



9th Annual Research Conference 2017



Rethinking parental values, aspirations and practices. Qualitative evidence from the Growing Up in Ireland Study

Jane Gray

Professor of Sociology

Maynooth University Social Sciences Institute





Background

New debates about parental culture and the reproduction of inequality

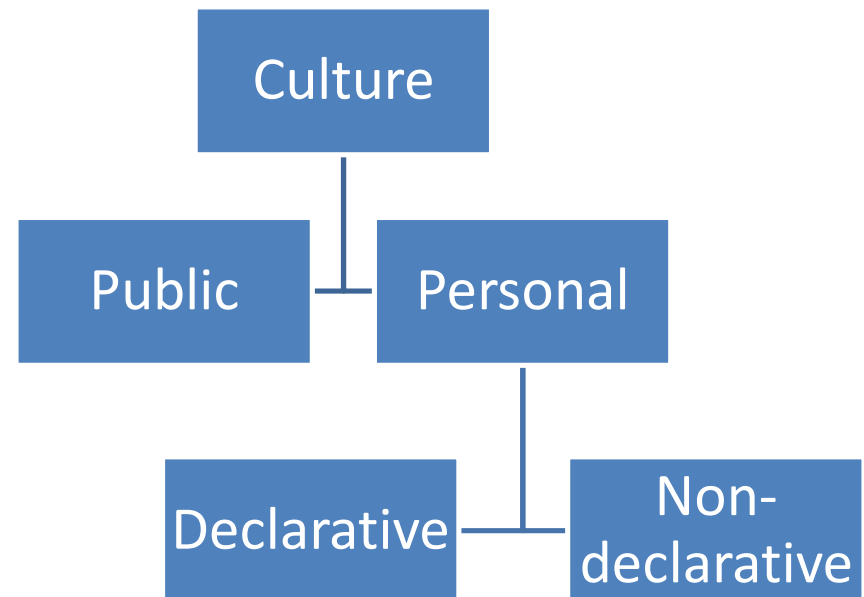
- Classic studies
 - Class differences in parental values and aspirations (Kohn 1963)
- Recent qualitative findings
 - Evidence of shared and cross-cutting sets of values and aspirations (Irwin and Elley 2011, 2013; Perrier 2013)
 - Differences in practices – ‘paradoxical pathways’ (Weininger and Lareau 2009)



Different theoretical understandings of culture

- From socialization to ‘toolkits, frames and repertoires’ (Swidler 1986 Lamont and Small 2008)
- Emerging influence of ‘dual-process’ models of cognition (Vaisey 2009; Lizardo and Strand 2010)
 - Idea that people draw both on ‘unconscious’ dispositions and public repertoires
 - However, claim that dispositions better predict practices

Figure adapted from Lizardo, 2017, p. 94





Methodological debates

- Challenging the value of in-depth interviews
 - Unlike surveys, cannot grasp ‘non-declarative’ dimension of personal culture (Vaisey 2009)
 - Unlike ethnography, tell us little about practices (Jerolmack and Khan 2014)
- Qualitative interviewers fight back
 - Importance of interrogating contradictions for understanding the ‘work’ of creating meaning (Pugh 2013)
 - Allow us to grasp ‘imagined meanings’ (Lamont and Swidler 2014)



Background

EVIDENCE FROM SURVEY DATA



Parental values

Consistent with international evidence the European Values Survey shows that older, better-educated and female Irish parents are more likely to select values associated with autonomy and less likely to select religious faith as important for their children to learn at home.

However, prioritization of these values not significantly related to occupation or household income.

Irish parents across all categories continue to select obedience as an important value, similarly to parents in other countries in the 'Roman Catholic cultural zone' (Fjellvang 2011)

Table II. Percent of parents (respondents with one or more children) choosing selected values as important for children to learn at home

	Independence	Imagination	Religious Faith	Obedience
Age				
15-29	66.7	54.8	36.7	50.9
30-49	73.0	55.9	38.4	55.2
>=50	51.0	35.7	51.3	59.0
Valid N	454	465	426	393
Chi-Square	20.757***	18.225***	7.663*	1.234
Sex				
Male	56.8	40.3	46.6	56.1
Female	66.4	51.9	42.1	56.3
Valid N	454	466	425	395
Chi-Square1	3.986*	5.623**	0.685	0.000
Respondent's Education				
No Secondary	42.1	36.4	55.4	62.3
Lower Secondary	68.7	43.5	33.1	50.4
Upper Secondary	65.0	47.4	50.0	62.4
Any Post-Secondary	68.1	57.6	42.7	50.0
Valid N	446	456	418	387
Chi-Square	17.579***	9.823*	11.410**	5.678
Respondent's Occupation				
Professional and Managerial	68.3	50.5	44.7	44.0
Non-Manual	58.2	45.0	41.0	57.8
Manual and Elementary	62.4	42.9	44.5	56.4
Valid N	383	393	352	329
Chi-Square	2.615	1.453	0.443	4.364
Household Income				
Low	62.5	45.3	48.7	61.4
Medium	63.1	46.2	53.1	57.5
High	70.5	50.6	43.8	54.8
Valid N	271	277	252	230
Chi-Square	1.528	0.560	1.536	0.652

1 Continuity correction applied

Source: EVS (2011): European Values Study 2008: Integrated Dataset (EVS 2008). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA4800 Data file Version 3.0.0, [doi:10.4232/1.11004](https://doi.org/10.4232/1.11004). Weight applied.



Parental expectations and concerted cultivation

- Evidence from Growing Up in Ireland study
 - Parental expectations (Williams et al. 2009)
 - Expectations of educational achievement for nine-year olds varied by mother's level of education
 - However, most mothers across all education levels expected their child to achieve a third level qualification.
 - Concerted cultivation (McCoy et al. 2012)
 - Class and gender differences in participation in structured activities after school
 - Participation in structured activities linked (in gender differentiated ways) to attitudes towards schooling and academic achievement



Evidence from qualitative interviews

QUALITATIVE STUDY WITH THE CHILD COHORT



About the qualitative study



- Semi-structured interviews with 120 families who had opted in from the main sample
- Qualitative sample purposive and stratified according to socio-economic status, urban/rural location and family type (one or two resident parents)
- Deposited in Irish Qualitative Data Archive, disseminated through Digital Repository of Ireland



Guidelines from qualitative interview schedule

The researcher explains that they are now going to ask the parent(s) some questions about their concerns and aspirations for the child.

- What are your concerns for the future regarding [child]?
- What pressures does this put on the family?
- What goals do you have for [child]?
- Do you think [child] will have the opportunity to do this?
- What do you think needs to happen for [child] to get to do this?



Low income parent (GUI_047)

Parents' responses typically incorporate generic statements about being 'happy and healthy' with:

- Normative expectations - 'happy to be honest'
- Aspirations for personal fulfilment – 'enjoy school' and 'happy in himself'
- Hopes surrounding relationships – 'have a few friends'
- Expectations for educational and occupational achievement (often non-directive) – 'get the most out of it' and 'whatever he wants to be'

I: what aspirations and concerns do you have for @@Dennis##'s future?

M: I just hope that he'd be healthy and...that he'd have a few friends and that he'd enjoy his childhood...and that he'd enjoy school and he'd enjoy going in to secondary and...get the best out of it and the most out of it and just that he'd be happy to be honest and content, and happy in himself you know and whatever he wants to be

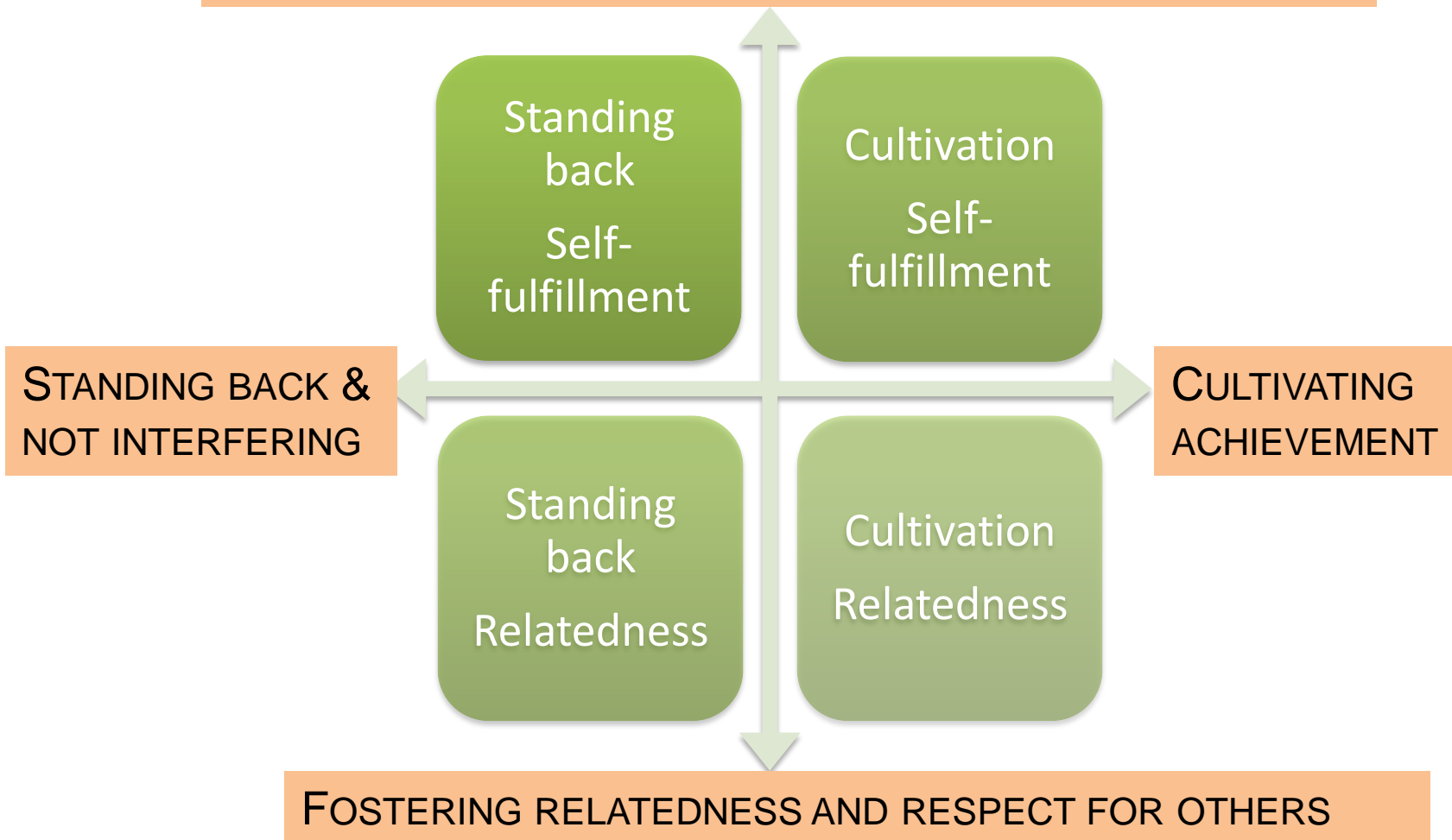


Method

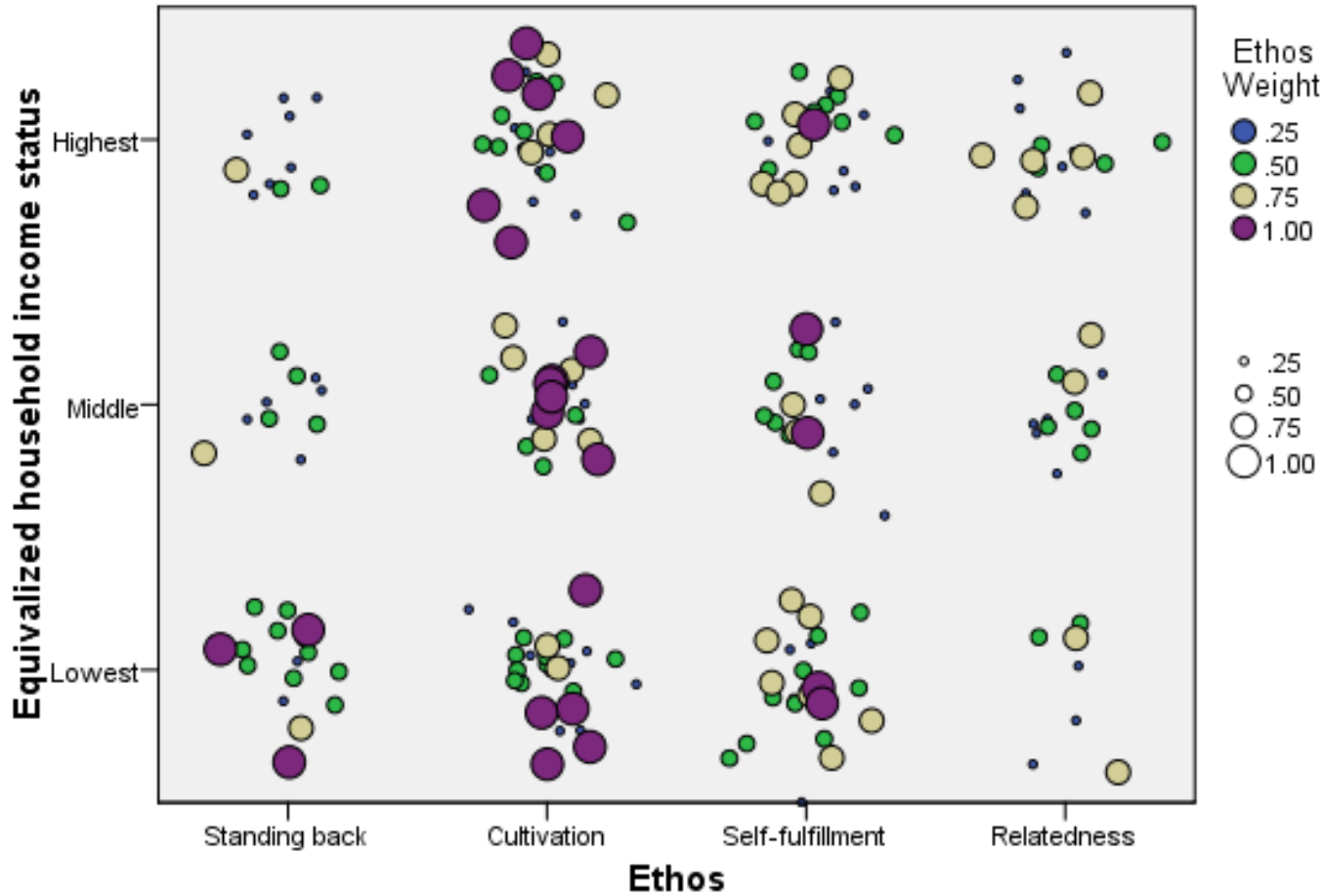
- Identification of ‘cultural configurations’
 - ‘Ensembles of practical and activated constituted knowledge, focused on ongoing shared goals of collectivities’ (Patterson 2014, p. 6)
- ‘Abductive’ approach (Timmermans and Tavory 2014)
 - Initial identification of themes by lead researcher
 - Independent fuzzy-set coding to identify extent of ‘membership’ within configuration
 - Refinement of configurations through discussion and agreement on conflicting scores

Four configurations

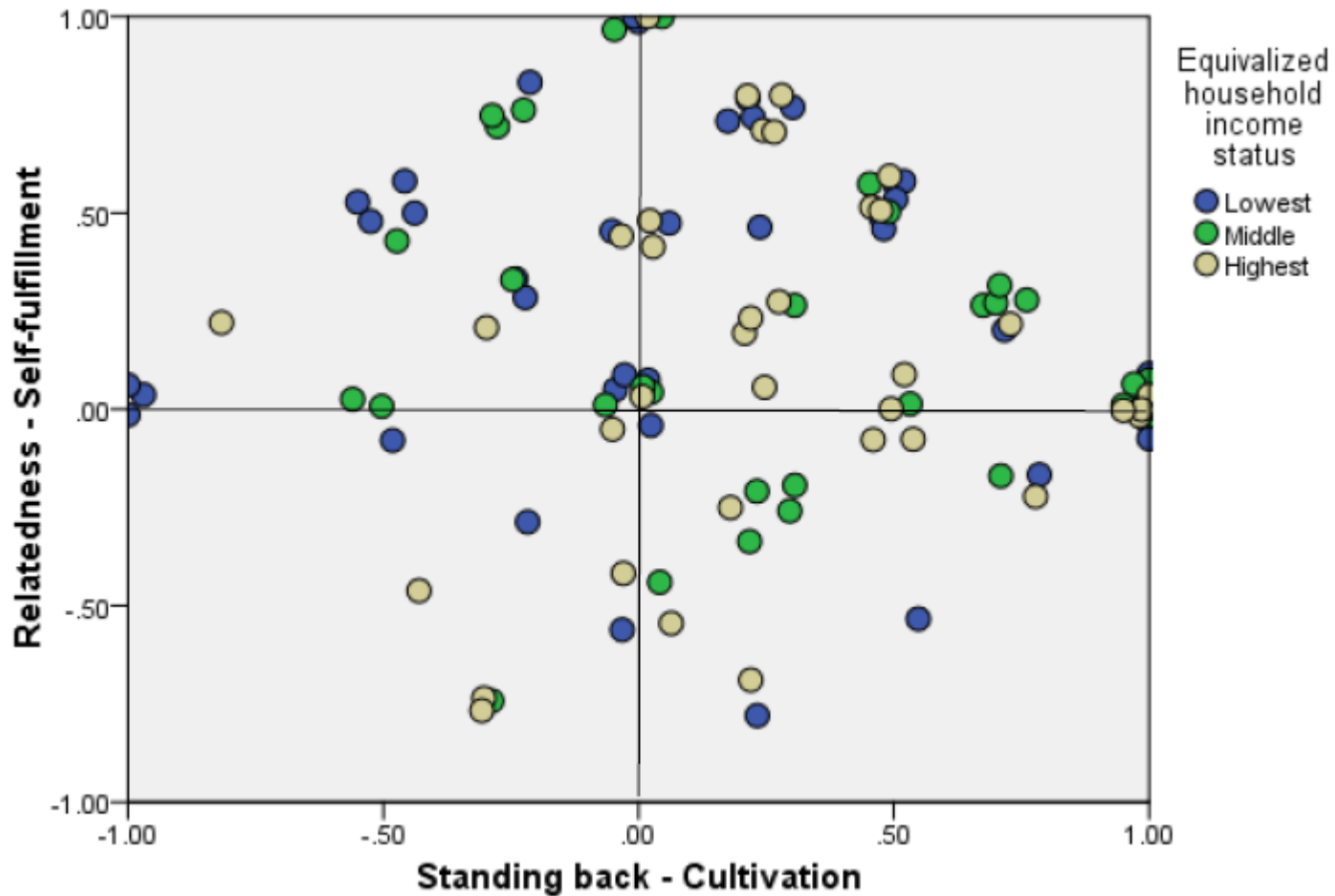
PROMOTING INDIVIDUAL HAPPINESS AND SELF-FULFILMENT



Distribution of configurations



Distribution of individuals





G084, Mother, Middle Income

Upper right quadrant

High level of orientation to cultivating achievement, moderate level of emphasis on happiness and self-fulfillment

“I’d like to see him doing something professional, so he could pay his way. All my brothers are builders and that was all right in their 20’s and 30’s but they are hitting their 40’s now and its tough for them...But no generally he’s very clever he’s good at school...I would like to see them find something that they are happy with. You don’t want a job to be a job really you want it to be more...[I]f any of them want to go to college all the stops will be pulled out to make it possible for them.”



GU051, Two Parents, High Income

Upper right quadrant

Significant emphasis both on achievement and personal fulfilment

Nice example of how upper-income participants often use humour to address moral ambivalence around orientation towards securing high earnings

M: Health and happiness really. Health and happiness, that's all I want....[L]ike we both have this conversation with him where you know he says "I want to be a fireman." ...And I'd say, "would you not like to be a doctor And [father] would say 'you know you're right, just do what will make you happy, not what's going to make you lots of money.' Like money will make him happy...money will help happiness (laugh). But no, I hope that...we just want him to feel very secure and happy and healthy then."



G041, Two Parents, High Income

Bottom left quadrant

Emphasis on standing back and on quality of relationships (especially by father in extended quote not included here)

Note also evaluative distancing from 'other' parents who have strong achievement goals

"M: [To]be honest I don't have concerns, I [...] will worry about it like in the future. I have got to make sure he is happy and healthy now. ..

F: [...]He is mixing well with all his peers. There is nothing bad about him, he is not bullied or he is not a bully [...] You can only guide them....

M: Really now personally I have no hopes and dreams for him it is whatever he wants to do. Like... I know people who are talking about wanting them to go to university and all, I have nothing like that in my head for him...if he doesn't want to he won't do it."



GU068, Low-Income, Mother, Lone Parent

Bottom left quadrant

Emphasis on standing back and
happiness

Note reference to avoiding danger

“Em...I suppose the same as every mother who has a daughter. I think as long as children are happy everything else will be fine. It doesn't matter what else is going on in their life as long as they are happy. [...]

I am not one of these mothers who sets goals for their kids. As long as they are happy. As long as they are not putting themselves in danger. I honestly think that is the most important thing.”



GU101, Mother, Low-Income, Lone Parent

Bottom right quadrant

Emphasis on quality of relationships and achievement

Good example of how participants often wove together statements about aspirations with statements about personal values

Participant continues to describe how other members of her family continued to third level – describes university education as ‘the norm’ in her family.

“R: I would hope that he would go to university. I would hope that he is happy in himself and that he likes himself and he is a nice person and a good friend to his friends and he would have the guts to stand up for what he believes in, that he disagrees with something that he would be able to say it. [...]

I: And do you think he will have the opportunity to go to university?

R: I shouldn’t see why not.”



Overview

- Qualitative responses to questions about ‘hopes and dreams’ take the form of shared, overlapping configurations in which
 - Statements about aspirations are interwoven with statements about personal values
 - Moral ambivalence about practices of cultivation is displayed through distancing from ‘other’ parents and humour
- However, there are class differences in the distribution and inflection of configurations
 - Lower income parents more likely to adhere to configuration centred on ‘standing back’
 - Middle income parents display less ambivalence about achievement orientation



Discussion

- Qualitative interviews have been criticized in recent times because they are performative and take the form of ‘post-hoc rationalisations’
- However, this analysis has shown how qualitative interviews can reveal the ‘cultural work’ through which personal ‘declarative culture’ gives rise to shared public culture
- Implications for policy
 - Better understanding of differentiated and overlapping cultural configurations key to developing approaches that are widely accepted and likely to be successful in their implementation



Acknowledgements

- Thanks to Ruth Geraghty (Data Curator, Children's Research Network of Ireland and Northern Ireland), who provided invaluable assistance with coding the data and thinking about configurations
- The 'Family Rhythms' study which provided the foundation for this work was funded by the Irish Research Council under a Government of Ireland Senior Research Fellowship (2011)



References

- **Data**

Williams, J, Greene, S, Doyle, E, Harris, E, Layte, R, McCoy, S, McCrory, C, McDaid, R, McNally, S, Merriman, B, Murray, A, Nixon, E, O'Dowd, T, O'Moore, M, Quail, A, Smyth, E, Swords, L, & Thornton, M. Growing Up in Ireland (GUI), Digital Repository of Ireland [Distributor], Irish Qualitative Data Archive [Depositing Institution]

- **Bibliography**

Irwin, S. and Elley, S. (2011) Concerted Cultivation? Parenting Values, Education and Class Diversity. *Sociology* 45(3): 480–495

Irwin, S. and Elley, S. (2013) Parents' hopes and expectations for their children's future occupations. *The Sociological Review* 61(1): 111–130.

Jerolmack, C. and Khan, S. (2014) Talk is cheap. *Ethnography and the Attitudinal Fallacy. Sociological Methods and Research* 43, 2: 178-209.

Kohn, M.L. (1963) Social class and parent child relationships: an interpretation. *American Journal of Sociology* 68 (4): 471-480.

Lamont, M. and Small, M. (2008) How Culture Matters: Enriching our Understanding of Poverty. In *The Colors of Poverty: Why Racial and Ethnic Disparities Persist*, edited by A. Lin and D. Harris. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 76-102.

Lamont, M. and Swidler, A. (2014) Methodological Pluralism and the Possibilities and Limits of Interviewing. *Qualitative Sociology* 37, 2: 153-171.

Williams, J. , Greene, S., Doyle, E., Harris, E., Layte, R., McCoy, S., McCrory, C., Murray, A., Nixon, E., O'Dowd, T., O'Moore, M., Quail, A., Smyth, E., Swords, L. and Thornton, M. 2009. Growing Up in Ireland, National Longitudinal Study of Children, Report 1. The Lives of 9 Year Olds. Dublin: Stationery Office.



References continued.

- Lizardo, O. (2017) Improving Cultural Analysis: Considering Personal Culture in its Declarative and Nondeclarative Modes. *American Sociological Review* 82 (1): 88-115.
- Lizardo, O. and Strand, M. (2010) Skills, toolkits, contexts and institutions: Clarifying the relationship between different approaches to cognition in cultural sociology. *Poetics* 38: 204-227.
- McCoy, S., D. Byrne and J. Banks. 2012. 'Too much of a good thing? Gender, concerted cultivation and unequal achievement in primary school education.' *Child Indicators Research* 5: 155-178.
- Patterson, O. (2014) Making sense of culture. *Annual Review of Sociology* 40: 1-30.
- Perrier, M. (2013) Middle-class mother's moralities and 'concerted cultivation': class others, ambivalence and excess. *Sociology* 47(4): 655-670.
- Pugh, A. J. (2013) What good are interviews for thinking about culture? Demystifying interpretive Analysis. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 1(1): 42-68.
- Swidler, A. (1986) Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies. *American Sociological Review* 51(2): 273-286.
- Tavory, Iddo and Stefan Timmermans. 2014. *Abductive analysis: theorizing qualitative research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vaisey, S. (2009). Motivation and Justification: A Dual-Process Model of Culture in Action. *American Journal of Sociology* 114(6): 1675-1715.
- Weininger, E.B. and Lareau, A. (2009) Paradoxical Pathways: An Ethnographic Extension of Kohn's Findings on Class and Childrearing. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71(3): 680-695.