

Do parents treat (their) children differently?

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How parents treat their children is highly relevant for offspring's life chances. However, there are numerous concepts of what constitutes parenting which is most relevant for childrens' well-being, skill development, and educational attainment, e.g., parenting styles and/or different kinds of activities that are theorized as cultural capital in sociology, or skill-enhancing activities in behavioral economics. Parents are differently able to implement/realize favorable parenting practices, be it due to psychological resources, like own skills and personality, be it due to social resources, like money, time, culture, or status. Moreover, they may react to perceived characteristics of their children differently. They may reinforce the development of those whom they perceive as having more potential, or in contrast they may exert compensating efforts for those whom they perceive as less advantaged. Or, following egalitarian ethical considerations, they may nevertheless treat their children equally. Existing evidence is inconsistent regarding these respects, which might at least be partly due to different concepts of parenting, inconsistent operationalizations, and methodologies that do not sufficiently account for unobserved heterogeneities.

We present analyses of the first half of wave 1 of the new TwinLife study, comprising 2000 twin families in four twin birth cohorts. We are able to investigate the interrelation between parenting styles and parental activities representing cultural capital and skill production. We explore main drivers of differential parenting, above all parental cognitive ability and personality, education, income, and social class and analyze their influence on different dimensions of parenting. Based on the study design which includes rich information about parents and children we show to which degree different aspects of parenting are dependent on parental education, SES and income, family structure, or their skills and personality. With the nuclear twin family design we can disentangle to which degree genetic and social factors contribute to differential parenting.

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