

Inherited Networks: the Intergenerational Transmission of Social Networks

Aim

This project aims to investigate to what extent social network connections and network resources are transmitted from parents to their children. The project contributes to theoretical and empirical knowledge on intergenerational inequality by focusing on social networks as a key, yet understudied, mechanism through which (dis-)advantage is reproduced across generations.

Theoretical background

Children from advantaged families often get a lasting head start in life, while those from disadvantaged backgrounds face persistent barriers that limit their opportunities. This persistent inequality has been a central concern in the social sciences as it challenges the ideal of a meritocratic society and undermines equal opportunity. Even against a backdrop of relatively widespread intergenerational mobility, parental background continues to shape key life outcomes, including educational and occupational attainment. While previous research has extensively documented the intergenerational transmission of cultural and economic capital, the extent and mechanisms of social capital transmission across generations remain relatively underexplored. By integrating perspectives from social capital theory, network sociology, and stratification research, this project aims to better understand to what extent parents' and children's networks show similarities, in which aspects, and under which conditions this intergenerational transmission is stronger or weaker. In addition, the project seeks to uncover the mechanisms through which network connections and resources are inherited, by examining parents' (un-)successful transmission strategies, and assessing whether these vary across socioeconomic status groups.

Research design

This PhD project is part of the broader NWO-funded research programme 'SHINE: SHaping unequal futures through Inherited Networks', which will collect multigenerational quantitative and qualitative data on the intergenerational transmission of social networks and their career outcomes among a representative adult population. The PhD candidate will analyse both existing panel data and newly collected survey data (e.g. with multilevel regression and longitudinal panel analysis). We will refine existing network measures to better capture inherited networks, with a primary focus on network size, composition, resources, and overlap. In addition, the candidate will work closely with the SHINE postdoctoral researcher to collect qualitative data aimed at understanding the mechanisms underlying intergenerational network transmission. Proficiency in Dutch is therefore required for this project.

Literature

- Gemar, A. (2024). Parental status connection and social network variety in adulthood. *Societies*, 14(2), 26.
- Otero, G., Volker, B., & Rozer, J. (2021). Open but segregated? Class divisions and the network structure of social capital in Chile. *Social Forces*, 100(2), 649-679.

Project initiators: Roza Meuleman (RU) Margriet van Hek (RU)

Location: Radboud University, Nijmegen, Department of Sociology