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1 message

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Fri, May 24, 2013 at 12:33 PM

To: jcalarco@indiana.edu

24-May-2013

Dear Dr. Calarco:

The reviews are now in on your manuscript, "Coached for the Classroom: How Parents and Children Negotiate the Transmission of Class Cultures." Based on the reviewers' comments and our own reading of the manuscript, we are unable to accept the manuscript in its current form. We would, however, be willing to consider a resubmission of a substantially revised version of the manuscript. This invitation is not a promise of eventual acceptance of the manuscript.

As you will see, the reviewers expressed a great deal of enthusiasm for the ideas in your manuscript, an enthusiasm we share. Nevertheless, there are a number of concerns they raise that will have to be resolved before this manuscript can be published. The reviews give a message of both enthusiasm about the project but also skepticism about the results and their interpretation. We encourage you to take time to digest these reviews and to address each of the suggestions the reviewers make, either in your revisions or in an accompanying response memo. Below we highlight some overlapping reviewer comments that in our view are especially central to the revision.

Mismatch Between Framing and Analysis: Your framing does a nice job of making the case for the necessity of parent-child interactional data to address your central question. But when it comes to the analysis, we are let down because the interactional data never fully materialize. One way or another, all three reviewers make this point and comment on the relative neglect of the kids' side of the equation and insufficient use of the observational data to get at interaction. This general issue is extremely important. Please address it carefully and completely.

Additional Analysis Issues: Reviewers highlighted several other analytical problems as well. First, there is the role of teacher behavior raised by Reviewers 2 and 3. Can you bring the teacher and classroom context into the analysis? Second, there is the issue of meaning attached to question-asking behavior in the classroom, a concern raised by both Reviewers 1 and 2. It would certainly strengthen your analysis if you could make the "self-advocacy" interpretation more convincing perhaps by bringing in other indicators of this construct. Third, there is the potential issue of the changing (or perhaps sample-specific) nature of working-class work and what that might mean for the transmission of class culture. It would be useful to demonstrate sensitivity to this issue when using earlier work about the nature of working-class culture and when interpreting your results. Please take all of these analysis concerns seriously.

Style, Accessibility, and Length: It is important that all ASR manuscripts be accessible to as much of the potential readership as possible. Our goal is for the majority of those with sociology PhDs from research universities to be able to understand the issue, the argument, and the findings. For example, all subdisciplinary jargon should be translated into ordinary English so that readers outside the subdiscipline can understand and benefit from your article. The current manuscript is approximately 12,422 words. We ask that you keep the revised manuscript at or below its current length (abstract text, references and notes combined). Any additions should be accommodated by tightening the prose. We understand the tension between revision and length, but have found that ASR reviewers and readers appreciate tight prose and concise contributions. Reviewer 2 recommended the use headings and sub-headings as a way to enhance the organization of your manuscript. We agree. Please consider implementing this recommendation.

The next round of reviews will assess whether you have been able to resolve the concerns raised by the reviewers. Our reading of the reviewers' comments, in combination with our own reading, suggests that the outcome for this manuscript is still very much in play and will require significant and serious revisions. A successful outcome will require rigorous attention to all of the reviewers' and editors' suggestions. If you decide to pursue a revision, please return your revised manuscript along with a detailed response memo explaining how you revised your manuscript in light of the reviewers' and editors' comments. For any reviewer or editor recommendations you decided not to follow, please provide a well-reasoned rationale for not revising the manuscript as recommended. At this point, we envision returning the manuscript to one or more of the current reviewers and to one or more new reviewers.

Once you have had the chance to read and digest the reviewers' comments, please let us know if you plan to submit a revision. If you do plan to resubmit the manuscript, please let us know when we might be able to expect the next draft.

To revise your manuscript, log into <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/asr> and enter your Author Center, where you will find your manuscript title listed under "Manuscripts with Decisions." Under "Actions," click on "Create a Revision." Your manuscript number has been appended to denote a revision.

You may also click the below link to start the revision process (or continue the process if you have already started your revision) for your manuscript. If you use the below link you will not be required to login to ScholarOne Manuscripts.

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You will be unable to make your revisions on the originally submitted version of the manuscript. Instead, revise your manuscript using a word processing program and save it on your computer. Once the revised manuscript is prepared, you can upload it and submit it through your Author Center.

When submitting your revised manuscript, you will be able to respond to the comments made by the reviewer(s) in the space provided. You can use this space to document any changes you make to the original manuscript. In order to expedite the processing of the revised manuscript, please be as specific as possible in your response to the reviewer(s).

IMPORTANT: Your original files are available to you when you upload your revised manuscript. Please delete any redundant files before completing the submission.

Please note that submission of a manuscript to another professional journal while it is under review by American Sociological Review (ASR) is regarded by the American Sociological Association (ASA) as unethical, and significant findings or contributions that have already appeared (or will appear) elsewhere must be clearly identified. All persons who publish in ASA journals are required to abide by these ASA guidelines and ethics codes. We thus assume that this manuscript or a substantially similar version of this manuscript is not under review elsewhere and that portions have not been published elsewhere in whole or in part. Please let us know if either of these conditions is not true.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to consider the manuscript for publication in ASR.

Sincerely,
Katharine M. Donato, Larry W. Isaac, Holly J. McCammon
Editors, American Sociological Review
ASR@vanderbilt.edu

Reviewer(s)' Comments to Author:

Reviewer: 1
Comments to the Author
ASR Ms 13 093

This paper addresses an important issue: how do families transmit particular values/dispositions related to education, and how does the process and content of this cultural transmission differ between classes? The central contribution of this paper is that it shows that this transmission is at least in part accomplished by deliberate effort (not just implicit modeling of certain dispositions) – and that the “lessons” of these deliberate efforts differ by class. I agree with the author that scholars have not adequately attended to the processes by which culture is transmitted and that qualitative study is especially well-suited to analyzing this matter.

When I read the description of the research methods, I was excited about the potential of the project. The author conducted lengthy interviews with parents and their kids and observed classrooms over a several years. This multi-pronged approach offers promise of unusually rich data, especially in light of the author’s concern to analyze cultural transmission as an ongoing, interactional, negotiated process.

Unfortunately the author only mines part of the potential richness in what is presented here. The presentation of data related to what parents (mostly mothers) said and did is vivid and well done. It reflects a good amount of interview material derived from responses to pertinent and imaginative questions (the vignettes). However, what happened to the kids? By my count only two kids appear in the section about the middle class. Any discussion of “negotiation” is inherently one-sided, and the “interactional” component of this process is only thinly revealed. At the same time, the observational component of the research gets short shrift. Only the material about Zach (p. 28) seems to draw on classroom observation. I can only surmise that lots of good data never got out of the author’s files.

That said, the author makes a good case that middle class parents make more effort than working class parents to get their kids to ask teachers for help in completing assignments. What I find problematic, however, is interpreting question-asking as “self-advocacy.” To me, that latter term implies something much broader than asking questions so that a kid can do well on an assignment. It implies some mix of self-promotion, development of a distinct presence and point of view, an autonomous sense of self, and a willingness to challenge the expectations and perceptions of others. Help-seekers may or may not have a broader commitment to self-advocacy. But because the author only writes about help-seeking, we can’t know.

Indeed, I see some of this help-seeking as almost the opposite of self-advocacy. The parents of the question-askers want their kids to get good grades, with a seemingly lesser concern for understanding. Essentially they want their kids to effectively conform to their teacher’s expectations. That behavior may well be good for their academic success, but it can also reflect an excessive concern to be “coddled,” to be told what to do and how to do it. How is that advocacy? (The author seems to partially acknowledge this point in the final section.) In any case, the paper would be much stronger if it included indicators of “self-advocacy” other than question-asking – and if it was more consistently attentive to the “mixed” implications of question-asking.

The paper ends with a long (too long, I think) discussion. Going into this section the reader would have the impression that “self-advocacy”/asking questions was some unalloyed good thing, and that self-reliance was a dubious way to go – and that this difference was consequential for class differences in academic performance. However, the author proceeds to equivocate in a somewhat rambling discussion. The role of kids in this section is also quite prominent, despite the limited attention in the results section.

The discussion of the causes of class differences is not convincing. The author draws on Kohn’s well known argument that parental work experiences shape their child-related values. As the author suggests (p. 33), managerial-professional positions require “curiosity, creativity, and self-direction.” Perhaps so. But those characteristics seem quite far removed from asking questions about completing an assignment. And, indeed, the applicability of Kohn’s argument seems undermined by the author’s finding that working class parents endorse self-reliance, a disposition seemingly much like self-direction.

Reviewer: 2
Comments to the Author

The goal of this study is to provide more in-depth insight into how parents of different social class backgrounds teach their children to behave within the classroom in ways that reproduce class inequalities. Through interviews and ethnographic methods, the author aims to go beyond previous socialization research—which assumes that children model or mirror the behaviors of their parents—to understand how parents actively work to equip their children with the skills to be successful, and how children internalize and enact these skills.

This is a great question, and I applaud the author's more child centered approach. Yet I do not feel the author does enough to articulate how different children, defined by their social class background, internalize their parent's teachings and enact these teachings within the classroom. Most of the evidence presented in the manuscript was based on the parent interview, which provided information that we, to some extent, already have from Lareau's work—although in much greater detail, which I recognize and see as a contribution of the study. Still, to meet the goals set out by the author at the beginning of the paper, I would like to know more about the negotiation process between parents and children, and the process by which some children go about learning to be advocates for themselves, and others self-reliant.

At the same time, I am also concerned that the author conceptualizes these differences in children's behaviors too broadly. While the author says that children of middle class backgrounds have learned self-advocacy, and children of working-class backgrounds are more self-reliant, what they really are is more or less likely to ask for help from teachers, and perhaps parents. Are there other examples of self-advocacy that would justify this broader claim? For example, do some middle class children ask for more work, or more difficult work? Do they try to negotiate grades, or placement in more advanced reading groups? Do working class children refuse the help of teachers? Are they self-reliant in other ways? And are there examples of working class children clearly do not self-advocate? In all, can we really extrapolate these findings beyond asking for help, or not?

In addition, I am not convinced that the middle class parents don't emphasize self-reliance too, but just do so in combination with advocacy. Teaching independence was a middle trait highlighted by Lareau. What did the author observe about this? Perhaps the real class difference is in advocacy, and that is what the author should emphasize.

Also, do the implications of these different child behaviors vary by the teaching approach? For example, in some schools in some districts, teachers must take a more child-centered approach to teaching, where different children work on different assignments at their own pace. In such classrooms, perhaps self-reliance is a desirable skill that can produce a positive outcome, (although reluctance to ask for help is still probably not—which brings me back to my points above about how these behaviors are conceptualized). Still, in such a case, both skills would be desirable. Could the author provide more detail on the structure of the classroom curricula and its implications for student behavior and teacher-student interaction?

Also, how does the social class background of the teachers come into play? Given the SES characteristics of the district, it seems likely that most teachers are more similar to their middle class children than working class children, in terms of race, marital status, and other features of SES beside education. Is it possible that these teachers work more to promote the learning of the middle class children, and it is these teacher behaviors that really reinforce the lessons parents try to teach at home. The role of the teachers (or their class background) was not discussed much at all, but this seems important if the author wants to tease out the second piece of this puzzle—how children of different social class backgrounds learn to act in school.

The author provides some speculative reason why middle class parents teach self-advocacy more than working-class parents. I'd like to suggest an additional explanation: competition. In other words, having run the rat race, these parents develop a competitive attitude, which they instill in their children. Self-advocacy, thus, reflects parents' desire for their children to get help, no matter the cost to other students, and of course, to gain the advantages Lareau discusses.

As a minor, but important issue, I think the paper would benefit much from some reorganization, especially the use of headings and subheadings. Doing so will help tighten up the findings in a way that conveys more, and does so more clearly.

Finally, while I have no problem (personally, although others might) with the author's decision to focus on only White parents, the implications of this restriction for the study's findings ought to be discussed in greater detail in

the Discussion section of the paper.

Reviewer: 3

Comments to the Author

This manuscript reports the results from interview and observational research into parenting goals and practices as stratified by class. Critiquing "socialization" theories as too deterministic and top-down, the author nonetheless seeks to contribute to debates about the reproduction of class status by focusing on the transmission of cultural class practices in the home. The author argues that parents differed by class in their goals for their children, with middle-class parents teaching their children self-advocacy and working-class parents teaching their children self-reliance. Children absorbed and utilized these lessons to varying degrees, the author maintains, making the transmission more uncertain and variable than predicted by straightforward socialization theories. In addition, teachers responded differently to the strategies, leading to "stratified profits," or different advantages for the children in the classroom.

This paper does a good job of characterizing the existing literature on the passing down of advantages, and juxtaposes well the socialization literature with contemporary critiques stemming from what childhood scholars have demonstrated about children's active agency. It rightly argues that interactional data is implicated by these literatures, and is needed to adjudicate among their claims. It convinces me that culture is passed down through interactions, that only through interactions can we properly understand the distance between what parents think they pass down and what they actually pass down, and only through interactions can we adequately surmise the role of children in shaping and interpreting these lessons. Finishing up the lit review, I was sold.

The problem is that this interactional data is almost nowhere in sight in this paper. Instead the bulk of the evidence is interviews in which parents lay claim to what they think they have passed down to their children, and in which children parrot some of the "lessons" they claim to have derived from their parents. In some parts this evidence feels wafer-thin, an account of wishful thinking and a lot of presentation of self on the part of the parents, and on the part of the children, an account of what they know they should be doing/thinking. Both are moral narratives, and so it is not that they are irrelevant. They are useful as renditions of the good, of what counts as being a good parent and a good child. The author demonstrates convincingly that these renditions vary systematically by class. But what we do not have with this evidence is any demonstration that these "lessons" actually have their effect on behavior or on how children succeed in school.

An inadvertent example of this fundamental problem is to be found in the paper's own data, of Ben Healey and his parents. We are told that Ben is a high-achieving middle-class student, a child of upwardly mobile parents who tell him that he needs to seek help, ask the teacher, and otherwise engage in the same self-advocacy that other middle-class parents prescribe. We learn that his parents don't really believe in this strategy, however, although they urge him to adopt it. Ultimately, does Ben go by what he is told? No, we learn that actually he doesn't seek help, even when his math score suffers at the end of fifth grade. If we are to believe that parenting is a major cause of how children handle problems in school, then it appears that explicit, discursive parenting, what the author calls "the goal-oriented process of teaching and training," where parents describe the lessons they think they are imparting, is not the key to Ben's narrative. More likely it seems that the modeling-and-mirroring kind of theories might have more purchase here, perhaps in routine interactions that are less about didactic pronouncements and more about showing children how the parents themselves handle such situations.

There is two mismatches here, then, one between the kind of data that the lit review prepares us for and that which we are given, and another between the kind of data we have and the kind of claims that it gives rise to. The data we have, about what kind of parenting goals are class-stratified, can lead to claims about how visions of the good vary by social location. What they cannot do, however, is allow for "targeted analysis of the interactive processes by which class-based cultural tools (i.e., skills and strategies for social interaction) are transmitted across generations."

Thus the manuscript essentially promises more than it delivers. The author makes note of the fact that interview data is not interactions, but observes that "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." I

am not sure of the point here – is it to say that this sort of data is too difficult to get? – but it does not eliminate the point that the literature review makes so well, that this sort of data is needed.

The author refers to extensive observations made over a 2-3 year period, suggesting plenty of interactional data to be had. Furthermore, in the ethnographic data included, the author is clearly a careful researcher capable of close-in observations with children. The example of Zach's behavior in the classroom is particularly compelling, for example, and it would offer powerful support for the argument if it were paired with data from his parents.

Other problems are less significant. The paper makes some mention of Kohn and the authoritarian/authoritative parenting work. It strikes me that the traits of obedience to authority and orderliness that were apparently important for working-class work sound quite dated, reflecting a time when working-class work was more likely to take place in a factory involving the necessary coordination of many human cogs, as it were. Today's working-class work is far more likely to involve service work, with the attendant emotional labor and manager-consumer-worker triad of relations, for example. (The author's own sample included mostly "food-service workers, store clerks, daycare providers, or transportation workers.") What are the skills necessary for that kind of work? This question is of course beyond the scope of this paper, but it suggests caution when relying on Kohn to justify/explain findings about working-class parenting.

The paper also mentions that how teachers respond to self-advocacy/self-reliance shapes the impact these strategies might have for the children's future – but we are given precious little evidence of those responses. More important for the argument, what if teachers were to respond differently to middle-class students' self-advocacy than the same strategy from working-class students? In other words, what if the teacher response has less to do with the strategy than with who is employing it, or with other co-varying characteristics (such as those that Lareau discovered in *Unequal Childhoods*). In addition, I was confused in the final section that discussed how working class students might benefit from self-reliance because studies show the benefits of a strong work ethic – I am not sure I understand those as the same thing. Finally, there were several typos: the quote from Ms. Matthews that used *hurtle* instead of *hurdle*, and later on when the author drops the word "them" from the phrase *equip to secure advantages* (no page numbers on my version, sorry).