Coached for the Classroom
How Parents and Children Negotiate the Transmission of Class Cultures

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Jessica McCrory Calarco

Indiana University
Department of Sociology
1020 East Kirkwood Avenue
Ballantine Hall, 744
Bloomington, IN 47405-7103
email: jcalarco@indiana.edu
phone: 484.431.8316

Abstract

How are stratified cultures perpetuated across generations? Are they taught, or simply absorbed? This study seeks to clarify the process of cultural transmission by examining social class differences in the skills and strategies that parents teach children for managing problems at school. Through observations and in-depth interviews with elementary-aged students and their parents, I find that middle-class and working-class parents both work to equip children with tools for navigating classroom interactions. Yet, the content of these lessons varies, with middle-class parents teaching self-advocacy and working-class parents emphasizing self-reliance. While children sometimes resist this advice, parents persist and even amplify their coaching so as to ensure children's well-being. Yet, these strategies may have unequal consequences in the classroom. I discuss the implications of these findings for theories of cultural transmission, for qualitative research on family life and social processes, and for understandings of the mechanisms driving social inequalities

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How is culture acquired? Is it taught, or simply absorbed? Research shows that cultural attributes—values, dispositions, skills, and strategies—vary along social class (Bourdieu 1984, 1990; Kohn 1969; Lareau & Weininger 2003). Because these stratified cultures persist over time (Heath 2012; Hitlin & Piliavin 2004), they play a critical role in the reproduction of inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Lareau 2011). Less clear, however, is precisely how cultures are transmitted from one generation to the next. Socialization theories typically assume that children mirror the attitudes and behaviors that parents model for them (Arnett 1995; Baumrind 1980; Maccoby 1992). Yet, scholars often criticize socialization models for being overly passive and deterministic, and for denying children's agency in these processes (Elder 1974; Skolnick 1981; Thorne 1993). While a few studies have provided tentative evidence in support of such critiques (Chin & Phillips 2004; Lareau 2011), existing research has not sought to systematically analyze the interactive processes by which individuals acquire and learn to utilize class-based cultural tools.

To answer these questions, this study examines social class differences in the skills and strategies that parents teach children for managing problems and opportunities at school. While there are various arenas in which cultural tools might be acquired (including homes, schools, and workplaces—see Gatzambide-Fernandez 2009; Horvat & Davis 2011; Lee & Kramer 2012; Stuber 2011), I focus on the home. The home is likely to be children's first arena of cultural learning, and also the one with the most lasting effects (Bourdieu 1990; Bronfenbrenner 1958; McKeever & Miller 2004). I consider these questions through in-depth interviews with middle-class and working-class children and their parents, and through in-school observations of the children during

third, fourth, and fifth grade. I find that cultural transmission is an interactive and negotiated, but also stratified process. Middle-class and working-class parents both taught their children how to with teachers and manage problems in the classroom, but the content of these lessons varies along social class lines. Middle-class parents worked to develop children's "self-advocacy" skills while working-class parents instead taught "self-reliance." All of the parents believed that these lessons would help their children to succeed. In reality, though, such successes were contingent on children's willingness to activate the strategies they learn, and on how schools responded to these efforts.

These findings are important both empirically and theoretically. First and foremost, they help to clarify and deepen our understanding of the processes by which culture is transmitted across generations. They suggest, for example, that children do not simply mirror the behaviors and attitudes that their parents model for them. Rather, the reproduction of cultural patterns also involves parents' goal-oriented efforts to teach their children, as well as children's willingness to respond to and utilize these lessons. This suggests, in turn, that cultural transmission is a negotiated process whose outcomes hinge on the active efforts of both parents and children. Such findings question common assumptions about the dominant mechanisms of socialization (Arnett 1995; Baumrind 1980; Maccoby 1992). They also highlight the importance of recognizing children's agency in family interactions and social processes more generally (Corsaro 2005; Pugh 2009; Thorne 1993). Finally, given that the cultural tools parents impart to their children are differentially valued by dominant institutions (Calarco 2011; Lareau 2011; Nelson 2000), these findings may also shed light on the mechanisms that drive social stratification and reproduce inequalities over time.

Culture and the Reproduction of Inequalities

Culture creates common ground, but also promotes distinction, and with it, stratification. Yet, culture is a complex concept that is used and operationalized in myriad ways. Popular and scholarly discussions often treat culture as an attitudinal construct: a collection of dispositions, values, and preferences (Bourdieu 1984; Kohn 1969; Lamont 2000; see Hitlin & Piliavin 2004 for a review). These attributes tend to vary along social class lines, and are linked to inequalities (Bourdieu 1984; Kohn & Schooler 1969; Wright & Wright 1976). This is because cultural preferences provide a foundation for social judgment and discrimination (Bourdieu 1984). Studies suggest, for example, that teachers tend to privilege middle-class students (providing them with more resources and opportunities) because they more closely embody the attitudes that teachers regard as ideal (Becker 1952; Rist 1970).

Other scholars instead view culture as an interactional construct: a set of knowledge, skills and strategies for use in navigating our social worlds (Bourdieu 1990; Lareau & Weininger 2003; Swidler 1986). These "tool kits" (Swidler 1986) tend to facilitate interactions within particular social spheres. And yet, because different social spheres have different norms and expectations, a given tool kit will be more valuable in some spheres than in others (Bourdieu 1990; Bourdieu & Passeron 1972). Research shows, for example, that the tool kits of the middle class are closely aligned with the standards of schools and other dominant institutions (Lareau 2000; Stuber 2005, 2011). When activated in those settings, middle-class knowledge, skills, and strategies yield meaningful profits, and thus become a form of cultural capital.

In light of these stratified profits, culture has important consequences for social inequalities. We know that opportunities in education, work, and even health are stratified along social class lines (DiPrete & Eirich 2006; House 2002). We also know that these patterns persist across

generations, with children's life chances closely mirroring those of their parents (Breen & Jonsson 2005; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell 1999).

Mirroring and Modeling Culture

To explain why inequalities persist over time, scholars have explored how stratified cultures are passed from one generation to the next. Their theories of cultural transmission focus on children's home environments and experiences as a primary source of cultural training (Bronfenbrenner 1958; Bourdieu 1990; Roberts & Bengston).[1] This focus, in turn, seems to stem from the fact that children's cultural behaviors, values, and orientations closely parallel those of their parents (Heath 2012; Lareau 2011; see Hitlin & Piliavin 2004 for a review).

Explanations for these similarities typically assume that children mirror the culture that parents model for them (Arnett 1995; Baumrind 1980; Maccoby 1992). Research on social class and language socialization provides one example. Scholars describe how middle-class families use more language and a wider variety of words than do their working-class counterparts (Hart & Risley 1995; Heath 2012). These families also use language in different ways. Middle-class parents tend to negotiate more with their children and grant their children greater power in family decision-making, while working-class parents are more apt to use directives to instruct children on appropriate behavior (Lareau 2011). In light of these interactions, children gradually begin to mirror the language patterns that their parents use with them at home. From this perspective, then, culture is transmitted across generations when children absorb and internalize the models to which they are exposed at home.

Research on social class and family life provides another example of this mirroring and modeling view of cultural transmission. Lareau's (2011) research, for example, has shown that the

rhythms of family life and interaction vary along social class lines, and that children in these families exhibit different orientations toward authorities. She describes how middle-class children mirror the sense of entitlement that their parents often display in interactions with adult professionals (e.g., physicians), while working-class children instead mirror their parents' sense of constraint. Studies of social class and parenting styles offer similar conclusions, suggesting that exposure to authoritarian and authoritative parenting prompt children to develop different orientations to authorities (Baumrind 1991; Gecas & Seff 1990; Kasser, Koestner & Lekes 2002).

Transmission through Teaching

These studies offering compelling evidence that parents model culture for their children. Yet, mirroring and modeling is unlikely to be the only process by which culture is transmitted across generations. Rather, cultural learning might also occur through a more interactive and goal-oriented process of teaching and training. While scholars have not examined these possibilities directly, a number of prior studies do offer tentative insights in this regard.

Studies of social class and family life, for example, have provided examples of parents engaging in more overt efforts to develop children's cultural capacities. As noted above, Lareau's (2011) goal is not to examine how children acquire skills and strategies for navigating their social worlds. Yet, Lareau does provide two examples of (middle-class) parents directing children's interactions with professional authorities: Alexander Williams's mother encouraging him to tell his doctor about bumps under his arms, and Stacey Marshall's mother discussing what Stacey will say to her gymnastics coach about joining a more advanced team. These examples suggest that cultural transmission may occur, at least in part, through an overt teaching process. Yet, they receive limited attention in Lareau's analysis. Nor does Lareau discuss whether working-class parents

might also work to develop children's tools and styles. Edwards's (2004) study, on the other hand, suggests that working-class mothers engage in "family identity management" by "teaching their children a particular self-definition that instills family pride and encourages children to maintain both their own and the family's reputation" (519). Edwards's focus, however, is not on the nature of this parental teaching. Thus, she does not discuss the actual processes by which working-class mothers work to shape their children's behaviors and dispositions. Taken together, though, these findings provide tentative evidence that parents may transmit stratified cultures not only by modeling particular orientations or behaviors, but also by explicitly encouraging their children to display particular cultural skills, styles, and attitudes.

These studies also suggest that parents' cultural training may be more goal-oriented than socialization models typically presume. These possibilities can be seen most clearly in research on social class and parenting beliefs (Nelson 2010). Luster, Rhoades and Haas (1989), for example, examine social class differences in parents' beliefs about appropriate parenting behavior. All of the parents in their study "were genuinely concerned about the well-being of their children and wanted to do what was best for them" (145). Yet, middle-class and working-class parents had different values for their children (e.g., conformity vs. self-direction). These values, in turn, were closely correlated with parents' preferences for different parenting strategies. Luster and colleagues do not consider the impact of these parenting preferences on children's behaviors or orientations. Yet, such findings do suggest that parents' goals for children are likely to be a guiding factor in their efforts to develop children's cultural skills, strategies, and orientations.

Scholars of childhood offer a somewhat different conclusion. Criticizing existing research on family life, they stress that children are not simply the "passive recipients of adult training and socialization" (Thorne 1993: 5; see also Elder 1974; Skolnick 1989). Instead, children play an

active role in creatively re-interpreting the adult cultures to which they are exposed (Adler & Adler 1998; Corsaro 2005). Studies show, for example, that children sometimes reject their parents' wishes (Pugh 2009; Valentine 2002). Chin and Phillips (2004) find that parents planning their children's summer activities often have to combat resistance from "less-motivated" children who prefer "fun" activities over those (e.g., reading) that parents see as more beneficial (202-204). While Chin and Phillips do not set out to study how children respond to parents' lessons about interacting with institutions, their findings indicate that cultural transmission may be a more negotiated and contingent process than socialization models typically assume.

Research Goals and Methods

Building on these existing insights, this study aims to provide a targeted analysis of the interactive processes by which class-based cultural tools (i.e., skills and strategies for social interaction) are transmitted across generations. As outlined in the research questions below, I focus specifically on parents' lessons about interacting with teachers and managing problems and opportunities in institutional settings.

1. How do parents teach children to manage their own problems and opportunities?
2. How do children respond to these lessons and utilize what they learn?
3. How do the nature and content of these interactions vary along social class lines?

I sought to answer these research questions with data from a longitudinal, ethnographic study of middle-class and working-class, white families whose children attend the same public elementary school.

Research Site

Maplewood (all names are pseudonyms) is a public elementary school (not a charter or magnet school) in a distant suburb of a large, Eastern city. Maplewood draws students from middle-class and working-class neighborhoods within one larger community: some students live in mobile homes, apartments, and townhouses, while others live in single-family homes ranging in value from $150,000 to over $2,000,000.

Maplewood serves approximately 500 students in Kindergarten through fifth grade. Maplewood is predominantly white (82%), but also has growing populations of (primarily middle-class) Asian-American (6%) and (primarily poor or working-class) Latino (9%) students. While the majority of Maplewood's families are middle-class, a substantial minority are from working-class backgrounds. This socioeconomic diversity allows me to compare how middle-class and working-class parents and children interact with each other and with the same teachers and administrators. My connections to the community (a close relative is a Maplewood employee) helped me gain access to the site, and also seemed to increase acceptance of the project among teachers, students, and parents.

Research Sample

In embarking on this project, I selected one cohort (four classrooms) of students to follow from third to fifth grade. To avoid conflating race and class, I focused on the white students in the cohort, and excluded students who moved away during the study. This focal sample includes fifty-six white middle-class and working-class students.

During the spring of the students' fifth-grade year, I invited a sample of families from the project to participate in in-depth interviews. I contacted all fourteen working-class families, and

randomly selected a group of fourteen middle-class families to contact, as well. None of the contacted families declined to participate, but scheduling conflicts prevented interviews with seven families (5 working-class, 2 middle-class).[2] The final interview sample included parents and children in twenty-one families (9 working-class, 12 middle-class). All of the students who participated in interviews also participated in observations at Maplewood. The majority of parents interviewed were mothers (I asked to speak with children's primary caregivers), but the sample did include two single fathers (both working-class), and three fathers (all middle-class) who participated in interviews with their wives. Most of the parents interviewed (both middle-class and working-class) were in married, two-parent families, though the sample did include some divorced parents (3 working-class, 3 middle-class), two of which (both middle-class) had subsequently remarried. For descriptions of the observation and interview samples, see Table 1.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

While scholars have debated the best way to conceptualize social class (Lareau & Conley 2010); I determine families' social class backgrounds by parents' educational and occupational status (Aschaffenburg & Maas 1997; Condron 2009). Using data from parent surveys and student school records, I identify middle-class families as those in which at least one parent has a four-year college degree, and at least one parent has a professional or managerial occupation (excluding lower-level white collar workers). Many middle-class parents work as teachers, lawyers, engineers, or office managers; though many of the mothers are stay-at-home parents or work only part-time. Parents in working-class families typically have only high-school diplomas, though some are high-school dropouts and others have some post-secondary education (usually community college). In most

working-class families, both parents work full-time, often as food-service workers, store clerks, daycare providers, or transportation workers. These families are typically "settled-living" families (Edwards 2004; Rubin 1976) where the parents have steady jobs and stable relationships, and provide neat, clean homes for their children.[3]

Data Collection

From March 2008 through June 2010, I visited Maplewood at least twice weekly, with each observation session lasting approximately three hours. I divided time equally between the four classes in each grade and rotated the days and times that I observed each class. This allowed me to see students in a variety of contexts, including regular classes, ability-grouped math classes, and enrichments, at lunch, on the playground, and during other school activities (assemblies, field-days, parties, etc.). I kept jottings during observations, and expanded these into detailed fieldnotes upon the completion of each visit.

As noted above, I also conducted in-depth interviews with twenty-one families whose children also participated in the observations at Maplewood. In these interviews, I asked about families' home lives, their experiences at Maplewood, and their perceptions of the teachers, students, and other families. Interviews with parents were generally conducted in parents' homes (one took place at a parent's office), and lasted approximately 90 to 120 minutes. Interviews with children were all conducted in children's homes during the summer after the students completed fifth grade, when the students were ten or eleven years old. These interviews lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. All interviewed were audio-recorded and transcribed.

This paper focuses primarily on observations of and interviews with Maplewood students and their parents. That said, I also conducted in-depth interviews with the twelve third-, fourth-, and

fifth-grade teachers at Maplewood (the same teachers in whose classrooms I observed). In addition to formal interviews, I had countless informal discussions with teachers, students, parents, and school personnel, which I recorded in my fieldnotes. I used these discussions to understand teachers' goals and styles, to clarify what I observed in the classroom, and to gauge teachers' assessments of and responses to particular students.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this project was an ongoing process. While conducting fieldwork, I regularly reviewed my fieldnotes and interview transcripts, and also wrote analytic memos (Lareau 2000). In these memos, I identified and discussed emerging themes and patterns in the data (e.g., self-advocacy, self-reliance, encouraging, coaching, etc.), linking these discussions to specific incidents in my fieldnotes and interview transcripts. I also used the memos to reflect on my preliminary findings, to highlight connections to existing research, and to identify additional questions to consider when going back into the field. The patterns and themes outlined in these memos were particularly useful in developing a preliminary coding scheme for use in analyzing the data.

Having developed this coding scheme, I used ATLAS.ti software to code sections of fieldnotes, interview transcripts, documents, diagrams (e.g., seating charts) and other materials. This coding process allowed me to trace common themes in the data, and also to identify additional themes. During this coding process, I also developed a series of data matrices (Miles & Huberman 1984). These matrices are useful for organizing data, clarifying comparisons, and identifying disconfirming evidence of larger patterns. In one set of matrices, for example, I compared parents' responses to interview questions about a series of vignettes describing common classroom

scenarios that I witnessed during my observations. With these vignettes, I sought to understand how parents from different social class backgrounds would interpret and respond when confronted with similar situations. I present the text of these vignettes and the results of these comparisons in table-form in the analysis below. Such comparisons, however, cannot substitute for the kind of nuanced conclusions that can be drawn from a more in-depth analysis of qualitative data.

In the interest of clarity and brevity, I will highlight a series of examples that help to illustrate the broader patterns I observed. I will then go on to discuss possible explanations for these findings, as well as their implications for our understanding of social inequalities.

Middle-Class Parents' Lessons to Children

For middle-class families at Maplewood, cultural transmission was an interactive, negotiated, and ongoing process. Middle-class parents worked hard to teach their children valuable skills and strategies for interacting with institutional authorities (Stanton-Salazar 1997) and managing problems they faced in their daily lives. Yet, the success of these efforts hinged on children's willingness and ability to activate the skills that they learned.

Middle-Class Parents Emphasize Self-Advocacy

Middle-class parents strongly believed that it was important for children to develop self-advocacy skills. In each interview, I presented parents with a set of vignettes describing various classroom scenarios. One of these vignettes described a situation in which a student, Jason, was struggling to understand a question on a science test. When asked how they thought Jason should

respond, all of the middle-class parents said that Jason should "go to the teacher" for help (see Table 2). Ms. Green, for example, is a married mother of two. She has a master's degree, and works full-time as a high school teacher. After reading the vignette, Ms. Green responded:

> Jason should ask the teacher to clarify for him. You want a kid to be able to answer the question, to make sure that he understands, rather than just not doing anything. So I think he should ask the teacher. And then the teacher should tell the whole class. Cuz if one student is having a problem then everybody else is probably having the same problem.

Like Ms. Green, the middle-class parents at Maplewood wanted their children to do well in school. They also saw help-seeking and other self-advocacy skills as critical for achieving these goals.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The middle-class parents I interviewed recognized that self-advocacy skills were valued by teachers, and were closely linked to academic success. Ms. Shore, for example, is a divorced mother of two boys; she has a master's degree, and works as a marketing director. She talked about how important it is for students to go to the teacher if they are confused or struggling in school. Ms. Shore described in her interview what she tells her children:

> It's become more than just a gentle encouragement. It's official. You're a high-quality learner if you're willing to ask questions when you have one, and the [teachers] actually reward the asking.

Like Ms. Shore, middle-class parents at Maplewood recognized that help-seeking was beneficial for students both as an academic strategy and as a way of demonstrating a strong commitment to learning.

Middle-class parents also felt that the benefits of self-advocacy would last far beyond children's elementary school year. Ms. Matthews, for example, is a college-graduate, a preschool teacher and a married mother of three. She explained:

> I really feel like [my kids] need to have those skills… to be able to talk to [the] teacher to understand and to work through those problems. When you get into a boss situation, your mom doesn't call and say, "Sorry my daughter doesn't understand what she's supposed to come and do today at work." You know, you need to learn how to do that! And if you don't start at this stage, it makes it more difficult and then you get fired! So I tell my kids, "It's okay to ask those questions in that setting. This is a place where you go every day. You talk to this teacher every day. He's invested in your interests." And once they learn to overcome that hurdle, it becomes easier to then deal with asking for [other things].

Middle-class parents like Ms. Matthews stressed to their children that self-advocacy skills would have positive consequences both in the short-term and over time.

Middle-Class Parents Teach Self-Advocacy

In light of these perceived benefits, middle-class parents actively worked to develop their children's self-advocacy skills. Like Ms. Matthews and Ms. Shore, all of these parents reported encouraging their children to feel comfortable approaching teachers with questions and requests. Another vignette described a student, Brian, who complained to his parents about being "bored"

in math. When asked what they would deal with the situation, all of the middle-class parents said that they would either talk to Brian's teacher or have Brian approach the teacher, instead (see Table 3). Ms. Ford, for example, is a college graduate and married mother of three who works as a business manager. Ms. Ford described in her interview what she would tell Brian, noting:

> I'd say to him: "Not everybody picks things up as quickly as you do. And the teachers need to go slower sometimes to make sure all of the kids in the class are really understanding it or knowing it. If you're bored you can ask for some extra worksheets to do, or ask if you can take out work from another class and work on that."

Like Ms. Ford, middle-class parents felt that children should be willing and able to manage their own opportunities in the classroom. They also worked to equip their children with skills and strategies for advocating on their own behalf.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

These efforts, in turn, often involved very explicit lessons about the steps children should take to be their own advocates in the classroom. Ms. Rissolo, for example, is a married mother of two who works part-time as an advertising director. Ms. Rissolo's son, Danny, struggled with learning disabilities, and was sometimes teased in school. Describing these difficulties, Ms. Rissolo recalled how she worked with Danny to teach him self-advocacy skills for use in surmounting those challenges. In first grade, for example, Danny was being "bullied" by a classmate. As Ms. Rissolo explained:

> The kid he was sitting next to was a bully, and was making fun of him. Danny wanted me to fix it for him, but I said to him, 'You know what Danny, I'll do that for you, but I want you to do something first. I want you to go to Ms. Girard, and say something like "Ms. Girard, can I talk to you for a minute?"' I said, 'I'll guarantee you, she'll say: "Oh my goodness! Sure!"' …. And I said: 'Ask her what she thinks you should do.'

Smiling, Ms. Rissolo went on to describe proudly how Danny—barely seven years old at the time—successfully sought help from Ms. Girard:

> At first [Danny] was like: 'You want me to do all that?' And I said: 'You can do it!' I go: 'You're a smart guy. You're very articulate. You can do this. And if it's still a problem, I'll call her also, but you need to do this first.' Well, he did it. He talked to Ms. Girard and asked her what she could do. And she was able to say: 'You know what, I'm gonna be changing where you're all sitting next week. Why don't we change tomorrow instead. And no one has to know why.' And his problem went away. And so he saw, he learned, early on, how to advocate for himself.

Like Ms. Rissolo, middle-class parents often taught their children specific language and strategies to use when asking teachers for help. They recognized that these lessons could help their children to manage both academic and social challenges at school.

Now, it is important to note that middle-class parents were not equally deliberate in their efforts to develop children's self-advocacy skills. The upwardly-mobile Healey family, for example, had a somewhat more cautious attitude towards teaching their high-achieving son, Ben, to ask for help. Mr. Healey, who works in finance and grew up in a working-class family, described how Ben's teacher, Mr. Potter, wanted Ben to be more comfortable seeking help.

> Mr. Potter kept saying: 'Ben needs to come to me for help.' He thought that was really important for Ben, but I don't really know. Mr. Potter wanted Ben to open up: 'When he needs help, come to me for help.' He said that in every conference we had with him. But Ben wasn't struggling. I probably helped him with homework three times in six years. And I guess Mr. Potter's theory was: 'This kid's eventually gonna need to come to somebody for help, and he needs to learn how to do that.' But I don't think Ben actually needed to do that in Mr. Potter's class. So I didn't quite get it.

In light of Mr. Potter's repeated encouragement, however, the Healey's did talk to Ben about help-seeking. As Ms. Healey, who also works in finance and grew up in a working-class family, explained:

> We did talk to Ben, a couple times. We said: 'It's gonna get harder, and if there's anything you're in doubt about, you can talk to Mr. Potter. We told him several times throughout the year: 'Listen, that's not a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength. Everybody has weaknesses, everybody needs help, and you need to know when you need it.' And Ben was like: "Yeah, I know.'

At school, Ben would go to his teachers with clarifying questions, but was more reluctant than most of his middle-class peers to admit when he was having trouble understanding. Toward the end of fifth grade, Ben—a straight-A student—began to struggle in his advanced math class, getting a B in math for his last marking period. Ben's hesitance in asking for help seemed to reflect, at least in part, the fact that the Healey's—and especially Mr. Healey—were less adamant in their coaching efforts than other middle-class parents, and also more skeptical of their potential benefits. And yet, like the other middle-class parents at Maplewood, the Healey's did recognize the potential

benefits of help-seeking, and did repeatedly stress to their son that it was okay to approach teachers with requests.

Middle-Class Children Learn Self-Advocacy

These lessons had a meaningful impact on middle-class children's attitudes toward self-advocacy. In light of their parents' encouragement and coaching, middle-class children seemed to internalize their parents' stance on the importance of help-seeking. Mr. and Ms. Dobrin, for example, are both computer engineers. Their son, Ethan, is a high-achieving ten-year-old boy. In my interview with the Dobrins, Ms. Dobrin explained how they stress to Ethan the importance of help-seeking:

> Ethan's teacher evaluations always said, "He's a joy. He's bright. He's making great grades, but he needs to ask for help sometimes." I don't think asking for help is comfortable for Ethan, but what we try to impress on him is: 'Think about how *important* it is that you get that information. If you *need* that information to do the job correctly, then you *need* to ask the teacher.'

While Ethan was initially somewhat reluctant to ask for help, his parents persisted in these lessons. By the end of fifth grade, Ethan would regularly approach his teachers with questions and requests. He also seemed to gradually internalize his parents' stance on the importance of asking for help. After Ethan described an incident where he went to a teacher with a question about the directions for a project, I asked him why he chose that approach:

> I didn't want to guess and risk getting it wrong. I don't want to get it wrong, because then I won't get as high a grade as I should have gotten. So it's just better to go up and ask the teacher. And then normally I would get it right.

Like Ethan, middle-class students at Maplewood often echoed their parents' sentiments in explaining why it was important to them to ask for help. In particular, they recognized the academic benefits of help-seeking, worrying that not asking would jeopardize their chances for success.

These lessons also played a critical role in supporting children's efforts to advocate for themselves in the classroom. Gina Giordano, for example, struggles with ADHD, and gets Bs and Cs in school. Gina's mother talked about how she and her husband try to help Gina overcome those challenges, explaining:

> We always tell her, "You go up and you talk to the teacher. You find out – you don't use your friends. You go to the teacher and find out." Like, Gina was [struggling]…and I told her, "Well, go ask your teacher what that means. That's your resource."

Gina's parents could have intervened for her to request help. And yet, by learning to approach teachers with these kinds of requests, Gina was able to get the help she needed more quickly:

> Like, I was having trouble staying organized, and I kinda talked to my parents about it. They told me to go talk to my teacher, Ms. Hudson. ….[So] I asked her if she could help me with my organization and stuff, [and] … she just brought me to the back of the class and showed me a few things.

Like Gina, middle-class children at Maplewood linked their ease and comfort in help-seeking to the lessons they learned from their parents at home.

This does not mean, however, that middle-class children were always immediately responsive to their parents' coaching efforts. Very shy children, for example, tended to be somewhat reluctant to take their parents' advice. Rather than cede to this resistance, however, middle-class parents tended to respond by increasing the frequency and intensity of their coaching efforts. Ms. Long,

for example, is a college-educated business manager; she is divorced, and has two daughters, Keri and Kelly. While Kelly is more outgoing, Keri is timid and shy. Early in her daughters' education, it became clear to Ms. Long that Keri was much more reluctant than Kelly to ask for help from her teachers at school. With a disappointed frown, Ms. Long recounted the following incident:

> Keri was doing well in third grade. She had straight As until this one math test [on which Keri got a C]. She came down [from studying in her room] and said, 'I'm confused about this.' And I said, 'Go talk to your teacher about it! You need to tell your teacher this is what you need help with.'

Despite this encouragement, however, Keri did not ask for help, and thus did not do well on the test. As Ms. Long went on to explain:

> She didn't have the power in her to do it. To say: 'I need help." … And that brought her grade down! She got a C on the test and it brought her down…. Which, to me, was very upsetting, because I told her, 'Go! Get help!' And she just… I dunno. Keri's very timid, very shy. I'm trying to teach her to look up and shake hands. That adults aren't scary and that the teachers are there to help her. It's getting better, but it's taken her a really long time.

Frowning deeply and wringing her hands, as if troubled by her daughter's lack of confidence, Ms. Long described how she encouraged Keri to go to the third-grade teacher to ask if she could retake the test.

> Well, with that, with Keri's grade. I wanted her to go to Ms. Williams and see what she could do to rectify it. And it wasn't that it was a C or whatever, but to see what she could do to pull it up. And she wouldn't do it… Keri's very timid, very shy….

> I'm trying to teach her to look up and shake hands.... It's getting better, but it's taken her a really long time.

Over time, and with her mother's repeated encouragement and coaching, Keri gradually became more comfortable asking for help.[4] Keri's sister, Kelly, on the other hand, seemed to require much less training in this regard. As Ms. Long explained: "Kelly can also be a little shy, but not like Keri. And she could do it. She could ask her teachers for help." As a result, Ms. Long spent more time working with Keri on help-seeking than she did with Kelly. Like Ms. Long, middle-class parents at Maplewood tended to intensify their coaching if they felt that their children needed extra support with help-seeking. Through these negotiations, middle-class parents helped to ensure that their children had the skills they saw as necessary for success in school.

Working-Class Parents' Lessons to Children

For working-class families at Maplewood, like for their middle-class peers, cultural transmission was an interactive and negotiated process. Working-class parents endeavored to equip their children with skills and strategies for navigating the challenges and opportunities that they faced in their daily lives. Yet, the outcomes of these efforts depended largely on children's choices about whether and how to activate the skills they learned at home.

Working-Class Parents Emphasize Self-Reliance

While middle-class parents stressed the potential benefits of self-advocacy, working-class parents worried that help-seeking would lead to more problems than solutions. As with the middle-class parents, I presented the working-class parents with the vignette describing Jason and the science test, asking them what Jason should do. While the middle-class parents were all quick to

respond that Jason should "ask the teacher," working-class parents took much longer to respond, often saying things like "I don't know" or "That's a tough one." When pressed for details, working-class parents also gave more varied answers than their middle-class peers (see Table 2). Five of the working-class parents said that Jason should just "try his best" or "skip it and come back to it later." These parents often followed-up by explaining that students who asked for help would likely experience teasing or stigma from their peers. Some also said that teachers would be unlikely to grant requests for help during a test. Two other working-class parents felt that the teachers would probably notice Jason struggling and offer him assistance. The remaining two working-class parents noted that how Jason should respond "depends on the teacher's rules." They recognized that while some teachers might allow questions during tests, others might get angry or respond negatively to students' requests for assistance.

The working-class parents at Maplewood all wanted their children to do well academically. Unlike their middle-class peers, however, working-class parents felt that these goals would be best achieved through self-reliance and responsibility, and not through self-advocacy. Mr. Graham, for example, is a high-school graduate and divorced father of three who works full-time in construction. He noted in his interview:

> My kids know that you just do your best and try. I just want my kids to be respectful, responsible. I try to be on the proactive, teaching them about being responsible and getting it done. I tell them just not to be passive about work. Just to get it done.

Working-class parents also linked this kind of hard work and self-reliance to student learning. Ms. Webb, for example, is a high-school dropout and married mother of four who works full-time as a store clerk. In our interview, Ms. Webb explained that when her youngest daughter, Sadie, comes

to her for help with a homework question, she usually tells Sadie to "skip it and come back to it later." Ms. Webb felt that this strategy was beneficial in more ways than one, noting:

> For the most part Sadie will come back and say she figured it out by just going on. My kids know that I will help them with their homework, but they also know I will not just give them the answer. Cuz I don't think they're learning if I give 'em the answers.

Like Ms. Webb, working-class parents worried that too much assistance would undermine student learning. They also felt that responsibility and self-reliance were critical skills that would support their children's achievement in school.

Working-class parents felt that learning these skills would benefit children both in the short-term and in the long-term. Ms. Marrone, for example, is a high-school graduate and married mother of four who works as a daycare provider. She noted in an interview:

> Trying to keep them on the straight and narrow, I tell [my kids] all the time: "Hey, if you stick with school and you try hard and you stay away from all that, you're gonna get a whole lot further in what you want." I don't expect my kids to grow up and be president. You know, you've gotta be realistic. We just want them to do better than we did.

Like Ms. Marrone, working-class parents felt that it was important for children to try hard in school, and to avoid behaviors—like disrespecting teachers, hanging around with a bad crowd, or dabbling in drugs and alcohol—that might derail their progress (see also Edwards 2004 and Furstenberg et al. 1999). These efforts, they believed, would help children to achieve more than they had managed in their own lives.

Working-Class Parents Teach Self-Reliance

Working-class parents, however, did not simply stress the importance of responsibility and hard work. Rather, they also worked to develop their children's skills for self-reliance. When their children came home and informed them of problems in the classroom, for example, working-class parents would often respond by telling them to "try their best." Ms. Compton has completed some community-college classes, and works part-time as a store clerk. Ms. Compton explained how she pushes her son, Jesse, to be more self-reliant, saying:

> Jesse can be lazy. He's very 'I can't do it. I don't know what I'm doing.' But he just needs a push to do it on his own. I just tell him, "You can do it. I know you can do it. I've seen you do this. I want you to try." Then he gets his confidence up and he snaps out of that low moment.

Through this kind of encouragement and coaching, working-class parents tried to develop their children's work-ethic, and their skills for self-reliance and responsibility.

At the same time, however, working-class parents were also willing to use hard lessons to teach their children these skills. In interviews, I presented parents with another vignette in which a student, Kelly, accidentally leaves her social studies homework packet at school. When asked how they would respond to this situation, many of the middle-class parents responded that they would drive Kelly back to school to retrieve the forgotten packet, or to call a friend to copy the questions, instead (See Table 4). While some working-class parents would also allow Kelly to call a friend, most instead tended to suggest that Kelly should suffer the consequences of her actions. Ms. Campitello, for example, is a high-school graduate and married mother of three who works part-time in food service. When asked what she would say to Kelly, Ms. Campitello laughed and responded:

> What would I say? “Oh well! You have to do it tomorrow. Sorry you don’t get to go outside and play. There’s consequences for your actions.” I’m sorry, but there’s never too young an age to start learning that. You know, cuz if she’s forgetting her homework now, she’s gonna forget her work-work when she’s older. So I’d teach her, you know: “This is your responsibility.”

At Maplewood, students who forgot their homework would usually have to stay in during recess to complete the missed work. While middle-class parents often tried to help their children avoid these consequences, working-class parents instead used these sanctions as an opportunity to teach children about the importance of responsibility and self-reliance.

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Working-Class Children Learn Self-Reliance

In light of these interactions with their parents at home, working-class children seemed to internalize their parents’ wary attitude toward self-advocacy. In particular, they expressed considerable concern about making teachers angry with requests for help. Jesse Compton, for example, is an average-achieving working-class boy. In an interview, Jesse explained that he is sometimes confused by things that he is supposed to be learning at school, saying:

> Some stuff my teacher told me, it didn’t make sense, but I just had to say okay, because I thought she would get mad at me because I couldn’t understand it. Like, with division, I got all mixed up. I didn’t know how to do the homework. So I just tried to do it on my own, but I got most of it wrong. I only got like two right.

Jesse was clearly struggling with math, but he did not ask for help. Jesse worried that his teachers would "get mad" if he did not understand class concepts or assignments.

Other working-class students also expressed similar sentiments. Amelia Graham, for example, is a high-achieving working-class student. I asked Amelia if she ever went to teachers for help when she was confused, to which she responded:

> That kind of thing makes me nervous. Like, if you ask a question about something, the teacher might say: "You should have been listening! I just said that!" But I'm thinking in my head: "I *was* listening, I just didn't catch it." But I wouldn't say that out loud, because I might get in trouble. Like, *even more* trouble, if I said that.

While the teachers at Maplewood were generally willing to answer questions, working-class students were very wary of proactive help-seeking and other self-advocacy efforts. They worried that teachers would get mad or angry, and that they would chastise students for making requests.

Working-class students also seemed to adopt their parents' positive stance on self-reliance. Sadie Webb, for example, is an average-achieving working-class girl. When I asked Sadie what it takes to do well in school, she explained:

> You need to work hard and learn things. Like, teachers give you homework to learn things. And then if you get help from your mom and dad, you're not learning that stuff. And if you get it from a calculator, you still don't learn it.

In making this statement, Sadie echoed her mother's beliefs about the link between help-seeking and learning. Recall from the example above that Ms. Webb offered her children only limited help with homework, noting: "I don't think they're learning if I give 'em the answers." Through both their actions and their words, working-class parents shaped their children's stance on both self-advocacy and self-reliance.

In light of these lessons, working-class students tended to respond to problems and questions in the classroom by trying harder. In doing so, they activated the skills for self-reliance that they learned at home. Jared Carson, for example, is a fairly high-achieving working-class student. Like Sadie, he approached problems through effort rather than through help-seeking, noting:

> I really don't understand a lot in science. I'm all right, but I don't even know what the words mean half the time, like "quadrille A" and stuff. And I just keep trying, but I have a lot to cover, with all of the things that we do in a day. It's hard to keep everything in your brain.

In interviews, working-class students repeatedly emphasized the importance of effort and self-reliance. Like Jared, these students sometimes recognized that self-reliance could be challenging, and did not always lead to positive results. Yet, they preferred to try harder, or to rely on their friends, rather than turn to their teachers for help.

This does not mean, however, that working-class children always drew on their parents' advice when dealing with problems or questions at school. At times, for example, working-class students would ask their teachers for assistance (though they tended to wait much longer before doing so—see Calarco 2011). And yet, if these efforts were unsuccessful, working-class students would sometimes get discouraged, giving up rather than continuing to try on their own. One afternoon in Mr. Fischer's class, the students were working on a social studies test that had both multiple choice questions and an essay question about the revolutionary war. As they got to the essay portion of the test, many of the middle-class students raised their hands or called out for help:

> Mr. Fischer is circling around, fielding question after question about the essay. Meanwhile, Zach Campitello, a working-class boy, is sitting at his desk, head in his hands. Zach stares hard at the test while picking distractedly at his eraser. After

> another minute, Zach looks up nervously and watches Mr. Fischer, who is talking with a student on the other side of the room. Slowly and timidly, Zach raises his right hand, holding it halfway up.

When Mr. Fischer did not immediately notice Zach's raised hand, Zach seemed to second-guess his decision to ask for help.

> After waiting for only five seconds, Zach lowers his hand, resting it on top of his head. After another five seconds, Zach's hand droops lower, and he rests his head on his other hand. Zach glances up hopefully at Mr. Fischer, but Mr. Fischer is now working with another student. Zach sighs heavily. He puts his hand down and slumps over his desk. Mr. Fischer eventually finishes helping the other student, and looks around for more hands. By this point, though, Zach is doodling on his test, having given up on the essay.

Like Zach and Jared, working-class students often struggled to maintain the kind of self-reliant work ethic that their parents desired. At the same time, however, these students also found it hard to reach out to teachers for assistance in meeting their academic needs.

Implications for Inequalities

This study aims to understand class differences in the lessons that parents teach children about interacting with teachers at school. It is not designed to assess the relative impact of these lessons on children's outcomes. When coupled with existing research, however, this study can offer tentative insights regarding the benefits and drawbacks of these different strategies.

Self-advocacy skills seem to have direct academic benefits. By asking for help, middle-class students at Maplewood were able to complete their work quickly and accurately, and avoid

problems in the classroom. Research also finds positive correlations between help-seeking and school achievement (Gall 1985). It is important to note, however, that these benefits are not automatic or intrinsic. Rather, they reflect the fact that teachers tend to value and reward help-seeking as a signal of student motivation (Calarco 2011; Newman 2000; Ryan, Hicks, & Midgley 1997). If teachers did not respond in this way, these skills would likely have fewer rewards. And yet, because teachers are very responsive to proactive help-seeking efforts, the training middle-class children receive at home seems to equip to secure advantages in the classroom.

Simultaneously, however, these self-advocacy efforts may also have drawbacks. At Maplewood, for example, teachers would sometimes become very frustrated with middle-class students' persistent requests. Teachers were occasionally gruff with students who asked for help without first reading directions. They also denied requests when they were too busy, or when they felt that students were not trying hard enough on their own. Teachers would even complain to me about feeling bombarded with constant requests, and worried that students' reliance on teachers for direction and guidance would undermine their development of problem-solving skills. While contemporary research in social psychology sees help-seeking as "instrumental" for learning, historically, such efforts were equated with dependence and immaturity (see Newman 2000:351 for a review). Teachers, in turn, seem to vacillate between these views. Such findings suggest that self-advocacy efforts (particularly if they are perceived as excessive) might undermine the quality of student-teacher relationships.

Working-class children's self-reliance may also have mixed consequences. Socially, these skills seem beneficial for students in the classroom. Teachers at Maplewood, for example, would praise working-class students for their strong work-ethic. They also appreciated the fact that working-class students were very respectful and well-behaved. Such findings align with prior

research showing that teachers value politeness and deference in students (Brophy & Good 1974; Wentzel 1993) and their families (Lareau 2000; Lareau & Horvat 1999). Thus, self-reliance may help students to establish positive relationships with teachers and to avoid provoking the teachers' frustrations.

Academically, however, self-reliance may have more limited benefits. Working-class students at Maplewood were sometimes able to work through problems on their own. Yet, these diligent efforts were not always successful. Compared to their middle-class peers, working-class students generally took longer to finish classroom tasks. They also tended to turn in work that was less complete, and less accurate, often resulting in lower scores. In keeping with such findings, research suggests that simply spending more time studying does not lead to higher grades (Schuman et al. 1985).

Taken together, these patterns suggest that middle-class students' self-advocacy efforts may have more instrumental academic benefits than will working-class students' self-reliance. That said, more research is needed to fully understand the long-term implications of these class-based approaches to classroom interaction. One possibility is that the benefits of working-class students' self-reliance will grow over time. Research shows, for example, that a strong academic work-ethic is highly valued in college, and is closely correlated with students' college grades (Rau & Durand 2000). Over time, then, and as students are expected to take greater responsibility for their own learning, working-class students' work-ethic might have increasing advantages.

Another possibility is that the benefits of self-reliance will wane over time, or at least be continually surpassed by those of self-advocacy. If, for example, working-class students are reluctant to seek help and clarification, they may also have difficulty determining what to study and how, making the effort they do expend less effective. Relatedly, when working-class students

at Maplewood struggled for a long time, they tended to get discouraged rather than ask for help. As they move into middle and high-school, these working-class students might have trouble maintaining their work ethic in the face of increasingly difficult academic challenges. They might eventually stop trying so hard, particularly if they feel unable to reach out for help and support (Stanton-Salazar 1997; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch 1995).[5] If this is the case, it could help to explain why working-class students tend to fall further behind their middle-class peers as they move into higher levels of schooling, experiencing greater declines in motivation (Gutman & Midgley 2000; Ladd & Dinella 2009) and self-esteem (Wiltfang & Scarbecz 1990), as well as higher drop-out rates (Rumberger 1995).

While more research is needed, it seems likely that children's class-based strategies for managing problems will generate stratified profits at school. If that is indeed the case, then this study has important implications for our understanding of inequalities in school and society more generally. In particular, it highlights the role that families play in teaching stratified lessons, and the role that children and teachers play in translating these lessons into stratified profits.

Discussion

Overall, I found that the middle-class and working-class students at Maplewood learned at home very different lessons about interacting with teachers in the classroom. While middle-class parents sought to develop their children's self-advocacy skills, working-class parents instead tried to foster children's sense of self-reliance. Activating these strategies generated different consequences for students in the classroom (see also Calarco 2011; Nelson & Schutz 2007; Streib 2011). Yet, all parents seemed to believe that they were equipping their children with important and valuable skills (Kohn 1959; Luster et al. 1989; Nelson 2010). In light of these beliefs, parents

worked diligently—encouraging and even coaching their children—to transmit these cultural tools to their children, and to ensure that their children were prepared to utilize those tools on their own behalf.

Why Parental Lessons Stratify Along Social Class Lines

A key question, however, is why parents teach their children these different lessons about interacting with teachers and managing problems at school. Existing research highlights two possibilities.

First, these lessons might reflect differences in parents' own experiences in school. Many working-class parents recalled struggling academically. One even recalled a teacher yelling at him when he tried to ask for help. That said, some of the working-class parents did describe teachers who reached out to them to offer help. Yet, in these situations, the teachers' assistance was always unsolicited—the parents did not actually have to ask for help. Middle-class parents, in turn, tended to recall having an easier time academically. In keeping with existing research, these parents also reported more frequent and more casual interactions with teachers and other parents at their children's school (Lareau 2000; Lareau & Horvat 1999). Such interactions have been shown to bolster parents' knowledge of children's schooling. This knowledge, in turn, may also have made parents more comfortable approaching teachers with requests and encouraging their children to do the same.

Second, parents' lessons to children might also reflect their current experiences, and particularly their occupational conditions. While middle-class and working-class parents have similar aspirations for their children (Luster et al. 1989), their lived realities are often very different (Edwards 2004; Lareau 2011). Kohn (1969), for example, shows how work responsibilities

determine which traits parents value in their children. Professional and managerial occupations tend to require high levels of curiosity, creativity, and self-direction. Parents who hold such jobs, in turn, value similar qualities in their children. Blue-collar or service jobs, on the other hand, tend to require higher levels of orderliness and obedience to authority. Holding such jobs prompts parents to prefer that children display similar attributes (see also Wright & Wright 1976; Alwin 1989). Kohn recognizes that while there is much value overlap between middle-class and working-class parents, differences arise on those attributes that parents consider "important but problematic" (Kohn 1959: 337). Given such findings, it seems likely that parents would not leave these traits to chance, but would make concerted efforts to teach children the skills that they feel are necessary for success not only in school, but in life as a whole.

Implications for Theory and Research

This study has a number of important implications for research and theory. First and foremost, it deepens and clarifies our understanding of the processes by which class cultures are transmitted across generations and reproduced over time. Scholars have long speculated that parents play a critical role in children's acquisition of class-based knowledge, skills, and strategies (Bourdieu 1990; Bronfenbrenner 1958). Yet, socialization models typically view cultural transmission as a relatively passive process of mirroring and modeling (Arnett 1995; Baumrind 1980; Maccoby 1992). While some scholars (particularly in the sociology of childhood) have challenged these models (Corsaro 2005; Elder 1974; Skolnick 1981; Thorne 1993), empirical research has offered only a few examples of more interactive processes of cultural transmission (Lareau 2011). Building on these examples, this study is able to show that both middle-class and working-class

parents engage in rigorous and results-oriented efforts to teach children skills and strategies for navigating their social worlds.

This study also highlights the importance of recognizing social processes as negotiated processes. In keeping with arguments about children's agency (Adler & Adler 1994; Pugh 2009; Thorne 1993), these results indicate that the successful transmission of cultural skills is contingent on the active participation of both parents and children. While parents taught lessons, children chose how to respond. The children at Maplewood, for example, were sometimes reluctant to take their parents' advice (see also Chin & Phillips 2004). Such reluctance, however, prompted parents to engage in even more intensive coaching efforts. These findings suggest that cultural transmission is a contingent process with uncertain outcomes. Recognizing these negotiations, in turn, could help to explain (within-class) variability in the ease and frequency with which individuals activate their cultural tools.

Simultaneously, however, I did not find evidence of children blatantly rejecting their parents' lessons. This may reflect the fact that these children were still relatively young when I interviewed them (ten or eleven years of age), and thus may not have acquired the anti-parent sentiments more commonly associated with adolescents (Brody & Shaffer 1982; Montemayor 1983). Additionally, research does show that even adolescents strongly identify with and want to be like their parents (Gecas & Seff 1990). In adopting the high value that their parents placed on academic success (Luster et al. 1989; Nelson 2010), these children may also have felt that their parents' lessons provided helpful tools for overcoming problems in the classroom.

Beyond these theoretical contributions, this research highlights the importance of studying social processes from a qualitative perspective. Until now, our understanding of the process of cultural transmission has been limited, at least in part, by the lack of qualitative research on family

life. In-depth analyses are particularly well-suited for understanding such theoretical and process-oriented questions (Burawoy 1991). While observations of family interactions might have provided even more detailed descriptions of these processes, parents' coaching efforts may not happen on a daily or even weekly basis. They are also more likely to happen in some settings (e.g., after-school conversations) than in others. Given that Lareau (2011) observed families only during the summer, it is not surprising that she did not find more evidence of these coaching efforts. In-depth interviews, particularly with the use of targeted vignettes, are thus well-suited for helping families to recall and discuss particular types of parent-child interactions. By interviewing parents, children, and teachers, and by observing students in school, I was able to triangulate these accounts and see first-hand the consequences of parents' coaching efforts.

This research, however, is not without limitations. Family-based socialization, for example, is unlikely to be the only process by which individuals acquire class-based cultural repertoires. Research shows that schools (Bowles & Gintis 2002; Gatzambide-Fernandez 2009; Horvat & Davis 2011; Lee & Kramer 2012; Stanton-Salazar 1997; Stuber 2011) and social networks (Carbonaro 1998; Cherng, Calarco, & Kao 2013; Corsaro & Rizzo 1988; Davies & Kandel 1981) can also shape individuals' behaviors and orientations. The training that individuals receive in these settings might supplement or supplant the lessons they learn at home, and, in doing so, might amplify or dampen the reproduction of social inequalities. At the same time, however, research also shows that working-class individuals who find themselves in the kinds of settings that are likely to impart training in middle-class norms (e.g., elite schools, workplaces, and social networks) often struggle to feel comfortable in these settings (Lee & Kramer 2012; Stuber 2005, 2011). Such findings suggest, in turn, that the cultural lessons children learn from their families at

home may have a particularly strong and lasting impact on both the cultural resources that they acquire and the advantages they are able to secure for themselves in activating those resources.

Despite its limitations, however, this study has significant implications for our understanding of critical social processes. It may help to explain not only the interactional dynamics of cultural transmission, but also the importance of these interactions for the reproduction of social inequalities. These results suggest that families may play a critical role not only in securing unequal opportunities for their children (Cucchiara & Horvat 2009; Devine 2004; Lareau 2000, 2011; Reay 1998), but also in equipping children to create their own stratified advantages.

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Endnotes

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[1] Looking beyond the home, scholars have also described how experiences in schools and workplaces can shape individuals' cultural dispositions. Scholars of the "hidden curriculum," for example, suggest that schools have different expectations for students from different social class backgrounds, and thus provide them with experiences that prepare them for different roles in society (Bowles & Gintis 2002; Rist 1970). Horvat and Davis (2011) instead show dropout prevention programs can alter the habitus of disadvantaged students and facilitate their success in school. Relatedly, scholars of social mobility have examined how upwardly-mobile, working-class youths learn to manage cultural mismatches that they encounter in higher education (Lee & Kramer 2012; Stuber 2011) and in the work-force (Lubrano 2004; Stuber 2005).

[2] Three families (one working-class, two middle-class) never responded despite repeated attempts at contact. Scheduling conflicts also prevented some interviews from taking place.

[3] There were a few single-parent families in both the middle-class and working-class groups. While the parents in these families sometimes felt overwhelmed with responsibilities, their efforts to teach children were similar to those of parents in two-parent families from similar class backgrounds.

[4] Such findings align with research indicating that although shyness may be a biological tendency, environmental factors can help children to feel more confident in social interactions (Kagan & Snidman 2004).

[5] Research shows that supportive relationships with teachers help to facilitate students' success in school, as well as their feelings of attachment. If working-class students are less comfortable seeking help from teachers, it may limit their opportunities to develop these kinds of beneficial relationships.

Tables

Table 1: Participants by Type of Participation, Age, and Social Class

Sample	White, Working-Class	White, Middle-Class
Classroom Observations[a]	14 Students	42 Students
Interviews[b]		
Students	9 Students	12 Students
Parents	9 Parents	15 Parents

[a] I solicited parental consent for all children enrolled in the target cohort at Maplewood, excluding those receiving full-time special-education. I received permission to observe all but 19 of the students (12 refused; 7 never returned consent forms despite repeated attempts at contact). To avoid conflating race and class, I exclude 6 students Asian-American students (all middle-class) and 4 Latino students (all working-class) from the analysis. I also exclude 12 more students because they moved away during the study, and did not complete fifth-grade at Maplewood (4 white, working-class; 5 white, middle-class; 2 Latino, working-class; 1 Asian-American, middle-class.

[b] I interviewed parents and children from the same families, selecting these families from those who were already participating in the observation portion of the study.

Table 2: Parents' Responses to Vignette 1 by Social Class

Vignette 1: *Mr. Patrick's fifth grade class is working on a science test. Mr. Patrick is at his desk, grading papers. Jason, one of the students, gets to the third question and reads it silently to himself. It says: "Make a chart comparing the atmospheres on the earth and on the moon." Jason is confused – he isn't sure how to answer the question, or what to include in the chart.*

Descriptions of Parents' Primary Responses to the Vignette	Middle-Class Parents	Working-Class Parents
Jason should go to the teacher for help	12	0
Jason should try his best	0	5
It depends on the teacher's rules	0	2
The teacher should notice Jason struggling and go over to help	0	2
Total	12	9

Table 3: Parents' Responses to Vignette 2 by Social Class

Vignette 2: *Brian, a fifth grader, usually gets good grades in math and does well on tests. Brian comes home from school one day and tells his mom that he is often bored during math class.*

Descriptions of Parents' Primary Responses to the Vignette	Middle-Class Parents	Working-Class Parents
I would ask the teacher to move Brian up a level or give him extra work	9	2
I would have Brian ask the teacher to give him extra work	3	0
I would ask for the teacher's advice at conferences	0	2
If it's really an issue, the teacher would notice and help Brian	0	3
I would tell Brian he just needs to be patient	0	2
Total	12	9

Table 4: Parents' Responses to Vignette 3 by Social Class

Vignette 3: *Kelly gets home from school and opens her backpack to get out her homework. Reaching inside, Kelly realizes that she forgot to bring home the Social Studies packet that she is supposed to finish for tomorrow.*

Descriptions of Parents' Primary Responses to the Vignette	Middle-Class Parents	Working-Class Parents
Kelly should be driven back to school to retrieve the homework packet	5	0
Kelly should call a friend to copy the questions	6	3
Kelly should have to suffer the consequences	1	6
Total	12	9