From Social Ties to Social Capital:
Class Differences in the Relations Between Schools and Parent Networks

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Focusing on parental networks—a central dimension of social capital—this article uses ethnographic data to examine social-class differences in the relations between families and schools. We detail the characteristics of networks across different classes and then explore the ways that networks come into play when parents are confronted by problematic school situations. The middle-class parents in our study tended to react collectively, in contrast to working-class and poor parents. The middle-class parents were also uniquely able to draw on contacts with professionals to mobilize the information, expertise, or authority needed to contest the judgments of school officials. We did not find substantial race differences. We affirm the importance of a resource-centered conception of social capital that grants the issue of inequality a predominant place.

The concept of social capital has undergone a meteoric rise to prominence over the last 15 years, as even a brief search of publication databases throughout the social sciences will document. Moreover, above and beyond its prominence in various subspecialties of sociology, political science, and neighboring disciplines, the concept's reach now extends into more distant fields such as public health (Hawe & Schiell, 2000; Morrow, 1999, 2000) and public housing research (Lang & Hornburg, 1998); it has also been placed on the agenda in various policy debates (see, for example, Woolcock, 1998).

This prominence is clearly reflected in educational research. James Coleman (1988, 1990) and Pierre Bourdieu (1986), the figures most frequently credited with theoretical development of the notion of social capital, both displayed an abiding interest in the sociology of education, thus ensuring that the concept would make itself known in that field of inquiry.[1] Nevertheless, in the context of educational research, studies elevating the concept of social capital to a prominent position have exhibited a restricted methodological scope, primarily using quantitative techniques. We argue that ethnography

can make an important contribution by providing insights into the under-lying actions that produce or expend social capital, thereby complementing quantitative research.

We take as our point of departure one of the most frequently invoked kinds of social capital—that of parental networks—to examine its impact on children's schooling. Using a large ethnographic dataset, we describe varia-tions in the architecture of such networks. We also examine how they facil-itate particular actions affecting children's school experiences. In doing so, we are particularly interested in assessing how social capital comes into play when problematic issues arise at school. Our data suggest that there are important class-specific differences in the architecture of parental networks and, associated with this, in parents' capacity to effectively intervene in school matters. On the basis of this result, we suggest certain reformulations that may render the concept of social capital more useful in the context of edu-cational research.

In what follows, we first briefly review the various conceptions of social capital that have animated educational research. After a short discussion of methodology, we demonstrate that parental networks vary across class cat-egories. Our findings imply that the form of "intergenerational closure" identified by Coleman (1998, 1990) as one of the paradigmatic instances of educationally relevant social capital—network ties connecting parents of school peers—is primarily a middle-class phenomenon. In the case of working-class and poor families, by contrast, closure is organized predomi-nantly along kinship lines. The data further indicate that the presence of pro-fessionals in parental networks is substantially more prevalent in the middle class. We follow with a discussion of how problems at school are dealt with by middle-class parents, on the one hand, and by poor and working-class parents, on the other, focusing on the manner in which these networks may

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play a role. Here we show that the resources that are made available to middle-class parents through their networks affect various aspects of their children's schooling, including teacher behavior, track placement, and program participation. We conclude by arguing that in the educational context, social capital may be just as likely to function as a mechanism that facilitates the intergenerational transmission of advantage as one that ameliorates its effects.

Social Capital and Education

Use of the term "social capital" has been plagued by conceptual murkiness. The "foundational" statements in the social capital literature—primarily those of Coleman (1988, 1990) and Bourdieu (1986)—were relatively brief and imprecise, leaving subsequent researchers free to develop discrepant meanings of the same term. Moreover, as Portes (1998) noted in a review, some of the most widely cited uses of the concept—including those of Coleman (1988, 1990) and Putnam (1996)—failed to distinguish adequately between the constitutive elements of social capital, the various manners in which it can be put to use, and the manifold consequences it brings about. The upshot of this, Portes argued, was analyses that often did not live up to their explanatory ambitions, punctuated from time to time by tautological declarations or equations that did little more than attach new labels to familiar variables.

Consequently, the most recent research has devoted considerable attention to the development of a theoretically clarified, broadly oriented, and analytically rigorous conceptualization of social capital (Lin, 2001; Portes, 1998; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993; Woolcock, 1998). However, with occasional exceptions (discussed later), educational research has not been involved in this conceptual work. Instead, studies of the (hypothesized) importance and role of social capital in educational contexts have proceeded largely on the basis of examples provided by Coleman (1988, 1990) and, in particular, examples of intergenerational closure (networks connecting the parents of school peers) and parent-child relations (and more specifically, parental involvement in children's schooling). In the case of intergenerational closure, social capital is understood in terms of a set of social relations that enables the reciprocal monitoring of children by the parents of peers, thereby increasing adherence to behavioral norms that are presumed to affect school performance. In the case of parent-child relations, social capital denotes the intensity—construed affectively or normatively—with which parents undertake behaviors that contribute to their children's schooling, such as studying together. (See Dika & Singh, 2002, for a review of educational research on social capital.) The outcomes of studies proceeding from these definitions have not, by and large, triggered theoretical reconsideration of the notion of social capital.[2]

The majority of studies examining social capital in school settings have used quantitative methodologies to address outcomes such as test scores and

grades, study habits, or high school dropout patterns and college attendance. The results have been less than decisive. Taking up the question of familial social capital, Goyette and Conchas (in press) reported modest effects for a parent-child interaction index on the amount of time devoted to homework among Mexican and Vietnamese youth. Likewise, Smith, Beaulieu, and Seraphine (1995)—using indicators such as maternal employment, number of siblings, and (self-reported) parental monitoring practices—have registered associations between familial social capital and the likelihood of college attendance; however, these associations were partially contingent on location (i.e., urban, suburban, town, or rural residency). Using different data and measures, McNeal (1999) found that familial social capital is only efficacious in keeping children from dropping out of high school in combination with high socioeconomic status—that is, when parents have a high income, education, and/or occupational prestige.[3]

The literature on intergenerational closure (that is, networks connecting parents of school peers) has been even more mixed. Both Muller (1995) and Carbonaro (1998) reported effects on mathematics achievement; the latter study also discerned an impact on high school dropout rates. However, Morgan and Sørensen (1999) subsequently presented data implying that the results for mathematics were spurious, a claim Carbonaro (1999) assented to. Muller and Ellison (2001) have also reported a modest negative effect on class cutting. In contrast, however, Goyette and Conchas (in press) found no association between a Colemanesque measure of closure and time devoted to homework among Mexican or Vietnamese youth. It is interesting that Teachman, Paasch, and Carver (1997), taking up the subject of high school dropout rates, discerned a significant interaction between income and a measure of whether parents know the parents of their child's friends.[4] The work of Stanton-Salazar (1997) and Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) constitutes something of an exception to the literature because it moves away from the general orientation toward Coleman's theoretical premises. Drawing on Bourdieu, Stanton-Salazar renders central class and race differences in the architecture and function of interpersonal networks: "[W]hereas working class community and networks are organized on the basis of scarcity and conservation, the cosmopolitan networks constructed by middle-class members are oriented toward maximizing individual (and group) access to the mainstream marketplace" (1997, p. 4). Indeed, Stanton-Salazar insists on the stratified character of social networks strongly enough to define social capital in terms of the "degree and quality of middle-class forms of social support" transmitted through social ties (1997, p. 5). From this perspective, social capital is largely implicated in the reproduction of stratification—an argument that finds at least provisional support in the quantitative studies (mentioned earlier) that exhibit a positive effect for social capital only in combination with an indicator of social position.

The institutional conditions under which schooling occurs generally fall outside the scope of the studies just discussed. Others, however, take a more critical edge. Some of these highlight resources that low-income families

provide for their children but which go unrecognized by school officials. Delgado-Gaitan (1992), for example, in a study of six Mexican-American families, finds that neither resources inside the home, such as parents assisting with homework, and resources outside the home, such as parents procuring information from co-workers on how to manage a problem at their child's school, are presently not recognized in the school. Similarly, Villanueva (1996), in a study of three generations of Latino families, stresses the "wisdom" of grandparents who are not formally educated yet provide important lessons to children and grandchildren. The work of both Delgado-Gaitan and Villanueva thus highlights the important role played by the school in selectively legitimating family resources.

In a related vein, Mehan and his colleagues (1996) studied an untracking effort in San Diego called Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), in which a sample of underperforming minority students was placed in a special class and provided with additional support services (i.e., help in procuring college applications, visiting campuses, and negotiating the application process). Mehan and his colleagues argue that if social and cultural capital can be inculcated and activated by institutional agents, then schools need not merely be reproducers of class cultures but can assist in transformation (see also Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzales, 1992). Similarly, Valenzuela (1999) reported that the recent immigrants in her study of Latino students in a Texas high school had higher levels of social capital than their U.S.-born counterparts, but also found that the social capital held by these students was no match for the exclusionary tracking practices of the school. Thus, although this work is useful in directing us to consider the strengths to be found in low-income immigrant families and communities, the fact remains that the school has an independent and critical role in deciding crucial aspects of children's educational advancement. In this context, the literature suggests that the social networks accessible by working-class and poor families are less valuable than those of middle-class families for negotiating the particular institutional environment formed by the school.

In this article we approach social capital in terms of the emergent consensus (Lin, 2001; Portes, 1998; Stanton-Salazar, 1997) that the concept must be taken to refer to the material and immaterial resources that individuals and families are able to access through their social ties. In contrast to Stanton-Salazar, whose work focuses primarily on the network ties that profitably connect students with key institutional agents such as teachers and guidance counselors, we return to one of the "canonical" implementations of the concept of social capital by asking whether informal parental networks differ by class in their basic architecture and whether parents differ in how they put their network ties to use in resolving problems with schools to secure advantageous outcomes for their children.[5] In particular, we take up the question of whether and how social capital can enable certain actors to *contest* the judgments or behavior of agents who occupy positions of institutional authority—in this case, educators and school officials. On the basis of our results, we subsequently return to questions of theory, arguing that, consistent

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with the work of Lin (2001) in particular, it is necessary to give a central place to the theme of *inequality* in efforts to re-conceptualize social capital.

Data and Method

The findings reported here are based on interviews with and observations of 88 third-and fourth-grade children and their families. The interviews were carried out in phases as part of a larger study that intensively examined children's lives both in and out of school. The study was designed to provide an in-depth comparison of parents' relationships with schools as well as other institutions, including health care and organized leisure activities such as organized sports, Brownies, and Boy Scouts. Third and fourth graders were selected because at that stage parents are still heavily involved in children's lives, yet children also begin to display some autonomy regarding their leisure time. All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

The third author of this article, a White middle-class woman, began the study by locating a pool of children in a third-grade classroom in the Midwestern university community of Lawrenceville (population approximately 25,000). She conducted participant observations and in-depth interviews at Quigley school, a mixed-race and mixed-class environment. In conducting the interviews she was assisted by a Black graduate student. In addition, she observed children in out-of-class activities such as sporting events. These data were collected in 1989–1990. After a move to a large Northeastern city, the third author continued data collection. Here, because of residential segregation, schools tended to be homogeneous by race and class. In the end, she settled for including a predominantly White suburban school with some Black middle-class families in it (Swan) and a city school in a White working-class neighborhood (Lower Richmond) that drew a number of poor Black families from an adjacent housing project.[6] These data were collected from 1993 to 1995. During data collection in the Northeast, a mixed-race and mixed-gender team of graduate students assisted the third author.[7] The third author conducted almost all of the classroom observations and was assisted by the team for the interviews and observations of school and community events. Thus the study was organized around classrooms in three different schools: Quigley, Swan, and Lower Richmond (see Table 1). It was primarily from these classrooms that the families were recruited. It is important to note that the project was conceived of as a single study. Although the data collection spanned multiple sites over a relatively long period of time, the same core interview protocol was used throughout (with modest additions and deletions), and the sampling techniques remained consistent. Most important, the research questions and aims of the study remained fundamentally the same for the duration of the project.

In all three schools, observations included both in-class and out-of-classroom activities. The classroom observations included routine classroom activities and lessons. Researchers also observed parent-teacher conferences, PTA meetings, and special events such as graduation, school fairs, book fairs,

Table 1
Summary of School Characteristics

School characteristic	Quigley	Lower Richmond	Swan
Type of school and grades served	Public 1–3	Public K–5	Public K–5
Number of students enrolled	200	475	450
Racial composition of student body	52% White[a] 44% Black 3% Asian 1% Hispanic	54% White 44% Black 1% Asian 1% Hispanic	90% White[b] 8% Black 2% Asian
Percentage of school population eligible for free lunch	40%	64%	n/a[c]
Surrounding area	Midwestern university town	Residentially stable, White working-class neighborhood close to a Black poor area in a large Northeastern city	Predominantly White, suburban middle-class area in a large Northeastern city

Note. n/a = not applicable.
[a]The ethnic breakdown is for the entire school district, which included four elementary schools, one junior high school, and one high school. The elementary schools were racially balanced.
[b]Estimated by the researcher on the basis of conversations with the principal.
[c]The school did not offer a free lunch program.

Back-to-School Night, and classroom celebrations of Halloween and Valentine's Day. During these informal school activities, visible differences in the density of the parental networks were observed. As in Lareau's 2000 study showing that middle-class parents were more connected to one another and to the school, the middle-class parents observed for this study were involved in the life of the school (for example, they ran the book fair and school fair) and connected to one another. The parents at Lower Richmond did not know each other. On Back-to-School Night the classroom was quiet before the start of the program. Few greetings were exchanged among parents. The reverse was true at Swan. Before the beginning of the formal program on Back-to-School Night the room was alive with parents' conversations about children's organized activities. The room was noisy. In addition, parent-run school events at Swan were more elaborate. For example, the school fair at Swan had more booths and fancier rides than the fair at Lower Richmond. Following up on the patterns observed at the schools, the third author and her assistants carried out interviews—averaging about 2 hours each—with 137 parents or guardians of the various children. It is these data, in particular, that we draw on here.

The families in each school were allocated to class categories on the basis of criteria widely used in contemporary sociology (e.g., Wright, 1997; Zipp & Plutzer, 1996), although the relatively small number of cases precluded highly differentiated schemes similar to those developed for quantitative class analysis. On the basis of detailed information concerning respondents' jobs, we grouped some families in the middle-class category in which at least one adult was employed in an occupation that entailed some kind of managerial (as opposed to merely supervisory) authority or presupposed some type of highly credentialed skill.[8] Correlatively, families in which adult members' jobs did not exhibit either of those attributes were grouped in the working-class category. We broke with the tendency of most sociological studies of class, however, by adding a category for "the poor" to our data, under which were grouped families for whom government assistance, rather than participation in the labor market, constituted the primary means of subsistence. Our reason for doing so was that one of our schools included a substantial number of children from such families, and their exclusion would have been arbitrary. To select interviewees, students at each school were grouped by race and social class. Then every third student was selected and a letter was sent home explaining the study and requesting one interview each with the mother and the father (the parents were interviewed separately). In these classrooms (which ranged from 26 to 30 students) more than 90% of the parents agreed to participate. The classrooms did not, however, yield sufficient numbers of children in some key categories (i.e., middle-class Black children and poor White children). These children were recruited elsewhere.[9]

As was indicated earlier, most of the families in the study were recruited from three schools. Given the significant impact of school culture and norms on the behavior of students and families, it is reasonable to question whether our results are due to school effects. That is, it could be argued that some of the class effects that we report are actually the result of differences between the schools. Because of the high degree of class homogeneity in the schools from which most of our sample was drawn, it is difficult to put this concern to rest. Thus, although our results clearly point to the power of the middle-class parents to harness social capital in their interactions with schools, this finding could also be affected by the school context. Further research that samples students from a wide selection of school settings is needed to disentangle these effects.

Although social class is the central focus of this article, the roles of race and family structure are worthy of comment. Briefly, we found comparable social class patterns interwoven across race boundaries; we consider the role of race later in the article. Similarly, reflecting a national pattern, we found social-class differences to be interwoven with differences in family structure (see Table 2). Middle-class children were far more likely to come from two-parent households. In the sample of 36 middle-class children, only three came from single-parent families. Although some of the poor children had regular contact with their fathers, none resided together. The working-class

Table 2
Family Structure, by Race and Class

Social Class	Intact, two-parent, original family		Blended family[a]		Single-parent family		Family run by grand-parent or guardian	
	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White	Black	White
Middle-class	13	17	2	1	3	0	0	0
Working-class	6 Black 6 White 1 Bi-racial		0	1	3	5	2	2
Poor	0	3	0	0	12	9	2	0

[a] "Blended families" include single- and two-parent households where a parent has remarried or there are other live-in adults who are romantically attached.

families had a mixed family structure with both two-parent and single-parent households. Although family structure is not the focus of this article, it may be confounded with the class differences we report.

Results: Class Differences in the Architecture and Mobilization of Networks

We proceed by first examining class differences in the shape or architecture of familial networks. We show that for middle-class families, webs of social ties tend to be woven through children's lives and especially through the organized activities they participate in, as well as through informal contacts with educators and other professionals. By contrast, the social networks of working-class and poor families tend to be rooted in and around kinship groups; ties to other parents and to professionals are considerably less common. We subsequently examine how these differences come into play when families encounter problems with the school. Here we demonstrate that middle-class parents, largely as a result of their network ties, have considerably greater resources at their disposal when it comes to dealing with such problems than do their working-class and poor counterparts. We detail the ways—both individual and collective—that they put them to use. Finally, we discuss some alternative ways that social networks can affect families' daily lives.

Network Patterns

Parental networks, our data suggest, differ dramatically by social class. We demonstrate this through an examination of children's participation in organized activities, the existence of ties between parents of school peers, parental ties to professionals, and frequency of contact with kin. Here we rely on quantified tabulations of our interview data as well as on ethnographic

interpretation. We make no claim that the tabulations can serve as the basis for inferences to corresponding populations; we use them merely as a convenient method for summarizing our findings.[10]

The role of children's organized activities in determining the shape of parents' networks was striking in our data. In families of all classes, informal connections between parents, when they existed, were largely generated and sustained through children's out-of-school activities. Typical was a White middle-class mother's response when asked how she knew another parent: "Our kids are the same age and PTA. They did similar activities, ballet, and all that together." The father of a White middle-class girl described how his children's school relationships and activities have shaped the family's social life: "Oh, yeah, I mean, between school and sports and scouts . . . those three things, you know, we've gotten maybe closer to some other families whose children are on the same routine than we would have otherwise." Another father of a middle-class White boy provided this account of how he knows some of the family's friends:

> Uh, Hingham are through soccer and Nadine's mother is through pre-school; Crowley's Dad goes to our church but he's in our department and we socialize with them; and Pete Hughes through athletics and Meadows through athletics and Nichols through athletics.

Working-class and poor families also tended to make connections with other parents through their children's activities. In a typical response, a working-class White mother reported how she knows a particular parent: "I know her from just bein' in Brownies." Parents used the significant amount of time spent waiting and watching at children's activities to get to know other parents. Here Ms. Logan, the aunt and guardian of a working-class White boy, described the typical process: "We would go and watch the game and that way you get to know some of the parents a little bit better. If you know some of the parents anyway, it gives you some time to visit and interact with them."

Despite the importance of organized children's activities in fostering and sustaining parental networks for members of all classes, there were substantial differences in the rates at which children participated in these activities. Middle-class children enrolled at significantly higher levels than their working-class or poor counterparts. As indicated in Table 3, middle-class children participated in just under five organized activities on average, whereas working-class children participated in just under three, and poor children participated in just under two. Given that children's activities are a central pathway for the formation and maintenance of parental connections, these differences suggest that in at least one important arena, middle-class parents have greater opportunity to forge such connections.

As has been noted, much of the literature on social capital focuses on the issue of ties between the parents of school peers. These ties figured prominently in the informal social connections that were forged as a result of children's participation in organized activities. Thus our data imply that

Table 3
Average Number of Child's Organized Activities, by Class

Organized activities	Middle-class	Working-class	Poor
Number of organized activities	4.9	2.5	1.5
Items with missing data[a]	2.5	3.0	2.0
N	36	26	26

Note. This table is based on information provided by each child's primary caregiver. Organized activities included Brownies or Cub Scouts, music lessons, team sports (soccer, Little League, etc.), nonteam sports (gymnastics, karate, etc.), Tot Tumbling, dance lessons (ballet, tap dance, etc.), religious classes, choir, art classes, and any activity offered through a recreational center that required formal enrollment.
[a] Not every respondent was asked about all of the activities that were eventually coded (although each was asked if his or her child participated in any activities not explicitly mentioned).

the type of social closure that is central to Colemanesque accounts of social capital is considerably more common in the middle class. In the interviews, parents were presented with a list of all of the children in their child's class and asked to identify those whose parents they would recognize and chat with if they ran into them in the grocery store. As Table 4 indicates, middle-class parents reported that they would likely recognize and chat with a parent of seven classmates, on average, as compared with only three for working-class parents. Hence, on the basis of our data it would appear that, among families of 8- to 10-year-old children, this indicator of social capital is not independent of social class.

However, the differences characterizing familial networks went beyond those pertaining to ties between parents of school peers. In another key area—acquaintance with various sorts of professionals—a similar pattern was apparent. This is highlighted in Table 5. The data imply that middle-class

Table 4
**Average Number of Child's School Peers Whose Parent(s)
Were Known to Respondent, by Class**

Peers	Middle-class	Working-class
Number of peers whose parent(s) were known to respondent	6.8	3.0
N	21	19

Note. This table is based on information provided by each child's primary caregiver. The "poor" group is excluded because most poor White families had to be recruited from outside the schools being studied. Because we did not have extensive information about such schools, we did not ask the same questions of respondents whose children attended them. The study included 36 middle-class families and 26 working-class families. Lower numbers are reported here as a result of missing data.

Table 5
Proportion of Children Whose Parents/Guardians
Knew Professionals, by Class

Type of professional	Middle-class	Working-class	Poor
Teacher	93.5%	47.6%	33.3%
Psychologist	48.4%	19.0%	8.7%
Lawyer	67.7%	35.0%	13.6%
Doctor	70.4%	15.0%	18.2%
N	27–31	20–21	22–24

Note. This table is based on information provided by each child's primary caregiver. The study included 36 middle-class families, 26 working-class families, and 26 poor families. Lower numbers are reported here as a result of missing data.

parents are far more likely to include professionals in their interpersonal networks than are working-class and poor parents. Thus almost all of the middle-class parents in our study reported that they knew a teacher, in contrast to less than half of the working-class parents and about a third of the poor parents. Analogously, two thirds of middle-class parents reported that they knew a lawyer, in contrast to a third of the working-class parents and only 14% of the poor families. The results for acquaintance with a doctor and a psychologist are similar: Despite some variation in the size of the working class–poor gap, middle-class families are always far more likely than all others to include professionals in their networks. To be sure, such a finding is not wholly surprising, given that a substantial proportion of the respondents in the middle-class category are themselves professionals. Nevertheless, as we demonstrate in the next section, professionals of various sorts can serve as a key resource for resolving some of the problems that crop up in the course of a child's schooling.

If the working-class and poor parents did not exhibit extensive ties to other parents or to professionals, what were the defining characteristics of their interpersonal networks? To be sure, parents in working-class families— like their middle-class counterparts—enjoyed friendships with co-workers; and members of all classes often counted neighbors among their close friends.[11] This being said, for both the working-class and poor families in our sample, the primary source of network ties was kinship. Indeed, the informal social life of family members frequently revolved around contact with relatives. This was in marked contrast to middle-class families, whose relatives often did not live in close geographic proximity and whose contacts with relatives were more likely to take the form of occasional events (e.g., holiday get-togethers). Table 6 includes two measures of the importance of kinship ties in the lives of working-class and poor families. Although the measures are imprecise, they indicate that frequent contact with a parent was considerably more common among working-class and poor respondents and that

Table 6
**Frequency of Parents'/Guardians' Contact with
Extended Family Members, by Class**

Contact with extended family	Middle-class	Working-class	Poor
Saw mother at least five times per year[a]	52.2%	87.5%	83.3%
N	23	16	12
Saw an extended family member at least five times per year[b]	63.6%	80.0%	69.2%
N	33	20	26

Note. This table is based on information provided by each child's primary caregiver. The study included 36 middle-class families, 26 working-class families, and 26 poor families. Lower numbers are reported here partly as a result of missing data.
[a]When a respondent reported a mother who was deceased, he or she was excluded from this calculation. There were 5 such cases among the middle-class families, 3 among the working-class families, and 10 among the poor families.
[b]These figures are based on the respondent's contact with the extended family member whom he or she saw most frequently. For the working-class and poor families, the rates on this variable are lower than the measure of contact with the mother because cases in which the mother was reported deceased are included here.

frequent contact with any extended family member was at least somewhat more common.[12] Also worthy of emphasis—a factor for which we lack a quantitative summary, however—was the prominence of relatives in the everyday lives of working-class and poor children: A great deal of leisure time was devoted to informal play with cousins of varying ages. The fact that the extended family played such an important role in the life of both children and adults in these families carries an interesting implication: The children were often enmeshed in a form of intergenerational closure; however, it was not one that was generated by school-centered networks.

Social Capital in Action

Having examined the network "profiles" of families located in different social classes, we now take up the question of how parents' social capital may affect their children's school experiences. We address this issue through an analysis of situations in which parents may feel compelled to intervene in their children's schooling. Our data imply that middle-class networks frequently make available various resources that parents can (and do) use to deal with such situations, thereby attaining a desired outcome for their children. For example, when confronted with inappropriate behavior on the part of a teacher, parents' ties to other parents often enabled them to function as "guardian angels," descending on the school en masse and quickly bringing about change. In contrast, working-class and poor parents inevitably responded to such situations in a purely individualized fashion. Likewise, middle-class parents' networks provided resources that made it possible to customize their

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children's educational careers in important ways—for example, by contesting a placement decision or obtaining additional resources for a learning-disabled child. In contrast, working-class and poor parents, lacking these resources, were considerably less likely to dispute the school's authority.

Responding to Inappropriate Teacher Behavior

In the schools that we studied, teachers occasionally acted inappropriately, either by losing their temper with a student and yelling or by striking or pushing a student. Middle-class parents responded in a very different fashion to these incidents than did working-class and poor parents. Middle-class parents mobilized resources to respond collectively. By contrast, in working-class and poor families, these incidents were treated as the behavior of an individual teacher with a student and were addressed at the individual level. Although kinship networks were often aware of the difficulty, other parents in the school community were not.

The case of Garrett Tallinger, a White middle-class boy, provides an example. In the course of what was supposed to be a noncompetitive football game, a dispute broke out with the physical education teacher over whether Garrett had scored a touchdown. According to Garrett's mother,

> Carl [the teacher] evidently pushed Garrett away, I mean, he just lost it. He just didn't want these kids in this big argument with him. And he must have thrown down the football, but it bounced up and hit one of the kids. Although one of the kids said he just threw it right at him. [He] pushed Garrett, picked up another kid, I mean, one of the kids, he picked [him] up and threw him down, sent the girls inside, apologized evidently, who knows, . . . and kept the boys out. But it really frightened the kids. It frightened the girls, because they were very upset, when they got to class. Carl went in, apologized to the girls. . . . He apologized on the spot and then left. The school. This was the last period of the day. But the boys were really shaken. Well, some of the boys.

Ms. Tallinger did not learn about these events from her son. Instead, she returned home that day to find a slew of phone messages already awaiting her:

> I had come home with this major traffic jam . . . , walk in the door, Garrett's in the basement, . . . and I had all these phone messages, Georgia Finley, Midge Bartlett, Rick's mother. [Before I could even say hello to the children I got another phone call.] Sarah says, "Have you talked to Garrett?" I said, "No." I could tell by her tone of voice. She said, "*Well* . . . ," and then she proceeded to tell me that Don [her son] was practically bruised. . . . At this point, I still hadn't talked to Garrett.

By then members of the school board were getting calls. The parental network facilitated a quick and collective response. The teacher and the prin-

cipal called the Tallingers that weekend. There was a meeting with the parents the following Tuesday. The teacher was suspended for a week.

In stark contrast, working-class and poor families handled these same types of incidents in a more individual fashion. In the following example, the live-in boyfriend of the mother of Wendy Driver, a White working-class girl, describes what occurred after a school bus driver pushed Wendy. Their intervention was restricted to the individual level; only the family, principal, and bus driver were involved:

> The bus driver pushed her back into her seat and we feel that the bus driver has slips that he fills out. If the kids are not behaving, he's supposed to fill them out and turn them in and then let the school handle it, not touch the children. That's not what he's there for. So we went up. Well, I went up. I was off that day. And I took her up and spoke to one of the counselors and she said that the principal wasn't in yet, so I said OK and I let her go to class and I came home. I went back up when the principal came in and I sat down and I talked to the principal. She seemed like a real nice person. She said she'll see what's going on. He is supposed to fill out slips and not touch students. So ever since then, she hasn't come home and said anything about the bus driver touching her.

In a similar, though more serious, example, a poor Black girl had her hair pulled by a teacher. The girl's aunt (also her guardian) responded by writing the teacher a "very nasty note." When asked to relay what the note said, she replied:

> I told him you put your damn hands on my daughter's head one more fuckin' time and I'll be there to fuck you up, period. Keep your hands off her. You don't have to pull her hair because she's not doing anything that bad. I know Kadija. Kadija don't do nothin'—she said somebody was messin' with her. You keep your hands off her, so I had no more problems out of him for the whole year [laughs].

In both cases, only immediate family members undertook the intervention. Although both actions were successful in the sense that they prevented future misbehavior, neither, to the best of our knowledge, resulted in formal disciplinary sanctions on the order of the one brought about by the Tallingers and their acquaintances.

In addition, among many working-class and poor parents there was knowledge that teachers would "hit kids" from time to time. For instance, Ms. Yanelli, a White working-class mother, had "heard" this:

> Well, I heard that Mr. Tier hits kids. And, uh, do you believe that? I don't know. I mean, there's talk in the neighborhood and I thought, what do you mean, he hits kids? He wouldn't get away with that so I kind of didn't believe it. And I asked Billy about it and he said once in a while he'll give him a noggin on the head, you know.

Nevertheless, despite this information, she liked the teacher because her son liked him:

> But, I really like Mr. Tier. He got Billy real interested this year and that means a lot to me because in Ms. Green's class he would daze out, just daze out, and that was our problem last year. . . . But he was so excited about having Mr. Tier this year he came home and said, I've got the best teacher in the whole school.

Our observations confirm that, on occasion, school officials or teachers would manhandle a student, by shoving or vigorously shaking him or her, or twisting an arm. Thus events that created an explosion of collective outrage among middle-class families tended to generate isolated anger or even resigned acceptance within working-class and poor families.[13]

Customizing Children's School Careers

Special Services

One very clear difference between the working-class and poor families and the middle-class families was in the way that parents handled any special educational needs their child might have. Whether the issue was a possible learning disability or inclusion in a "gifted" program, middle-class parents were much more proactive about the (perceived) educational needs of their children. Mobilizing network members to provide testing and gather information was the norm when a family was presented with a problem of this sort. Parents routinely talked about discussing these types of issues with family and friends who were in the field of education. For example, the mother of Melanie Handlon, a White middle-class girl, tapped into her networks when the school suggested that Melanie might have a learning disability.

> Well, [the school] decided at the end of last year that they didn't think [testing] was necessary. She had improved in all of her subjects. And now when this year started they again suggested that we have her tested, and we are going to do it this year. Uh, I've been watching and observing her. My sister-in-law, who is a teacher, has been watching her and observing her. We don't see any of the classic things that, you know, they diagnose for learning disabilities.

A similar process took place in the case of children potentially eligible for inclusion in a gifted program. In the case of the Marshalls, a middle-class Black family, we can again see how a parent collected information through network ties and then used it to secure the desired outcome for her daughter. Stacey Marshall had applied for admittance to the gifted program but had scored slightly below the minimum threshold on the entrance exam. She subsequently enrolled in a school activity called Problem Solving that was run by the teacher who administered the gifted program. Encountering Ms. Marshall

in the hall one afternoon, the teacher declared, "You really should get her tested. She's an extremely bright child." After discussing the matter with her husband, Ms. Marshall determined that they should "scrape together the money" (about $200) to have Stacey tested by a private psychologist. In the following excerpt Ms. Marshall details her use of community contacts to locate a psychologist:

> I found out about Terry Hoffman [the psychologist] from . . . a White friend of mine . . . whose son had been at the same . . . school with [Stacey's older sister]. They live in a different school district and, as it turns out, they had gone through the same thing with her son. Her son had not made the screening test at his elementary school. And June [the mother] is very, um, . . . aggressive and assertive and she kinda hit the roof. You know, "Well wha'd'ya mean?" If you don't make it, you can challenge it. And she decided, "I'm takin' Drew [her son] some place else." And she had found this Terry Hoffman.

Networks were pivotal both in making the decision to have Stacey tested and in locating a psychologist to conduct the testing. Stacey was tested by Dr. Hoffman and scored high enough that her parents were able to push to have her admitted to the gifted program.

Also interesting in this respect is the case of Marcus Baldwin, a Black middle-class boy. Two months into his third-grade year, Ms. Baldwin heard from his teacher that "he wasn't learning anything, wasn't makin' any gains." The teacher and the counselor called a conference to deliver this information, in which they said that they thought Marcus had "serious delays." The educators proposed testing him for learning disabilities. Ms. Baldwin was upset that it had taken them so long to notify her. Drawing on her extensive professional networks, she decided to have him evaluated herself:

> I'm in the field of mental health so I know psychologists. I have a Master's in clinical [psychology]. . . . I've done almost everything. I've worked all the settings: community mental health, school, residential, . . . all of that, individual . . . therapy, group therapy, testing. I—I've done it all. So I got a psychologist to evaluate him. It was someone I know that I have worked with in the past. We were in the same organization. . . . He was a school psychologist, certified school psychologist.

Ms. Baldwin was able to use the assessment provided by her colleague to challenge the educators' conclusions:

> He evaluated him and Marcus tested out above-average intelligence. Well what's goin' on? So, we had a big conference: the principal, the teacher, [the psychologist] came—presented the test, everything. And then they're like: We have to figure out what's—what has happened. If you've got a kid who has above-average intelligence and the performance is—is totally different: Where are things?

Thus Ms. Baldwin's network ties provided her with the leverage that allowed her to contest the school officials' view of her child's abilities.

In contrast, working-class and poor families rarely used network ties to try to intervene in placement processes or to dispute assessments—whether the families were sanguine about the results or not. They did not, by and large, mobilize networks to challenge gatekeepers in schools. Indeed, some parents were wary of contact with professionals and also felt that they should be able to "handle it themselves." This sentiment is apparent in the response provided by Ms. Nelson, a Black working-class mother, when asked whether she and her husband would take their child to a counselor or psychologist:

> Well, there's nothing wrong with them [counselors and psychologists]—if you can't do it, you go find somebody else. If you can't handle it. But I shouldn't have to go somewhere. I don't send mine anywhere else when I can deal with the situation or we can deal with the situation.

In combination with the fact that their networks included so few professionals, this ethos rendered working-class and poor parents highly dependent on the school in the area of assessment and considerably more deferential than their middle-class counterparts in matters pertaining to placement. In one example, Wendy Driver, a White girl from a working-class family, was unable to read by fourth grade. Her mother was very concerned but felt that she could depend on the school to advise her on a course of action:

> I think they just want to keep it in the school [for] now, and when they get to a point where they can't figure out what it is, . . . then I guess they'll send me somewhere else. . . . So I figured I'd wait until the first report card to see what they'd say and then take it from there.

Nor did she have any idea what she might do to address the issue herself:

> I wouldn't even know where to start going. On the radio there was something for children having problems reading and this and that call and I suggested it to a couple different people and they were like, wait a second, it's only to get you there and you'll end up paying an arm and a leg. So I said to my mom, no, I'm going to wait until the first report card and go up and talk to them up there [at the school].

Whereas Ms. Baldwin could and did turn to colleagues for information, Ms. Driver's source of information was a radio advertisement. Later in the year, Ms. Driver knew that the teachers disagreed about how to proceed with her daughter. At a conference the fourth-grade teacher recommended retention, but the reading specialist argued that Wendy should be promoted. Ms. Driver felt incapable of adjudicating between them and ultimately left the decision to the school, on the grounds that she "[didn't] want to jump into anything and find out that it's the wrong thing."

Requesting a Teacher

Middle-class parents also used their networks to exert control over another critical aspect of their children's educational lives: selection of a teacher.[14] In the course of our interviews, parents were asked if they had ever requested a particular teacher for their child. As can be seen in Table 7, the results indicate that the middle-class parents were more than twice as likely to have made such a request as the working-class parents.[15]

To know which teacher to request, these middle-class parents used their connections with other parents and with professional educators. The following response from Mr. Conner, the father of a middle-class White boy, provides another example of the importance of professional connections:

> I don't think I [sought out such information] specifically. My wife probably did—she's more involved in the whole educational process. She's been a teacher, and she probably takes a much more active role researching about school, talking to other parents, finding out about teachers for the upcoming year, and requesting a teacher for the next year.

This remark reveals a general middle-class orientation toward the quasi-strategic customization of children's school careers ("the whole educational process")—that is, a careful scrutiny of potential opportunities to "improve," "correct," and render more "fulfilling" their children's school experience. (Also typical is the fact that the majority of the actual work is done by the mother.)

Informal conversations with other parents that touched on the subject of teachers often took place at school events or at community events such as church functions or children's activities. When asked where she gathered information on prospective teachers, Ms. Hughes, a White middle-class mother who had made many such requests, replied, "Oh, from parents—just

Table 7
Proportion of Parents/Guardians Who Requested a Teacher, By Class

Parental requests	Middle-class	Working-class
Requested a teacher	34.4%	15.8%
N	32	19

Note. This table is based on information provided by each child's primary caregiver. The poor group is excluded because most poor White families had to be recruited from outside the schools being studied. Because we did not have extensive information about those schools, we did not ask the same questions about the school experiences of respondents whose children attended them. The study included 36 middle-class families and 26 working-class families. Lower numbers are reported here as a result of missing data.

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out on the soccer field or, you know, you kind of scout around." Ms. Irving, the mother of a Black middle-class girl, offered the following account:

> Well, I have several friends who are teachers in the school district. And I have several friends that have kids who go to the school. . . . So you talk to someone who has an older kid who had her [the teacher]. What did you think of her, ya know? And usually when you do that you go, you talk to someone whose child had the same learning ability. Or whose child you would like to see [your child] do as well as. I've done that before. I've asked people, you know, What do you think of her? Or just in talking to people. . . . You hear about other teachers, just in associating with other parents.

Thus Ms. Irving not only perceived a need to gather information that could be useful in improving her child's school experience but also exhibited a deft awareness of the variable relevance of information provided by various sources. An analogous sensitivity is apparent in the remarks of Ms. McNamara, a middle-class White mother who also described teacher selection in strategic terms: "I try to not request very often. . . . Because if you do . . . it's like, you get ignored. It's better to, like, save your ammunition for when you really need it."

In contrast, working-class and poor parents tended to accept the luck of the draw in their children's teacher assignments. This attitude presumably was due, at least in part, to the distinct character of their interpersonal networks, which typically lacked the type of contacts used by their middle-class counterparts for gathering the information that fueled teacher requests. Nevertheless, even when working-class and poor parents did have more or less compelling information regarding a teacher, they were much less likely to make a request. Rather, if they heard about an undesirable teacher at the bus stop, grocery store, or laundromat, they simply "hoped" that their child would avoid him or her. As Ms. Doerr, a Black working-class mother, put it:

> What's her name for next year? I sure hope she don't get her. What's her name, Ms. Worthingham or something like this, she's a fourth-grade teacher. I've heard horrible things about her. . . . It seems that she's not very friendly and she doesn't like children at all. In fact, I've been told that she's a real redneck.

Indeed, it appeared that many working-class and poor parents assumed that they had neither the capacity nor the right to intervene in such matters under the gatekeepers' jurisdiction.

Contesting the Curriculum

The occasional furors that erupted over curricular issues gave rise to processes similar to those that we have already examined. Middle-class parents, for example, shared concerns about aspects of the curriculum with other parents.

Thus when her child's school decided to hold an AIDS awareness week, Ms. Hopewell, the mother of a middle-class White girl, brought the matter before the PTA, arguing that it was inappropriate for young children and instigating a wide-ranging discussion. Although no consensus emerged among the parents, the school decided to send home formal notification of the program, offering parents the opportunity to hold their child out if they wished.

The full range of resources that middle-class parents have at their disposal becomes apparent in the case of the Kaplans, a middle-class Jewish family. In early fall, their son's class began practicing for the winter holiday program. The Kaplans were offended by a Christian song that the choir teacher had selected (as part of a multicultural holiday program) that included the lyrics "come let us bow and worship Him now." They were offended not for religious reasons but because they felt the lyrics blurred the distinction between church and state. Ms. Kaplan complained to the choir teacher, but the teacher felt that the song was in keeping with the overall diversity of the holiday program. Ms. Kaplan then went to the principal. Although usually highly attuned to parents' concerns, the principal sided with the choir teacher in this instance.

Mr. and Ms. Kaplan first attempted to mobilize other parents. They circulated a petition but found some parents unsupportive and unwilling to sign. They also wrote a letter on their own to the district superintendent, triggering a districtwide policy review. The offending song was removed from the holiday program. (The principal was "counseled" on issues of sensitivity as well.) The Kaplans were satisfied with this outcome but found that it had strained their relationships with some of the other parents. It is important to note that, in the process of contesting the school's authority, they did not expend all of the resources at their disposal. An old college friend of Ms. Kaplan's, who happened to work for a major television network on a national show, called to say hello in the middle of the drama. The friend offered to send down a camera crew to do a story; Ms. Kaplan declined, preferring to hold that option in reserve.

Alternative Network Functions

Our discussion thus far has presented an image of working-class and poor networks that verges on privation: Lacking extensive ties both to other parents in their child's school and to professionals, we have suggested, these parents tend to handle the problematic situations that arise in the course of their children's schooling on a purely individual basis, if they don't concede authority to the school altogether. Nevertheless, we do not wish to create the impression that working-class and poor familial networks are irrelevant. What is striking about our dataset is precisely the fact that these networks appear to offer working-class and poor families so little purchase on matters pertaining to *schooling*. They do, however, fulfill important functions in other areas of daily life, a point that we detail briefly in this section.

As noted earlier, working-class and poor families had stronger ties with kin than did middle-class families. These networks typically were dense, and much leisure time was spent with immediate and extended family members. Kinship ties also played a crucial role in enabling parents to deal with various exigencies, such as transportation to and from work. Here Ms. Connor, a White working-class mother, discusses the routine contact she has with her family:

> *Ms. Connor:* [My parents] live on Spring Lane, which is a 5-minute drive from here. . . . If we ever need anything he [my father] can get to us. My brother lives up the street. I have another brother that lives down the street. I have a sister that lives over a few streets, and my twin sister lives around the corner from my parents, so we are all within 5 minutes of each other.
>
> *Q:* And how often would you guess that you see your parents?
>
> *Ms. Connor:* Every day. My father takes me to work every day.
>
> *Q:* He drives you to work?
>
> *Ms. Connor:* Yeah. He was driving me when I was working two jobs. Now I've been walking the kids to the bus stop. It's off and on, off and on. So when I'm not working two jobs I'm with the kids, and when I am working two jobs he drives me so I can get there quicker.

Later in the interview she described her close relationship with her mother and her sisters:

> Oh, we go to the laundromat, shopping, we spend every single holiday together and all the preparations for the holidays together. We have our Easter egg dyes—all of us; and one year I had 12 kids and four sets of parents and all kinds of dye and we dyed 15 dozen eggs, and Christmas time we do all the malls and see Santa Claus. . . . We're always together, inseparable.

In addition to transportation, extended family members frequently provided childcare, emotional support, and, at times, financial assistance. Thus Ms. Yanelli typically relied on her mother when her son had half days at school:

> Well, uh, I'll start throwing hints like 2 weeks before. I'll say to my mom, There's only a half day next week, or I'll give her my car. She doesn't have a car so she'll get the car and she'll do it. But as soon as the school year starts, I'm like, all these half days are gonna kill me. I just hate to ask people for anything. I'm sure they would do it but I just don't like to ask them to do it. They've got their own lives.

To be sure, the vagaries of residential location affected these dynamics: Working-class and poor families in our dataset were more likely than their middle-class counterparts to live in close proximity to kin. However, insofar as it is possible for us to separate objective issues of location from subjective ones, those families also appeared substantially more likely to consider extended kin to be an integral part of their daily lives—Ms. Yanelli's fierce sense of familial independence includes her mother—unlike middle-class families, for whom contact with relatives was reserved for "events" (e.g., holidays).

It is interesting that working-class and poor respondents did recognize the impact that "connections" could have. Needless to say, however, the connections at issue were not the psychologists and television producers that middle-class families would call on in times of need. This fact becomes palpably clear in the case of Ms. Grover, the mother of a poor White boy:

> *Ms. Grover:* Yeah, my mom works at, at, um, House of Bargains, so she gets me a discount on their clothes, the smaller kids' clothes. And I can wear the clothes from there.
>
> *Q:* Good connection there.
>
> *Ms. Grover:* Yeah, it's always a good to have people connected.

For working-class and poor families, network ties had little relevance to the enhancement of schooling. Instead, they served primarily to alleviate problems stemming from economic necessity: transportation and childcare, clothing and money.

The Role of Race

Although we found that social class was most prominent in shaping the architecture and function of networks, race also played a role. In other analyses not reported here, the third author provides a detailed analysis of the ways in which race is interwoven with class (Lareau, 2002, in press). Briefly, she argues that the largest differences in the organization of children's daily lives—including familial networks and styles of interaction with institutional representatives—are across lines of class, not race. The analysis indicates that middle-class families, Black and White, have far more in common with each other than they do with working-class and poor families of either race. As others have noted, Black middle-class parents express concern about their children experiencing racial discrimination in the wider world, particularly when they come into contact with institutions (Cose, 1995; Hochschild, 1995; Tatum, 1987). Black middle-class parents also take stock of the racial balance of many of their children's activities, for example by working hard to ensure that their son or daughter is never the only Black child participating in an event. Nevertheless, aspects of everyday life such as time use, social

networks, and strategies for interacting with institutions that were exhibited by middle-class Black families were extremely similar, and in many ways indistinguishable, from those of their White counterparts. Moreover, a similar cross-racial pattern was found in the case of working-class and poor families. Below, we elaborate on the social-class similarities across race groups in three areas: children's organized activities, kin visits, and interventions with teachers in school.

As we illustrated earlier, one of the most important conduits for parental networks was children's activities. In comparing Black and White children's activities, we found very little difference by race. The cases of Alexander Williams, a Black middle-class boy, and Garrett Tallinger, a White middle-class boy, exemplify the similarities we found. Garret Tallinger is the oldest of three boys in his family. Both of his parents are professionals. His activities (apart from those he engages in as a part of school) include soccer team, traveling soccer team, basketball team, summer basketball team, swim team, and piano. The list of activities for Alexander Williams is strikingly similar. Alexander's parents also both work in professional positions. He is an only child. Outside school, Alexander is involved in soccer team, basketball team, community choir, church choir, Sunday school, and piano. The parents of both boys spend considerable time ferrying them to and from these activities, and during the study each boy found sometimes that the schedule for one of his activities overlapped or conflicted with another.[16] There were also indications in our data that Black parents tended to know other Black parents, in particular, when attending racially diverse organized activities and in school settings. These parents sometimes discussed racial issues together, including, for example, the need for more Black teachers in the school district. Still, with the exception of church, the activities that the middle-class Black children in this sample participated in were racially integrated. In these activities, we observed middle-class Black and White mothers chatting together. Overall, middle-class children (Black and White) participated in many more organized activities than did their working-class and poor counterparts. These activities broadened parents' networks.

Similarly, in terms of contact with kin, we found a pattern that was characterized by distinct social class differences across race. Both Black and White middle-class families spent less time with kin than did working-class and poor families of both races. Typically, extended family lived far away, requiring significant travel and making visits time-intensive and infrequent. For example, Ms. Hopewell, a White middle-class mother with five children, drove 10 hours for an annual vacation with her husband's family, stating, "It's really the only time they get to see their cousins, which is why we want to kind of do it. The cousins get along famously." Similarly, a Black middle-class couple, Mr. and Mrs. Irving, did not have any relatives within 50 miles. They saw relatives only once a year. Mr. and Mrs. Williams, a Black middle-class couple, had to fly to see their relatives; they saw them three times per year but spoke on the phone more often. Even in middle-class families where kin lived in the same city, however, visits were less frequent than in working-class and poor

families, Black and White. For example, the Whatleys, a middle-class Black family, lived across town (20 minutes by car) from aunts, uncles, and cousins on both sides of their family and yet saw them only on special occasions. As Ms. Whatley noted, "Most of our families live [across town] so we have very little contact just because of distance, you know, face-to-face. Except for holidays, special occasions or running down there, but it's not like a weekly thing." By contrast, for White and Black working-class and poor families in the study, extended kin were generally present in their daily lives. A White working-class mother, Ms. Yanelli, spoke on the phone with "all of my family" every day. A Black poor mother took care of her sister's children while her sister was between residences. It was hard to overestimate the importance of kin in the lives of working-class and poor families in this study.

In addition, middle-class parents of both races tended to intervene on their children's behalf in similar ways. As detailed above, we found that middle-class Black and White parents took steps on their children's behalf that we did not observe with working-class and poor parents. Ms. Baldwin, a Black middle-class mother activated an arsenal of resources when her son developed academic problems in third grade. Similarly, Mrs. Handlon, a White middle-class mother, hired a tutor when her daughter had learning problems. As we have reported elsewhere (Lareau, in press), Black mothers had more work in their childrearing tasks than did their White counterparts because, in addition to the generic shepherding of their children through schools and other institutions, they were vigilant about the possibility of racial discrimination and insensitivity on the part of officials, a concern that White parents were spared. Nevertheless, the general pattern of intervention in schooling was apparent in both Black and White homes.

It is important to note that the children whom we studied were relatively young. We expect that the role of race looms larger as children age, as peer groups become more segregated, and as individuals face racial pressures in dating and marital selection (Tatum, 1987). Racial discrimination was also part of the lived experience of these families: They lived in racially segregated neighborhoods, Black fathers experienced slights and insults as they encountered Whites in public settings, and many of the Black parents noted racial difficulties in their work lives. Black parents also wanted their children to have a positive Black identity; many attended Black churches. Thus race was undoubtedly salient in the lives of the families. However, in the aspects that we studied, particularly the organization of children's schedules and the propensity for parents to intervene in schooling, Black and White parents exhibited very similar patterns of behavior. In sum, within this limited, nonrandom sample, the racial differences in parents' childrearing practices were minimal.

Discussion

For this article we have used an ethnographic dataset, composed of extensive information on the families of 88 children, to examine the nature of parental networks and their impact on schooling. Our aim has been to describe

variation in the architecture of social networks and to explore class differences in the mobilization or activation of network ties by parents in school settings. Given our methodology, systematic outcomes are hard to measure; however, our data do point to several important findings regarding the shape of the networks, their function in school settings, and the theoretical implications for social capital theory.

We find that Coleman's (1988, 1990) school-based "intergenerational closure"—that is, networks that link parents of school peers—is primarily a middle-class phenomenon. Moreover, these networks appear to form, at least in part, as a result of children's participation in organized activities, which is itself far more frequent in the middle-class. In contrast, working-class and poor families exhibit a form of intergenerational closure that is often circumscribed or delimited by kinship (see Fischer, 1982). In general, the social networks that we observed among working-class and poor families did not include ties to school or children's activity-based contacts.

We also find that the parental networks of middle-class families are far more likely to include professionals of various sorts than are those of their working-class and poor counterparts. Moreover, parental networks tend to be homogeneous with respect to class, in the sense that middle-class networks do not encompass working-class or poor parents, and working-class and poor networks do not encompass middle-class parents; in other words, informal networks tend to be "homophilous" (Lin, 2001). This network homogeneity is generally unrecognized in the tradition of social capital research stemming from Coleman (1988, 1990). And although it is to some degree a function of school homogeneity, we believe it extends beyond that.

These network differences are clearly associated with differences in the way that problems with the school are handled. Working-class and poor parents tend to undertake individual responses and do not receive much concrete support through their networks in doing so. By contrast, middle-class parents sometimes react collectively; at other times they act individually but maintain the possibility of collective involvement in reserve. In yet other instances, middle-class parents draw on ties to individuals unconnected with the school who can provide the information, expertise, or authority necessary to compel the school to follow a preferred course of action. In short, both the architecture of parental networks and their use vis-à-vis the school vary dramatically by class.

Parents must decide how to handle the various problems, small or large, that inevitably crop up in the course of their children's schooling, as well as whether to try to intercede in the school's routine practices. To be sure, our data do not enable us to establish unequivocally whether the types of interventions we have documented tend to cumulate and whether they thereby have definite consequences for educational outcomes. Nevertheless, even if forms of parental involvement such as teacher requests are judged unlikely to dramatically affect children's educational attainment, interventions in issues such as teacher behavior, track placement, and program participation are a different matter. Indeed, Lucas (1999) has described a contemporary tracking

regime in which placements in different subject areas are uncoupled from one another, resulting in an increase in the significance of parental interventions as determinants of tracking location (see also Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Lareau, 2000; Useem, 1992). Thus, although we lack longitudinal data, there is good reason to suspect that the forms of parental behavior that we have documented are relevant to student outcomes.

What do these findings suggest for future research examining social capital in educational settings? The most comprehensive general theory of social capital produced to date is that of Lin (2001), and it is largely against the background of this theory that our results can best be understood. From our perspective, Lin's fundamental insight (consistent with Bourdieu, 1986, before him) is that a theory of social capital that focuses on the resources that are transferred or pooled through social networks must necessarily include the social-structural location of the actors involved in its purview. This implies that any such theory is simultaneously a theory of *inequality in* social capital (see Lin 2001 [esp. pp. 243–249], 2000). Thus, the working-class and poor parents we observed and spoke with were often able to draw on their networks for crucial forms of assistance. In particular, childcare needs were frequently satisfied through the support of extended family members; from time to time, financial needs could also be met through kin networks. Nevertheless, important though they undoubtedly were for the lives of the children in working-class and poor families, these resources were both qualitatively and quantitatively distinct from those that were pooled or transferred through middle-class networks. Educational researchers who draw on the social capital concept would thus do well to specify the nature and social distribution of the resources that are identified by means of this concept.

The reorientation of much of the social capital literature that is implied by this viewpoint can be briefly illustrated. In their analysis of high school dropout rates, Teachman et al. (1997) demonstrate the existence of significant interactions between family income and (school-centered) intergenerational closure. They view this result as a partial confirmation of Coleman's (1988) hypothesis "that the production of human capital in subsequent generations occurs when social capital allows the financial and human capital of parents to influence children" (Teachman et al., p. 1354). In contrast, we tend toward the opposite interpretation of their data: The efficacy of parental networks and parental school involvement should be viewed as conditional upon the presence of other forms of capital.[17]

Nevertheless, although we are inclined to view our results through the lens of a network-centered theory of social capital, our data do not fully lend themselves to the conceptual vocabulary on which this theory typically draws. To a large extent, the empirical research accompanying the development of the theory has revolved around the study of occupational mobility. In this research tradition, certain aspects of network ties have frequently been foregrounded, including the presence of strong versus weak ties and the preponderance of dense versus "bridging" ties (Lin 1999, 2000, 2001; see also Bian, 1997). These concepts do not map onto our ethnographic data

particularly well. To take just one example, the connections forged between parents at children's organized activities were often weak, involving no more than intermittent encounters on the sidelines of a soccer field. In some cases, however, when the children of two families participated in activities together over the course of many years—or when they participated in multiple activities simultaneously—parents forged extremely strong ties, replete with frequent social interactions that were independent of the children's activities. On the basis of our dataset, we are unable to identify any clear patterns in the middle-class group that would account for the observed efficacy of informal networks in these terms.

Nevertheless, we believe that our findings can inform social capital theory in interesting ways. Parental interventions in schooling represent, in effect, an assertion of power in an institutional arena where parents are formally endowed with only a restricted authority. In many of the examples provided here, parents were able to mobilize sufficient network resources to essentially trump the authority that school officials wielded on the basis of their institutional positions. Their success indicates not merely an instrumental use of social capital but a *quasi-conflictual* one. The theme of conflict remains relatively undeveloped in the social capital literature, and we hope to see it pursued further.[18]

In undertaking to criticize a substantial portion of the educational research on social capital, we do not wish to overstep the bounds of what can reasonably be argued on the basis of the analysis that we have presented. It is thus prudent to note the most important limitations of our study. This means, in the first place, recalling the usual caveats concerning qualitative research (e.g., its limited generalizability) as well as the fact that we lack longitudinal data on the families that we studied. Also worth mentioning is a limitation created by the sample design—namely, the absence of immigrants. Immigrants have loomed large in the literature on social capital and entrepreneurship (see the discussions in Portes, 1998; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993), and there is a growing body of literature on immigrant experiences in the American Southwest (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992, 2001; Mehan et al., 1996; Villanueva, 1996). In addition, the nature of our data does not enable us to cleanly partition effects attributable to social class from school effects (although this ambiguity is, to some extent, grounded "in reality," because the composition of school populations is rarely independent of students' class background). Last, and most important, our article focuses on young children and their families. This focus stands in contrast to the majority of the literature, which—using quantitative datasets such as NELS—follows children from middle school to high school and college. Indeed, the whole question of whether and how particular forms of social capital are tied to the life course of the child remains unexplored in the literature, the present article included.

With these caveats in mind, we would nevertheless like to draw a more general lesson from our investigation. Throughout the wider literature, theorists and researchers have often ascribed an excessively palliative character to social capital, rendering it, in extreme cases, the foundational condition

of a well-functioning democracy and an efficient market. In these accounts, some of which have also been influential in educational research, differences in power and in other resources recede into the background (except, that is, in studies that view social capital as an independent corrective to such differences). In contrast, consistent with Lin (2001) and Stanton-Salazar (1997), we would emphasize that although various resources that flow through parental networks (for example, the capacity for reciprocal monitoring of children) are class-neutral, a wide variety are not. Moreover, whereas certain resources that are relevant in the educational context, such as information, may vary with a family's class position, others, such as economic and cultural capital, are in fact constitutive of it (at least in Bourdieu's [1984, pp. 101–125] framework). This implies that researchers drawing on the social capital concept cannot be content to treat "social ties" as a generic good. To the contrary, especially when individuals or families must contend with institutional agents, social capital is frequently deployed to overcome resistance. In such situations (and, we suspect, in many others), it is not the simple fact of network connections that is significant, but rather the quantity and quality of the resources that are accessed through them—vis-à-vis the particular institutional setting. In our view it is only once such efficacy has been established empirically that the designation of social ties as a "capital" is warranted.

Notes

[1] Indeed, the inclusion in the National Education Longitudinal Survey of questions intended to allow for testing of hypotheses drawing on Coleman's (1988, 1990) account of social capital reflects well the importance ascribed to the concept in the field of educational research.

[2] It is important to note the theoretical foundations underlying the conceptions of social capital and how they implicate the actions of both families and schools. In our work, we find the theoretical perspective of Pierre Bourdieu to be particularly useful in understanding the dynamic between schools and families. Bourdieu has produced a vast body of work, which is accompanied by a large and growing secondary literature that explains and extends his ideas. Readers who would like to explore Bourdieu's work in this area are directed to consult Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1986, 1990, 1994) as well as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), and the secondary works by Calhoun, LiPuma, and Postone (1993), Robbins (1991), and Swartz (1997). Bourdieu's notion of social capital is part of a larger framework that uses the concepts of *habitus, field,* and *symbolic violence,* as well as various forms of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic). Social capital can be conceived of as the set of valuable connections of an individual. Unlike Coleman, Bourdieu recognizes the unequal value of various network ties. In the school setting, the ties that are valuable are by-and-large middle-class. Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and others (Bernstein, 1974; McLaren, 1998; Mehan et al., 1996; Stanton-Salazar, 1997) have argued that schools are essentially middle-class institutions that reward middle-class behaviors. That is, the behaviors that most easily map onto the expectations of teachers and others at school are those that are most likely to be rewarded. In the realm of social capital, the connections or parental networks that are the most valued in school settings are those that provide leverage in this middle-class environment. Parent's connections to middle-class professionals thus provide them with valuable capital in the school setting.

[3] Valenzuela and Dornbusch (1994) report an interesting, positive association between familism—understood in terms of culturally specific phenomena of proximity to, contact with, and emotional affinity with adult kin—and school grades among Mexican students. Valenzuela and Dornbusch proffer an account based on Coleman's notion of social capital. But once again, it turns out that social capital is efficacious only in combination with an indicator of social position—in this case, parental education (Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994, pp. 30–31).

[4] We leave out of this discussion works, such as Bankston and Zhou (1995), that use alternative conceptions of social capital (in this case, subjective identification with an ethnic community).

[5] Because it focuses so exclusively on membership in voluntary organizations, the tradition of social capital research established by Putnam (2000) ends up excluding a variety of forms and instances of social capital from its purview—that is, precisely those in which the transfer or sharing of resources occurs on an informal basis. We thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing our attention to this implication of our research.

[6] This approach to data collection does in fact echo the general pattern of class segregation in the nation (Massey & Denton, 1993) but did result in a limitation to the study. It is impossible to know if parents would have behaved differently had they resided in a community that was different in terms of class.

[7] The first and second authors were not part of the data collection team, coming to the project only after it had been completed. Their participation was therefore limited to analysis of the data.

[8] The schools from which we recruited the families included very few children of employers or self-employed workers, rendering moot the perennial question of whether these categories belong to the middle-class.

[9] District statistics indicated that a vast a majority of the White and Black children were on school lunch, from which we surmised that they were poor. Interviews, however, revealed that most of the White families had unreported income that boosted them out of the poverty level. As a result, we needed to recruit additional White poor families. These families were generally recruited by using flyers in social service offices and posting flyers on telephone poles in another neighborhood; as an incentive, these White poor families were paid ($25 per interview). No other families were paid for interviews. But we did bring a pie with us to all of the other interviews, and we followed up (for the entire sample) with a handwritten thank you note. A number of the Black middle-class families, again where the schools did not provide sufficient number of cases to fill this category, were recruited through informal networks.

[10] The tabulations suffer from certain problems, further implying that they should be read with caution. In particular, all of the tabulations are beset (with varying degrees of severity) by missing data, usually as a result of time constraints on interviews. In addition, in some tabulations it was impossible to include figures for the poor group. The reason, as explained above, is that all of the poor White families were recruited from schools other than those on which the study was focused, thus entailing changes in the questions posed by the interviewer.

[11] Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that, among all classes, these friendships tended to be relatively class-homogeneous.

[12] We do not include any measures of contact with the respondent's father because a substantial proportion of interviewees (especially in the poor category) reported growing up without a father present.

[13] In our sample, working-class and poor parents were themselves considerably more likely to use corporal punishment in disciplining their children.

[14] An extensive literature highlights the importance of teacher quality in enhancing student outcomes. See, for example, Darling-Hammond (2000) and Haycock (1998).

[15] Here again we were unable to tabulate responses for the poor group (see note 5).

[16] We do not subdivide the results in Table 3 by race because cell sizes become very small.

[17] From our theoretical vantage point, the income-closure interaction might be expected on the grounds that, within the confines the given model, income may serve as an indicator of quantitative and qualitative differences in the potential effectiveness or

"value" of parental network ties. This expectation would rest on the assumption that income functions reasonably well as a proxy for the resources (economic, cultural, and symbolic) that network partners make available—or in our preferred vocabulary, the assumption that networks are relatively class-homogeneous. Of course, in the case of school-based intergenerational closure, this assumption is true simply as a matter of definition to the extent that the school itself is class-homogeneous.

[18] The question also arises here of whether school reforms might attenuate the pervasive advantage that accrues to middle-class families on the basis of their social capital. In this respect, Mehan et al. (1996) and Noguera (2001) have reported some suggestive results, and Stanton-Salazar (1997) has provided a compelling theoretical account of just what an alternative arrangement would have to look like. However, Stanton-Salazar (1997, pp. 17–21) also carefully details the institutional and organizational barriers to such an arrangement and does so with enough force to temper optimism.

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