

Dear Ms. Calarco:

The reviews are now in on your manuscript, “Can You Help Me Get Ahead? Social Class Differences in Elementary Students’ Efforts to Negotiate Opportunities for Learning.” 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 enthusiasm for the topic of your manuscript – an enthusiasm we share. However, they also raise a number of very serious concerns that will have to be resolved before this manuscript can be published. 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. We were successful in securing very learned, hardworking and insightful reviewers for this manuscript. The result is a very demanding set of revisions, but also, hopefully, the opportunity to craft a manuscript with significant impact and defensive findings.

Theoretical Contribution – We, along with the three Reviewers, want you to develop stronger conceptual links to additional studies either not cited in your literature review, or those that you do cite but only nominally engage. This includes work by Rist, Meghan, and Lareau, among others. The idea here is to fully engage prior studies that are particularly relevant for your study. A fuller engagement should help you define what part of social reproduction this manuscript speaks to (see Reviewer 2) and then link your findings back to this idea in the discussion section so that the theoretical contribution of the paper is clear to readers.

Data and Analysis – One big concern is the insufficiency of the data to illustrate key findings, both in terms of using one example to suggest a pattern and in terms of not offering any other type of data, e.g. counts of particular types of interactions and/or more detail about the conditions under which the interactions occur. Therefore, although your ethnographic data from observations of elementary school children in 3rd-, 4th- and 5th-grade classes are rich, the data analysis presented in this manuscript is thin. Think carefully about how you could use your data to respond to the possible critique that you are just observing what you set out to see (see Reviewers 1 and 3) and how you might address readers who come to your work with alternative explanations. Not only should you offer multiple examples of possible patterns the data suggest, you should offer the reader more information about how frequently you observed the behaviors. In addition, please add more about the context in which certain types of children requested help and when they did so, and avoid the subjectivity found in some of your descriptions, unless you let the reader know how you came to define a child in this way (see Reviewer 1). Relatedly, Reviewers 1 and 2 raise serious concerns about some of the examples you present in the text.

With respect to your data, we, as Editors, ask you to present more information that summarizes the interactions of the 56 non-Hispanic white students. If your observations occurred during the 2009-10 academic year, how many total observations did you observe and for what duration? We assume there were more than 56, but how many more? How many classes did you observe each week or month? Answering these questions (and perhaps presenting these data in a table) may help minimize concerns about the small sample size of children, especially those of working class. In addition, do the data show differences in the interactions by student’s grade level? By gender (as Reviewer 3 asks)? We also ask you to strengthen your rationale for including children of middle- and upper-class parents together.

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. These goals are achieved in the abstract, introduction, and conclusions but also have implications for writing throughout the manuscript. 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 length of the current version is what should be needed for this project. Therefore, any additions should thus be offset by tightening the prose elsewhere and the next draft should be no longer than 12,000 words, inclusive of abstract, text, footnotes and references. Also, please remove Figure 1 and consider whether all the Appendix tables are necessary (following the suggestions of Reviewer 2). Finally, if accepted, the Appendices would probably be published in the ASR on-line supplement, for which we have a 10-page recommended limit.

Could you send your revised manuscript to us by Mar. 5, 2011? We are currently planning issues for later this year and your work may fit well thematically in one of them, assuming a successful revision.

The next round of reviews will assess whether you have been able to resolve the serious concerns raised by the reviewers and us. Our reading of the reviewers' comments, in combination with our own careful reading, suggest that the outcome for this manuscript is still very much in play, and as such, the manuscript will require significant and thoughtful 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 decide not to follow, please provide a well-reasoned rationale for not revising the manuscript as recommended. At this point, we envision returning your revised manuscript, previous reviews, and response memo 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.

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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. Please also highlight the changes to your manuscript within the document by using the track changes mode in MS Word or by using bold or colored text.

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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,

Tony N. Brown, Katharine M. Donato, Larry W. Isaac, Holly J. McCammon
Editors, American Sociological Review
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Reviewer(s)' Comments to Author:

Reviewer: 1

Comments to the Author

This paper argues that children are active participants in the reproduction of social class. More specifically, it argues that middle class children enact behaviors of "entitlement" and working class children enact behaviors of "constraint" and that through these different enactments children directly affect their educational experiences and their opportunities for mobility within the educational system. The paper builds on three years of participant observation in a single school system, following a cohort of children from third to fifth grade; it also draws on interviews and surveys.

There is much to commend in this manuscript. The author extends beyond research that has already been conducted which explores the behavior of working class and middle class children in different schools to demonstrate that these same differences occur when working class and middle class children attend the same schools. The particular examples of the differences found are clearly delineated and well presented.

Ultimately, however, I am concerned that the evidence is not sufficient. I hate to say this because I believe that qualitative work is necessary for a piece like this and because I believe the important conclusions that the author draws. But both of those reasons make me hesitate here. That is, this

approach, and these specific findings, are too important to be subject to the kind of critique that they inevitably evoke.

What do I mean? If we look at a comparable study – the old study by Ray Rist about teacher’s expectations in the classroom, we find some numerical data that accompanies his assertions that teachers’ expectations made a difference in what happened to the kids in the classroom he observed. He shows, for example, how seating assignments were related to social class and how during three different observations periods children at different tables were subject to different kinds of control.

Similarly, Nelson and Schutz (in a study cited in this paper) actually count correction issues, praise issues, children’s interactions with each other, teacher involvement in children’s interactions, and children’s requests of teachers for specified periods in each of the two day care centers under consideration.

These two articles (to take two examples) thus provide evidence that goes beyond an author’s assertion that there was differential treatment (in Rist) or that children made different kinds of requests of teachers (in Nelson and Schutz). As I read the manuscript under review I kept on wishing for some such data that would help the author respond to the (possible) charge that s/he was simply observing what s/he set out to see. Take the example that begins on page 12 (of the manuscript; page 13 if the cover page is included). The author describes how Jesse (a working class kid) does not overtly ask the teacher for help while the teacher is reading and how, by way of contrast, Mandy (a middle class kid) does jump up and demand assistance. But these are not comparable situations: Jesse would have had to interrupt a teacher who was reading; Mandy interrupted a teacher who was in the act of helping children already. Unless we have direct comparisons of working class kids and middle class kids who interrupt (or who ask for assistance when the teacher is “otherwise” free), we don’t have sufficient evidence to claim differences in style.

The same problem arises with the example that begins on page 15 where the author says that “many of the middle class kids start to barrage” the teacher with questions. But the author does not show that no working class child entered into that barrage of questions.

In short, I worry that the significant point (and I do think that the point is significant) of this article will be dismissed for lack of sufficient evidence. This concern is even more pronounced because there was only one observer and no independent coding of the events. Indeed, many of the observations are very subjective: the author describes working class children being less “comfortable” and less “assertive” and middle class kids being engaged in “strategic timing” but there is inadequate corroboration of these claims and the author does not explain how s/he came to define an individual child as being comfortable or assertive.

I have another concern. The strength of this paper lies in considering working class and middle class children in the same school. Yet the working class children are a definite minority” 12 out of 56 in the sample; 22 out of 78 in the full project sample. This issue has to be discussed: is the behavior of the working class children at all shaped by the fact that this is a predominantly middle class school? Would the working class children be behaving differently in a working class school? Would the middle class children be behaving differently in a working class school? Even if the author cannot answer these questions with the data at hand, they do have to be addressed.

A couple of minor points:

- 1) I found the male pronoun was used unnecessarily on occasion (page 6)

2) The author says that “middle-class kids bring from home a greater understanding of this ‘hidden curriculum’” (page 11) but this seems to be what the author is trying to demonstrate;

3) the author needs to be explicit about how middle-class children demonstrate “a sense of entitlement”

4) The discussion and conclusion is a little repetitive from the beginning rather than pushing beyond what was said earlier.

Reviewer: 2

Comments to the Author

This study addresses important issues for scholars of social stratification, sociology of childhood, and sociology of education. The paper is intelligent, well written, and easy to comprehend. It has the potential to make a good contribution to ASR, but I point out a handful of issues – some more pressing than others – that I think the author should consider and address in order to improve the manuscript.

Note: I refer to the page numbers that appear at the top of the pages.

Major issues

1. The research question/statement, on p. 2, strikes me as problematic. The author states that “In this study, I explore whether children are simply the passive recipients of socialization and the advantages it produces, or whether they adopt class cultures and, by displaying them, influence their own opportunities.” My question is, what is the difference between the two? How is receiving socialization different than adopting culture? It seems to me that both could be true – that kids could be passive recipients of class-based socialization. Maybe agency needs to play more of a role here? I would like for the author to consider this issue and achieve greater conceptual clarity in stating the central goal of the study at this early point in the paper.

2. The author never really states what she means by “social reproduction.” One could argue that this is not necessary; readers of ASR should know what social reproduction is. At the same time, one could argue that this study does not really get at social reproduction – if working-class kids do not ask teachers for help as often as middle-class kids do, is this really indicative of social reproduction in action? This is where defining social reproduction comes into play. If we are talking about parents transmitting advantages to their children in a broad sense, then yes, this study speaks to the process of social reproduction. But if we are talking about kids ending up, as adults, in the same social class as their parents, then it becomes more of a stretch to argue that this study speaks to social reproduction. At one point, the author mentions that “help-seeking correlates positively with school achievement” (p. 6), hinting that this study is about social reproduction in the sense that it is ultimately about achievement gaps between middle- and working-class kids. But the seasonal comparisons literature suggests that low-SES kids actually do OK during the school year and primarily lose ground to high-SES kids over the summer, so it begs the question of whether the help-seeking analyzed here is as consequential as the author makes it out to be. I recommend that the author clarify in the paper (a) what she means by social reproduction and (b) what part of the social reproduction process this study actually illustrates.

3. The framing of the study could benefit from greater engagement with Mehan’s 1992 Sociology of Education article, “Understanding Inequality in Schools: The Contribution of Interpretive Studies.” The author does cite this article, but does not engage it much. Yet Mehan’s arguments about the need to incorporate culture and agency into reproduction theories are extremely relevant to what the author is

trying to accomplish in the current study. It seems to me that Mehan (1992) warrants a paragraph or so in both the front end (perhaps on p. 5 before turning to the next section) and discussion/conclusion sections. (By the way, I am not Hugh Mehan.)

4. In the findings section, the author should present more convincing evidence of the overall pattern reported (that middle-class kids more often ask for help and do so with more comfort, confidence, and strategy, compared to working-class kids). One issue here is the way in which the author repeatedly says that a specific example “suggests” the overall pattern: p. 19 and 20, “as this example suggests;” p. 23, “as this quote suggests;” p. 24, “as this excerpt suggests.” The way I see it, a single example does not suggest a pattern; an example illustrates a pattern that is found when considering all of the data. In general, then, I recommend that the author make more of an effort to explain to readers how she concluded that systematic differences between working- and middle-class kids exist in the data as a whole. More specifically, though:

(a) In the example discussed on pp. 13-16, the teacher is reading out loud to the group and a working-class student (Jesse) does not ask for help. The teacher ends up noticing that Jesse needs help, so she stops reading out loud and comes over voluntarily to help. As this is occurring (as the teacher is getting staples), a middle-class student comes and asks the teacher for help. The author presents this scenario as a good example of a working-class student not asking for help while a middle-class student does. It seems noteworthy, however, that the teacher was reading out loud to the group when the working-class student did not ask for help, but the teacher was not reading out loud when the middle-class student asked for help. Would the middle-class student have asked for help while the teacher was reading out loud, or did she take the opportunity to do so only after the teacher stopped reading out loud? To reassure readers, the author needs to note that it was common for students to ask for help while the teacher was reading out loud (assuming that is true) and provide examples of middle-class students doing so (assuming there are examples to report). Otherwise, skeptical readers may not be convinced that this is a good example of a larger pattern.

(b) The example on p. 16 is questionable, too. In that example, 12 out of 14 middle-class students but 0 out of 2 working-class students ask for help with a math question. Can we really say that there is a pattern of no working-class students asking for help when only two were present in the class? If it was the case that 6 out of 8 middle-class students but 1 out of 8 working-class students (for example) asked for help, the author would have stronger evidence of a pattern. Perhaps the author can use a better example here to illustrate this point?

(c) On pages 17 to 19, the author presents a detailed and lengthy description of an incident in which a working-class student hesitantly asks a teacher for help. Again, just one example is provided as evidence indicating a larger pattern. How are readers to conclude that there is a pattern when only one example is given?

More minor issues

5. The author makes it a point to note that “middle-class kids have an advantage in help-seeking not because their cultural style is inherently better than that of their working-class peers, but because teachers respond positively to the help-seeking strategies they use” (p. 26). I understand the desire to make this point (that one culture is not “better” than another), but the author might need to expand on it a bit. For example, if one defines a “better” strategy as a strategy that works, then one must conclude

that middle-class students have better help-seeking strategies. How, then, are middle-class students' strategies not better?

6. Figure 1 seems unnecessary, the information in Appendix A easily could be presented in the text, and the point of Appendix C is unclear. Arguably, Appendix B is the only table that is needed.

7. On p. 28, the author refers to an example involving a student named Christian, but I do not recall this example being mentioned earlier in the manuscript.

Reviewer: 3

Comments to the Author

This paper examines an understudied topic: the role of children in participating in their own social reproduction. It adopts a useful design and provides engaging evidence. However, it is limited by several shortcomings in the way the issue is conceptualized and the argument is framed.

1. At the outset, the author effectively sets up a contrast between views of reproduction that focus on the role of the school and views that focus on the role of the family (p.2-3). Yet when turning to the role of children, instead of setting up the issue as one possibility alongside schools and families, the author argues that children "also have to shape their own opportunities" (p.4). This point is made even more starkly on the opening page: "children must also adopt class-based patterns of interaction that affect their own outcomes." In framing the argument in this manner, the author presents an overly deterministic view of the role of children. Moreover, there is empirical evidence that calls this predetermined conclusion into question. Along with the well-known research on the stratification of learning opportunities that the author cites on p.2, perhaps the strongest counter-example is the classic work of Ray Rist (1970), in which teachers sorted kindergarteners by table according to how they were dressed, and allocated most of their attention to the better-dressed (middle-class) children while virtually ignoring their less privileged peers. I am not saying Rist is right and the author of this paper is wrong – perhaps the children in Rist's study behaved in the same manner as those in this study, but Rist did not explore their behavior – only that the author's way of framing the paper puts the conclusion before the evidence. Children may or may not adopt cultural routines according to their class backgrounds that contribute to the stratification of learning opportunities, and this is worth investigating but should not be taken as a given from the start.

2. The author criticizes past research that examined class differences in children's behavior by contrasting behavior of children in different schools, because this research cannot distinguish between behavior that reflects differences in school culture and behavior that reflects differences in children's own cultural orientations (p.5). In response to this past limitation, the author studies behavioral differences among children from different class backgrounds within the same school. However, the author's approach does not solve the problem because children in the same school (and even in the same class) have different experiences based on the class or group to which they are assigned and they way others (teachers, other children) interact with them. As a result one cannot assume that differences in children's behavior reflect cultural orientations they bring with them to school as opposed to socialization experiences they undergo in school.

3. The author does not go far enough in connecting his/her findings to important prior research. First, the main argument – that children participate in their own reproduction as a consequence of their cultural orientations – owes a far greater debt to Willis (1970) than the author allows. Second, the main findings are closely tied to two insights from Lareau's (2000) Home advantage. First, middle class

children perceive a sense of entitlement: like their parent's in Lareau's research, the children in this study perceive that they have a right to make demands on their teachers. Second, the finding that working class children wait for assistance rather than making demands resonates with Lareau's depiction of working class parents viewing educators as the experts whose judgment is not to be questioned. While Lareau's work is noted in the paper, the conceptual parallels are not elaborated. Another conceptual link could be drawn to Dreeben's (1968) argument about the norm of independence, although this study suggest that may be a class-bound norm.

4. Ordinarily I hesitate to criticize a paper for what it does not attempt to do, but in this case there are two issues that cry out for attention. First, was there no misbehavior in these classes? In my experience the phenomenon of children seeking help from teachers is closely bound up with children's classroom deportment – often children seek help through their misbehavior, or they avoid seeking help by misbehaving. This phenomenon was explored long ago by Metz (1978), who identified track differences in the way students misbehave that resulted in differences in learning opportunities: low-track students misbehaved by disengaging with schoolwork while high-track students misbehaved through their schoolwork (e.g., by shouting out answers to questions). The issue of misbehavior seems too closely tied to the phenomenon investigated in this paper to leave aside.

A second missing issue is that of gender. Was there no discernable pattern of gender differences in seeking help from teachers (or receiving attention from teachers)? Whether the answer is yes or no, this issue should be discussed – it's just too salient to ignore.

5. A few minor comments:

- a. I found the constant use of the slang term "kids" to be distracting.
- b. It is an overstatement to say that "working-class and middle-class children rarely attend the same school" (p.2).
- c. The comment that "almost all" children want to succeed in school (p.12) seems strange. Are there fifth graders who do not want to succeed in school?
- d. Although the empirical examples are well drawn, I found it difficult to get a sense of how frequently these behavior patterns were observed.
- e. The last paragraph before the discussion (p.25) raises an interesting point about the possible disadvantages of the help-seeking behavior of middle-class students, but the point does not go anywhere. It should be developed or dropped.

Additional references:

Dreeben, Robert. (1968). *On what is learned in schools*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Metz, Mary H. (1978). *Classrooms and corridors: The crisis of authority in desegregated secondary schools*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Rist, Ray C. (1970). "Student Social Class and Teacher Expectations: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Ghetto Education." *Harvard Educational Review* 40: 72-73.