Why does education pay off? Relations between institutional context and the mechanisms by which education pays off in the labor market

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If you want to become a PhD student, reading acknowledgements in dissertations is not the best way to get motivated. Often former doctoral students use this space to write about the relief of finishing, and in between the lines you clearly taste the difficulties they faced during their research. I had a completely different experience: my PhD was anything but a struggle and was extremely fun to do. That the writing of my dissertation went relatively smooth is, however, largely due to others. I would like to use this space to thank them.

Over the past four years, I have gained a great deal from both of my supervisors. Daniela, you were always ready to provide detailed feedback on my work. It did not only improve my dissertation, but also taught me to become a more critical reader myself. Herman, during your inaugural lecture you mentioned that your door would always be open for your doctoral students. This was not an empty promise; you encouraged me to work on new ideas, and were always available to discuss them with me. I am confident that we will keep collaborating in the future. This dissertation would not be the same without the help of my supervisors—thank you both.

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Most chapters of this book were at a certain time presented at either the Sociology club, the ISOL club, and/or the IPE(CS) club. I would like to thank all participants for their feedback. I am especially grateful to Brian and Annette from the IPE club, who gave me a lot of constructive criticism during the early stages of my PhD.

As becomes clear by now, I am quite positive about all aspects of my work: my supervisors, the department, the AISSR. It will be no surprise that colleagues were an important source of my work happiness as well. First, I would like to thank the Spinhuis group, who started teaching around the same time as I did, and who motivated me to pursue an academic career (Thomas, Chip, Sylvia, Robbie, Gerben, and Jonathan). Second, I would like to thank my international colleagues, most of whom I met during a very educative summer school in Trento, and many of which provided me with information on their countries’ educational system (Felix, Mark, Markus, Celine, and Wesley). Third, I have been surrounded by a great group of co-workers at the AISSR (Sander, Marii, Franciska, Annemarie, Martin, Jacqueline, Jasper, Lutz, Matthijs, Elmar, Daphne, Marc, Julia, Paul, Marcel). I would like to especially thank Rogier and Valentina. Rogier, you were a great roommate, and I envy the next person with whom
you will share a room. Valentina, I enjoyed working with you in the same project, and I am confident that we will keep collaborating in the future. In a pub I once declared to a group of co-workers that colleagues and friends should be kept separated. I have to take this back: colleagues can become friends.

And then there is a group of people who helped me with this dissertation, but are hard to categorize: Tom van der Meer (the lay-out of this dissertation is based on his design), Megan Raschig, Jip Frank, and Iris Deppe. Thank you.

I did not neglect my friends during my doctoral research, so I am not going to thank them for sticking around with me for the past four years. I will also not thank them for being immensely interested in my research, because, frankly, they were not. That is, however, a good thing: having fun outside your work is vital to remain enthusiastic about your work. In that way you did contribute a lot, and I am thankful for always being there for me whenever I needed you.

Finally, my family. Daan and Neis, I am lucky to have you as a brother and sister, and I am happy that we are so close. My parents, Anneke and Dienus, have always been supportive of anything I wanted to do, and are always there when I need them. This dissertation is about education, and how it helps people become successful in the labor market. My parents taught me a very important lesson: there are things in life that are more important than being successful in the labor market.

Next to my family and friends, for me that “thing” is Gianna, the love of my life. We met in the first year of our sociology studies and chose different, although related, careers: you educate students, and I study education. Gian, I am grateful for your love and support over the past four years, especially during the time I spent in Ithaca. I look forward to growing old with you.

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1. It must be noted that my mother always thought that I would become a physicist. Mum, I am a quantitative sociologist now, and that is as close to physics as you can get within the broad field of sociology.