" *à la* Bourdieu: it is understood to be a set of assets and resources that give access to rewards and that can be accumulated, in the logic of an equivalence between economic, social and cultural positions. In reality, it is precisely the presence of particularly high levels of economic and social capital that risk undermining the cultural baggage available to young people as a tool for the development of their personal and independent professional ambitions. Education, in family expectations, is interpreted as a duty/obligation that must be pursued and obtained to ensure the continuity of the familial condition and as a protection from risk, especially when there is a position of acquired prestige that could be lost. In this case what happens is that children, in order to compensate for the lack of independence in their personal choices, expect a sort of "positional yield" from their families, that is to say they expect some form of facilitation or benefit for the fact that they have not deviated from the well-traced family path.

The only thing that made a difference in his choice was that it was the father's school and his father told him: "what's all this talks? He will be enrolled in the classical [lyceum] anyhow!". He made no decision concerning the future, only some hypotheses on pursuing a career in Law given that his father, his grandfather

and his great-grandfather [followed that path] ... (mother of classic lyceum student, Salerno, 26).

My family on my father's side chose this lyceum, because it's supposed to be the most comprehensive school, that offers the grounding for those who want to go to university. The whole family went to a lyceum: my brothers, my father, my grandfather. They all made this choice to follow in my father's footsteps: we want to follow my father's footsteps with a university career. A couple of teachers said: "if you really have to go to a lyceum, perhaps it's better if you don't choose a classical one". I want to attend a lyceum, I'm not interested in vocational schools: one always tries to imitate one's parents. Like, if you have a father who's a chemist, it's normal you'd want to be a chemist too, because your path is a bit more paved out for you (student, scientific lyceum, Bari, 34).

In the second ideal type of family what emerges is what we might call the other side of the coin of the aforementioned process. Here the mechanisms of intergenerational transmission, conversely, favour the increase, as opposed to the decrease, of cultural resources. This tendency emerges in families (of any social class) where education has value in itself and as a personal achievement. Parents invest in their children's education enabling them to acquire skills and tools to interpret reality and foster the development of critical thought and a reflexive attitude. In these families what is passed on are expressive attitudes towards education and value is placed on the importance of knowledge, which is considered to be a domain of personal achievement, without it necessarily implying a status privilege.

In these family contexts, education has value irrespective of its potential to ensure social mobility or maximise earning potential, there are fewer preoccupations for socio-economic issues, while there is an effort to maximise and broaden young people's choices, given that knowledge implies openness, curiosity, the development of new interests. Moreover, families recognize the primacy of cultural resources in the knowledge society, and culture is considered the only safeguard against the complexities of contemporary life. Indeed, if economic resources can easily be dispersed in times of crisis, only adequate cultural instruments enable subjects to resist and react against external social conditioning. Cultural instruments are the tools that help individuals develop a personal

perspective on society, relationships, and politics, deal with and overcome uncertainties and develop solid footholds thanks to specific cultural bases.

Because what these families pass on is an expressive vision of education, they do not emphasise the importance of achieving results, but rather focus on how education and appropriate cultural consumption can teach young people to attribute meaning to events, situations, and life paths, in a logic that allows for the unexpected, for transformation, for innovation, for the re-creation of new possibilities. Parental education thus becomes an opportunity to think of the future as a possibility; it becomes an object of re-signification and an occasion for reflexive thought for new generations²³.

These propensities can develop in families where the educational style is non-directive and reflexive, acquired and constructed in the child-parent relationship and, over time, shared by both. In these families parents have an active involvement in their children's education, fostering young people's capacity to choose independently and to take responsibility for their choices, without excluding the risk that adolescents' may make the wrong ones in the process. Young people can thus experience the sense of being in charge of their destiny and develop their life project independently, even with discontinuities from their parents.

Families where such a propensity develops can be defined as "families that promote responsibility" (Rinaldi, 2007; Lazzarini, 2009). In this type of family children are educated to develop self-esteem and consider school as an opportunity and a place where one can develop one's individual abilities; a place of interaction and where children are initiated to a continuous educational process that enables them to acquire the skills to help them deal with difficulties, but also to acknowledge and express their abilities and proficiencies. School is understood to be but one dimension of life, certainly important but not all-encompassing.

Within this second scenario, education, in the family's expectations, is understood to be not so much a form of capital related to an economic revenue²⁴, but rather becomes an entitlement one ought to make the most of or the opportunity to develop one's abilities. School is thus a place for confrontation, where one begins engaging with continuous education as a

²³ On the construction of one's life project and on the necessity to develop a personal and social dimension of reflexivity in contemporary society see Beck, 2008.

²⁴ Goldthorpe (2007) has recently argued that the term "cultural capital" can be used only if we accept the theory of social reproduction that underlines the relational nature (and the economic valence) of the concept, which exists solely in function of other forms of capital (economic, social) and which is an indicator of social class positioning.

means to deal with life's difficulties, where one can express and recognize abilities and proficiencies, and where there is space for innovation in terms of one's family history.

Education is certainly useful in order to be able to evaluate situations better, to understand what people are talking about. At that age you need to understand what to choose, and if you don't acquire a culture of what surrounds you, you can't decide. The scientific lyceum taught the subjects I was interested in; I love nature. I had already pretty much made up my mind, I already knew I wanted to choose the scientific [lyceum]. My parents gave me a lot of space, they always gave me a lot of freedom and independence of choice, from when I wanted to be a newsagent when I was 5 to my desire to be a park ranger now. My family is not really that much of an example, because my father works in an office and I don't want to work in an office (student, scientific lyceum, Torino, 12).

It was very much their choice, I didn't force them, I don't want the responsibility of hearing them say in the future: "you made me choose the wrong school". They're kids that know what they want, they decided with a lot of conviction. Parents have to support children allowing them the freedom to understand what their aspirations are. Advising, yes, but imposing, never (mother, 12).

The scientific lyceum seemed the most fitting with who I am, since my inclinations are primarily scientific. I'm planning to continue on to further education and get a Bachelor's degree, a qualification that my father didn't have (student, scientific lyceum, Bergamo, 18).

Both my children were educated to go to the classical [lyceum], but I think they did it more thinking about our social status. We insisted on the scientific [lyceum], making suggestions, trying to help them understand also what other schools were offering. The teachers knew we were a family with a certain type of tradition, they knew we had to confirm certain choices, but we felt this educational offer was not adequate. It was a tradition we didn't want to maintain, it seemed like a value that had no justification (mother of a scientific lyceum student, Bari, 32).

The ideal type 2 family is thus characterized by an open educational style, which promotes responsibility and is not marked by determinism. What emerges is an idea of the future as a possibility and that is not exempt from the risk of loss (be it quantitative or qualitative) of a certain cultural inheritance, even when what is at stake are in fact modest social conditions.

In conclusion, the process of intergenerational transmission of cultural resources and the discontinuities that can promote the increase or the dispersal of these resources among new generations, as highlighted by the empirical data analysed, undoubtedly represent an object of study that deserves further attention. It appears to be a particularly meaningful area of further investigation as this aspect is connected to the re-activation of mechanisms of innovation and social transformation that we would expect as a result of the processes of secondary school choice. As we tried to demonstrate in this article, the use of family cultural capital is connected to the circulation of equal school opportunities among different subjects, to the emergence and consolidation of new meaning of education and to a renewed trust towards the educational system, faced with the challenges of the new century.

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