CHAPTER SIX

Social Class and the Transition to Adulthood
Differences in Parents' Interactions with Institutions

Annette Lareau and Amanda Cox

Although the importance of social class in family life has preoccupied social scientists, it has failed to capture the attention of the general public (New York Times 2003). A body of research on social class and the family finds that middle-class individuals, defined either by education (i.e., having a college degree) or by occupation, typically have different family histories than working-class individuals (Kohn and Schooler 1983). More specifically, as Carlson and England, Cherlin, McLanahan, and others in this volume show, researchers have found class-based differences in the likelihood of marriage, divorce rates, household structures, lifespan, and health outcomes. In addition, social class has been found to be a factor in the character of childrearing (see Crossnoe and Cavanaugh 2010 for a review). While the importance of social class in family life has been documented since the classic studies by Robert and Helen Lynd (1929, 1937) in Middletown, Americans generally lack an awareness of social class (New York Times 2005).

As researchers have documented social-class differences in family life, increasing attention has been given to the transition to adulthood, as youth move from adolescence into the world of work (Furstenberg 2010). There are social-class differences in the timing and nature of the transition, particularly in terms of residential independence from family of origin, marriage, work, childbearing, and other signs of adulthood (Settersen, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut 2005). Many studies focus on class differences as the reason youth achieve (or don’t achieve) key outcomes in adulthood. However, we have less insight into the crucial social processes through which these outcomes are produced. Indeed, social scientists have also developed a truncated understanding of how social class shapes the life chances of youth. There is a tendency among researchers to focus on the characteristics of youth. This individualistic approach discounts the degree to which youth are embedded in a social context. Notably, it fails to recognize sufficiently the role that parents play in situating their children, interacting with institutions, and transforming the circumstances that their children experience. Hence, it is important to study variations in the role children’s development, particularly in such as high schools and colleges. In a state attention to the material transfer, one by Schoeni and Ross (2005), the more material resources to their young parents. Others show that class difference (Conley 2001). Beyond material resources, differences in class-based cultural respec- tion that parents have about institutional resources, however, have received less attention.

In this chapter we draw on a qualitative American families to suggest that the social impact on the lives of young adults by sons’ and daughters’ institutional experts, we highlight three key class-based resources—middle-class parents and youth had more knowledge of the inner workings of key institutions related to getting in and succeeding and poor parents and youth. Second, a more detailed understanding of the social “cases” and unique options. Third, in many ways, middle-class parents integrate theirs. Some of the working-class and poor youth make changes in their lives, but their efforts were less frequent and more limited (i.e., global knowledge, case-specific intervention) as constituting class-based challenges in their interactions with institutions of the chapter, we suggest that parents who have been more successful as they helped their children in two key problems and to solve them, which we add to focusing on youths’ individual interaction within the home, we believe in which parents differ in how they use the forestall problems and to solve them.

After discussing our research methods, the studies of a white middle-class young woman and working-class young woman, Wendy D., differed in their global knowledge, case-specific intervention in their children’s institutional lives of these two young people, as well as on the study, to suggest that these class-

134
important to study variations in the role that parents play in facilitating their children's development, particularly in helping them deal with institutions, such as high schools and colleges. In addition, there has been disproportionate attention to the material transfer of resources. Some studies, including one by Schoeni and Ross (2005), show that middle-class parents transfer more material resources to their young adult children than do working-class parents. Others show that class differences affect savings rates for college (Conley 2001). Beyond material resources, however, there are signs of differences in class-based cultural resources, such as the amount of information that parents have about institutions (Lubrano 2004). These cultural resources, however, have received less attention from social scientists.

In this chapter we draw on a qualitative study of white and African American families to suggest that the social class of parents has an important impact on the lives of young adults by affecting how parents manage their sons' and daughters' institutional experiences. In the first part of the chapter, we highlight three key class-based resources that surfaced in the study. First, middle-class parents and youth had much deeper and more detailed knowledge of the inner workings of key institutional structures, especially those related to getting into and succeeding in college, than did working-class and poor parents and youth. Second, middle-class parents and youth had a more detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their own "cases" and unique options. Third, while all parents helped their children in many ways, middle-class parents intervened in institutions on behalf of theirs. Some of the working-class and poor parents also sought to intervene, but their efforts were less frequent and less successful. We see these three factors (i.e., global knowledge, class-specific knowledge, and a propensity to intervene) as constituting class-based cultural resources that parents drew on in their interactions with institutions such as schools. In the second part of the chapter, we suggest that parents drew on these class-based resources as they helped their children in two key ways: to foresee and forestall problems and to solve problems, which we refer to as untangling knots. Thus, in addition to focusing on youths' individual characteristics and parent-child interaction within the home, we believe it is important to study the ways in which parents differ in how they work with institutions to foresee and forestall problems and to solve problems that surface.

After discussing our research methodology, we present two detailed case studies of a white middle-class young man, Garrett Tallinger, and a white working-class young woman, Wendy Driven, to show how their parents differed in their global knowledge, class-specific knowledge, and propensity to intervene in their children's institutional lives. We draw on the case studies of these two young people, as well as on the experiences of the other youth in the study, to suggest that these class-based cultural resources made a dif-
Social Class and the Transition to Adulthood

In particular, while all parents were able to foresee problems, middle-class parents were able to forestall problems much more effectively than were working-class and poor parents. In addition, all of the youth encountered problems in institutions during their transition to adulthood. However, middle-class parents had more resources for trying to solve these problems than did working-class and poor parents. In the conclusion we stress the importance of embedding the family in a broader social context, as well as the drawbacks of middle-class parents’ childrearing strategies.

METHODOLOGY

To capture the social processes that family members experience, as well as the meaning of the processes, it is essential to use qualitative methods of participant-observation and in-depth interviewing. This chapter draws on re-interviews with twelve young adults and their families approximately ten years after the young people’s participation in an ethnographic study, “Unequal Childhoods,” about variations in family life and children’s activities (Lareau 2003). This unique data set has a number of important advantages. The original ethnographic study provided a rich portrait of the rhythm of family life. The interviews, a decade later, build on the original observations while providing a chance to assess the situation in the families a decade later as the youth were in the process of transitioning to adulthood. Figure 6.1 provides an overview of the original study. The families were white and African American and lived in a large Northeastern city or the suburbs of the city (see Table 6.1 for a breakdown of the race and class of the participants in the study, as well as the definition of social class). A more intensive observational phase was then completed with twelve of these families; there was an effort to select families that were roughly comparable across race and class (i.e., one poor girl from a deeply religious family and one middle-class girl from a similar family). (For more discussion of the criteria for selection and the methodology, see Lareau 2003.) Each family was observed for about three weeks, usually on a daily basis.

Over the years, Annette Lareau kept in touch with the families through annual holiday cards and small gifts. A decade after the original study, she located all twelve families, interviewed all of the target children, and conducted separate interviews with the youths’ mothers, fathers, and siblings. The interviews of the target young people took place in their parents’ homes, except for one (Garrett Tailinger’s), which took place in his dorm room. Family members were paid (see Figure 6.1). The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. For data analysis we created codes for key themes (e.g.,

Original study
- Classroom observations in three public schools in the Northeast, one racially mixed city school.
- In-depth interviews with educators and mothers of 10-year-olds.
- Most of the families came from the three racially white poor and black middle-class communities.
- Most of the data were collected in the period described later.

Observations of 12 families
- Nine of the 12 families (the other 3 families were from the same community).
- We asked people we asked 63 percent (asked 19 times).
- Usually 20 visits to each family, usually daily or weekly.
- Most visits lasted 2-3 hours but sometimes longer.
- One overnight visit per family.
- Families were paid, generally $350, at the end of the study.
- Worked in racially diverse teams of 2 or 3, but with visits.
- Wrote field notes for 5-12 hours after each visit.

Follow-up study
- Two-hour tape-recorded interviews with “target” individual, parents, or friends.
- Family members were paid in honorarium ($75).
- Interviews generally took place in the homes of the target children.
- Interviews 2003-2005; reached all 12 families.
- Most children remember the study but have one.

Figure 6.1. Methodological details of study follow-up study.
into adulthood. In particular, while all
families, middle-class parents were able to
relate more closely than were working-class and poor
and, therefore, encountered problems in institutions.
However, middle-class parents had these problems than did working-class
parents. This is why we stress the importance of embedding
important, as well as the drawbacks of middle-

family members experience, as well as:

essential, to use qualitative methods in

interviewing. This chapter draws on
this and their families approximately ten
years in family life and children's activities
has a number of important advantages.

provided a rich portrait of the rhythm of
later, build on the original observations
in the families a decade later.
transitioning to adulthood. Figure 6.1

Original study

- Classroom observations in three public schools (one predominantly white suburban school in the Northeast, one racially mixed city school in the Northeast, and there is no description of the racial makeup of the third school).
- In-depth interviews with educators and mothers and fathers of 88 children who were 9 and 10 years old.
- Most of the families came from the three observed schools; the remaining children (especially white poor and black middle class) came from social service programs or informal networks.
- Most of the data were collected in the period 1993-95, but some were collected earlier and later.

Observations of 12 families

- Nine of the 12 families (but neither of the black middle-
  class families) came from the classrooms; response rate
  of people we asked was 65 percent (asked 19 to get 12).
- Usually 20 visits to each family, usually daily in the space of
  one month.
- Most visits lasted 2–3 hours but sometimes longer
- One overnight visit per family
- Families were paid, generally $350, at the end of the
  study.
- Worked in racially diverse teams of 2 or 3, sharing visits
  to the families.
- Wrote field notes for 2-12 hours after each visit

Using the fieldwork

- No question that we were intrusive, but families
  adjusted
- Yelling and cursing increased, especially on the third and
  fourth days.
- Children generally liked our visits, said it made them feel
  "special".
- Kept in touch with the families
  for the over the years by sending
  a Christmas card with monetary gift to the child.

Follow-up study

- Two-hour tape-recorded interviews with "target child" and mother, father, one sibling, and
  a spouse or serious boyfriend or girlfriend for a total of 38 interviews.
- Family members were paid an honorarium ($75 for target young person, $50 for others).
- Interviews generally took place in the homes of the families.
- Interviews 2003–05; reached all 12 families, a few family members not interviewed.
- Most children remember the study but have only a fuzzy memory of specific events.

Figure 6.1. Methodological details of study for "Unequal Childhoods" and follow-up study.

education decisions, work, perceptions of parent role, disappointments, college applications, independence) and coded the interviews accordingly. We also read and reread the interviews in order to understand the context of
the coded material. Amanda Cox, who was not involved in data collection,
worked on the coding with a researcher who was involved in the original
research project. All names are pseudonyms, and we have substituted names
of comparable colleges and have removed identifying information about the
colleges attended by the youth.
Social Class and the Transition to Adulthood

### Table 6.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social class</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>African American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>Melanie Hamilton</td>
<td>Stacey Marshall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Garrett Tallinger</td>
<td>Alexander Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>Wendy Driver</td>
<td>Tyree Taylor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Billy Yarelli</td>
<td>Jessica Irwin*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Katie Brindle</td>
<td>Tara Carroll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karl Greerley</td>
<td>Harold McAllister</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** In the original study, a total of 88 families were interviewed; 12 of these families were also observed. Since the 2003-05 follow-up only focused on the families that were observed, we have only included data on these 12 families. For additional information see Lareau 2003.

**Middle class children** are those who live in households in which at least one parent is employed in a position that entails substantial managerial authority or centrally draws upon highly complex, educationally certified (e.g., college-level) skills.

**Working-class children** are those who live in households in which neither parent is employed in a middle-class position and at least one parent is employed in a position that has little or no managerial authority and that does not require highly complex, educationally certified skills. This category includes lower-level white-collar workers.

**Poor children** are those who live in households in which parents receive public assistance and do not participate in the labor force on a regular, continuous basis.

* Biracial girl: black father and white mother.

Longitudinal studies using qualitative methods are rare (Burawoy 2003). It is useful that Lareau was able to reach all twelve of the youth in the intensive phase of the original study, as well as to triangulate their information with separate interviews with other family members. Of course, the labor-intensive nature of qualitative research means that researchers must make hard choices. Depth of research almost always comes at the expense of breadth of the sample. The longitudinal nature of the research further compounds this problem. This study has a small sample, twelve families, and focuses on the transition to adulthood within those families. Nevertheless, the study’s value is apparent in that the patterns we found are highly consistent with findings from studies using nationally representative data (Settersten, Fursenberg, and Rumbaut 2005); but the findings offer much more depth and insight into social processes than nationally representative data sets can provide. In addition, both qualitative and quantitative studies tend to focus on the actions of youth alone. Yet, since families operate in social contexts, it is important to consider how parents and youth negotiate with institutions outside the home. Also, we show that the strategies that parents adopted when their youth were in the transition to adulthood were highly consistent with strategies they followed when their children were 10 years old. This kind of longitudinal insight is rare. We see the results as helping to improve our conceptual models about the ways in which social class has an impact on family life, particularly in terms of the largely hidden advantages that many middle-class parents provide for their children in institutions.

**Class and the Transition to Adulthood: A Tale of Two Families**

Research in the sociology of the family has focused on the outcomes of individual youth, but the social institutions surrounding family life are not simply about these institutions. In this chapter, we seek to understand the social context of youth as they move through key life transitions. Class differences are important in understanding how youth navigate the social institutions surrounding family life. Indeed, there is a striking pattern of more age among working-class and poor parents, and in particular the middle-class youth, and the differences that youth ages more dependently, and more child-like than their working-class counterparts.

**Turning Points and Interventions**

When Garrett Tallinger was in fourth grade, his family moved from an urban area to a leafy cul-de-sac in a large Northeastern city. Both of his parents, who were both educated to enter high school, his parents, Garrett’s family, moved to a much larger new home in Mr. Tallinger’s workplace. Their income is medium for American families. In 2003, Mr. Tallinger was working as a laborer on a construction job; he frequently traveled for work. Mr. Tallinger, now a basketball coach at a private university, has been at the forefront of child development. When Garrett was 10 years old, his parents took him on a cross-country road trip, including Garrett’s two younger brothers. The road trip was a work-related experience within the family. His parents possessed valuable knowledge about the institutions such as high schools and colleges that these and other institutions played in the lives of Garrett through high school and into college.
To Adulthood

4.1
Follow-up study, by social class and race

African American

Sawyer
Stacey Marshall
Alexander Williams
Treece Taylor
Jessica Irving
Tara Carroll
Harold McAllister

class parents provide for their children by negotiating their experiences in institutions.

CLASS AND THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD:
A TALE OF TWO FAMILIES

Research in the sociology of the family has largely been devoted to the life outcomes of individual youth, but there has been less attention paid to the institutions surrounding family life and the interactions between families and these institutions. In this chapter, we show that the strategies parents adopted mattered. Class differences in the global and specific information possessed by parents, and how they intervened in institutions, had consequences. Working-class parents were able to foresee and forestall some key problems and unroll important knots in their children’s lives. However, there was a striking pattern of more aggressive intervention by middle-class parents in predicting and preventing problems and solving problems than among working-class and poor parents. In our follow-ups with these families, the middle-class youth (although over the age of 18) seemed younger, more dependent, and more child-like than working-class youth.

Turning Points and Interventions: Garrett Tallinger

When Garrett Tallinger was in fourth grade, his family lived in a large suburban home on a leafy cul-de-sac in the predominantly white suburb of a large Northeastern city. Both of his parents had graduated from an Ivy League college (where they were both athletes). As Garrett was getting ready to enter high school, his parents, Garrett, and his two younger brothers moved to a much larger new home in an elite development to be closer to Mr. Tallinger’s workplace. Their income placed them in the top 10 percent of American families. In 2003, Mrs. Tallinger had a high-level managerial job; he frequently traveled for work. Ms. Tallinger worked in fundraising.

Garrett Tallinger, now a basketball player on a top-ranked basketball team at a private university, has been a talented athlete since he was a young child. When Garrett was 10 years old, his parents spent a great deal of time and effort helping him pursue his interests and skills and providing him with a wide range of activities and experiences. Garrett’s schedule of activities often dictated the daily and weekly rhythm of the Tallinger family, including Garrett’s two younger brothers. Backed by their own educational and work-related experiences within largely middle-class contexts, Garrett’s parents possessed valuable knowledge of the ways in which “gatekeeping” institutions such as high schools and colleges work. Their understanding of these and other institutions played an important role in their ability to guide Garrett through high school and into college.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Middle class families</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>African American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Garrett Tallinger</td>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>High school graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College student</td>
<td></td>
<td>College student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruited by 2 Ivy League schools to play basketball, attends small private college on basketball scholarship, earns As and Bs</td>
<td>Accepted early decision to Ivy League school; has been admitted to medical school at same elite university; earns Bs, some As</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy Yanelli</td>
<td>High school dropout</td>
<td>High school graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned GED</td>
<td></td>
<td>College student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works full-time, is apprentice in painters' union</td>
<td>Accepted at small Catholic college; chose not to attend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class families</td>
<td>Wendy Driver</td>
<td>Tyce Taylor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>High school graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accepted at small Catholic college; chose not to attend</td>
<td>Started community college, did not finish 1st semester; took 1 year off; has completed 1 semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stay-at-home mother; is program: has 2-year-old, husband is in Navy</td>
<td>Works full-time in construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor families</td>
<td>Karl Greeley</td>
<td>Harold McMullister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High school dropout</td>
<td>High school dropout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took GED classes; did not take GED test</td>
<td>Married, separated; has 1-year-old (father is not current husband)</td>
<td>Has been working at chain restaurant full-time since age 15; now to 9 p.m. shift; 2-hour commute to work (4 buses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works full-time (nights), stocking grocery store shelves</td>
<td>Works full-time, cleaning houses</td>
<td>Works full-time (3–11 p.m.) as caretaker for disabled people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Katie Brindle</td>
<td>Tara Carroll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High school dropout</td>
<td>High school graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stay-at-home mother; is program: has 2-year-old, husband is in Navy</td>
<td>Accepted at Ivy League school, but attends public university on basketball scholarship; earns mostly Bs (2 Cs in biology)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When Garrett entered high school, his state nearly 1,000 miles from where he was raised. He was quick to learn about the city, but his future plan was vague. When we talked about Garrett's future plan, he had a lot of detailed information about the college program he was interested in, but he wasn't sure which school to attend. Garrett wanted to attend a school with a strong engineering program, but he wasn't sure which school would be the best fit for him.

Ms. Tallinger was well informed about Garrett's education:

"One of the things I did know was that we need to find a school that is a good fit for Garrett. We need to find a school that he will enjoy going to. We need to find a school that is going to be able to give him the education that he needs."
When Garrett entered high school after he and his family relocated to a state nearly 1,000 miles from where Garrett had lived as a young child, Ms. Tallinger was quick to learn about the local high school and its curriculum. When she visited Garrett’s future public high school, Ms. Tallinger sought detailed information about the colleges attended by the school’s graduates:

I was appalled [when I visited the local public high school]. It’s ugly. It’s far away. I asked how many kids go to . . . get recruited for Division I [athletic] programs. . . . they probably thought . . . they probably were wondering, “Who is this Northern busy coming in here and asking these questions?” [laughs] But they couldn’t tell me where kids went to school. . . . they all went mostly to [in-state] schools. So, [I asked], “How many would go to the Ivies, to the Stanfords or the MITs?”

As Garrett began high school, Ms. Tallinger encouraged him to take the “most rigorous” courses, and she shared her desire and her sense of her son’s academic capabilities with Garrett’s high school guidance counselors:

In talking to the guidance people, I said, “I think he’s capable of honors [i.e., enrolling in the honors courses]. But, obviously you all need to decide that . . . .”

Ms. Tallinger was well informed about the global standards in higher education:

One of the things I did know was that the more competitive colleges look at what is available in a high school, and if you’re not taking the most rigorous of what’s available, that’s a strike against you in terms of their evaluating your transcript. And so I wanted Garrett, as is true with all my kids, I want them to take the most rigorous [course] that they’re possibly capable of taking.

His junior year Garrett took Advanced Placement (AP) economics, AP calculus, and AP English literature, as well as the highest levels of physics and history offered by his high school. Just as Ms. Tallinger oversaw and shepherded Garrett through various academic transitions and decisions, Garrett’s father guided his son through the complicated (and highly strategic) process of being recruited by a top-tier collegiate basketball program. As Mr. Tallinger reports, his guidance required a complex understanding of the inner workings of what he describes as the “very political” recruiting process:

We sent marketing packets to a lot of schools. There are a lot of recruiting websites out there. So those guys come and see kids play, and I got to know a lot of those guys, so having them write about your kid is important. Get his name out there, they do all these rankings, it’s very political networking kind of deal. And then the coaches go to all of these tournaments and these camps and they watch him.
Mr. Tallinger described his understanding of the strategy involved on both sides of the recruiting process, the universities' and the athlete's:

All these schools send you letters. So the first thing they look for: did you respond to the letter quickly, 'cause they're all trying to measure interest. So, what happens is both sides are playing the game: the schools tell you they have a priority list of kids they want. They do their best not to tell you where you are on that list. They want every kid to think he or she is number one, and we do the same thing on this end. I mean our strategy was to never [tell] a school he wasn't interested 'cause they start talking to each other. So if you tell a school of a certain kind, "I don't want to go there," they say [to other schools], "Well, don't bother to recruit him."

In addition to his quickly learned knowledge about the recruiting process, Mr. Tallinger was also knowledgeable about the likelihood of Garrett's receiving financial aid from an Ivy League university that was recruiting Garrett "very hard." Mr. Tallinger knew that Ivy League universities do not offer athletic scholarships and that his family's income of $175,000 placed them above the school's financial aid cut-off. With three children, he knew an Ivy League school was unaffordable.

The involvement of the Tallinger parents is similar to the role that they had played in Garrett's academic and athletic affairs when he was a 10-year-old. For example, when Garrett was in early elementary school, he missed the IQ cut-off for his school's gifted program by just a few points. Upon receiving the news that Garrett would not be able to join the program, the Tallingers insisted that Garrett be retested at what they felt would be a more appropriate time for him to perform at his best. Garrett was retested, but his score was again not high enough to qualify him for his school's gifted program.

Like their knowledge of how institutions work, Ms. and Mr. Tallinger's knowledge about Garrett in particular was valuable as they helped him navigate the transition from high school to college. They had a nuanced understanding of how Garrett might fare when compared with other students and athletes. Ms. Tallinger reported:

He never cracked 1200 on the SATs. So, that was tough—families. 'Cause I didn't test well either, and did well in school. Obviously I felt for him. He didn't... what did he get on the ACT... I think he got a 27 or a 28, so that was a little bit better.

Mr. Tallinger was also aware that Garrett would not have shined at Princeton in the way that he did at Villanova:

While I think Garrett would have done okay academically [at Princeton], I think Villanova is a better fit. Garrett is a good student, but he's not a brilliant kid. So he would have gotten by at Princeton, whereas [at] Villanova you know he was, he got the academic highest GPA on the basketball team, did not the academic committee... not just the basketball team, the whole ten they wouldn't have gotten and got some other academic opportunities that Villanova probably actually a better fit for him.

Mr. Tallinger also thought that after getting Garrett's basketball shooting percentage (reported) and how he compared with recruited by the same universities. For example as "a stretch"?

I think U. Conn. would have been a great fit were recruiting him. And they came afterwards and he goes, "You know, we were hoping he was 6'6". But we have another one." I had no problem with the Villanova's parents had both general knowledge and an ability—with a cold and critical look at their son's situation. They also had experience: they were not confined to college. This can be seen in Tallinger's post-college basketball options. By recruiting on a basketball team that was nation, Mr. Tallinger felt that Garrett would be more professionally in the NBA upon grade.

Well, realistically, if it went very well, an NBA team... [but] playing in East enough to play in the NBA. I mean, probably be one of those guys that's not 20 free-agent tryouts, probably America for a few years or something.
know he was, he got the academic award on the basketball team. He was the highest GPA on the basketball team, and he’s been selected [to be on the] student athletic committee. . . . He was selected to represent Villanova, not just the basketball team, the whole university. So, those kinds of opportunities he wouldn’t have gotten at Princeton. Now obviously Princeton’s got other academic opportunities that Villanova doesn’t by far, but I think it’s [i.e., Villanova’s] probably actually a better fit.

Mr. Tallinger also thought that after graduation the booster club networks at Villanova would help Garrett land an attractive job in business. Garrett himself also had a sense of how his SAT scores would help or hinder his chances of acceptance into various colleges and universities and how their standards differed:

I was real worried about it [i.e., his SAT score] cause I was trying to go to Stanford at the time. And 1190 isn’t . . . I mean, they did accept a kid with an 1140, but still it’s only . . . if you’re trying to get into Stanford, you need . . . that’s why I wanted to get 1200 real bad. I mean, and then coming here [to Villanova], their standard’s not as high.

In addition to their academic knowledge, Garrett’s parents also knew their son’s basketball shooting percentage (“56 percent for his career,” Mr. Tallinger reported) and how he compared with other high school athletes being recruited by the same universities. For example, Mr. Tallinger saw some schools as “a stretch”:

I think U. Conn. would have been a stretch ability-wise for Garrett, but they were recruiting him. And they came to see him play, and the coach called me afterwards and he goes, “You know, we know you told us he was 6’4”. We were hoping he was 6’6”. But we have three 6’4” kids, and we don’t need another one.” I had no problem with that. So you move on.

Garrett’s parents had both general knowledge of how institutions worked and an ability—with a cold and critical eye—to assess the weaknesses of their son’s situation. They also knew detailed information about institutions not confined to college. This can be seen in how the Tallingers weighed Garrett’s post-college basketball options. Although Garrett was currently playing on a basketball team that was ranked among the top twenty-five in the nation, Mr. Tallinger felt that Garrett would not be “good enough” to play professionally in the NBA upon graduation from college:

Well, realistically, if it went very well for him, he’d probably be trying to make an NBA team . . . [but] playing in Europe. I’m not sure if he’s quite good enough to play in the NBA. I mean, hopefully he’ll get better. He’ll probably be one of those guys that’s not drafted by the NBA, but gives him what are called “free-agent tryouts,” probably ends up playing in Europe or South America for a few years or something.
Garrett also harbored doubts about his chances of making it to the NBA. When asked about his post-college plans, Garrett said, “Probably still playing basketball somewhere. In the NBA hopefully. But if not, overseas somewhere.”

As Ms. and Mr. Tallinger guided Garrett through the various academic and athletic institutions that he encountered from early childhood and into college, their informal knowledge about how the institutions worked and how their son “measured up” in the face of these institutions played a key role in shaping Garrett’s experiences and outcomes. Both their knowledge of the institutional workings in general and of Garrett’s “case” in particular often led to the third mechanism that contributed to the transmission of advantages within the middle-class families in this study: parents’ (often successful) interventions in institutions in which their children participate.

In addition to encouraging Garrett to take the “most rigorous” courses his high school had to offer and talking to Garrett’s high school guidance counselors about her son being “capable of honors,” Ms. Tallinger was quick to intervene when a scheduling conflict would have prevented Garrett from enrolling in both AP English literature and AP calculus:

I did have to go fight about his schedule because they went into this new scheduling system, and if he wanted to take the AP English and AP calculus, they were given at the same time. I was like, “C’mon, this is not—you gotta figure something out. I mean, I can’t believe Garrett’s the only person this is impacting. You have to figure a way for these kids to maximize their opportunities, and they have to switch things around.” So that I did fight for.

Similar to the way in which Ms. Tallinger intervened to maximize Garrett’s chances for academic success, Mr. Tallinger played an active role in shaping Garrett’s experiences on the basketball court. The summer after Garrett’s junior year of high school, Mr. Tallinger negotiated to get Garrett onto a summer-league traveling team that would “give him the visibility” so he would “get the exposure” to recruiters from top-tier collegiate basketball programs. Sponsored by a well-known athletic company, Garrett’s new team included a rising young star who was eventually drafted into the NBA directly after completing high school. Mr. Tallinger was grateful for the opportunity for Garrett to play on such a successful team—“I have nothing but thanks and respect for the Memphis Warriors,” he said—but he felt that Garrett was not receiving enough playing time to “get the exposure” he needed. When asked if he had ever done anything to increase Garrett’s playing time, he replied:

I did, which is something I don’t normally do. But I did only because... they were playing a lot of juniors-to-be. I was saying to [the coach], “Well, that’s fine, but you have kids.”—and Garrett wasn’t the only one[where] “this is like their last shot. If they don’t get juniors-to-be didn’t seem remarkably point in the AAU [summer league]... So that I didn’t understand: when you got kids who wanted and needed guess they kind of listened. His play

Thus, Mr. Tallinger’s intervention appeared playing time in front of college recruiters.

Later that year, when Garrett was looking to play association college basketball, Mr. Tallinger worked with recruiters of the recruiting process to make sure Garrett had taken a turn that was not to his liking.

University of Kansas was recruiting him from then for a while. And I called as the thing went on—and said, like, “Okay, that’s fine.” Don, of course we told that the recruiting on him, that’s—and Kansas—not to say they were not a scholarship—they stopped recruiting that they didn’t have a shot.

The Tallingers’ parental interventions were accepted to play basketball for a higher level, but both continued to offer him valuable coaching opportunities through the process of choosing a college. Such an instance:

I guess it was some point in freshman year where I wanted to be a math teacher and then to be that’s—fine. Don, of course, you know all you want to earn for the 模型 yourself the most options when you can, but he came to the decision that he had and sort of shift emphasis to mark.

In the end Garrett Tallinger did not end up at several top-ranked college basketball programs himself the most options a few years after graduation. He has potential career path. His parents have seen the strengths of institutions and, of their son’s strengths, educational and travel opportunities at school, within his college recruiting process. When the institution was not what it should be...
like their last shot. If they don't get seen this summer, then it's over."... These juniors-to-be didn't seem remarkably better than the seniors-to-be. The whole point in the AAU [summer league] teams is to get kids seen by college coaches. ... So that I didn't understand why you would play these young kids when you got kids who wanted and needed scholarships sitting on the bench... I guess they kind of listened. His playing time went up some.

Thus, Mr. Tallinger's intervention appeared to increase by "some" Garrett's playing time in front of college recruiters.

Later that year, when Garrett was being actively recruited to play Division I college basketball, Mr. Tallinger again used his knowledge of the inner workings of the recruiting process to intervene when he felt that the process had taken a turn that was not to Garrett's advantage:

University of Kansas was recruiting him at one point, and then we didn't hear from them for a while. And [I] called the coach and just—I was getting bolder as the thing went on—and said, like, "What's up?" [The coach said] "Oh, we were told that the recruiting on him was closed." I was like, "Who told you that?"... and Kansas—not to say they would have ultimately offered him a scholarship—they stopped recruiting [Garrett] because someone told them that they didn't have a shot.

The Tallingers' parental interventions did not end when Garrett was accepted to play basketball for a highly ranked collegiate team. His parents both continued to offer him valuable guidance as they shepherded him through the process of choosing a college major. Ms. Tallinger reported one such instance:

I guess it was some point in freshman year; [Garrett] wasn't sure he wanted to continue in business or stay in the business school. He's thinking he wanted to be a math teacher and wanted to... major in education. We said, "Okay, that's fine." Don, of course, again being the more pragmatic, said, "If that's all you want to earn for the rest of your life... as a teacher... But give yourself the most options when you come out of school."... Anyway, so on his own he came to the decision that he's gonna stay in the business school and sort of shift emphasis to marketing.

In the end Garrett Tallinger did not miss the opportunity to be recruited by several top-ranked college basketball programs, nor did he fail to "give himself the most options" a few years later when choosing a college major and a potential career path. His parents' knowledge and understanding of institutions and of their son's strengths and weaknesses in relation to the standards and expectations of these institutions eased Garrett's negotiations and transitions at school, within his elite basketball club, and throughout the college recruiting process. When they felt that Garrett's experience within an institution was not what it should be, Ms. and Mr. Tallinger did not hesitate...
to intervene on their son’s behalf. As we explain below after discussing the case of Wendy Driver, these three factors constituted class-based cultural resources that helped the Tallingers foresee and forestall problems and untie knots in their son’s life.

“Awesome” Parents: Wendy Driver

Wendy Driver, a cheerful and friendly 10-year-old, grew up in a white working-class family where her daily life centered on visiting with family, playing with her cousins, and attending family events. After Wendy’s parents separated, she lived with her maternal grandparents, her mother, and her older brother. By the time Wendy was in fourth grade, her father had died and her mother and Mack moved in together before the birth of their daughter, Valerie. Ms. Driver and Mack married, and Wendy grew up living in a small rented townhouse in a large Northeastern city. Ms. Driver worked as an administrative assistant while Mack worked in a unionized position. Wendy was involved in a few organized activities, but unlike Garrett Tallinger’s, Wendy’s activities did not dominate family life, and Wendy’s mother and Mack saw her activities not as a way for Wendy to develop skills but as things to “give her something to do” and “keep her off the street.”

A decade later Wendy is a tall, thin, fresh-faced young wife, 20, an 18-month-old daughter and another child on the way. When Wendy’s older brother went into the Navy, he introduced her to Ryan, who is also in the Navy and is out on a submarine six months at a time. Wendy had learned in November after her high school graduation that she was pregnant, just before Ryan’s (already planned) marriage proposal. Her parents were supportive. Wendy had had her heart set on a big wedding, but Wendy and Ryan “wanted to get married for the baby.” Her parents helped her work out a plan for two weddings: a small wedding took place when Wendy was three months pregnant, and then there was a large, formal, and elaborate wedding when the baby, Clara, was 1 year old. Wendy lives about four hours away from her parents, but when Ryan is out at sea, Wendy and Clara visit Wendy’s parents for long stretches of time.

Throughout Wendy’s life, Mr. and Ms. Driver have intervened in her life. Wendy sees her mother as having been particularly helpful in “fighting” for her in school-related matters and in giving her a model she hopes to emulate with her own children:

I have to go to school and fight for my child. If my mom can do it, then I can do it. I remember my mom going to school and fighting for me all the time. They told me I had to go to a special school and my Mom is like, “No, she’s fine.”

As they are today, Mr. and Ms. Driver were devoted parents when Wendy was a child. They assessed the situation and frequently intervened to help Wendy. Wendy was not admitted to the grade she was expected to attend. She was redirected to the neighborhood school, a high dropout rate, and considered a “bad” school. Ms. Driver urged Cop (i.e., her paternal grandparents) to send her to the Catholic high school she attended. Wendy reported that her parents were supportive of her decision.

The eighth-grade counselor told my parents, because I wouldn’t make it, that I wouldn’t make it in a freshman year. That’s when the current people coming and giving me to drop out. This is what you have to do to cope with it so much easier. But even my parents said, ‘You’re not doing it anymore, you’re just made me and my mom push out and quit now, just to drop out and move on.’

The high school arranged for tests to provide verbal answers. With this strategy, Wendy kept Wendy out of school. Ms. Driver tutors work with Wendy so she would graduate.

Wendy’s parents also helped her when she entered the Navy. Ryan began dating during her senior year. Ms. Driver sent Wendy to the Navy after she graduated from high school and before she sent her back to the Navy. Wendy did not believe this point as well: “We don’t believe in giving the baby up for adoption. If it’s here, we take it.” Ms. Driver said definitively.

Ms. Driver intervened and had a plan in place before he married Wendy to do the same thing. I’m not one to hide my feelings. And I had a coach— and I said, “I want to ask you if you think that this is not yours and you do not have to come back.”
was a child. They assessed the specifics of their daughter’s situation, and they frequently intervened to help her. For example, at the end of eighth grade Wendy was not admitted to the magnet high school of her choice. She was redirected to the neighborhood school which, with metal detectors, a high dropout rate, and occasional fights, was widely characterized as a “bad” school. Ms. Driver was extremely concerned. Wendy’s “Pop Pop” (i.e., her paternal grandfather) paid the $3,000 annual tuition to send her to the Catholic high school that Wendy’s mother and sisters had attended. Wendy reported that her eighth-grade counselors were not supportive of the idea:

The eighth-grade counselor told my mom that they would be wasting their money. Because I wouldn’t make it. And when I got down there I struggled freshman year. That’s when the counselor started coming . . . and I had different people coming and giving me tests and talking about it, telling the school, “This is what you have to do to cope with my disability.” And it just like made it so much easier. But even my sophomore year in high school, I had teachers tell me to quit now, just to drop out and to try to get my GED by myself. And that just made me and my mom push even harder. The high school arranged for tests to be read to Wendy and allowed her to provide verbal answers. With this system in place, Wendy earned a place on the honor roll. Later in her high school years, when multiple knee surgeries kept Wendy out of school, Ms. Driver coordinated with the school to have tutors work with Wendy so she would not fall behind in her studies. Wendy graduated.

Wendy’s parents also helped her in her personal life. When Wendy and Ryan began dating during her senior year in high school, after she and Ryan became close, Ms. Driver sent Wendy to the doctor to get birth control. In November after she graduated from high school, Wendy (unexpectedly) became pregnant. Wendy did not believe in abortion. Her mother was firm on this point as well: “We don’t believe in abortion, and there’s no issue about giving the baby up for adoption. If it came down to it, me and Mack would have taken it,” Ms. Driver said definitively.

Ms. Driver intervened and had a frank conversation with her future son-in-law before he married Wendy to determine if he was willing to accept the responsibility of being a father:

I’m not one to hide my feelings. And I said to Ryan—we were sitting on the couch—and I said, “I want to ask you something. . . . The first thing a lot of young guys say is, ‘It’s not mine, and they take off, and you never see them again.’ I said, ‘Don’t.’ I said, ‘If you have any doubt in your mind [and if you think that] this child is not yours, there’s the door. You can walk out now, and you do not have to come back.”
Ms. Driver’s intervention was an effort to avert a disaster in the future. She spoke to Ryan directly:

I said, “I do not want two months from now, five months from now, six months from now you [to] say to her [that] this is not your child. If there is any doubt in your mind at all, or if you have second thoughts that you don’t want this child....”

Contributing $5,000 (more than Wendy had wanted them to contribute) to the big wedding, Mrs. and Mr. Driver also assisted in the planning and preparations for it. Both parents like their son-in-law, Ryan’s structured past, which includes heavy drinking and arrests for possession of a pipe bomb, as well as Wendy’s difficult relations with Ryan’s mother (who refused to attend either of the weddings) do not seem to trouble Mr. and Mrs. Driver. They are very optimistic about the future. When asked directly what would happen if Wendy and Ryan separated or divorced, they are quick to indicate that Wendy always has a home with them. As Mack, Wendy’s stepfather, says:

Oh, she’s more than welcome to come home.... We’d just have to make arrangements and make the house bigger probably. [Laughter] But we’d discuss it, and everything would be fine.

Since Wendy moved away from home, Mack has been an invaluable source of transportation. Like her mother, Wendy does not drive. Wendy lives four hours from her childhood home, and although public transportation between the two cities exists, it is not convenient and, with the baby, not ideal. At least once a month, and sometimes more often, Mack makes the eight-hour roundtrip drive to fetch Wendy and Clara. Thus, Ms. Driver and Mack continue to help Wendy and Ryan by providing child care, transportation, and emotional support. All in all, Wendy characterizes her family as “awesome.” She says, “They are what I would want. If I need anything, I can call them.”

Wendy has warm relations with her parents and, like Garrett, sees her parents as very helpful to her. However, we found differences in the kind of help provided by middle-class parents in relation to institutions and that provided by working-class and poor parents. We found that working-class and poor parents possessed important kinds of information about institutions, but middle-class parents had even more, including information that was often highly specialized and customized to the specific case of their child. This pattern also was present, in a different fashion, among the young adults themselves. Specifically, compared to Garrett, Wendy had limited global information about key matters involving institutions, and her information was much more general. For example, throughout high school and then during the college admission process, there were many moments when Wendy’s learning disability was discussed. She often took notes, and Mrs. Driver made sure that offered a program for students with disabilities. There are many different ways to label students, and Wendy did not fit the generally held only a vague understanding of what kind of help they needed.

Mrs. Driver: Did you learn the name of what it is?
Wendy: No, they call it LD.
Mrs. Driver: Do you know what LD stands for?
Wendy: Learning Disability.

In high school Wendy’s learning disability was a complete mystery. She reported, “I am really good at everything except the math part.” Wendy was not always clear about her disability, but she knew that it was something she had to work on and that there was support available for her. By the time she was in college, Wendy was much more confident in her ability to handle her disability and had received a lot of help from professionals who had worked with her on her disability. She had learned that she was not alone in her struggles, and that there were people who could help her. She felt that she was able to cope with her disability and that she was not alone in her struggles. She felt that she was able to cope with her disability and that she was not alone in her struggles. She felt that she was able to cope with her disability and that she was not alone in her struggles. She felt that she was able to cope with her disability and that she was not alone in her struggles.
Wendy's learning disability was discussed. Wendy was admitted to a college that offered a program for students with learning disabilities and included the provision of a note taker, additional time on tests, and other learning supports. There are many different types of learning disabilities, but Wendy had only a vague understanding of the nature of her own:

AL: Did you learn the name of what your disability was?
Wendy: No, they call it LD.
AL: Do you know what LD stands for?
Wendy: Learning Disability.

In high school Wendy's learning disability made it difficult for her to complete her school work. She reported, "And then finally I got the nerve up to tell my good friends, 'Look, I am retarded. I can't do this.'" The term "retarded" is rarely, if ever, used by professionals today to describe a learning disability. While on the one hand Wendy understood that she had a learning disability, she was not fluent in the categories and terms used by educators.

A similar pattern existed for Wendy's parents. Unlike the Tallingers, who possessed deeper and more detailed global knowledge of institutional structures and specific knowledge of their son's relative place and options within those structures, Ms. Driver often had incomplete information about the inner workings of key institutions, and her knowledge about the specifics of Wendy's educational trajectory was vague and partial. Therefore the Drivers relied on professionals who had specialized training in such areas. The Drivers' lack of detailed knowledge about key institutional structures and their reliance on school personnel were evident when Wendy applied to colleges. With the assistance of her friends and an accommodation for her learning disability, Wendy had been able to graduate from high school. Her mother very much wanted her to go to college, and the high school counselor guided the family through the college application process:

Ms. Driver: She had to go to a particular college that would help her with her disability. Because she couldn't get into another college. They [the high school] wanted a college that would have other children with disabilities who need help. She went up to . . . where's she go? Brockport maybe?
AL: Brockport?
Ms. Driver: Yeah. She didn't get accepted there.

Ms. Driver passionately wanted her daughter to go to college. Her global knowledge of higher education systems was limited; for her, a wide variety of institutions were included under the term "college." The differences among colleges that preoccupied the Tallingers did not preoccupy her. Nor did she fixate on Wendy's relative chances of acceptance at various schools or in relation to other students. The Drivers were guided by Wendy's high
school counselor, who selected the schools to which Wendy would apply and then helped Wendy with the applications. Wendy's parents were powerful emotional supports for her, but since she was being guided by the counselor, they did not become involved with the application process. Hence it is not surprising that Ms. Driver did not know Wendy's SAT scores or her high school grade-point average.

Other steps in the college application process that were extremely important to middle-class parents such as the Tallingers were less salient to the Driver parents. For example, neither Mr. nor Ms. Driver could recall the names of the colleges to which Wendy had applied. They could only remember the names of the towns in which the colleges were located. Similarly, although Ms. Driver and Mack had driven Wendy to the college planed to attend, had filled out a financial aid form for the school, and had had numerous conversations about the school, Ms. Driver could remember the name of the town (Reading) but not the name of the college (Alvernia) to which Wendy had been admitted:

Ms. Driver: She got accepted up in West . . . West Reading. I can't think of the name of [the college]. It had an “A” like that.
AL: West Reading?
Ms. Driver: Up in West Reading. And they accepted her there.

Unlike the Tallingers, who memorized a great deal of ancillary information, including exact tuition costs, financial aid awards, and the gap between the two at the various colleges to which Garrett had applied, what the Drivers focused on was what they would be required to pay, which amounted to $1,000 per month (i.e., $12,000 per year).

Neither Ms. Driver nor Mack had ever been to college, nor had anyone in their immediate families. Thus it is reasonable that their understanding of the general structure of the college application process would be minimal. For example, Mack had been surprised to learn that colleges do not return application fees, and Ms. Driver misunderstood a key communication during a fall visit to the college to which Wendy was later admitted:

It was really shocking because of the interview. The person we met with was very nice and looked at her grades and SATs and all that stuff . . . and when we left they said, “Well, we will see you in a couple months for [the] reception.” And we were ecstatic!

Having thought that Wendy had been accepted, Ms. Driver continued:

When we left we had to go down to the front desk. And they said, “We'll be calling you.” And I said, “What do you mean you’ll be calling me?” I said, “Well, we'll give you a call or a letter to let you know if you’re accepted.”

And I’m like, “She’s accepted.” They said, “You know, we must have screwed up.”

Ms. Driver and Wendy had not known application process, wherein student acceptances and rejections in the spring.

In the end, however, Wendy did feel very “stressed” during the summer and in June she told her parents that she could not make her happy. . . . I had a scholarship. . . . I was happy where I was. . . .

Wendy was concerned that she did not want to go to college:

Every day I would tell her, “Mom, it’s time to leave your boyfriend Ryan. I don’t want to leave you. I’m not going because I didn’t want to be there. I didn’t want to go because I didn’t know how I would personally take it.”

Wendy had worked in two different positions. After she decided not to go to college, she explored the option of attending the local community college in January and dropped out of Rutgers . . . didn’t want to fail, what?

When Wendy ran into some difficulties in her academic situation, she was told to take remedial courses. She was given her an additional year to complete them.

I want to go to a class to get credit first. If I pay for the [learning disability] program, it’s not for me. I just want to talk to the guy . . . and they didn’t want...
And I'm like, "She's accepted." They're like, "What?!" I said, "They said she was accepted." They said, "You know that's not a promise."

Ms. Driver and Wendy had not known that there is a "season" to the college application process, wherein students apply in the fall and are notified of acceptances and rejections in the spring.

In the end, however, Wendy did not go to college. She reported being very "stressed" during the summer following her high school graduation, and in June she told her parents that she was "not going":

"I couldn't see myself... I applied to make my mom happy. I did everything to make her happy... I had a scholarship. That made it into a bigger deal because I had a scholarship... I said, "I am not going." [My mom] said, "What?" [I said], "I do not want to go."

Wendy was concerned that she did not have the academic skills to succeed in college:

"Every day I would tell her, "Mom, it is not that [i.e., that Wendy did not want to leave her boyfriend Ryan]. I don't want to go away." I tried to explain to her I wasn't going because I didn't want to fail. Because if I failed, I didn't know how I would personally take it... My friends were in honors classes in high school, and they were having problems in college. My friend went to [SUNY Geneseo] and she dropped out, and then she went to community college in January and dropped out of there, and now she is supposed to go to Rutgers... I didn't want to fail, which I knew would happen.

Wendy had worked in two different part-time jobs all the way through high school. After she decided not to go to Alvernia, she continued working. She explored the option of attending the local community college in January. She reported speaking with someone in a learning disability program:

"I even applied to community. I was going to community in January. I had applied. I went down. They wanted me to go to night school: it was a whole free [learning disability] program, and I had to go for six months.

Where Wendy ran into some difficulties with the program, she saw these complications as her own to overcome. Unlike many of the middle-class youth when faced with similar issues, Wendy did not involve her parents; nor did she request their help in resolving her problem. Wendy's placement test did not put her in a class for which she would receive college credit. Instead she was told that she had to take remedial (non-credit) courses. This decision seemed unreasonable to her given her honors in high school:

"I want to go to a class to get credit first. They said, "No." They wouldn't do it. If I paid for the [learning disability] program then I could do it... I tried to talk to the guy... and they didn't want to hear it."
Wendy felt that the program did not understand the nature of her disability:

They wanted me to live with a bunch of kids with ADHD or [who were] bad. I'm not bad—I'm a good student. I have a learning disability. I can't read or write. I can write. I can't spell. I can write a word down and he doesn't understand it, but I do. Basically he told me “No, this is what [you] have to do.” I just got upset.¹

Wendy wanted to enroll in a program at the community college similar to the one that she had been offered at Alvernia:

[At Alvernia] I would have been in a regular class, [there would have been a] note taker and testing accommodation; [for a] three-hour test I would have six hours. The teacher could read the test to me. [I would] have chances to retake the test to get a better grade. Alvernia was going to have that plan.

The lack of flexibility at the community college bothered Wendy. She did not go back. Unlike Garrett Talinger, she did not even consider involving her parents in her interactions with the community college. When asked if she had considered having her parents go to the community college to help her, Wendy visibly bristled at the idea, noting that she has adult status and these institutional interactions are her responsibility:

Because I was old enough to make my own decisions. I knew what was wrong with me. My parents could have come down, and they [i.e., the program officers] basically would have told them the same thing. I didn’t want that. I am 18. I am old enough to make my own decisions!

Wendy hopes, at some point, to go back to school, to get “my degree,” to “take night classes,” and to get a degree in “early childhood education” so that she can run a day care center in her own house.

Although Wendy did not, in the end, go to college, it is striking how much the Drivers depended on the high school counselor and other professionals throughout the college application process. Moreover, there is a clear parallel between the approach of the Drivers to educational institutions when Wendy was in high school and when she was in fourth grade. For example, when Wendy was not reading by the time she had reached the fourth grade, Ms. Driver welcomed the efforts of educators at Lower Richmond School to determine the reasons underlying Wendy’s difficulties with language-based activities. Taking Wendy to the eye doctor, listening to her read, and helping her with her homework, Ms. Driver promptly and precisely followed each recommendation by Wendy’s teachers and the reading specialist at Lower Richmond. However, when these efforts led to only minimal improvements in Wendy’s reading skills, Ms. Driver was hesitant to pursue any course of action beyond those suggested by school personnel: “I don’t want to jump into anything and find out that it’s the wrong thing,” Ms. Driver reported at the time.

In sum, Wendy (correctly) sees life. In many different ways they try to improve her situation. However, the rational involvement of the Talingers in the actions of the two young adults and goes out with his friends. We hang a household and caring for a more experienced, and more many Wendy and many of the other students seem younger, less exposed to them.

PARENTS’ USE OF CLASS-BASED FORESEEING AND FORESTALLING UNTYING KNOTS

All of the parents in the study were concerned with strategies they adopted at their discretion, the information that is constituting class-based institutions as constituting class-based in their interactions with institutions drew on these resources as they forecasted and forestalled problems and their resolution. In this section, we draw on Wendy Driver, as well as on other parents in the study, to suggest that these differences in the youths’ experience. Upper-middle-class parents were able to foresee and forestall problems much more effectively than lower-middle-class parents. In addition, all of the youth parents tied to as “knobs,” in institutions during middle-class parents had more resources.

Foreseeing and Forestalling Problems

Familiar with educational institutions, our study proactively tried to alleviate potential problems. They were often before they arose and to redirect students. For example, Garrett’s mother had a class...
understand the nature of her disabilities of kids with ADHD or [who were] have a learning disability. I can't read or write a word down and he doesn't understand. “No, this is what [you] have to do.” I

at the community college similar to

regular class. [There would have been a] [for a] three-hour test I would have six to me. [I would] have chances to retake was going to have that plan.

college bothered Wendy. She did not did not even consider involving her

community college. When asked if she to the community college to help her. asking that she has adult status and these

ability.

own decisions. I knew what was wrong down, and they i.e., the program at the same thing. I didn’t want that. I am decision!

ask to school, to get “my degree,” to

in “early childhood education” to

own house.

and, go to college, it is striking how

school counselor and other profes-
sors process. Moreover, there is a clear

vers to educational institutions when

was in fourth grade. For example,

she had reached the fourth grade,

ators at Lower Richmond School to

by’s difficulties with language-based

listening to her read, and helping

emply and precisely followed each

and the reading specialist at Lower

led to only minimal improvements in

situation any course of action men: “I don’t want to jump into any-

In sum, Wendy (correctly) sees her parents as being very proactive in her

life. In many different ways they gathered knowledge and they intervened

to improve her situation. However, there were key differences in the institu-
tional involvement of the Tallingers and the Drivers, as well as between

the actions of the two young adults. For example, Garrett lives in a dorm

and goes out with his friends; Wendy is married and is responsible for run-
ging a household and caring for a toddler. In key ways, Wendy seems older,

more experienced, and more mature than Garrett, who in comparison with

Wendy and many of the other working-class and poor youth in the study,

seems younger, less exposed to the world, and more dependent.

PARENTS’ USE OF CLASS-BASED RESOURCES:
FORESEEING AND FORESTALLING PROBLEMS AND
UNTYING KNOTS

All of the parents in the study wanted the best for their children, but social

class made a difference in the resources parents were able to draw on and the

strategies they adopted as their children entered adulthood. We see global

information about institutions, specific information about their child’s par-
ticular “case” within an institution, and the propensity to intervene in institu-
tions as constituting class-based cultural resources that parents drew on

in their interactions with institutions such as schools. We find that parents

drew on these resources as they helped their children in two key ways: to

foresee and forestall problems and to untie knots (i.e., to solve problems

that arose). In this section, we draw on the case studies of Garrett Tallinger

and Wendy Driver, as well as on the experiences among the other youth in

the study, to suggest that these class-based cultural resources made a dif-

ference as the youth transitioned into adulthood. In particular, while all

parents were able to foresee problems, middle-class parents were able to

forecast problems much more effectively than were working-class and poor

parents. In addition, all of the youth encountered problems, what we refer

to as “knots,” in institutions during their transition to adulthood; however, middle-class parents had more resources for solving these problems.

Foreseeing and Forestalling Potential Problems

Familiar with educational institutions themselves, middle-class parents in

our study proactively tried to alter the conditions under which their chil-
dren functioned. They were often able to anticipate potential problems

before they arose and to redirect their children or intervene strategically

to prevent the potential problem from altering a child’s trajectory. For ex-

ample, Garrett’s mother had a clear understanding of academic tracking.
When she told the counselor that she wanted her son to be in “the most rigorous courses,” she was hoping to forestall a potential problem: that Garrett (who had never tested extremely well) would not have the strongest possible profile in his college applications. Similarly, Garrett’s father strategically managed the college basketball recruitment process; he negotiated for Garrett to play on a summer-league team to “give him the visibility” he needed, arranged for Garrett to attend tournaments where he would be seen by college recruiters, and spoke with coaches on the phone to convey Garrett’s interest. Tallinger did not focus only on one or two schools; instead he systematically conveyed interest to coaches in a wide variety of schools to make sure that Garrett would have options. Similarly, Garrett’s parents’ knowledge of the academic demands of institutions, of the specific strengths of their son, and of the potential catastrophic problems that could emerge if their son was “over his head” at a school allowed them to critically assess Garrett’s weaknesses and his strengths. They sought a situation that would be a good “fit” for him, both academically and athletically, even if it was not the most highly ranked college.

The pattern of foreseeing and forestalling problems that we observed with Garrett also appeared among the other middle-class youth in our study. For example, in the African American middle-class Marshall family, when Stacey Marshall was in high school, in order to ensure that Stacey was well positioned for acceptance at selective colleges, her mother spoke regularly with Stacey’s high school counselor regarding Stacey’s course selection, and she enrolled Stacey in an expensive ($1,500) ten-day summer science program at a local university. When Stacey entered college, Ms. Marshall corresponded directly with Stacey’s college basketball coach about her exercise-induced asthma, which was diagnosed during the summer before Stacey departed for college. In addition, Ms. Marshall instructed her daughter in how to use institutional supports, such as arranging for a consultation with her academic advisor before selecting her courses. At other times Ms. Marshall advised Stacey on course selection herself so as to prevent potential problems. Since Stacey aspired to attend medical school after completing college, when Stacey received a C in biology during her first semester in college, Ms. Marshall counseled her to “get out of calculus” because “you don’t want your GPA to get too low, because then you can never dig yourself out of it.” Ms. Marshall also counseled Stacey to avoid taking a class that Ms. Marshall thought was not in Stacey’s best interest:

She emailed me first and then she called me one night at eleven o’clock. And it was like, “Well, I can take the cinema course.” I said, “Stacey.” [Laughter]. I said, “Do you know anything about this? Do they ever give you a description?” [She said,] “Wellllll, no, not really.” But she . . . was on the competen . . . she could see that there were seats in

“Sometimes you can be jumping out of course may have an interesting nam . . . watching movies, but, really, you’ll pe . . . these other courses where you will the . . . don’t like to write.”

Other middle-class parents reported similar concerns about preventing potential problems that would echo this pattern. Indeed, some college programs to “push parents out” of their children’s lives were aimed at preventing potential problems and facilitating the development of independence.

Working-class and poor parents were more likely to be involved in key areas of their children’s lives. For example, when Wendy was not admitted to the University of California at Berkeley, Ms. Driver anticipated the educational disadvantages that attending her neighborhood public school would bring and arranged for the tuition for Wendy to attend the College of Charleston. When Wendy became sexually active, Ms. Driver sought to set limits on her daughter’s behavior by arranging for her daughter to be monitored by the school’s guidance counselor. Ms. Driver proactively set limits on Wendy’s behavior by arranging for her daughter to be monitored by the school’s guidance counselor.

Like the Drivers, the other working-class families we studied anticipated and helped their children achieve their academic goals, so that when they needed transportation to attend college, they always had a reliable means of transportation. When Wendy’s husband went back to jail, Ms. Driver appeared to be heavily dependent on the other parents in her community for emotional support and advice. The other parents appeared to be heavily dependent on the other parents in their community for emotional support and advice. The other parents appeared to be heavily dependent on the other parents in their community for emotional support and advice.

Despite the Drivers’ attempts to help Wendy navigate key turning points in her daughter’s life, they did not possess informed knowledge of the higher education system or the resources available to help them assess and augment the advice of their high school guidance counselors. With the exception of Ms. Driver, the other parents were dependent on the guidance counselors at their children’s high schools for information about college and the college application process.
wanted her son to be in “the most forestall a potential problem: that well would not have the strongest en. Similarly, Garrett’s father gr. recruitment process; he negotiated t team to “give him the visibility” in tournaments where he would be. As a coach on the phone to convey focus only on one or two school, text to coaches in a wide variety of w the height. Similarly, Garrett’s tands of institutions, of the specific catastrophic problems that could at a school allowed them to contain. They sought a situation academically and athletically, even e. teaching problems that we observed her middle-class youth in our study. middle-class Marshall family, who in order to ensure that Stacey was well integers, her mother spoke regularly ident Stacey’s course selection, and 500) tea-day summer science oriented college, Ms. Marshall cor. basketball coach about her exerted during the summer before Stacey Marshall instructed her daughter in arra making a consultation with the courses. At other times Ms. Marshall herself so as to prevent potential v medical school after completing he in the first semester in cal. out of calculus” because “you don’t when you can never dig yourself out try to avoid taking a class that Ms. she told me one night at eleven o’clock. And I said, “Stacey.” [laughs] s! Do they even give you a descri- but she . . . was on the computer, she could set that there were seats in this class, the time was right. I said, “Sometimes you can be jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. This course may have an interesting name but, one, it sounds like yeah, you’d be watching movies, but two, you’ll probably be writing about [then]. You have these other courses where you will be writing. You are telling me that you don’t like to write.”

Other middle-class parents reported similar patterns of frequent intervention aimed at preventing potential problems from arising. National reports also echo this pattern. Indeed, some colleges are working to develop formal programs to “push parents out” of their children’s college lives in order to facilitate the development of independence in college-aged youth (Gabriel 2010).

Working-class and poor parents also foresaw and forestalled problems in key areas of their children’s lives. For example, at the end of eighth grade, when Wendy was not admitted to the magnet high school of her choice, Ms. Driver anticipated the educational disadvantages that Wendy might face by attending her neighborhood public school, which had a high dropout rate and frequent fights, and she arranged instead for Wendy’s grandfather to pay the tuition for Wendy to attend the Catholic high school. When Wendy became sexually active, Ms. Driver sought to forestall an unplanned pregnancy by seeing that her daughter used birth control, and when Wendy became pregnant, Ms. Driver proactively sat her future son-in-law down for a frank discussion about his willingness to accept the responsibility of being a father and husband.

Like the Drivers, the other working-class and poor parents in the study anticipated and helped their children avoid potential problems. For example, Mr. Yanelli, a white working-class father, helped his son Billy buy a car when he needed transportation in order to work as a house painter in the painters’ union. The mother of Katie Brindle, who grew up in a poor fami, gave Katie work cleaning houses so Katie would be able to pay her bills when her husband were back to jail. However, working-class and poor par ent appeared to be heavily dependent on professionals in their institutional interactions (e.g., with educational institutions, health care institutions, and criminal justice institutions).

Despite the Drivers’ attempts to foresee and forestall problems in Wendy’s life, they did not possess information about colleges or about Wendy’s potential “fit” with them that would allow them to intervene effectively to help Wendy navigate key turning points. For example, the Drivers lacked the nuanced knowledge of the higher education system that might have helped them assess and augment the advice that Wendy was receiving from her high school guidance counselor. Without this knowledge, Wendy’s parents were dependent on the guidance counselor’s selection of possible schools for
Wendy and were not prepared to help customize the college fit in ways that the Tallingers and other middle-class parents in the study did.

Unfamiliar with the inner workings of these institutions, working-class and poor parents found it difficult to forestall difficulties by intervening. For example, Mr. and Ms. Yanelli could tell in sixth grade that Billy’s schooling was not going well. They were sick with worry. Ms. Yanelli wanted to move Billy to a private school, but the tuition would be difficult for the Yanellis to afford, and Ms. Yanelli was convinced that Billy would not be admitted.

She wasn’t able to resolve the problems that Billy faced at school, and her efforts to encourage Billy to stay in school were not effective. Eventually Billy dropped out of high school in the tenth grade. Thus, although the Yanellis foresaw problems, they were unable to prevent them.

*Untying Knots*

As youth moved through institutions, they inevitably became entangled in "knots." Some of these knots were small, and others were large. Youth injured themselves and needed surgery, encountered conflicts in the scheduling of high school courses, had unplanned pregnancies, or dropped out of high school or college. But differently, some knots were relatively inconsequential, and others had the potential to knock a child off of a life trajectory.

Although the parents of all of the young adults in the study attempted to help their children untie knots as they transitioned into adulthood, untangling knots in their children's education often required that parents possess detailed information about how institutions worked, specific information about their young adult's "ease" within the institution, and the belief that intervention was appropriate. As we have discussed above, these resources were unequally distributed among the families by social class.

As the middle-class youth transitioned into adulthood, their knots tended to be smaller than those of their working-class and poor counterparts, but their parents tried vigorously to help their children untie them. When a scheduling conflict threatened to prevent Garrett from taking both AP English and AP calculus, Ms. Tallinger pressured Garrett’s high school to reschedule the courses, and as Garrett’s interest in playing college basketball developed, his father spoke to Garrett’s coach about increasing his playing time and later initiated contacts with college coaches to generate interest in Garrett. Alexander Williams’ mother, a middle-class African American woman, also helped untie a knot for her son: when Alexander was in college and his summer internship fell through at the last minute, Ms. Williams helped him develop a new plan for the summer that would allow him to develop his pre-med interests and skills as well as his résumé.

There were some problems that middle-class parents could not fix. After Stacey Marshall got a C in a pre-med course, her mother wasn’t able to untie the knot that was Stacey’s love at home from her mother, Melanie. The middle-class family stopped attending church, and the failure to get the family to involve their children in the intervention of problems, middle class to untie knots and facilitate their children’s development.

Like the middle-class parents, the parents of the Tallingers and the Yanellis attempted to untie knots for their children. After knee surgery, the parents of the middle-class family, Stacey’s parents, stopped attending church, and the failure to get the family to involve their children in significant problems, middle class to untie knots and facilitate their children’s development.

...
matured the fit in ways that is parents in the study did.

encounters with difficulty by interviewing. For example, in sixth grade that Billy's school was not in sixth grade, the Yanelli's wanted the best for the Yanelli's. It was that Billy would not be admitted to the school. The Yanelli's told that Billy faced at school, and her school was not effective. Eventually Billy left the school. Thus, although the Yanelli's tried to prevent them

ents, they inevitably became entangled in small, and others were large. Youth in care encountered conflicts in the scheduling of appointments, crises in pregnancies, or problems with school attendance. Some situations were relatively inconsequential, but at the time it seemed to knock a child off of a life trajectory. In many cases, young adults in the study attempted to maintain a sense of normalcy and control as they transitioned into adulthood, seeking information and support from their parents. However, the situation often required that parents possess specific information or be actively involved in the institution, and the belief that the parents had supported and protected them from these experiences.

On transition into adulthood, their knots their working-class and poor counterparts to help their children untie them. When Wendy Driver could not attend school after knee surgery, her mother helped arrange for a tutor so Wendy could graduate from high school. However, when Wendy had difficulty enrolling in the classes she wanted at her local community college, she did not look to her parents for guidance. Nor did her parents take it upon themselves to get involved. It is easy to imagine that a middle-class parent such as Garrett Tallinger's mother would have called the program coordinator, submitted documentation of her daughter's disability, hired a private psychologist to test her, or paid privately for the learning-disabled program for one semester. However, Wendy, who was only 17 years old, did not think of either option. Since she was "grown," she believed it was unacceptable to rely on her parents for help; and in any case, Wendy did not think that her parents would do anything different than what she had already done. So, having failed to untie that knot, Wendy never attended college. As a result, she entered the labor market as a high school graduate and never earned the college credits that might have helped increase her future earnings (Settersten, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut 2005).

In some instances, working-class and poor parents were quite effective at untying knots for their children. For example, Billy Yanelli enjoyed recreational use of marijuana, but during his apprenticeship in the union as a house painter, he was subjected to random drug tests. After one of Billy's drug tests turned up "hot," Billy was warned by the union. Billy's mother was extremely anxious about these developments, but his father used his own union membership to smooth the situation over for his son. After three violations, Billy should have been dismissed (per union policy), but he was not kicked out.

Like Billy, Tyree Taylor, a young African American man from a working-class family, benefited from his parents' help in untying knots as he transitioned into adulthood. Tyree, a talented basketball player, was in a public middle school where he excelled. He then enrolled in a charter high
school without a basketball team. Although he was doing well academically, Tyrec pleaded with his mother to allow him to leave the charter school to go to Lower Richmond High, which had a basketball team. His sophomore year his mother relented. Tyrec's grades immediately plummeted, and he did not qualify academically to play. Tyrec started hanging around with friends that his parents did not approve of, and he was arrested in a juvenile offense. His father, using a credit card, hired a lawyer and Tyrec was released without charges. Tyrec's mother tried to send him back to the charter school he had been attending, but the school was full. An application to another charter school was also turned down because it was too late in the academic year, and this second school was also full. (Tyrec's low grades were also a concern.) Tyrec's mother pleaded with Tyrec's father to put him in a private school. In the end, Mr. Taylor took out a loan to cover the private school tuition of approximately $4,000. Tyrec graduated, but in his junior and senior years, although colleges visited his school, he never ended up taking the SAT or applying to college. As Tyrec explains, his mother wanted him to go to college, but it did not work out:

AI: And when you finished that, did anyone talk to you about the possibility of going to college?
Tyrec: Yeah they came to our school. Colleges came to our school. I could have went to SUNY Geneseo, but I never really took no SATs. I wasn't really thinking about going away to a university. I could have. My mom and them probably wanted me to, but I was like... after high school I really wanted to do what I wanted to do.

Tyrec reports, "My mom and them kept trying to get me to go to school." However, Tyrec's mom's approach differed in key ways from that of the Marshall and Tallinger families. She felt that in crucial ways her decision was fundamentally up to Tyrec; her actions were less interventionist than those of the middle-class families. In short, although Tyrec's parents were able to untie some knots in their son's educational trajectory, they were unable to untie others.

Although the interventions of working-class and poor parents such as the Drivers, Yanellis, and Taylors were consequential in helping their youth transition to adulthood, when faced with knots related to educational institutions the parents of the working-class and poor youth in the study were often less equipped than their middle-class counterparts to untie them.

Harold McAllister, a young African American man who grew up in a poor family, failed to untie a knot in high school that contributed to his leaving school without a diploma. Like Tyrec, Harold's passion in life was basketball. He desperately wanted to play on his high school's basketball team but wasn't selected. Harold's own efforts to resolve the situation—by talking to the coach and by his being put on the team—were largely fruitless, and he was not chosen for the team. His being hugely consequential, in his case, deferred to educators to resolve. The benefit of interventionist class parents. Harold began playing basketball. He got off work early.

In the end, he dropped out. He was ranked below Harold in college ball, Harold is not playing for him.

It is, of course, possible that the parents of working-class and material support, but more children's behalf with institutions.

**CONCLUSION**

As the children moved from school, and beyond, they explored options for school, not considering getting pregnant, and marrying people's lives. Some were more

As McLanahan and others have documented important life. In contrast, social scientists have been focusing on the behaviors of youth, such as their emotions and behaviors about school (see Walpole 2015 and Flanagan and Maccoby, 2015). Nonetheless, actions rather than on parents' expectations function or the highly institutionalized nature of their young adults. To think about the research helps. The ways that parents shape a child's life have been conceptualized. There are signi
Although he was doing well academically, the principal allowed him to leave the charter school to try out for a basketball team. His sophomore year started well, but his grades plummeted, and he was arrested in a juvenile detention center. Tyrec was released and sent back to the charter school, but his grades remained low. An application to another school was rejected because it was too late in the academic year. Tyrec's low grades were also a factor in his relationship with his parents. His mother wanted him to try out for basketball, but his father did not.

College came to our school. I could never really like got SATs. I wasn't interested in college. I could have my mom said. I was like, after high school I really just trying to get me to go to school."

Colleges came to our school. I could never really like took no SATs. I wasn't interested in college. I could have. My mom said, I was like, after high school I really just trying to get me to go to school."

Parents of working-class and poor youth often lacked the financial resources and social networks to help their children. Tyrec's parents were concerned about Tyrec's education, but they did not have the resources to provide the same level of support as middle-class parents. Harold began working full-time to "take his mind off" of basketball. He got off work late, got home late, and began missing school. In the end, he dropped out of school. While Harold's close friend, who was ranked below Harold in the city's basketball rankings, is playing college ball, Harold is not playing anywhere. This life event was traumatic for him.

It is possible, of course, that Harold exaggerated his basketball prowess and that he wasn't as skilled as the players who made the team. Nevertheless, when institutional conflicts occurred, the parents of middle-class youth were more likely to understand the "system" and their own children's particular circumstances and could more easily intervene to resolve problems. The parents of working-class and poor youth provided them with emotional and material support, but most did not or could not intervene on their children's behalf with institutions.  

**Conclusion**

As the children moved from fourth grade through middle school, into high school, and beyond, they experienced numerous challenges. Dropping out of high school, not considering college, selecting a college, choosing a major, getting pregnant, and marrying were each crucial moments in these young people's lives. Some were more consequential than others.

As McLanahan and others in this volume show, studies of the family have documented important social class differences in key aspects of family life. In contrast, social scientists have frequently focused on the individual behaviors of youth, such as time spent on homework and talking to parents about school (see Wampole 2003 for a review). Other models have sought to introduce "intervening variables" in predicting youth outcomes (Warren and Hauser, 1997). Nonetheless, most of this work has focused on aspirations rather than on parents' detailed, site-specific knowledge of how institutions function or the highly idiosyncratic interventions made by parents on behalf of their young adults. These studies have taught us a great deal. Yet in crucial ways the research has disconnected youth from their family settings. The ways that parents shape and intervene in youths' life paths are not fully conceptualized. There are signs that there is more between-class variability.
in the strategies that parents bring to bear when negotiating their children's institutional lives than studies acknowledge.

In addition, we do not fully understand the kinds of informational resources that parents bring to the table. In analyzing the transition to adulthood, researchers have focused more often on the key outcomes—college graduation, employment, marriage, birth of the first child—than on the process (Sertorio, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut 2005). Such research does not necessarily reveal how parents are able to transmit advantages across generations.

In our longitudinal interviews it was clear that the parents in all social classes loved their children and wanted the best for them. Most of the working-class and poor parents aspired to college for their children. Although not the focus of this paper, there is ample evidence of devotion and sacrifice on the part of the working-class and poor parents for their children as they scraped together scarce resources for food, shelter, and transportation, encouraged their children to do their best, activated their networks to find employment, and generally sought to offer advantages to them. Thus, within the limitations of this sample, we did not see striking differences—at least in terms of what we learned through interviews—in the kinds of devotion parents showed to their youth or the level of material sacrifice they made for them.

Where we did see differences, however, was in parents' interactions with institutions. Although all of the parents loved their children deeply, middle-class parents' interactions with institutions were linked to their more global information about how educational institutions worked, more specific information about the strengths (and weaknesses) of their child's situation, and a greater belief in and history of intervening in educational matters than working-class and poor parents. Since all of the youth faced challenges, turning points, and dilemmas as they aged, the class differences in parents' actions affected how they confronted those challenges. All of the parents wanted to foresee and forestall problems. All of the parents also wanted to help their children untie knots in their children's lives. But to do that, parents needed very detailed "inside" information about how educational institutions work. Parents could not plan for or prevent a problem if they did not know it might arise. Similarly, untangling knots in children's educational careers required that parents had detailed information about how institutions worked, an understanding of their child's particular case in relation to the institution, and the belief that parental intervention was appropriate.

What is striking from these interviews is the degree to which middle-class parents consistently and aggressively gathered information, were preoccupied (in some cases almost obsessed) with the college application process, intervened in little and big ways, and were a constant resource for their young adults. And their interventions extended beyond education. Garrett Tallinger's father, for example, was a high school basketball coach and was able to secure a college scholarship for his son. Harold McAllister, the son of a carpenter, who had spent most of his childhood in the Caribbean, was able to gain acceptance at a top university in the United States. In contrast, Harold McAllister, who had grown up in a working-class family, was not able to secure a college scholarship for his son. This highlights the importance of class in shaping children's lives. Middle-class parents were more likely to be able to provide their children with advantages that were not available to working-class and poor families.

We found class differences in general as well as class differences in the kinds of problems that young adults experience. Middle-class young adults tended to have less academic problems and to work successfully to achieve their goals. In some instances, the intervention of middle-class parents seemed to be more effective than the intervention of working-class and poor parents.

Researchers often overlook the role of class in shaping children's lives. They often assume that interactions with educational institutions are neutral and that parents' compensation for this neutrality is an indication of the value parents place on education. However, middle-class parents are more likely to have a better understanding of how educational institutions work, and they are more likely to be able to provide their children with advantages that are not available to working-class and poor families. This highlights the importance of class in shaping children's lives. Middle-class parents were more likely to be able to provide their children with advantages that were not available to working-class and poor families.
no bear when negotiating their children's knowledge.
understand the kinds of informational available. In analyzing the transition to adulthood often on the key outcomes—college graduation, birth of the first child—than on the child's enrollment in schooling (Lareau and Rumberg 2005). Such research does not show that parents are able to transmit advantages across generations.

It was clear that the parents in all socioeconomic groups wanted the best for their children. Most of the parents expected to college for their children. Although there is ample evidence of devotion and encouragement, and that class and poor parents see their children's education as a matter of survival, they do not all have the resources or the time to offer advantages to them. Thus, we did not see striking differences in the kinds of educational sacrifices they were willing to make.

We found differences in parents' institutional knowledge at a general level as well as class differences in parents' knowledge of and ability to evaluate the specific "fit" between their children and institutions. We also found differences in the kinds of interventions parents made for their children. Middle-class parents were more likely to anticipate problems and to work successfully to steer their children along their youth's trajectory. In some instances, the interventions that middle-class parents made seemed to be more effective than the interventions attempted by working-class and poor families.

Researchers make a mistake when they treat the standards of institutions as neutral and parents' compliance with these institutional standards as an indication of the value parents place on their children's success. A better approach would be to try to unpack the forms of cultural knowledge and expertise that facilitate parents' ability to understand, "decode," and comply with institutional standards. When Ms. Driver told an Alvernia College employee that Wendy had been "accepted," she misunderstood a fundamental aspect of the college admission process. When Harold's father told him to stay at his current high school, he was depending on the school to manage his son's academic and athletic trajectory. In contrast, in Garrett's family, his parents took charge of such matters, not relying on the school to guide their son in the right direction.

At the same time, we should not ignore the drawbacks of the strategies adopted by middle-class parents. College administrators sometimes complain that middle-class parents' efforts to help their children can thwart the development of their independence. Indeed, the working-class and poor children in the study seemed older and more mature than the middle-class youth (see Lareau 2011).

By definition, the professionals who work in institutions are middle class. Policymakers are also college graduates and are employed in professional occupations. As such, many aspects of the sorting mechanisms in the stratification system are "taken for granted" and are hard for individuals to articulate. But the invisible nature of these standards should not blind us to the somewhat arbitrary and historically specific nature of the standards. Nor should it lead us to ignore the ways in which parents' social
class facilitates compliance with these standards. By unpacking the ways in which parents guide, hover over, and transform the “choices” that their children face, social scientists stand to improve our knowledge of one of the most important dynamics in the reproduction of inequality in American family life.

REFERENCES


NOTES

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the National Science Foundation. Additional support was provided by the University of Pennsylvania Center for the Study of Global Poverty and by the Temple University. We have benefited from conversations with a number of colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania, the Northwestern University, the University of Oxford, the University of Virginia, and the University of California, Berkeley. Special thanks to our research assistants and many colleagues who provided invaluable comments on earlier drafts of this article. We also wish to thank the editors. We acknowledge the contributions of Nana Kojo, an especially capable research assistant. Approximately 20% of the respondents were either black or Hispanic. We have not included these respondents in the main results of this article, but they are presented in an appendix. We are grateful to those who participated in the survey and the many others who helped to make this project possible. We also wish to thank the editors for their thoughtful comments. The authors are responsible for all errors in this work.

1. One set of parents, Mr. and Mrs. Allister, was in poor health, and one set to schedule and then was in jail. In some people: in the McAllister family, for example, in the family of the study.

2. In the presentation of quoted narratives false starts and filler words include a few instances we have reordered speech to be changed.

3. Yet the data set has important limitations: there are no interviews with students of those who report to the reports are retrospective. Still, a key point of is small, non-random sample and the data of the study were others.

4. The selection of the two cases was the following factors. We began by considering the following factors. In order to make a comparison with the working-class or poor family in which the sample was drawn. The Drivers, Carrolls, and Taylors had a working-class and poor families, in part the same family as the college students. We also wanted, if possible, of one sample (and not random) to be the same racial and ethnic backgrounds and the parents. Once we took into account the Tallinger comparison was our best option.

Stacey Marshall, see Lareau and Weining.


NOTES

We gratefully acknowledge the generous financial support of the Spencer Foundation. Additional support was provided by the University of Pennsylvania and Temple University. We have benefited from feedback on earlier versions of this work, including at the conference “Thinking about the Family in an Unequal Society,” the American Educational Research Association Annual Meetings (2010), the colloquia at the University of Pennsylvania, the University of California San Diego, Northwestern University, the University of Southern California, George Mason University, Indiana University, and the University of California, Los Angeles. We appreciate the comments of a number of readers, including Kevin Roy, Erin McNamara Horvat, Donna Kurz, and especially Elliot Weiniger. Any errors are the sole responsibility of the authors.

1. One set of parents, Mr. and Ms. Williams, declined; one father, Mr. McAllister, was in poor health; and one husband, Katie Brindle's husband, was hard to schedule and then was in jail. In some families Lareau interviewed additional people: in the McAllister family, for example, a cousin who had lived with the family at the time of the study.

2. In the presentation of quoted material, we have in some instances eliminated false starts and filler words including “um,” “so,” “uh,” and “mhm.” In a few instances we have reordered speech for clarity if we felt the meaning would not be changed.

3. Yet the data set has important and difficult limitations: there is no observational data; there are no interviews with critical educators; there is no independent confirmation of the reports of the family members by the institution; and the reports are retrospective. Still, a key point of this chapter is to analyze class differences in this small, non-random sample. There are not any signs that the methodological limitations of the study were more prominent with some families than others.

4. The selection of the two cases presented in this section was guided by the following factors. We began by considering possible working-class or poor families. In order to make a comparison with middle-class families, we wanted a working-class or poor family in which there was as much institutional contact as possible. The Drivers, Carrolls, and Taylors had more contact with institutions than other working-class and poor families, in part because their youth had made some contact with colleges. We also wanted, if possible, a youth who was reasonably typical of our sample (and national patterns). Ideally we wanted to compare youth of the same racial and ethnic backgrounds and for whom we had interviews with all of the parents. Once we took into account these factors, the Wendy Driver/Garrett Tallinger comparison was our best option. For a comparison of Tara Carroll and Stacey Marskell, see Lareau and Weiniger 2008.
5. Wendy also said: “I had to go to community and take a test. You had to go back down and they put you up into a different section. Of course I was the only little white girl there. I was the only white girl.” Later in the interview, however, she insisted that the key factor was not that she was the only white girl (which “didn’t bother me,” she said) but that she could not move into classes where she would receive college credit.

6. Put differently, working-class and poor youth did not have the cultural resources that had the potential to produce “profits” in a particular sector.

As summarized in the introductory chapter of the twentieth century witnessed dramatic changes that have served to increase the complicating link between marriage and childbearing in the Western world has been notably a trend toward women spending time living in one or more marital partnerships, and children often experience one or more changes of birthplace by the time they reach age 18. Time living apart from at least one of the biological parents and those with low or moderate income in labor markets hungry for college graduates is

These family changes are of great concern to the family, particularly as one of the oldest institutions in Western societies and is documented strong associations between positive outcomes for adults and children: Nock 1998; Waite and Gallagher 2000. Which marriage and family stability has been increasingly associated with other indicators of positive outcomes—emerging research. Families which are associated with work or family change and instability. For example, children in 2009 were born to unmarried parents.