

Schools, Housing, and the Reproduction of inequality

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Neighborhood and place established
as important

But: insufficient attention to
mechanisms through which parents
choose

Matters: for policy, for research

○ Research question:

How do parents of young children
decide where to live?

Macro and Micro: Social class is important in schooling and family life

- Evidence of it in many spheres:

Class and Child rearing:

- "*concerted cultivation*" middle-class strategies

- "*accomplishment of natural growth*" working-class and poor strategies

Methods:

- *Observations at schools, open houses in the city, playground.
- *Interviews with 90 native-born, parents living in a large Northeastern city and 3 contiguous suburbs
- *Recruited from local public elementary schools, day cares, and from other parents in the sample
- *Brought a pie as a friendly gesture, \$50 honorarium
- *Most children 3 to 7 but some as old as 11
- *Lareau did over one-half of the interviews; rest done by a multi-racial research team
- *Additional interviews with educators, real estate agents, community leaders, and day care teachers

Warren



Gibbon



Kingsley

| Table 1: Choosing Homes, Choosing Schools Sample | White parents in the city | African-American parents in the city | White parents in suburbs | African-American parents in suburbs | Total |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Upper-middle-class: Advanced degree and credentialed job with autonomy (JD, MD, MBA) | 10 | 5 | 11 | 5 | 31 |
| Middle-class: BA+ and job where have more limited autonomy (teachers, claims adjuster) | 6 | 6 | 11 | 6 | 29 |
| Working-class: no BA and more closely supervised work (retail sales clerk, home health care aide, on gov't assistance) | 6 | 9 | 6 | 9 | 30 |
| Total CORE study | 22 | 20 | 28 | 20 | 90 |

| | Kingsley: "best" Schools elite | Gibbons: Lower- middle class | Warren: Working- class | City varied |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Per pupil expenditure | \$26,500 | \$15,800 | \$14,200 | \$13,400 |
| SAT scores | 1750 | 1575 | 1200 | 1150 |
| % free/ reduced lunch | 9% | 9% | 82% | 88% |
| % proficient 3 rd grade reading | 90% | 95% | 46% | 36% |
| average home value | \$485,000 | \$318,000 | \$140,000 | \$150,000 |

How does structure matter?

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

Policies:

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

Power of economics

Undeniable played a role

- *Median cost of home varied

- *some parents priced out of Kingsley

- But: insufficient, significant variability in housing options within each area

Parents had mental maps

- Considered a small number of suburban DISTRICTS
- Drawing on informal networks, very rapidly settled on a district
- Most of the region was “greyed out”
- Only considered comparable districts
- Word-of-mouth

Many suburban middle-class parents
concerted cultivation EXCEPT re
where to live:

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

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

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

○ Mr. Quigley, African-American father:

○ “The school system is one of the best.”

Suburban Working-class Families

Reputation and experience: Schools are good

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

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

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

- Pride in being in the suburbs

City process very different

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

City families: worry, obsession

- Middle-class families, extensive searches

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

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

Harrowing process

Working-class families also worry

- Charter schools uniformly seen as higher quality by all white and African-American working-class city parents we interviewed
- Some African-American mothers expressed a desire for a religious education
- Most went to neighborhood school

Phi Delta Kappan Survey 2012

- “Nationally, only 19% [of parents] gave schools an A or B.
- But, when asked to rate their oldest child’s school, 77% of parents gave that school an A or a B.”

Role of race

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

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

Paradox: Across class: Networks were crucial

- But, networks class (and race) stratified and hence networks also ended up guiding parents to different locations
- Most parents had very limited knowledge about school districts other than the ones in their class range



Micro climates

- Limits to knowledge
- Blank looks about school districts 20 minutes away
- MENTAL MAPS: other areas “greyed out”
- Not only about being able to focus:
- Movers only considered school districts with a similar demographic or more highly ranked

Power and limits of social class

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

How does Social class transmit advantages?

- Structures mattered
- Suburbs: “nonchalant” or “casual”
- City: far from nonchalant
- Everyone drew on networks, but networks also guided people to different places
- Need to think more about structures and how they intersect with micro-interactions
- “mental maps” “micro climates”