Schools, Housing, and the Reproduction of inequality

Annette Lareau
University of Pennsylvania
and
Elliot Weininger
SUNY Brockport
Neighborhood and place established as important

But: insufficient attention to mechanisms through which parents choose

Matters: for policy, for research

- Research question:
  How do parents of young children decide where to live?
Macro and Micro: Social class is important in schooling and family life

- Evidence of it in many spheres:

  *Class and Child rearing:*

  - “concerted cultivation” middle-class strategies
  - “accomplishment of natural growth” working-class and poor strategies
Methods:

* Observations at schools, open houses in the city, playground.

* Interviews with 90 native-born, parents living in a large Northeastern city and 3 contiguous suburbs

* Recruited from local public elementary schools, day cares, and from other parents in the sample

* Brought a pie as a friendly gesture, $50 honorarium

* Most children 3 to 7 but some as old as 11

* Lareau did over one-half of the interviews; rest done by a multi-racial research team

* Additional interviews with educators, real estate agents, community leaders, and day care teachers
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White parents in the city</th>
<th>African-American parents in the city</th>
<th>White parents in suburbs</th>
<th>African-American parents in suburbs</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Upper-middle-class</strong>: Advanced degree and credentialed job with autonomy (JD, MD, MBA)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle-class</strong>:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BA+ and job where have more limited autonomy (teachers, claims adjuster)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working-class</strong>:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>no BA and more closely supervised work (retail sales clerk, home health care aide, on gov’t assistance)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total CORE study</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kingsley: “best” Schools</td>
<td>Gibbons: Lower-middle class</td>
<td>Warren: Working-class</td>
<td>City varied</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per pupil expenditure</td>
<td>$26,500</td>
<td>$15,800</td>
<td>$14,200</td>
<td>$13,400</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT scores</td>
<td>1750</td>
<td>1575</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>1150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% proficient 3rd grade reading</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average home value</td>
<td>$485,000</td>
<td>$318,000</td>
<td>$140,000</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How does structure matter?

Roads, highways
- Public transportation
- Property taxes
- Zoning for home size
- Businesses, shopping
- Work availability
- Real estate practices

Policies:
- Tax policy
- School finance policy
- Housing policy (Federal housing authority, credit, interest rates)
- Employment policies (incentives for businesses)
- Poverty policies (housing)
Power of economics

Undeniable played a role

*Median cost of home varied

*some parents priced out of Kingsley

*But: insufficient, significant variability in housing options within each area
Parents had mental maps

- Considered a small number of suburban DISTRICTS
- Drawing on informal networks, very rapidly settled on a district
- Most of the region was "greyed out"
- Only considered comparable districts
- Word-of-mouth
Many suburban middle-class parents concerted cultivation EXCEPT re where to live:

Ms. Wauters: white mother, psychologist, husband also has advanced degree:

“some of my decisions are not like I’ve carefully researched.”

Ms. Preston: white PhD “I’m a scientist, I know how to check things out, and the fact is I really didn’t do it”

Mr. Quigley, African-American father:

“The school system is one of the best.”
Suburban Working-class Families

Reputation and experience: Schools are good

- Mona Edgerton, an African-American single mother (who had worked as a medical assistant)

  “I like Warren. Like I said I went there. I like the staff.”

- Because not in the city, assured that schools are good

- Pride in being in the suburbs
City process very different

- Parents of ALL social classes deeply worried, no one was casual
- Many expressed a desire for charter schools (presumed to be superior to public schools)
- Again, networks were crucial
- Friends, co-workers, relatives guided parents to schools to consider
- Most did not use websites, test scores, if did, then middle-class or upper-middle-class
- Process was harrowing for many middle-class moms
- Only 4 to 6 public neighborhood schools defined as viable by middle-class parents, oversupply of parents
- Some charters had acceptance rates of 14%
- Limits of class
City families: worry, obsession

Middle-class families, extensive searches

Ann: applied to 14 charter and public transfer schools: not accepted to any

Great trepidation sent her daughter to an “up and coming” school which middle-class parents were seeking to reform:

Harrowing process
Working-class families also worry

- Charter schools uniformly seen as higher quality by all white and African-American working-class city parents we interviewed
- Some African-American mothers expressed a desire for a religious education
- Most went to neighborhood school
“Nationally, only 19% [of parents] gave schools an A or B.

But, when asked to rate their oldest child’s school, 77% of parents gave that school an A or a B.”
Role of race

White and African-American parents followed SIMILAR pathways in gathering information about schools, looking for schools, and deciding on schools.

- Middle-class whites expressed a desire for diversity.
- African-American parents had more intensity in discussions of diversity.
- But all used networks: networks guided them to different areas to live (i.e., where people in their network lived).
- Some African-American families expressed desire for religious based education not expressed by whites.
- BUT: African-American parents expressed concern about their children encountering discrimination once in schools.
Paradox: Across class: Networks were crucial

- But, networks class (and race) stratified and hence networks also ended up guiding parents to different locations

- Most parents had very limited knowledge about school districts other than the ones in their class range
Micro climates

- Limits to knowledge

- Blank looks about school districts 20 minutes away

- MENTAL MAPS: other areas “greyed out”

- Not only about being able to focus:

- Movers only considered school districts with a similar demographic or more highly ranked
Power and limits of social class

- Would expect social class to matter in search for a good school; in suburbs did not mirror research on other aspects of parents
- Finding class similarity where would expect class difference
- ALL guided by social networks
- Social networks were not random but stratified by class and race: SO ended up living in different locations
How does Social class transmit advantages?

- Structures mattered
- Suburbs: “nonchalant” or “casual”
- City: far from nonchalant

- Everyone drew on networks, but networks also guided people to different places
- Need to think more about structures and how they intersect with micro-interactions
- “mental maps” “micro climates”