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### Residential practices of middle classes in the field of parenthood

Boterman, W.R.

**Publication date**  
2012

[Link to publication](#)

#### **Citation for published version (APA):**

Boterman, W. R. (2012). *Residential practices of middle classes in the field of parenthood*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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# Summary

## Introduction

This dissertation is about the changes in the lives of middle classes in Amsterdam when they become parents for the first time. It is about how becoming a parent affects their working life, their consumption patterns, and their social life. It is about how identities as new parents and city dwellers may conflict and coincide. It is also about how the way the household as an economic and social unit is organized and how the relationship between partners changes when couples become families. Above all, this study is about the decision where to live, and more specifically about the question whether to leave or to stay in the city.

Generally, for most middle classes the city does not seem to be the most attractive environment to raise their children. The (perceived) inconveniences of urban living and a lack of suitable and affordable family dwellings on the one hand, and the image of space, quietness and green of suburbia on the other, make many parents decide to leave the city for suburbia. Many believe that suburbanization of families is even a natural process and that any attempt to keep families in the city is doomed to fail. Although it is true that suburbanization of families has been the dominant trend for several decades, a substantial number of middle class families have always stayed in the city and some studies have suggested that this number is rising.

This increase appears to be connected to broader trends of gentrification of inner-cities and the growth in dual-earner households. Although several studies have shown that inner-city living for some middle-class families is part of their identity and their preferred way of coping with the opportunities and various constraints in their everyday lives, it remains unclear in which respects middle class families that stay in the city differ from middle class families that suburbanize. The goal of this study is to understand how various groups within the middle classes are affected differently by the transition to parenthood and how this translates into different residential practices. The main question addressed in this study is:

*How do residential practices of urban middle classes change when they have children and how are their residential practices informed by their habitus?*

In addressing this two-folded question, this dissertation mainly draws on two main strains of literature: demographic studies on the life course and residential mobility; and on literature on the urban orientation of new middle classes exemplified by gentrification. In bringing these literatures into dialogue with each other, this study makes use of concepts derived from the work of Bourdieu: habitus, field, capital and practice. The households of this study are considered

to have their own historically embodied experiences, which are rooted in what is called the *habitus*. It portrays the transition to parenthood as entering a new social world with new rules, new positions and new stakes: the field of parenthood. The practices of middle class households, so not just what they say but also what they actually do, are seen as being produced by the interaction between their *habitus* and the various fields (housing, work, consumption, social life, education etc.) in which they are engaged. This book consists of five smaller studies, which each cover various aspects of the relationship between parenthood, middle class *habitus* and urban space. Chapter 2 of this book shows the patterns and the trends of middle-class family settlement in Amsterdam. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 deal respectively with the fields of employment, housing and education. The final empirical chapter synthesises some of the insights from the previous chapters and presents a model for predicting the likelihood of residential mobility. The conclusion brings all findings together and puts them into perspective.

## Data and Methods

In order to study how practices of urban middle classes change when they become parents, this research has collected a sample of middle class households that lived in the boroughs within the ring road of Amsterdam, which were expecting their first child. These households filled out two questionnaires, one in 2008 and another in 2010. Furthermore, of these respondents 28 couples also participated in two in-depth interviews in the same years. These two waves of both quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a comprehensive analysis of how the lives of middle class parents change when they have children that takes into account the complexities of the various practices and identities of middle class parents. Furthermore, this dissertation also draws on various datasets from Statistics Netherlands (Social Statistical Database and Survey Labour Force) and from the Department for Research and Statistics of the municipality of Amsterdam (Census data and data from the Survey 'Living in Amsterdam').

### *Patterns and Trends of Middle-class Family Settlement in Amsterdam*

Chapter 2 demonstrates that in the past two decades the number and share of family households in the municipality of Amsterdam has increased considerably. Although the majority of family households prefer the suburban parts of the city and other communities in the region, centrally located neighborhoods have shown the strongest increase. Based on data from the Living in Amsterdam survey (WIA, 2007), this chapter has provided evidence that the increase in family household in the city is to a substantial extent caused by higher educated families with above modal incomes. This remarkable rise of middle class families in Amsterdam is taking place in most central neighborhoods, but some areas stand

out in this respect: Watergraafsmeer and Oud Zuid, both traditional (upper-) middle class areas, have witnessed the most significant growth of middle-class family settlement. Also the newly developed areas of Osdorp de Aker, IJburg (both peripheral) and Oostelijk Havengebied (relatively central) have attracted large numbers of middle class families.

This chapter has linked this changing geography of middle class family households with two interrelated processes: 1) a general reorientation of middle-class groups to the city, gentrification; and 2) the role of place in balancing work, family, leisure and social obligations in the everyday lives of middle-class families.

In Amsterdam changes in employment and a rise in higher education have created a larger group of middle-class people who have been living in the city for a considerable part of their lives. It is argued that these people have accumulated experiences in the city and could be claimed to have built up an urban habitus. They have established social networks, may have various work experiences, and may derive parts of their identity from living in the city. They have accumulated a feel for the city, both metaphorically and practically. Consequently, there are more people with an urban lifestyle when they come to the stage of having children.

This chapter suggests that various middle-class fractions can be identified with a different habitus, who prefer different residential environments, depending on the amount and forms of capital they command, as well as how their residential location offers positions in the fields of employment, housing, consumption and education. We suggest that, in addition to these fields, the neighbourhood should also be analyzed for what advantages it might give in terms of time-budget and qualities of space.

### *Residential Environment and the Field of Employment*

Chapter 3 specifically looks into the relationship between division of paid work within family households and their residential location. Based on data from the large Survey Labour Force (EBB, 2005) and the Social Statistical Database (SSB, 2006), this study suggests that family households with various arrangements for the divisions of paid work have different residential locations. Although this study has not identified independent neighbourhood effects, it seems that within Amsterdam specific spatial clusters of family household types exist. Three main types could be identified: 1) non-western minority families who work with a traditional division of labour who are spatially concentrated in social-housing estates in the post-war boroughs; 2) one-and-a-half earner families who are particularly oriented to the most suburban parts of the city; and 3) symmetrical or female-breadwinner households, who concentrate in centrally-located middle-class or gentrification areas.

This chapter argues that the clustering of particular household types should be explained by the interaction the structure of the housing market and choices made in relation to the time-space organisation of everyday life. Although it is

appreciated that economic resources play an important part, it is argued that income itself is the outcome of gendered negotiations at the level of the household concerning division of labour.

### *Middle-Class Households and the Field of Housing*

Chapter 4 addresses a second field that plays an important role for the residential practices of middle classes: housing. Often housing is analysed from a housing market perspective in which supply and demand are key. Based on interview data on middle class housing histories and their strategies and tactics for finding and getting access to housing, Chapter 4 shows that in order to explain access to housing, it is necessary to investigate housing practices and to include other forms of capital than merely financial, such as social networks, embodied taste, and knowledge of the legal and institutional context.

Middle class households are often not only endowed with relatively much financial capital, but they also command other forms of capital that may help explaining their position in the field of housing. This chapter shows that various fractions of the middle class with various orientations of capital are both successful in getting access to housing but that they play different games and use other forms of capital to obtain their goals. In highly regulated housing fields, it seems that social capital and particular forms of cultural capital are sometimes more important than economic capital. But also in so called free market segments of the housing market, other forms of capital than merely financial play an important role.

It is argued that housing is not just consumption of a good, but that specific middle-class habituses are associated with specific strategies and tactics culminating in various housing pathways. Middle-class groups with a more economic habitus may follow housing pathways that are more focused on the free market sector. Other middle-class households with a less strong focus on the accumulation of economic capital may follow their housing pathway in the social sector, thereby making use of their social and cultural forms of capital.

### *Middle-Class Families and the Field of Education*

Chapter 5 is a study about the relationship between residential environment, primary school choice and middle class habitus. Based on in-depth interviews it argues that when urban middle class parents start orientating for primary schools for their children ethnic diversity becomes a major concern.

This chapter demonstrates that although nearly all parents indicate to prefer a mixed school for their children, the more concrete the issue of schooling gets, the more other aspects of school choice such as type of education and also practical issues such as proximity seem to be eclipsed by issues of school quality, which are often associated with the social class and ethnic/racial composition of the school population. School choice in Amsterdam is a practice that lays bare the

half-hearted attitude middle-classes have towards diversity: most of the middle-class parents in this study like the diversity of the city and also give voice to an aversion to homogeneity that they associate with suburbs. The majority of the respondents resent the parents that opt for a white elite school and so 'retreat' from Amsterdam reality. Simultaneously, they see this diversity as a threat to the intergenerational transfer of their own class position through good education. All families expressed that they wanted an environment that would enable their child to thrive academically and socially. Yet, the degree to which they experienced to have to make compromises and were willing to make those compromises differed. This study has identified five types of socio-spatial strategies for dealing with the issue of school choice: 1) move out of diverse Amsterdam into homogeneous suburbs; 2) move into relatively homogeneous areas with homogeneous schools with a good reputation within the city; 3) stay in a diverse neighbourhood, but commute for a good and homogeneous school; 4) stay in a diverse area and develop strategies for 'mixing' (read: 'whitening') the local school population; and 5) stay in a diverse area and accept the (best) local school.

This study argues that these various strategies are associated with various orientations of capital and thus with different middle class habituses. Although no comprehensive analysis is made on the relationship between habitus and socio-spatial strategies, this chapter suggest that middle class families that prioritise economic capital tend to leave the city or if possible send their children to a 'white' school elsewhere in the city. Households that attach more value to an urban life style and have significant amounts of economic capital may move into the stable middle class areas of the city, where they likely have access to the right schools. Parents that command relatively little economic capital but emphasise cultural capital and the accumulation of specific symbolic capital 'doing what is morally right' tend to choose 'black' neighbourhood schools.

### *Residential mobility of middle classes in the field of parenthood*

The final empirical chapter (Chapter 6) combines the insights of the various chapters and from other literature into one comprehensive analysis of the residential mobility of middle class households in the period in which they become parents. Building on work on urban middle classes, inspired by the theoretical concepts of Bourdieu, this paper analyses through multi-level analysis how various orientations of capital influence the decision whether to stay in the city or move out to suburban areas. Drawing on the self-collected survey data a model is presented that tests what factors can explain who moves out of central Amsterdam in the period 2008-2010 and who stays. A second model is run to test moving intentions for the households that initially stayed in the central city in the period 2010-2012.

In the period of study about half of all households had changed their residential location. Considering the difficult housing market because of the global financial crisis, the residential mobility of these households is remarkably

high. Of all urban middle class households 24% moved out of the central parts of Amsterdam in the period 2008-2010; while 18% moved within the central parts of Amsterdam. Of those households that initially stayed another 21% intends to move out in the period 2010-2012.

Controlling for a range of individual and neighbourhood variables, this chapter shows that couples with high economic capital and relatively low cultural capital have a higher propensity to move out of the central city, while couples with high cultural capital and low economic capital have a smaller chance to suburbanize. Furthermore, this paper shows that the degree of social and economic connectedness through social networks and work in the city also play an important role in the propensity to move out. This paper demonstrates that apart from a range of 'classical' residential mobility variables, such as dwelling size, tenure, and job location, also orientation of capital differentiates the practices of middle classes when they enter the field of parenthood.

## Conclusions

Although for all households becoming a family marks the beginning of a new life, this dissertation has shown that urban middle class households respond differently to the transition to parenthood. These different reactions to this transition are related to the various positions of these households in the fields of employment, housing, consumption, education as well as their social networks, their residential histories and identities. This study has shown that all these aspects are interconnected, and that they are all linked to the set of historically embodied experiences that are rooted in the habitus.

An important aspect of the habitus which can explain part of the differences between residential practices of middle class families is the amount and orientation of their capital. This study has shown that capital orientation provides different opportunities and imposes various constraints on middle classes, resulting in a differentiation of residential practices.

In spite of the evident effect of orientation of capital, two other important aspects of the habitus have been identified.

A first aspect of the habitus, which is also related to capital, is gender. Although most households in this study have a relatively equal division of paid and unpaid work, entering the field of parenthood often evoked or accentuated specific gender roles. The differences in residential practices between middle classes are directly related to gendered ideas about paid work and division of tasks between partners. Households with an symmetrical division of labour tend to be relatively urban in their residential location. This study suggests this may be facilitated by a specific urban opportunity structure, such as access to jobs and amenities.

In the second place it is clear that personal childhood experiences affect

middle class parents' perceptions of space and ideas about good parenting. Furthermore, the relationship with Amsterdam or urban environments more generally is related to the duration and intensity of people's experiences with and in the city. The longer people have lived in the city, the more tacit and explicit knowledge one possesses about that place. Moreover, a long stay in the city also increases the chance that one has built up meaningful social networks there. These spatial aspects of the habitus are interrelated with orientations of capital and also with gender, but they represent an autonomous dimension too.

## **Future Research**

By conceptualising parenthood as the interaction of practices and fields this dissertation has proposed to see the transition to parenthood as entering a new field: the field of parenthood. Although this study has explained how positions in the field of housing, education, consumption and employment change in the field of parenthood and how they are related to residential practices, the field of parenthood stretches much further than what this study has covered. As households proceed further in the field of parenthood many new aspects of the relationship between parenting and the environment will come to the fore.

The most apparent question that is raised by this study is: is the presence of middle-class families a temporary or a more permanent phenomenon; and related, how do middle-class parents deal with their residential environment when their children grow older?

Future research should include further longitudinal studies of how the position in the fields of employment, education, consumption and housing changes when middle-class family households advance in the field of parenthood. Long-term longitudinal studies would enable a further understanding of why, when and how urban middle classes change their residential practices when they become parents.