

# Social capital and the educational expectations of young people

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**Alireza Behtoui**

Södertörn University, Sweden

## Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the determinants of the educational expectations of young people in disadvantaged urban areas in three large cities in Sweden. In addition to the conventional predictors such as parental resources (economic and cultural capital) and demographic characteristics (such as age, gender, immigration background), this study examines the impact of the different types of social capital (both within-family and extra-familial), on the educational ambitions of these young people. The results indicate that the class background of the respondents, together with the demographic characteristics of young people, are important predictors of their educational ambition. Different forms of social capital also explain a significant part of the variance in students' educational expectations.

## Keywords

Educational expectations, young people, social capital, Sweden

Researchers in the field of education studies distinguish between educational *expectations* – realistic goals – and *aspirations* – ideal ones (see, for example, Portes et al., 2013: 560). As Brookover et al. (1967: 393) suggest, aspiration is about wishes or 'desires to excel', while expectation is about a realistic plan/goal for the future, a 'perceived likelihood of success'. In other words, while 'aspirations' reflect what pupils hope to study, 'expectations' are grounded in: a) relatively clear valuations of the intended education, and b) an awareness of personal and structural constraints. Many studies in this field acknowledge that 'idealistic' aspirations and 'realistic' expectations 'are highly correlated and yield similar results', and explain a substantial portion of the variation in the future educational achievements of individuals (Buchmann and Dalton, 2002: 101). The educational expectations of young people, as used in this article, refer to 'subjective assessments of how far in school they reasonably expect to go' (Reynolds and Burge, 2008: 486) or, as Portes et al. (2013: 566) put it, a 'realistic level believed to be attainable'.

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## Corresponding author:

Alireza Behtoui, Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University & School of Social Sciences, Södertörn University, Universitetsvägen 10 B, 106 91 Stockholm, Sweden.

Email: alireza.behtoui@su.se

The data used in this study were collected from pupils attending schools mainly in relatively disadvantaged areas of three large cities in Sweden, since the general aim of this study is to provide insights into the factors that influence these pupils' plans for their future education. The students' educational performance in these schools was considerably below the national average. As previous research has demonstrated, some of the young people in such schools potentially run the risk of becoming early school-leavers (Rumberger, 2011). A deeper understanding of the factors affecting the educational expectations of these young people can facilitate the implementation of helpful intervention programmes through which to decrease educational inequality.

There is strong evidence from earlier research demonstrating that the class background of pupils (i.e. their parental resources; the economic and cultural capital accessible to them) remains the primary predictor of differences in educational expectations and outcomes. Inspired by research linking economic and cultural capital with social capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Coleman, 1988), this article explores the extent to which the different forms of young people's *social capital* affect their educational expectations. While in earlier research only limited dimensions of social capital were included, this study enlarges the research field by presenting a more rigorous and wider set of measurements of the concept. In addition to those dimensions of social capital which have been used in many previous studies, and by applying Bourdieu's conceptualization of social capital, this study presents two other dimensions of the concept, namely the resources to which young people have access through their *parents' social networks* and their own *membership in social organizations*. In this way, my study can provide more profound insights into the possible underlying mechanisms involved in generating educational inequality.

The following research questions, in particular, have guided this study.

- Given the class background, health problems and demographic characteristics of the students, what impact do the different forms of social capital have on their educational expectations?
- What are the differences between young people of varying class, gender and immigrant background regarding their access to different types of social capital?

In the next section, the theoretical approach of the study is described. The following section presents the data, and the measurements of the different variables are explained. The results of the analysis are then shown, before the final section summarizes the findings.

## Theoretical framework

Numerous longitudinal studies in the USA have consistently demonstrated that young people's educational expectations have a clear effect on their school performance and educational attainments and vary according to the class, gender and racial background of the pupils (Portes et al., 2013: 566). As Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) state, we cannot isolate young people's educational expectations (their disposition towards education) from the social conditions of production of these expectations, which basically shape them. We should not forget 'the individual and collective history of agents through which the structures of preference that inhabit them are constituted in a complex temporal dialectic with the objective structures that produce them and which they tend to reproduce' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 123). A pupil's disposition towards education, consequently, is closely linked to the different forms of resource (economic, cultural and social capital) to which he or she has access. The children of people at the bottom of the hierarchy do not have high educational expectations because 'They have internalized and resigned themselves to the limited opportunities for school success that exist' for people like them (Swartz, 1997: 197). They

accept their lot in life and withdraw from education, which is such an important arena for competition and social stratification. They manifest, in this way, their practical acceptance of the situation, without considering that there may be possibilities to do otherwise.

As Swartz (1997) puts it, Bourdieu's explanation of educational expectation determined by objective possibilities is insightful but not always conclusive. One obvious example is the higher educational expectations of the children of immigrants relative to their native peers with the same class background (despite awareness of the limited career opportunities in the labour market), as several American studies demonstrate (see, *inter alia*, Feliciano and Rumbaut, 2005).

Explaining educational expectations, proponents of 'status attainment theories' state that such expectations are shaped through interaction with *significant others* (parents, teachers, close friends and other adults and adolescents in their social networks). Young people define their educational expectations in dialogue (and sometimes in struggles) with significant others, conditioned on their perception of the opportunity structure (Haller and Portes, 1973). 'Significant others' are those whose care and love shape young people's tastes, desires, opinions and plans (including their educational expectations) early in life. Significant others also serve as role models. They communicate with young people about their expectations, information and experiences (Taylor, 1997). Educational expectations, accordingly, may be viewed as the product of socialization processes, conditioned by a person's class background, gender, ethnicity, etc.

Accordingly, social capital (the resources to which an individual has access through membership of various social networks), along with economic and cultural capital, is an essential factor in the educational expectations of young people.

Social capital, as Bourdieu (2001) defines it, refers to the sum of the actual and potential resources to which an individual has access through membership of organizations and social networks. Social capital in this tradition (the *social stratification* perspective) deals with the problem of the production and reproduction of social inequality, is defined as an important resource (capital) accumulated through historical relations of power and is associated with a wider set of structural relations and consequently bound up with the gender, class and ethnic backgrounds of individuals (Behtoui and Olsson, 2014). Therefore, those coming from privileged backgrounds (relative to others) are able to take advantage of resource-rich social networks in the competition for scarce resources (Lareau, 2011).

According to Stanton-Salazar (2001), adolescents have different kinds of social networks and interact with 'significant others' in various contexts such as *within-family* and *extra-familial* environments. *Within-family* social capital, as Coleman (1988) defines it, is the extent and type of relations between children and their parents. While the education of the parents signifies their *potential* capability to inspire and help their children, it is the *actual* interactions with the child and the support which the parents give them (intra-familial relations) which affect the latter's educational expectations and performance, maintains Coleman (1988).<sup>1</sup>

*Extra-familial* social capital, on the other hand, is those resources which are provided by a variety of people beyond the immediate family members of the pupils, that is: a) people in their parents' networks, b) school staff, c) their own best friends and d) other adults and adolescents they have contact with through organized and informal leisure activities and membership in civil society organizations. As Stanton-Salazar (2001: 17) maintains, social networks in which adolescents are involved 'are subject to the pull of various contradictory social, cultural, and ideological forces'.

Although the stratification effect of social capital is the predominant pattern, some groups or individuals from the lower strata of society, as Stanton-Salazar maintains, have been able to develop and use certain network resources that allowed them to 'access greater institutional resources (e.g., funded programs), neutralize the effect of deleterious social forces (e.g., racist myths), and maintain high self-regard and a high level of motivation' (Stanton-Salazar, 2001: 19).

When young people from disadvantaged groups have been able to gain access to resources beyond their immediate (ego) social networks, through institutional mediation (teachers and other adults in school) or via membership in civil society organizations, these *counterstratification* resources ‘operate principally as a buffer against the full burden of class and racial oppression’ (Stanton-Salazar, 2001: 257).

To summarize, educational expectations should be understood as the operation of an individual’s mental structure and dispositional properties (*habitus*) which, in turn, is closely linked to the different forms of resource (capital) to which the young person has access. Beside economic and cultural capital, the social capital of young people also has a significant impact on their educational expectations. Through relationships with various individuals in their social network, young people obtain access to important and useful advice, support and information about their education choices. These relationships include *within-family* (support and expectations provided by parents) and *extra-familial* social capital. Thus, students’ educational aspirations are shaped by their own life histories and educational experiences (conditional on their perception of the opportunity structure) and through interaction with *significant others*.

## Data and measurements

The data used in this study were collected during the Spring Term 2014, as a part of the RESL.eu project (Reducing Early School Leaving in Europe), in Sweden. In collaboration with Statistics Sweden (SCB), we conducted a questionnaire survey in 50 schools among students in their final year of ‘compulsory school’ (ninth grade) and the first year of ‘secondary school’. The schools were selected from the register database of SCB. The main criteria for selection were the average merit rating in Year 9 and the average grade point for upper-secondary school. Those schools which had the poorest results and which agreed to participate in the survey were selected.<sup>2</sup>

Among students in the participating schools, the rate of response on average was about 82% (the number of participants divided by the total number of pupils in each selected class). The main reason for non-response was either absence (illness or time off at the moment of the survey) or simply declining to participate. Although there were relatively few non-responses in this study, there were still some which had to be discounted (137 questionnaires were deleted because the respondents gave ‘non-applicable’ answers to the majority of the questions). The final number of respondents after cleaning the dataset was 2033 students. One possible risk for somewhat biased results is students with language difficulties who were likely to be over-represented in the sample. Alongside the results of the questionnaires, the following information was also obtained from the longitudinal register databases of SCB: respondents’ age, gender, final grades in the final year of compulsory schooling, their own and their parents’ birthplace (grouped), their parents’ highest educational attainments and their job status based on the Swedish Standard Classification of Occupations (SSYK).

The index for measuring individuals’ educational expectations was based on answers to the following questions about their future plans: ‘What is the highest level of education you are aiming to achieve before leaving full-time education?’, with five answer alternatives (1 = I don’t know, 2 = Primary school only, 3 = Secondary school–vocational programme, 4 = Secondary school–theoretical programme and 5 = University studies). This was followed by the question ‘How likely do you think it is that you will achieve your desired level of education?’, with four alternative answers (Not at all likely, Not very likely, Fairly likely, Very likely). With the help of answers to the second question, two steps for each level of education (a total of eight values) was calculated (higher for those who answered Fairly or Very likely for the second question), adjusted after their final grades in the last year of compulsory schooling. Ultimately, this index has nine values (a continuous

variable, as defined by Miles and Shevlin (2001), with the lowest value assigned to those who answered 'I don't know' and the highest to those who are determined to continue their education up to university level.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, if the first question is about young people's plans for their future education, the second question specifies their realistic goal for further/higher education (expectations).

The first independent variables included in the analysis are the highest educational attainments and job status of the parents of our respondents (in both cases the parent with the higher-status job and higher level of education determines the family's collective status). Meanwhile, the *living standard* of each respondent was measured by asking about some symbolic but highly illustrative indicators of economic *prosperity* of his/her family. The standard was assessed by a factor analysis of answers to five questions: whether or not they have their own room (to do homework) and have regular access to a) a smartphone, b) a tablet, c) a computer or laptop and d) an internet connection (Yes = 1, No = 0).<sup>4</sup>

Pupils were asked in the questionnaire 'Do you have any longstanding illness or disability, infirmity or mental health problem that affects your daily activities in any way?' The answers which could be given were 'A lot', 'To some extent' or 'Not at all' concerning 1) physical illness, disability or infirmity, 2) a mental health condition or 3) learning difficulties. The variable 'Health problem' is constructed based on the answers to these questions.

The *demographic variables* are gender (Boys = 1) and then immigrant background, which is sorted into the following regional categories, either based on the country of birth of the respondent (first-generation, subscript suffix 1 for each group) or country of birth of the parents (second generation, subscript suffix 2). The countries of birth were: 1) North-West European countries (the EU 15), North America and Australian (NW); 2) other European countries; 3) Asia; 4) Africa; and 5) Latin America. A dummy variable for citizenship status (Swedish citizen = 1) is also included.<sup>5</sup>

The academic performance of respondents is measured by their final grades in the last year of compulsory schooling (a continuous variable from register data).

Measurement of social capital (the resources to which young people had access through their relationships with 'significant others') is based on the characteristics of the adolescents' social networks. Social capital as operationalized in this study includes both within-family and extra-familial features of the concept.

**Within-family social capital.** *Within-family* social capital consists of the following elements:

- First, *parents' support* – a variable based on a combination (through factor analysis) of answers to the question of how they feel about talking to their parents:
  - a) I feel that I can trust my parents as someone to talk to;
  - b) if I talk to my parents, I think they will try to understand how I feel;
  - c) if I'm having trouble with my schoolwork, I can go to my parents for help;
  - d) if I'm having a social or personal problem, my parents would have advice about what to do;
  - e) when I feel bad about something, my parents will listen; and
  - f) my parents praise me when I do well in school (five scales from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree').
- Second, *parents' expectations* – a variable based on the young people's reports of their parents' hopes and expectations for their children's educational attainment: What are your parents' expectations for your education? The answers (five scales) ranged from 'Not studying further than primary school' (Grade 9) to 'Continue onto college or university'.<sup>6</sup>

- Third, *family structure* – measured with a dummy variable indicating whether the child lives in a two-biological-parent household (= 1) or another form (= 0). Based on results from previous research, we can assume that children living with both biological parents have access to more resources and greater attention from and guidance of adults (Manning and Lamb, 2003).

*Extra-familial social capital.* *Extra-familial* social capital can be provided by 1) school-based relationships, 2) parental social networks, 3) young people's own friendship networks, and 4) contacts which other individuals develop within the formal and informal organizations and networks to which they belong (Behtoui and Neergaard, 2016).

- 1) School-based social capital: the social climate of a school, i.e. supportive and caring teachers, is particularly important for children in marginalized areas (Woolley and Bowen, 2007). School personnel in general, and teachers in schools in marginalized areas in particular, are key agents in the social networks of these adolescents and a potential source of social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Besides their role as mediators of social reproduction, they can act as 'co-parents and informal mentors' and play a decisive role in preventing the reproduction of class inequality, particularly for those from the lower classes. Goyette and Conchas (2002: 48) write about some school personnel as a source of social capital: 'Teachers provide encouragement, support, supervision, and information to the student', particularly to those for whom they have some sympathy and 'believe are talented or hard-working'. Measurement of the school-based form of social capital includes the following components:
  - First, *teachers' support*, based on a combination (through factor analysis) of answers to questions about teachers in the respondent's school:
    - a) I feel that I can trust my teachers as people to talk to;
    - b) if I talk to my teachers, I think they will try to understand how I feel;
    - c) if I'm having trouble with my schoolwork, I can go to my teachers for help;
    - d) if I'm having a social or personal problem, my teachers would have advice about what to do;
    - e) when I feel bad about something, my teachers will listen; and
    - f) my teachers try to help me do well in school.
  - Second, *teachers' judgements*, based on answers to following questions (reversed scale):
    - a) if I tell my teachers about a problem, they will probably blame me for it;
    - b) my teachers do not treat me fairly;
    - c) my teachers do not care if I fail or succeed; and
    - d) my teachers think that my work is poor.
  - Third, *teachers' expectations* for your education (five scales).
- 2) Family networks: this dimension of young people's social capital refers to the resources that parents are able to access through their social ties. Since social networks are formed largely on the homophily principle (Lin and Erickson, 2008), we can assume that there are important class-specific differences in the structure of parental networks. To measure this type of social capital, this study employs the position-generator method (Lin and Erickson, 2008). A list was drawn up of 30 occupations ranging from low to high in the hierarchical structure of Swedish society. Respondents were asked: 'Thinking about last year, of your relatives or your family's friends whom you meet regularly, is there anyone who has a job listed in the following table?' The *number* of the position (from the list of occupations) where the response was 'Yes', the *highest*-status job among the respondent's contacts, the



range of positions (the distinction between the highest and lowest attainable positions) and the composition of the resources or *average* status of the contacts were assumed to indicate the resources accessible by the pupils' families. Based on these four indications, an index was constructed for each individual through factor analysis, with principal-component methodology and varimax rotation, and labelled as *Family's SocCap*.

- 3) Friends: the third type of extra-familial social capital is the pupils' own networks. In the survey, respondents were asked questions about their best friends, their academic motivation, their attitude towards school, and their future education plans: 'Thinking about the friends you hang out with, how important is it to them to 1) attend class regularly, 2) study, 3) get good grades and 4) continue education to university degree?' (five scales from 'Not at all important' to 'Very important'). These four components do, in fact, measure the same dimension (a positive correlation among them) and, subsequently, an index was constructed for each individual through factor analysis, with principal-component methodology and varimax rotation, and labelled as *friends*.
- 4) Social activities: to measure the fourth form of extra-familial social capital we asked the respondents about their participation in different kinds of social activity. Organized activities (sport, culture) and membership of voluntary associations (whether religious or pupils' council, for example) fulfil an important function in providing a meeting place for pupils with other adults and young people, extending young peoples' social network and, more possibly, providing a stimulus for their further development (cf. Lareau, 2011). Respondents were presented with a list of nine types of activity and asked how often they attend them. The activities included participation in a) athletic associations and sport clubs, b) cultural activities (e.g. art, music, dance and theatre), c) activities organized by religious groups (e.g. church or mosque), d) political party youth organizations, e) charities (like Amnesty, Save the Children and the Red Cross), f) pupils' council, g) scout associations, h) activities organized by community groups, i) spending time at a local youth club, j) meeting up with friends, and k) connecting with friends through social media sites.

## Results

Table 1 summarizes the respondents' characteristics in terms of socio-economic background, with the parents' highest educational level as indicator (divided into three categories). As expected, there is a clear association between the educational level and job status of the respondents' parents and the respondents' own educational performance (final grades). Further there is a positive correlation between the class background of pupils and their own educational expectations, and the same goes for their parents' and teachers' expectations. The number of respondents living with two biological parents also increases with the educational level of the parents. Finally, the three indications of extra-familial social capital show a positive correlation with parents' educational levels.

To gain more precise readings of the data, we further examine the results through a series of regression analyses. In the following section, first, the impact of class background, demographic characteristics, final grades and the various forms of social capital on the educational expectations of young people are examined. Second, the association between class, gender, the migrant background of respondents and their access to various forms of social capital is investigated.

### Expectations and social capital

In Table 2, the results of a series of linear regressions, with the educational expectations of the respondents as the outcome variable, are presented. In Model 1, we examined the impact of our

**Table 1.** Summary of sample characteristics for the three educational levels of parents, mean or %.

Parents' highest educational level (as a proxy for class background of pupils)	Low	Middle	High	Significance
<b>Numbers<sup>a</sup></b>	616	733	545	
<b>Highest job status of parents</b>	30	41	59	All ***
<b>Educational expectations (pupils)</b>	5.1	5.7	6.3	All, at least **
<b>Educational performance (final grade)</b>	185	214	240	All ***
<b>Native-born with native-born parents (%)</b>	34	55	63	
<b>Male (%)</b>	50	56	52	
<b>Parents' expectations</b>	2.7	2.8	3.1	All ***
<b>Parents' support</b>	-.06	.04	.05	Low with High and Middle ***
<b>Living with two biological parents (%)</b>	56	71	73	Low with High and Middle ***
<b>Teachers' support</b>	-.02	.01	.07	Low with High **
<b>Teachers' judgement</b>	-.05	.01	.05	Low with High and Middle **
<b>Teachers' expectations</b>	1.8	2.1	2.4	All ***
<b>Average job status of contacts in family's networks</b>	45	46	51	All ***
<b>Friends</b>	-.07	.05	.09	Low with High and Middle ***
<b>Organized cultural activities</b>	1.6	1.7	2.2	All, at least **
<b>Youth local recreation centre</b>	1.8	1.6	1.4	All, at least **

Notes: <sup>a</sup>There are 109 cases with a missing value on the variable educational levels of parents; \*\*\* denotes significance at 1%, \*\* at 5%.

respondents' class background (indicated by education and job status of parents), family living standards and possibly health problems reported by pupils. As expected, parents' education and job position have a positive and significant impact on their educational expectations. The same goes for the living standards of families, i.e. those with higher living standards had higher expectations. Conversely, there is a negative and significant association between having health problems and educational expectation.

Given the same socio-economic background and in line with previous studies, boys have significantly lower expectations than girls, and their educational underachievement is well documented in the academic literature (see, for example, Jackson, 2003). However, researchers warn us that the gender gap in education should be portrayed as a complex one, intersecting with class and race (Jackson, 2003). Theories about hegemonic masculinities (Phoenix, 2004) provide an explanation for this gap. Educational hard work is perceived by many young boys (particularly for those in the lower echelons of society) as 'feminine' and not compatible with 'cool' masculinity. They avoid academic work and, instead, concentrate on hardness, aggressiveness and confrontation so that they are not the recipients of physical and verbal abuse for being 'feminine'. This anti-swot culture, as Phoenix (2004: 233) puts it, 'is part of boys' constructions of masculinity'.

As shown in Model 2, there is, again, a negative association between being older and educational aims, because older respondents have repeated one year or more at school.

In Model 3, the impact of having an immigrant background is examined. In line with previous research, the results show that, after controlling for socio-economic background, gender, health problems and age, the majority of the children of immigrants report higher educational expectations compared to students with a native background (see, for example, Feliciano and Lanuza, 2016; Heath and Brinbaum, 2007; Van Houtte and Stevens, 2010). For first-generation immigrant children from the NW group and those from Africa and South America, the results are statistically



**Table 2.** Determinants of educational expectations, OLS regression, partial (and standardized) coefficients.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Parents' Highest edu.	.26*** (.20)	.28*** (.06)	.30*** (.18)	.09*** (.08)	.05* (.003)	.03 (.04)	.03 (.02)	.03 (.02)
Parents' Highest status	.05*** (.12)	.05*** (.09)	.07*** (.09)	.003 (.10)	-.007 (.07)	-.008 (.02)	-.009 (.001)	-.009 (.01)
Prosperity	.24*** (-.15)	.19*** (.09)	.20*** (.09)	.15*** (.10)	.05* (.06)	.016 (.04)	-.01 (.03)	-.02 (.03)
Health problem	-.33*** (.15)	-.30*** (.12)	-.28*** (.14)	-.15*** (.16)	-.09*** (.09)	-.06* (.07)	-.07*** (.05)	-.07*** (.04)
Boys		-.70*** (-.17)	-.68*** (-.23)	-.37*** (.22)	-.29*** (.03)	-.19*** (.04)	-.15*** (.03)	-.15*** (.03)
Age		-.60*** (.23)	-.57*** (.23)	-.08*** (.22)	-.10*** (.03)	-.09*** (.03)	-.09*** (.03)	-.08*** (.03)
NW			-.14 (.04)	-.29 (.04)	-.20 (.06)	-.23 (.03)	-.24 (.03)	-.24 (.02)
Rest of Europe			.50*** (.05)	.61*** (.09)	.32*** (.03)	.25* (.05)	.21 (.04)	.21 (.04)
Asia			.61*** (.05)	.65*** (.01)	.36*** (.04)	.29*** (.03)	.26*** (.01)	.26*** (.01)
Africa			.05 (.03)	.44* (.03)	.03 (.03)	.020 (.015)	.06 (.02)	.09 (.02)
South America			.58 (.02)	.58* (.09)	.30 (.08)	.36 (.03)	.36 (.02)	.34 (.02)
Rest of Europe2			.14 (.05)	.09 (.05)	-.10 (.08)	-.16 (.04)	-.18 (.04)	-.19 (.05)
Asia2			.53*** (.07)	.56*** (.07)	.19*** (.06)	.14* (.03)	.10 (.02)	.13 (.02)
Africa2			.42*** (.07)	.70*** (.07)	.35*** (.08)	.39*** (.04)	.38*** (.03)	.43*** (.03)
Citizenship			.47*** (.07)	.12 (.07)	.13 (.08)	.20* (.03)	.19 (.03)	.20 (.03)
Grade				.02*** (.64)	.02*** (.57)	.02*** (.53)	.02*** (.52)	.02*** (.52)
Parents' support					.07*** (.03)	.07*** (.03)	.06*** (.03)	.06*** (.03)
Two bio parents					.005 (.001)	-.1 (.29)	.03 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Parents' expectations					.45*** (.29)	.34*** (.22)	.32*** (.20)	.32*** (.21)
Teachers' support						.05* (.02)	.07*** (.03)	.07*** (.03)
Teachers' judgement						.06* (.03)	.07*** (.03)	.07*** (.03)
Teachers' expectations						.51*** (.20)	.44*** (.18)	.44*** (.18)
Family social capital							.11*** (.05)	.11*** (.05)
Friends							.16*** (.08)	.16*** (.08)
Social Activities								
Sport								.01 (.01)
Cultural								.04* (.03)
Religious								-.04 (.02)
Political								-.06 (.01)
Social								.04 (.01)
Pupils' council								.06* (.02)
Scouts								.02 (.01)
Local association								-.13*** (.04)
Recreation centre								.03 (.01)
Meet friends								-.05* (.03)
Social media								.04 (.02)
R <sup>2</sup> adj.	.089	.18	.19	.495	.564	.595	.601	.603

Notes: \*\*\* denotes significance at 1%, \*\* at 5% and \* at 10% level; in all steps (Models 1–8), the significance of R<sup>2</sup> change is tested.

non-significant.<sup>7</sup> In the same model, variable citizenship is added. The positive and significant coefficient of this variable shows that those who have gained Swedish citizenship have higher expectations compared to others.

How can we then explain that parental economic and cultural capital have a stronger impact on the educational expectations of the children of natives than on those of immigrants?<sup>8</sup> One explanation for this is the desire and expectation of immigrant parents who have not been able to attain a social position in line with their qualifications due to their downward social mobility in the new country. Their orientation and outlook are to encourage their children to ensure a better life for themselves through education and to achieve what the parents could not accomplish. Another explanation, the 'blocked opportunities' approach, emphasizes the structural barriers to labour-market success; immigrants and their offspring who have experienced and have a perception of blocked mobility try to devote more energy to education in order to compensate for these restrictions (Sue and Okazaki, 1990). Other scholars maintain that the socio-economic status of immigrant parents in the receiving country does not reflect their status in the country of origin. Thus, to be able to explicate the social mobility of their offspring, the starting point should be the latter rather than the former (Ichou, 2014).

One final explanation is the less salient impact of class position on shaping the networks of immigrant parents (Behtoui, 2016). The social networks of immigrant families, as a source of social capital, may compensate for their economic and educational disadvantages, provide valuable information and promote higher educational goals (Zhou, 2005). In consequence, the social networks of immigrant parents, with their valuable resources, can be converted into a vital source of higher educational expectations (see further discussion in the next section).

In Model 4, the educational performance of respondents is added. As expected, their final grades in the last year of compulsory school explain a large part of the variance of the educational expectations of young people ( $R^2$  increases from .19 to .495; see also the standardized coefficient of this variable). After the entering of this variable, the coefficients of parents' education and job status are reduced considerably (from .30 to .09 and from .07 to non-significant), which once more confirms that parents' resources are the important predictor of the educational performance of pupils. Control of pupils' grades does not reduce (but actually increases in some cases) the impact of the migrant background variables on educational expectation. This means that the children of immigrants have higher educational expectations than those of natives, even after controlling for their final grades.

In Model 5, the impact of within-family social capital is examined. All three variables show a positive correlation with expectations (two of them are statistically significant). Entering these variables once again reduces the effect of class background and decreases the impact of immigrant background variables. This indicates that part of the effect of the young people's class background on their educational expectations is their parents' support and expectations, as is part of the higher educational expectations of the descendants of immigrants.

In Model 6, school-based social capital variables (the young people's assessment of their teachers) are included. As the results demonstrate, all three variables have a positive and significant effect (the strongest effect was observed for 'teachers' expectations'). One important result regarding young people with health problems is that, by including within-family and school-based social capital, the negative coefficient of health problem reduces from .15 to .06, compared to the previous model.

In Models 7 and 8, the impact of extra-familial social capital variables is investigated. In line with previous studies (see Behtoui and Neergaard, 2016) and given the pupils' class background, the demographic characteristics of the respondents, their grades, their within-family and school-based social capital, their parental social networks with valuable resources (more social capital) and being friends with those who hold positive attitudes towards education all have a positive and

significant impact on pupils' educational expectations. Among organized social activities (which are presumed to enable pupils to obtain resources which would normally be beyond their individual reach), we find positive significant effects for just two variables. Pupils' participation in 'organized cultural activities' and involvement in 'pupils' council' in the schools demonstrate positive associations with the educational expectations of the young people in this sample. Conversely, their participation in 'activities organized by community groups' and 'meeting up with friends', show negative associations. The positive effect of the former organized activities and the negative impact of the latter activities on the expectations of the young people in this sample, as Bankston and Zhou (2002) explain, is possibly due to the resources provided by formal organizations in mainstream society, in the first case, in contrast to the local network closure of young people in marginalized areas of big cities in the second.

Furthermore, as we can observe, none of the variables which indicate class background of pupils is significant after the inclusion of variables that specify the different dimensions of social capital (from Model 5 to Model 8). This means that social capital is a partial mediator between class background and the educational expectations of young people and tends to reproduce class stratification.

### *Access to different forms of social capital*

To explore how gender, class and immigrant background contribute to the distribution of the different dimensions of social capital, a series of regression analyses has been estimated with various forms of social capital as the dependent variables (*class background* of respondents in this part is measured by a factor analysis combination of a) the prestige scores of occupational status and b) years of education of the respondents' parents).

As demonstrated in Table 3, there are no significant differences regarding parents' support. The only exception is first-generation young people from Africa and the Rest of Europe who, compared to others, consider their parents to be less understanding.

Next, those with a higher-class background, girls, and young people of immigrant background (compared with those from the lower classes, boys, and those of native background) report greater hopes and expectations of their parents for the children's educational attainment.

Furthermore, we can see from columns 3 and 4 in Table 3 that a higher-class background is positively associated with more experiences of teachers who show 'support' and 'fair judgement'. Conversely, however, boys and pupils with immigrant backgrounds report experiences of less 'support' and fewer 'fair judgements' from their teachers. It is possible, as Goyette and Conchas (2002) claim, that teachers and other school personnel support and judge students differently, based on the children's gender and race. As a recent Swedish study demonstrated, students with immigrant backgrounds are subject to sizeable and robust discrimination by their teachers in high-school grading. The effect of this direct form of discrimination is greater for those of non-European migrant backgrounds (Hinnerich et al., 2011). In the case of teachers' expectations, the trends are identical for class and gender but the descendants of immigrants report higher expectations by their teachers.

There are positive and significant associations between young people's class background, their family's social capital and their best friends' attitudes towards education. There is a negative association between the same types of social capital and being a boy. As far as the attitudes of their best friends are concerned, this is unsurprising because, as already mentioned, educational hard work is not perceived by many young boys (particularly those, as in our sample, in the lower echelons of society) to be compatible with 'cool' masculinity.

According to the results shown in column 6, those whose parents were in the higher social classes tend to have access to family social networks with valuable resources. But why should boys (compared with girls) have reported fewer contacts in their family's social networks? It seems to

**Table 3.** Access to different types of social capital by gender, class and immigrant background, OLS regression, partial coefficients.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Class background	.035	.254**	.043*	.050*	.112**	.173**	.059**	.214**	-.024	-.022	-.029
Boys	.062	-.292**	-.122**	-.250**	-.089*	-.135**	-.344**	-.430**	-.012	.000	-.307**
NW	-.049	-.172	-.154	.015	-.011	.052	.024	-.036	-.023	-.005	-.103
Rest of Europe	-.264*	.612**	-.238*	-.121	.247*	.119	.342**	-.006	.125*	.200**	-.115
Asia	-.410	.565**	-.283**	-.132*	.276**	.358**	-.001	.037	.272**	.194**	-.302**
Africa	-.275*	.597**	-.347**	.142	.123	-.086	-.386**	.151	.203*	.198*	-.260
South America	-.098	.637*	-.458**	-.334*	.135	.427*	-.156	.211	.035	.179	-.503*
Rest of Europe2	.096	.474**	-.277*	.052	.104	.345**	.101	.163	.091	.050	-.148
Asia2	-.101	.880**	-.027**	-.116*	.265**	.414**	.154**	-.119	.133**	.167**	-.146*
Africa2	-.068	.741**	.086	-.212*	.227*	.328**	-.124	-.175	.185**	.210**	-.149
R <sup>2</sup> -Adj.	.02	.084	.021	.021	.014	.045	.043	.051	.025	.02	.02

Notes: \*\*\*, \*\*\*, \* denotes significance at 1%, \*\*, \* at 5% and \* at 10% level. 1 = Parents' support, 2 = Parents' expectations, 3 = Teachers' support, 4 = Teachers' judgement, 5 = Teachers' expectations, 6 = Family's social networks, 7 = Friends, 8 = Cultural activities, 9 = Pupils' council, 10 = Local association activities, 11 = Meet friends.

be due to the fact that the work of maintaining the family's social capital through different activities and ceremonies which bring people together 'falls almost exclusively to the women' (Bourdieu 2001: 97). Therefore, the girls in our sample are more observant about the family's social networks than the boys.

Pupils with an immigrant background have friends with higher educational ambitions and higher family social capital. This is because their friends have mainly the same background (Behtoui, 2015b) and, as mentioned above, schooling occupies a central place in the future plans of immigrant children whose families aspire to upward social mobility. They also reported higher family social capital, which may be caused by the socialization patterns of immigrant families in which the class constraints are less salient in structuring the social networks compared to others (Behtoui and Neergaard, 2016).

Regarding participation in the different social activities which had a positive impact on the expectations of our young respondents, the results in columns 8 and 9 show that those with a higher-class background more often participate in organized cultural activities. In the case of boys, we have the opposite trend and, for immigrant background, there are mixed results. Membership of pupils' councils in schools are significantly positive only for some groups of immigrant children.

Participation in local/neighbourhood associations, with a negative impact on educational expectations, is not significant in the case of class and gender. However, several groups of immigrant background participate more often than natives in such activities, probably due to the lack of opportunities to participate in mainstream organized leisure activities. As Lareau (2002) shows, the (organized and informal) leisure activities of children from the different social groups vary and consequently generate different social contacts.

Boys (relative to girls) and some groups of immigrant background (relative to the children of natives) have reported 'meeting up with friends' slightly less often. In the latter case, the reason seems to be that they experience more control from their parents regarding their relations with friends.<sup>9</sup>

## Summary and discussion

The students' disposition towards education, as the results of this study show, are affected by the individual's educational and life experiences, themselves shaped by class, gender and race/ethnicity, as well as by their interactions with significant others (parents, peers, teachers and other reference groups).

The findings in this study demonstrate that class background, health problems, gender and migrant background explain about 18% of the variance in the educational expectations of young respondents in this sample. It is also worth noting that the bulk of young people of immigrant background in this study report higher educational expectations than those of native background.

Within-family social capital in general, and parents' expectations about educational attainment in particular, had a positive impact on young people's educational aims. This means that having well-educated parents with a high social status is not a sufficient reason for having high expectations. It needs, particularly, parental support and their active presence in their children's lives. On the contrary, lower-class parents may, through more support and higher expectations, compensate for their lower economic and educational capital. As Portes and Rumbaut (2001: 105) put it, parental expectations 'set the framework for the development of the children's own ambitions'. Boys in this study reported a lower parental expectation compared to girls.

The results regarding school-based social capital demonstrated that teachers' support (i.e. how they treat their pupils) and, more importantly, their expectations for the educational achievements of the students, have a significant impact on forming the future educational plans of these young

people. Boys and several groups of pupils of immigrant background reported lower levels of support and fair judgement from their teachers. In all dimensions of school-based social capital, the lower-class background of young people was associated with lower levels of teachers' support and expectations.

Having a resource-rich family social network and friends with a positive attitude towards education showed a positive impact on the educational expectations of young people. Higher-class position was positively associated with these two dimensions of extra-familial social capital. After controlling for class background, several groups of young people of immigrant background reported higher access to these types of social capital, compared to the offspring of natives. This is what Stanton-Salazar (2001) has identified as the 'counterstratification' effect of social capital for this group.

Participation in social activities, if they were organized and in mainstream society organizations, generated positive social capital, while being involved in activities arranged by local organizations and meeting friends had a negative impact on the educational expectations of participants in this study.

The results of this study draw attention to the fact that young people and their families are not isolated islands, but are deeply embedded in a nexus of various kinds of social networks. These networks include kinship members of the extended family, friends of the family and friends of the children. They also have regular interactions with school personnel, other adults and adolescents active in different kinds of mainstream and local organizations. The findings also demonstrate that extra-familial social capital plays an important role in forming the educational expectations of young people.

In all dimensions of social capital, as the results have demonstrated, the lower-class position of young people (associated with lower educational expectations/performance) was also associated with less access to network resources. These are the youngsters who, more than any other, encounter significant risk factors in their lives. They definitely need the emotional, personal and informational support of their extra-familial networks. External interventions (e.g. attempts by the public authorities or civil society organizations) to enhance access to social capital for young people from subordinate groups are certainly effective when it comes to the extra-familial forms of social relationship. Relationships in the schools and activities in different kinds of organization (in schools and in the children's leisure time) are the spheres of such interventions. Activities which aim to empower these young people, as Stanton-Salazar (2011: 1097) puts it, should embed them in resource-rich social networks, enhance their access to resource-generating relationships and be fruitful in orienting them towards this empowerment.

One limitation of this study is that we have not examined the possible 'school effects' on the educational expectations of pupils. Further studies are needed to assess the more exact impact of school-based social capital, through taking into consideration differences across schools that might be due to policies, practices or ambiance of these organizations.

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## Notes

- 1 Including *within-family* as an aspect of young people's social capital, and measuring this aspect with classical measures such as 'family structure' and 'parental expectations', is not an over-extended use of the concept of social capital. Because, as Coleman argues, 'within-family' social capital, i.e. the quality of the parent-child relationship in a family, is an important additional aspect of young people's social capital, because, if highly educated parents do not have sufficient time to interact with their children, their higher education will not have an adequate impact on the children's educational outcomes. This aspect of social capital (within-family social capital) has been used in several studies on the educational achievements, aspirations and expectations of the children of immigrants (see, for example, Portes and Rumbaut, 2001).
- 2 As our results show, about 27% of the parents of our respondents have a university education. This may indicate that schools with poor performance are not totally segregated and homogeneous in the Swedish context (compared with schools in American hyper-ghettos; see Behtoui, 2013).
- 3 The rates of the different levels are as follows; I do not know (value 0) = 2.5%, 1= 1.8%, 2=2.8%, 3=13.3%, 4=12.9%, 5=8.1%, 6=8.7%, 7=31.7% and 8 (determined to continue education up to university level)=18.2%. Those who answered 'I do not know' in this sample had the lowest mean final grades in the last year of compulsory schooling (39.2 of a total of 340).
- 4 In all factor analyses in this article, item-to-scale correlations, correlation matrix and the *Cronbach's alpha* have been measured, to ensure that the item-to-scale correlation coefficient is not lower than 0.3 and we have a reliability coefficient of .70 or higher. In all cases, a one-factor solution (one latent variable) was appropriate (results for these factor analyses are available upon request).
- 5 Among the respondents, 49.4% had parents who were born in Sweden (native background). The others were divided into the following groups: NW = 3.2% (66 individuals); Rest of Europe1= 4.9% (99); Asian1= 11.2% (227); Africa1= 3.0% (61); South America1= 1.1% (23); Rest of Europe2 = 5.8% (117); Asian2 = 16.1% (328); and finally Africa2= 5.3% (108). A total of 9.8% of respondents did not have Swedish citizenship. There were a few cases among the first generation (21 individuals) with parents from different groups. For this cases, the country of origin of the mother was used (for an explanation of the rationale behind this usage, see Feliciano, 2006).
- 6 About parents' expectations, we should remember Cynthia Feliciano's (2006: 291) remark when she writes 'Although pupils' perception of what their parents [and their teachers] want for them may not match their actual expectations, pupils' expectations are likely to be shaped (to some extent) by these perceptions'.
- 7 The effect of the 'South America' variable is not statistically significant, possibly due to the small number of individuals in this group.
- 8 To see if there is an interaction effect between the class and the immigrant background of respondents, a regression analysis was conducted with 'educational expectation' as the outcome variable and three control variables: 'class background' (measured by a factor analysis combination of a) the highest prestige scores of occupational status and b) highest years of education of the respondents' parents); 'children of natives'; and 'interaction between these two variables'. The results (available on request) demonstrate that the coefficients for all three variables are statistically significant (positive for the first and third variables; negative for the second). The same results are obtained when we run two separate regressions with 'educational expectation' as the outcome variable for two groups (children of natives and others). The coefficient for 'class background' in the first regression is higher than for the second, which means that we have an interaction effect between class and migration background.
- 9 The results from other questions in our survey are not shown here, but are available from the author on request.

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## Author biography

Alireza Behtoui is Associate Professor of Sociology. His research is focused primarily on the impact of social capital on the stratification process in fields such as the transition from school to work, marriage market and labour market with a focus on socioeconomic background, gender and ethnicity.