The Effect of Education on Culture and Leisure Consumption

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Background #1

- In overall project ("Mozart with Mom?"), we study how family background and socioeconomic characteristics affect culture and leisure consumption

- We ask: Why do people prefer different cultural genres and how might their participation in culture/leisure activities enhance social inequality?

- We focus on how education affects culture and leisure consumption. Existing research shows large educational gradients in culture consumption:
  - Higher education → Higher overall consumption (e.g., "cultural omnivores")
  - Higher education → Higher likelihood of preferring/consuming "highbrow" activities (e.g., classical music, arts, and "serious" literature).
  - Lower education → Higher likelihood of preferring/consuming "lowbrow" or popular activities (e.g., heavy metal, stand-up comedy, or practical/"hands-on" hobbies).

Background #2

- Existing research is **descriptive**. We want to get closer to identifying the **causal effect** of education on culture and leisure consumption

- How might education affect culture and leisure consumption? Three mechanisms:

1. **Competences**: Education increases analytical/creative competences → Easier to understand complex cultural genres (e.g., opera and classical music).
2. **Preferences**: Education shapes cultural preferences via curricula, peers, and social networks.
3. **Human capital**: Education increases human capital → Higher income/better job → Better opportunity to pay/find time for culture and leisure activities.

Contribution

- **Identification problem**: Education is likely to be correlated with unobserved characteristics that also affect culture/leisure consumption (abilities, preferences, resources; genetic and environmental) → Causal interpretation?

- (We have collected data on cultural consumption among Danish MZ/DZ twins and find additive heritability of cultural consumption [opera, ballet, musical, stand-up comedy etc.] to be in the range .30-.50)

- In this paper, we use a research design that provides a stronger basis for causal interpretations than previous research

Data and Research Design

- We analyze data from the **Wisconsin Longitudinal Study** (WLS). Three selling points:
  - Rich information on culture and leisure consumption (e.g., hours per week spent on cultural events, arts, going to cinema etc.);
  - Information on two (full) siblings from the same family (e.g., within-family variation);
  - Information on pre-college IQ and genetic propensity for education (e.g., individual-level confounders);

Research Design:

1. *OLS regressions* of culture/leisure consumption → Baseline association.
2. *Linear Family fixed effects (FFE) model*: Compare siblings to control out shared family background (genes + environments).
3. *FFE model + individual controls* (especially, pre-college IQ [around age 18] and genetic propensity for education [PGS for educational attainment, Lee et al. 2018]).

Main Findings

- Years of completed education (a) positively correlated with hours spent on "highbrow" cultural activities, as measured by cultural events and (b) uncorrelated with frequency of "lowbrow" activities such as reading, doing hobbies and going out (OLS).

- Positive effect of education on "highbrow" cultural activities after we control for shared family background (FFE), PGS, and pre-college IQ → Positive effect of education?
  What might explain this effect:
  - Competences? Yes (not cognitive skills/IQ, we control for pre-college IQ).
  - Preferences? Yes, education fosters "taste" for highbrow culture.
  - Human capital? No, we control for income and results do not change.

Perspectives

- In next steps, we wish to (a) look at specific educational degrees (e.g., Liberal Arts, Science), (b) analyze life stage differences (we observe culture and leisure participation at app. age 35, 55, and 65), and (c) address pre-college cultural tastes (based on high school yearbooks, available for some respondents)

- Our finding that education fosters competences and tastes that increase participation in "highbrow" cultural activities (i.e., activities that are complex, sophisticated, and yielding high status) fits theories claiming "treatment effect" of education

- The taste for "lowbrow" activities (simple, unsophisticated) unrelated to education. Curious, but other stratifying axes, for example income.