



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life by Annette Lareau

Review by: Lisa D. Pearce

Source: *Social Forces*, Jun., 2004, Vol. 82, No. 4 (Jun., 2004), pp. 1661-1663

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3598460>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Oxford University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Social Forces*

JSTOR

of agency; agency is best invoked and enacted when the road map for one's future is uncertain.

Despite its many strengths, *Opportunity and Uncertainty* is still susceptible to the criticisms aimed at most studies based on nonrepresentative longitudinal data sets. Response rates are not optimal; the 1994 sample includes only 31 percent of the original sample. However, a detailed appendix documents the sources of sample attrition, and the authors take great efforts to contrast characteristics of their analytic sample with data from the census of Canada, thus minimizing worries about the generalizability of their findings. Second, the book is very rich in analytic detail and thus is not an easy or quick read. To the authors' credit, they do not lose sight of their central framing question and their discussions are quite lucid. Although the presentation of quantitative data is dense, the tables are generally limited to basic cross-tabulations and frequency distributions.

Opportunity and Change is a valuable contribution to the rich (and growing) collection of cohort studies produced over the past three decades, including Michael Wadsworth's *Imprint of Time* (England) and John Clausen's *American Lives*, Glen Elder's *Children of the Great Depression*, and William H. Sewell and Robert M. Hauser's *Education, Occupation and Earnings: Achievement in the Early Career* (U.S.). Anisef and colleagues, observe that the findings from their study may have the most powerful impact when examined in contrast with the experiences of other birth cohorts, in Canada and elsewhere. This observation is probably correct; such comparisons may help to highlight the distinctive opportunities, obstacles, and sources of uncertainty in a cohort of Canadian young adults who came of age in a period of economic, social, and normative instability.

Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life.

By Annette Lareau. University of California Press, 2003. 331 pp. \$21.95.

Reviewer: LISA D. PEARCE, *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

Numerous studies link family-of-origin class status and later life economic well-being, but none expose the processes through which inequality is reproduced like Annette Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods*. Using observations from two elementary schools, interviews with 88 students' parents, and more than a year of observation in the homes of 12 of these nine- and ten-year-old children, Lareau explores how parenting and childhood vary by social class. Some may argue her small observation sample limits cross-class and cross-race comparisons, but what is sacrificed in breadth is more than compensated for with depth. What she and her assistants hear from parents and observe through soccer games, neighborhood play, car and bus trips across town, homework

sessions, morning routines, doctor and dentist appointments, and parent-teacher conferences demonstrate striking class-based differences in the organization of children's daily lives, their language development, and their ability to interact with social institutions. Further, these class-based distinctions translate into a sense of entitlement among middle-class offspring and a sense of restraint among children growing up in poorer households. While other studies allude to these class differences, especially in school contexts, this study takes readers even deeper into the lives of children than most. The result is a richer understanding of how cultural repertoires imparted to children vary by class in ways that entrench class inequality at early ages.

The first of the two approaches to child rearing identified by Lareau is "concerted cultivation." This style is predominant in middle-class homes. Parents using this approach constantly foster and assess their children's talents by involving them in organized activities, molding their reasoning skills, and intervening on their behalf with teachers and coaches. Through rich description of children's daily lives, readers see how middle-class parents challenge children to formulate questions for doctors, teach them to shake hands and look adults in the eye, broaden their vocabularies, and model how to demand action from social institutions. Lareau calls the logic of child rearing among working-class and poor families "natural accomplishment of growth." This approach is more spontaneous, focusing on providing children's basic needs while allowing talents to develop naturally. These children's lives take place near home with fewer structured activities, more interaction with siblings, and more clear boundaries between adults and children. Lareau nicely contrasts the two styles with her detailed descriptions of how working-class and poor children are expected to be silently obedient in the presence of adults while their parents model unease and restraint in their interactions with school officials and medical professionals. These contrasts demonstrate how middle-class children learn to demand what they want while working-class and poor children learn to accept what is.

While children raised with the "concerted cultivation" logic are better prepared to achieve within social institutions like school and work, Lareau also outlines down sides to this approach. Middle-class children are generally more stressed and exhausted, less creative, and fight more with siblings than working-class or poor children. Ultimately, Lareau suggests parents and society should expose all children to the beneficial features of both approaches and be wary of the harmful aspects.

One unsatisfying feature of the book is its limited discussion of race's role in shaping childhood and framing futures. Lareau argues that social class is more determinative of the organization and experience of childhood than race. In her study, middle-class black children's lives are organized more similarly to middle-class white children's lives than to poorer black children's lives.

However, one similarity across class categories is that black children all encounter racism. Mention is made of how black children and parents in each class category face discrimination. These confrontations with race make childhood and how children see their futures different for black and white children, regardless of class. Further, the interesting dynamic may be less in comparing the relative impact of two closely intertwined social forces and more about how the two intersect. For example, do middle-class black parents make a more “concerted” effort to teach their children strategies for dealing with racism than working-class or poor black parents? Also, does either child rearing approach seem more or less beneficial as it interacts with the child’s race? Attention to these issues would contribute to knowledge about how class and race interactively shape childhood experience and family life.

All in all, this is a thought-provoking book sure to become a classic for scholars working to understand how inequality is reproduced. In addition, its readability and clear expression of basic sociological ideas about social class, inequality, and family life make it ideal for use in undergraduate classes covering any of these topics.

Engaging Cultural Differences: The Multicultural Challenge in Liberal Democracies.

Edited by Richard Shweder, Martha Minow, and Hazel Rose Markus. Russell Sage Foundation, 2002. 485 pp. Cloth, \$49.95.

Reviewer: DOUGLAS HARTMANN, *University of Minnesota*

Because of its reliance on consent and moral regulation as well as its ideals of tolerance and inclusion, liberal democracy has always had problems with cultural difference. But in recent years — with the social changes brought by global trade and mass communications, massive transnational migration, the liberalization of citizenship laws, and the appearance of democratic institutions and ideals in many new places — these problems appear more acute and multifaceted than ever. So, how now to deal with them?

Scholars, it seems to me, have at least two distinct contributions to make in answering this question: One involves producing knowledge about the form and content of various cultural differences; the other with clarifying the practical and moral choices (and their consequences) these differences give rise to. Needing both, we are fortunate that three noted scholars from the fields of anthropology, law, and the behavioral sciences have collaborated to bring us this wonderful new collection of essays on the challenge that multiculturalism poses in contemporary liberal democracies.

Engaging Cultural Differences is composed of 21 individual contributions — primarily case studies of some type — grouped into four parts. Part 1 focuses