Laughing and yelling, a white fourth-grader named Garrett Tallinger splashes around in the swimming pool in the backyard of his four-bedroom home in the suburbs on a late spring afternoon. As on most evenings, after a quick dinner his father drives him to soccer practice. This is only one of Garrett’s many activities. His brother has a baseball game at a different location. There are evenings when the boys’ parents relax, sipping a glass of wine. Tonight is not one of them. As they rush to change out of their work clothes and get the children ready for practice, Mr. and Mrs. Tallinger are harried.

Only ten minutes away, a Black fourth-grader, Alexander Williams, is riding home from a school open house. His mother is driving their beige, leather-upholstered Lexus. It is 9:00 P.M. on a Wednesday evening. Ms. Williams is tired from work and has a long Thursday ahead of her. She will get up at 4:45 A.M. to go out of town on business and will not return before 9:00 P.M. On Saturday morning, she will chauffeur Alexander to a private piano lesson at 8:15 A.M., which will be followed by a choir rehearsal and then a soccer game. As they ride in the dark, Alexander’s mother, in a quiet voice, talks with her son, asking him questions and eliciting his opinions.

Discussions between parents and children are a hallmark of middle-class child rearing. Like many middle-class parents, Ms. Williams and her husband see themselves as “developing” Alexander to cultivate his talents in a concerted fashion. Organized activities, established and controlled by mothers and fathers, dominate the lives of middle-class children such as Garrett and Alexander. By making certain their children have these other experiences, middle-class parents engage in a process of concerted cultivation. From this, a robust sense of entitlement takes root in the children. This sense of entitlement plays an especially important role in institutional settings, where middle-class children learn to question adults and address them as relative equals.

Only twenty minutes away, in blue-collar neighborhoods, and slightly farther away, in public housing projects, childhood looks different. Mr. Yanelli, a white working-class father, picks up his son Little Billy, a fourth-grader, from an after-school program. They come home and Mr. Yanelli drinks a beer while Little Billy first watches television, then rides his bike and plays in the street. Other nights, he and his Dad sit on the sidewalk outside their house and play cards. At about 5:30 P.M. Billy’s mother gets home from her job as a house cleaner. She fixes dinner and the entire family sits down to eat together. Extended family are a prominent part of their lives. Ms. Yanelli touches base with her “entire family every single weekend.” Unlike for Garrett and Alexander, who find their activities more satisfying, for an inner-city working-class girl, Wendy Dri, video and eat popcorn, crowd.

Further away, a Black fourth-grader, who is the only organized activity, clean children’s clothes and take care of them. Unlike the Tallingers and Williams, the children’s parents tend to use directives in reasoning. Unlike their middle-class peers, the working-class peers are more accustomed to activities, the working-class peers are also

The adults in the lives of Black children have a different understanding of the constraints that make it a major life decision. Their parents negotiate unsafe neighborhood or the lack of money, clean children’s clothes and take care of them. Unlike the Tallingers and Williams, the children’s parents tend to use directives in reasoning. Unlike their middle-class peers, the working-class peers are more accustomed to activities, the working-class peers are also

As a result, while children with a sense of entitlement, children gain an emerging sense of direction. America may be the land of the largely invisible but powerful poor. [...] I argue that key elements in the history of the United States, middle-class children may take the accomplishment of their success for granted. Middle-class children experience long stretches of leisure time, and daily interactions with the economic strain, often have no experience of leisure time, they appear to have a different understanding of the constraints that make it a major life decision. Their parents negotiate unsafe neighborhood or the lack of money, clean children’s clothes and take care of them. Unlike the Tallingers and Williams, the children’s parents tend to use directives in reasoning. Unlike their middle-class peers, the working-class peers are more accustomed to activities, the working-class peers are also

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Farther away, a Black fourth-grade boy, Harold McAllister, plays outside on a summer evening in the public housing project in which he lives. His two male cousins are there that night, as they often are. After an afternoon spent unsuccessfully searching for a ball so they could play basketball, the boys had resorted to watching sports on television. Now they head outdoors for a twilight water balloon fight. Harold tries to get his neighbor, Miss Latifa, wet. People sit in white plastic lawn chairs outside the row of apartments. Music and television sounds waft through the open windows and doors.

The adults in the lives of Billy, Wendy, and Harold want the best for them. Formidable economic constraints make it a major life task for these parents to put food on the table, arrange for housing, negotiate unsafe neighborhoods, take children to the doctor (often waiting for city buses that do not come), clean children's clothes, and get children to bed and have them ready for school the next morning. But unlike middle-class parents, these adults do not consider the concerted development of children, particularly through organized leisure activities, an essential aspect of good parenting. Unlike the Tallingers and Williamses, these mothers and fathers do not focus on concerted cultivation. For them, the crucial responsibilities of parenthood do not lie in eliciting their children's feelings, opinions, and thoughts. Rather, they see a clear boundary between adults and children. Parents tend to use directives: they tell their children what to do rather than persuading them with reasoning. Unlike their middle-class counterparts, who have a steady diet of adult organized activities, the working-class and poor children have more control over the character of their leisure activities. Most children are free to go out and play with friends and relatives who typically live close by. Their parents and guardians facilitate the accomplishment of natural growth. Yet these children and their parents interact with central institutions in the society, such as schools, which firmly and decisively promote strategies of concerted cultivation in child rearing. For working-class and poor families, the cultural logic of child rearing at home is out of sync with the standards of institutions. As a result, while children whose parents adopt strategies of concerted cultivation appear to gain a sense of entitlement, children such as Billy Yanelli, Wendy Driver, and Harold McAllister appear to gain an emerging sense of distance, distrust, and constraint in their institutional experiences.

America may be the land of opportunity, but it is also a land of inequality. This book identifies the largely invisible but powerful ways that parents' social class impacts children's life experiences. [ . . . ] I argue that key elements of family life cohere to form a cultural logic of child rearing. In other words, the differences among families seem to cluster together in meaningful patterns. In this historical moment, middle-class parents tend to adopt a cultural logic of child rearing that stresses the concerted cultivation of children. Working-class and poor parents, by contrast, tend to undertake the accomplishment of natural growth. In the accomplishment of natural growth, children experience long stretches of leisure time, child-initiated play, clear boundaries between adults and children, and daily interactions with kin. Working-class and poor children, despite tremendous economic strain, often have more "childlike" lives, with autonomy from adults and control over their extended leisure time. Although middle-class children miss out on kin relationships and leisure time, they appear to (at least potentially) gain important institutional advantages. From the experience of concerted cultivation, they acquire skills that could be valuable in the future when
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they enter the world of work. Middle-class white and Black children in my study did exhibit some key differences; yet the biggest gaps were not within social classes but, as I show, across them. It is these class differences and how they are enacted in family life and child rearing that shape the ways children view themselves in relation to the rest of the world.

CULTURAL REPERTOIRES

Professionals who work with children, such as teachers, doctors, and counselors, generally agree about how children should be raised. Of course, from time to time they may disagree on the ways standards should be enacted for an individual child or family. For example, teachers may disagree about whether or not parents should stop and correct a child who mispronounces a word while reading. Counselors may disagree over whether a mother is being too protective of her child. Still, there is little dispute among professionals on the broad principles for promoting educational development in children through proper parenting. These standards include the importance of talking with children, developing their educational interests, and playing an active role in their schooling. Similarly, parenting guidelines typically stress the importance of reasoning with children and teaching them to solve problems through negotiation rather than with physical force. Because these guidelines are so generally accepted, and because they focus on a set of practices concerning how parents should raise children, they form a dominant set of cultural repertoires about how children should be raised. This widespread agreement among professionals about the broad principles for child rearing permeates our society. A small number of experts thus potentially shape the behavior of a large number of parents.

Professionals' advice regarding the best way to raise children has changed regularly over the last two centuries. From strong opinions about the merits of bottle feeding, being stern with children, and utilizing physical punishment (with dire warnings of problematic outcomes should parents indulge children), there have been shifts to equally strongly worded recommendations about the benefits of breast feeding, displaying emotional warmth toward children, and using reasoning and negotiation as mechanisms of parental control. Middle-class parents appear to shift their behaviors in a variety of spheres more rapidly and more thoroughly than do working-class or poor parents. As professionals have shifted their recommendations from bottle feeding to breast feeding, from stern approaches to warmth and empathy, and from spanking to time-outs, it is middle-class parents who have responded most promptly. Moreover, in recent decades, middle-class children in the United States have had to face the prospect of “declining fortunes.” Worried about how their children will get ahead, middle-class parents are increasingly determined to make sure that their children are not excluded from any opportunity that might eventually contribute to their advancement.

Middle-class parents who comply with current professional standards and engage in a pattern of concerted cultivation deliberately try to stimulate their children's development and foster their cognitive and social skills. The commitment among working-class and poor families to provide comfort, food, shelter, and other basic support requires ongoing effort, given economic challenges and the formidable demands of child rearing. But it stops short of the deliberate cultivation of children and their leisure activities that occurs in middle-class families. For working-class and poor families, sustaining children's natural growth is viewed as an accomplishment.

What is the outcome of these different philosophies and approaches to child rearing? Quite simply, they appear to lead to the transmission of differential advantages to children. In this study, there was quite a bit more talking in middle-class homes than in working-class and poor homes, leading to the development of different skills, and many skill differences in interpersonal relations. Children such as Garrett, of adults and look through the potential employees have the importance of eye contact view. In poor families live in another eye when colleagues who can in competence transmitted to others (in employment interviews).}

Williams.

The white and Black the sense of entitlement to pursue their own interests. They appeared to be asking for attention. All of the practice among middle-class Williams knew how to get what he wanted (his new deodorant). His smile. Similarly, a Black middle-class gymnastics teacher to accommodate in the rules of the game. They were not conversing for hours on end during warm-ups or hanging out with other kids who learned (by imitation and enormous stress on reading and future institutional negotiations) interactions. Even in four years to gain advantages. They try to accommodate their desires.

The working-class and middle-class interactions in institutions vary to their own preferences. Little (although at times they were not as aware of their homework). Other times, Driver’s mother told her she were proud of him when suspended from school. When Ms. Yanelli complained and frustration in the classroom, Marshall learned to manage rules work in their favor.
In my study did exhibit some as I show, across them. It is rear that shape the ways leading to the development of greater verbal agility, larger vocabularies, more comfort with authority figures, and more familiarity with abstract concepts. Importantly, children also developed skill differences in interacting with authority figures in institutions and at home. Middle-class children such as Garrett Tallinger and Alexander Williams learn, as young boys, to shake the hands of adults and look them in the eye. In studies of job interviews, investigators have found that potential employees have less than one minute to make a good impression. Researchers stress the importance of eye contact, firm handshakes, and displaying comfort with bosses during the interview. In poor families like Harold McAllister’s, however, family members usually do not look each other in the eye when conversing. In addition, as Elijah Anderson points out, they live in neighborhoods where it can be dangerous to look people in the eye too long. The types of social competence transmitted in the McAllister family are valuable, but they are potentially less valuable (in employment interviews, for example) than those learned by Garrett Tallinger and Alexander Williams.

The white and Black middle-class children in this study also exhibited an emergent version of the sense of entitlement characteristic of the middle-class. They acted as though they had a right to pursue their own individual preferences and to actively manage interactions in institutional settings. They appeared comfortable in these settings; they were open to sharing information and asking for attention. Although some children were more outgoing than others, it was common practice among middle-class children to shift interactions to suit their preferences. Alexander Williams knew how to get the doctor to listen to his concerns (about the bumps under his arm from his new deodorant). His mother explicitly trained and encouraged him to speak up with the doctor. Similarly, a Black middle-class girl, Stacey Marshall, was taught by her mother to expect the gymnastics teacher to accommodate her individual learning style. Thus, middle-class children were trained in “the rules of the game” that govern interactions with institutional representatives. They were not conversant in other important social skills, however, such as organizing their time for hours on end during weekends and summers, spending long periods of time away from adults, or hanging out with adults in a nonobtrusive, subordinate fashion. Middle-class children also learned (by imitation and by direct training) how to make the rules work in their favor. Here, the enormous stress on reasoning and negotiation in the home also has a potential advantage for future institutional negotiations. Additionally, those in authority responded positively to such interactions. Even in fourth grade, middle-class children appeared to be acting on their own behalf to gain advantages. They made special requests of teachers and doctors to adjust procedures to accommodate their desires.

The working-class and poor children, by contrast, showed an emerging sense of constraint in their interactions in institutional settings. They were less likely to try to customize interactions to suit their own preferences. Like their parents, the children accepted the actions of persons in authority (although at times they also covertly resisted them). Working-class and poor parents sometimes were not as aware of their children’s school situation (as when their children were not doing homework). Other times, they dismissed the school rules as unreasonable. For example, Wendy Driver’s mother told her to “punch” a boy who was pestering her in class; Billy Yanelli’s parents were proud of him when he “beat up” another boy on the playground, even though Billy was then suspended from school. Parents also had trouble getting “the school” to respond to their concerns. When Ms. Yanelli complained that she “hates” the school, she gave her son a lesson in powerlessness and frustration in the face of an important institution. Middle-class children such as Stacey Marshall learned to make demands on professionals, and when they succeeded in making the rules work in their favor they augmented their “cultural capital” (i.e., skills individuals inherit that
can then be translated into different forms of value as they move through various institutions) for the future.\textsuperscript{10} When working-class and poor children confronted institutions, however, they generally were unable to make the rules work in their favor nor did they obtain capital for adulthood. Because of these patterns of legitimization, children raised according to the logic of concerted cultivation can gain advantages, in the form of an emerging sense of entitlement, while children raised according to the logic of natural growth tend to develop an emerging sense of constraint.\textsuperscript{11}

[...]

In terms of income and wealth, the richest 10 percent of families in our society own almost 80 percent of all real estate (other than family homes), more than 90 percent of all securities (stocks and bonds) and about 60 percent of all the money in bank accounts.\textsuperscript{12} One widely used indicator of inequality in income is the child poverty rate, a rate that is heavily dependent on social policy. (There are many more poor children in the United States than in most Western European countries.)\textsuperscript{13} In the United States, one-fifth of all children live below the poverty level, and the figure is approximately twice as high for Black children.\textsuperscript{14} The distribution of income and wealth became even more heavily concentrated in the hands of a few during the last decades of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{15} Still, during the study period, one-seventh of Black Americans were making over fifty thousand dollars annually.\textsuperscript{16}

Educational accomplishments are also lopsided. In the United States, just under one-quarter of all adults have completed a bachelor’s degree; the figure is a bit higher for individuals in their twenties. More than 10 percent of high school students drop out.\textsuperscript{17} Even among younger people, for whom college education is becoming increasingly common, a clear majority (from two-thirds to three-quarters) do not graduate.\textsuperscript{18} Although some studies show that, after taking into account parents’ social position, Black youth are more likely to pursue higher education than whites, overall levels of educational attainment are far lower for Black children.\textsuperscript{19} Substantial stratification also exists within higher education, ranging from community colleges to elite universities. The more elite the school, the more richly graduates are rewarded.\textsuperscript{20}

Moreover, there has been a profound shift in the U.S. and world economies, with a decline in "good jobs" with high wages, pensions, health benefits, and stability, and a rise in "bad jobs" with relatively low wages, no benefits, little opportunity for career promotion, and lack of stability.\textsuperscript{21} In the lives of most people, these separate threads — their educational attainment, what kind of job they get, and how much money they earn — are all tightly interwoven. Together, these factors constitute parents’ social position or social structural location.

Many studies have demonstrated that parents’ social structural location has profound implications for their children’s life chances. Before kindergarten, for example, children of highly educated parents are much more likely to exhibit "educational readiness" skills, such as knowing their letters, identifying colors, counting up to twenty, and being able to write their first names.\textsuperscript{22} Schooling helps, and during the school year the gap in children’s performance narrows quite a bit (but widens again during the summer). Children of highly educated mothers continue to outperform children of less educated mothers throughout their school careers. By the time young people take the SAT examinations for admission to college, the gap is dramatic, averaging 150 points (relative to an average score of 500 points) between children of parents who are high school dropouts and those with parents who have a graduate degree.\textsuperscript{23} There are also differences in other aspects of children’s school performance according to their parents’ social structural location.\textsuperscript{24} Many studies demonstrate the crucial role of educational success in determining occupational success. Parents’ social class position predicts children’s school success and thus their ultimate life chances.\textsuperscript{25}

[...]

Class position influences also the way that working-class and middletop-class mothers, and their working-class and middletop-class mothering," but there is a great deal of variability in the kinds of behaviors and actions that are considered important by different groups. Some parents view a sense of entitlement as natural, while others see it as a byproduct of social inequality. In either case, the ways that social class positions are transmitted to children vary depending on the context in which they grow up.

THE LIMITS OF SOCIAL CLASS

Among the families we observed, the limits of social class were evident in everyday life. Harold, for example, who lived in a working-class neighborhood, had a dog but then, in an attempt to please his wife, he gave the dog a special treat. This gesture was appreciated by his wife, who then took the dog for a walk around the neighborhood. Harold, on the other hand, rarely took his dog for a walk. He simply brought the dog home and kept it in the backyard. This difference in behavior reflects the different social positions of Harold and his wife.

All the families we observed had children who were involved in activities that were perceived by their parents as important. For example, some children were involved in sports, while others were involved in music lessons. Regardless of the specific activities, what was important was that the children were involved in something that was meaningful to their parents. This was true for both working-class and middle-class families. Across all social classes, children were expected to participate in various activities. And, while some children were involved in more activities than others, the expectations were the same for all children. This was true regardless of whether the children were from a working-class or a middle-class family. The expectations were that the children would be involved in activities that would help them develop their skills and abilities.

CONCERTED CULTIVATION

Despite these important differences, there were also many similarities in the routines of children’s daily life. Children were expected to be responsible for their own behavior, and were expected to follow the rules of the family. This was true for both working-class and middle-class families. Across all social classes, children were expected to follow the rules of the family. This was true regardless of whether the children were from a working-class or a middle-class family. The expectations were that the children would be responsible for their own behavior, and would follow the rules of the family.

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Class position influences critical aspects of family life: time use, language use, and kin ties. Working-class and middle-class mothers may express beliefs that reflect a similar notion of “intensive mothering,” but their behavior is quite different. For that reason, I have described sets of paired beliefs and actions as a “cultural logic” of child rearing. When children and parents move outside the home into the world of social institutions, they find that these cultural practices are not given equal value. There are signs that middle-class children benefit, in ways that are invisible to them and to their parents, from the degree of similarity between the cultural repertoires in the home and those standards adopted by institutions. In the next section, I acknowledge areas of family life that did not appear to be heavily influenced by social class. Then I turn to highlighting the ways that social class membership matters and to discussing why these differences exist and what can be done to lessen or eliminate them.

THE LIMITS OF SOCIAL CLASS

Among the families we observed, some aspects of daily life did not vary systematically by social class. There were episodes of laughter, emotional connection, and happiness as well as quiet comfort in every family. Harold McAllister and his mother laughed together as he almost dropped his hot dog but then, in an awkward grab, caught it. After a baseball game, Mr. Williams rubbed Alexander’s head affectionately and called him “handsome.” Ms. Handlon gave her daughter a big squeeze around her shoulders after the Christmas Eve pageant, and Melanie beamed. One summer afternoon, Mr. Yanelli and Billy played cards together, sitting cross-legged on the sidewalk. These moments of connection seemed deeply meaningful to both children and parents in all social classes, even as they take different shape by social class, in terms of language, activity, and character.

All the families we observed also had rituals: favorite meals they often ate, television programs they watched, toys or games that were very important, family outings they looked forward to, and other common experiences. The content of their rituals varied (especially by social class); what did not vary was that the children enjoyed these experiences and they provided a sense of membership in a family. Also, in all social classes, a substantial part of the children’s days was spent in repetitive rituals: getting up, making the bed, taking a shower, getting dressed, brushing hair and teeth, eating breakfast, finding school books and papers, and waiting for adults to get ready. These moments were interspersed with hours, days, and weeks of household work, tedious demands, mundane tasks, and tension. This was true for all families, regardless of social class. Nor were any families immune to life tragedies: across all social classes there were premature deaths due to car accidents or suicides. Across all social classes children and parents had different temperaments: some were shy and quiet; some were outgoing and talkative. Some had a sense of humor and some did not. The degree of organization and orderliness in daily life also did not vary systematically by social class. Some houses were clean and some were a disaster. Some of the messiest ones were middle-class homes in which the entryway was a paragon of order but the living spaces, particularly the upstairs, were in a tangle. Despite the formidable differences among the families detailed previously, in each home, after a few visits, the research assistants and I found that the surroundings felt normal, comfortable, and safe. Put differently, they all felt like home.

CONCERTED CULTIVATION AND THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF NATURAL GROWTH

Despite these important areas of shared practices, social class made a significant difference in the routines of children’s daily lives. The white and Black middle-class parents engaged in practices of
concerted cultivation. In these families, parents actively fostered and assessed their children’s talents, opinions, and skills. They scheduled their children for activities. They reasoned with them. They hovered over them and outside the home they did not hesitate to intervene on the children’s behalf. They made a deliberate and sustained effort to stimulate children’s development and to cultivate their cognitive and social skills. The working-class and poor parents viewed children’s development as unfolding spontaneously, as long as they were provided with comfort, food, shelter, and other basic support. I have called this cultural logic of child rearing the accomplishment of natural growth. As with concerted cultivation, this commitment, too, required ongoing effort; sustaining children’s natural growth despite formidable life challenges is properly viewed as accomplishment. Parents who relied on natural growth generally organized their children’s lives so they spent time in and around home, in informal play with peers, siblings, and cousins. As a result, the children had more autonomy regarding leisure time and more opportunities for child-initiated play. They also were more responsible for their lives outside the home. Unlike in middle-class families, adult-organized activities were uncommon. Instead of the relentless focus on reasoning and negotiation that took place in middle-class families, there was less speech (including less whining and badgering) in working-class and poor homes. Boundaries between adults and children were clearly marked; parents generally used language not as an aim in itself but more as a conduit for social life. Directives were common. In their institutional encounters, working-class and poor parents turned over responsibility to professionals; when parents did try to intervene, they felt that they were less capable and less efficacious than they would have liked. While working-class and poor children differed in important ways, particularly in the stability of their lives, surprisingly there was not a major difference between them in their cultural logic of child rearing. Instead, in this study the cultural divide appeared to be between the middle class and everyone else.

Across all social classes, child-rearing practices often appeared to be natural. Like breathing, child rearing usually seemed automatic and unconscious. Parents were scarcely aware that they were orienting their children in specific ways. For example, the Handlon and the Tallinger children had cousins their own ages who lived within a twenty-minute drive. They saw their cousins, however, only on special occasions, not several times per week as did children in the Driver and McAllister families. While firmly committed to the strategy of concerted cultivation, Mr. and Mrs. Williams did not seem especially conscious of their approach. Although both parents mentioned the pleasure they experienced from knowing that Alexander was curious, they did not appear to link that trait to their own extensive use of reasoning with him. Nor did they analyze their failure to use directives. The fact that most of Alexander’s time was spent with other children his own age, rather than with his cousins (in part because they lived so far away), also was not a subject of reflection or discussion. Parts of their lives, of course, did reflect conscious choices and deliberate actions, including Ms. Williams’s vehement objections to television and both parents’ commitment to furthering Alexander’s musical talents. The scarcity of time was also a subject of discussion. Even here, however, the focus was on the details of life (e.g., missing a baseball game to take part in a school play) rather than on the overall approach to child rearing.

Similarly, in families using the accomplishment of natural growth, there was tremendous economic constraint and almost constant talk about money. But there was a “taken for granted” character to daily life that presumed a focus on natural growth rather than concerted cultivation. Ms. McAllister stressed her strengths as a mother. As she fed, clothed, and cared for her children, they took them on picnics, and watched out for them, she compared her actions favorably to the behavior of mothers living nearby, including those who took drugs. She did not compare herself to the Ms. Tallingers or Ms. Williamses of the world.
THE INTERSECTION OF RACE AND CLASS

In Race Matters, Professor Cornell West reports his frustration in trying to hail a cab to get to a photo shoot for the cover of his latest book. As he waited and waited, ten taxis without passengers passed him by, stopping (often within his vision) instead to pick up people whose skin color was not black. Furious, he gave up, took the subway, and was late for the appointment.29 Professor West and other middle-class African Americans report feeling enraged over this inability to signal their class position in social interactions with strangers. In these situations, race trumps social class.30

The middle-class Black fathers in this study told similar tales. One father reported white women clutching their purses and looking terrified as he walked briskly one evening to use the cash machine in an upscale shopping district. Also, as I have shown, the mothers and fathers of middle-class African American children kept a keen eye out for signs of racial problems. Their worries were confirmed, as when a first-grade boy told Alexander Williams (son of a lawyer) that he could only be a garbage man when he grew up, or when Fern Marshall, the only Black girl in a camp of a hundred white girls, had fun during the morning basketball activities but at lunchtime found it more difficult (than if she had been white) to blend into the groups of girls chattering away. Although they moved heavily within white worlds, parents sought to avoid having their children be the only Black child at an event. In addition, parents sought to have their children develop a positive self-image that specifically included their racial identity. Thus, for example, they attended all-Black middle-class Baptist churches every Sunday.

Given this evidence, it would be a mistake to suggest that race did not matter in children’s lives. It did. Nevertheless, the role of race was less powerful than I had expected. In terms of the areas this book has focused on – how children spend their time, the way parents use language and discipline in the home, the nature of the families’ social connections, and the strategies used for intervening in institutions – white and Black parents engaged in very similar, often identical, practices with their children.31 As the children age, the relative importance of race in their daily lives is likely to increase.32 Most African Americans do not date or marry outside their own racial and ethnic groups. Housing markets are heavily segregated for Black homeowners, regardless of their income.33 African Americans also are likely to encounter racism in their interpersonal contact with whites, particularly in employment settings. In fourth grade, however, in very central ways, race mattered less in children’s daily lives than did their social class.34 Black and white middle-class children were given enormous amounts of individualized attention, with their parents organizing their own time around their children’s leisure activities. This prioritizing profoundly affected parents’ leisure time. In these situations, race made little to no difference. Mr. Williams, after a week of working until midnight preparing for a trial, spent Sunday driving Alexander to baseball practice, home for a quick shower and change, and then off to a school play. Mr. Tallinger flew across the country on a red-eye, had a short nap, went to work, and then was out late at a soccer practice on a chilly spring evening, yearning for the event to be over so that he could get home and sleep.

Similarly, it was the middle-class children, Black and white, who squabbled and fought with their siblings and talked back to their parents. These behaviors were simply not tolerated in working-class and poor families, Black or white.35 Still, the biggest differences in the cultural logic of child rearing in the day-to-day behavior of children in this study were between middle-class children on the one hand (including wealthy members of the middle class) and working-class and poor children on the other. As a middle-class Black boy, Alexander Williams had much more in common with white middle-class Garrett Tallinger than he did with less-privileged Black boys, such as Tyrec Taylor or Harold McAllister.
HOW DOES IT MATTER?

Both concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth offer intrinsic benefits (and burdens) for parents and their children. Nevertheless, these practices are accorded different social values by important social institutions. There are signs that some family cultural practices, notably those associated with concerted cultivation, give children advantages that other cultural practices do not.

In terms of the rhythms of daily life, both concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth have advantages and disadvantages. Middle-class children learn to develop and value an individualized sense of self. Middle-class children are allowed to participate in a variety of coveted activities: gymnastics, soccer, summer camps, and so on. These activities improve their skills and teach them, as Mr. Tallinger noted, to be better athletes than their parents were at comparable ages. They learn to handle moments of humiliation on the field as well as moments of glory. Middle-class children learn, as Mr. Williams noted, the difference between baroque and classical music. They learn to perform. They learn to present themselves. But this cultivation has a cost. Family schedules are disrupted. Dinner hours are very hard to arrange. Siblings such as Spencer and Sam Tallinger spend dreary hours waiting at athletic fields and riding in the car going from one event to another. Family life, despite quiet interludes, is frequently frenetic. Parents, especially mothers, must reconcile conflicting priorities, juggling events whose deadlines are much tighter than the deadlines connected to serving meals or getting children ready for bed. The domination of children's activities can take a toll on families. At times, everyone in the middle-class families – including ten-year-old children – seemed exhausted. Thus, there are formidable costs, as well as benefits to this child-rearing approach.

Working-class and poor children also had advantages, as well as costs, from the cultural logic of child rearing they experienced. Working-class and poor children learned to entertain themselves. They played outside, creating their own games, as Tyrec Taylor did with his friends. They did not complain of being bored. Working-class and poor children also appeared to have boundless energy. They did not have the exhaustion that we saw in middle-class children the same age. Some working-class and poor children longed to be in organized activities – Katie Brindle wanted to take ballet and Harold McAllister wanted to play football. When finances, a lack of transportation, and limited availability of programs conspired to prevent or limit their participation, they were disappointed. Many were also deeply aware of the economic constraints and the limited consumption permitted by their family's budget. Living spaces were small, and often there was not much privacy. The television was almost always on and, like many middle-class children growing up in the 1950s, working-class and poor children watched unrestricted amounts of television. As a result, family members spent more time together in shared space than occurred in middle-class homes. Indeed, family ties were very strong, particularly among siblings. Working-class and poor children also developed very close ties with their cousins and other extended family members.

Within the home, these two approaches to child rearing each have identifiable strengths and weaknesses. When we turn to examining institutional dynamics outside the home, however, the unequal benefits of middle-class children's lives compared to working-class and poor children's lives become clearer. In crucial ways, middle-class family members appeared reasonably comfortable and entitled, while working-class and poor family members appeared uncomfortable and constrained. For example, neither Harold nor his mother seemed as comfortable as Alexander and his mother had been as they interacted with their physician. Alexander was used to extensive conversation at home; with the doctor, he was at ease initiating questions. Harold, who was used to responding to directives of his own. Unlike Mr. McAllister, Alexander permitted Alexis to train him to be a chef. He did not order his children. Absolutely not. Harold's diet, Harold apprised.

This pattern of warm and friendly interaction in this study had much to do with home, Ms. McAllister, whose conference yielded:

"Other working-class and poor-teacher conferences are more likely to be able to read, resist, and do the wrong thing." We had a similar educational experience. We are chatty when she is. On Saturday morning, Ms. McAllister personnel. She fairly typical.

There were also little natural school officials but most of the school rules prohibited the girls from bothering him. Since her ponytail, and Chelsea's boyfriend added, Chelsea's boyfriend added.

The unequal life's will, exerted, can yield different results. We applauded assertive, self-reliant children and praised efforts. Alexander and the McAllister's children and the McAllister's children.

Overall, the unequal life's will, exerted, can yield different results. We applauded assertive, self-reliant children and praised efforts. Alexander and the McAllister's children and the McAllister's children.
Excerpts from Unequal Childhoods

...and the accomplishment of children learn to develop and to participate in a variety of activities improve their skills. If parents were at comparable as well as moments of glory between baroque and classical at this cultivation has a cost. Siblings such as Spencer and John in the car going from one to another, frenetic. Parents, especially for deadlines are much tighter for bed. The domination of the middle-class families - formidable costs, as well as...
These potential benefits for middle-class children, and costs for working-class and poor children, are necessarily speculative, since at the end of the study, the children were still in elementary school. Still, there are important signs of hidden advantages being sown at early ages. The middle-class children have extensive experience with adults in their lives with whom they have a relatively contained, bureaucratically regulated, and somewhat superficial relationship. As children spend eight weeks playing soccer, baseball, basketball, and other activities, they meet and interact with adults acting as coaches, assistant coaches, car pool drivers, and so on. This contact with relative strangers, although of a different quality than contact with cousins, aunts, and uncles, provides work-related skills. For instance, as Garrett shakes the hand of a stranger and looks him or her in the eye, he is being groomed, in an effortless fashion, for job interviews he will have as an adult (employment experts stress the importance of good eye contact). In the McAllister home, family members have great affection and warmth toward one another, but they do not generally look each other in the eye when they speak; this training is likely to be a liability in job interviews. In settings as varied as health care and gymnastics, middle-class children learn at a young age to be assertive and demanding. They expect, as did Stacey Marshall, for institutions to be responsive to them and to accommodate their individual needs. By contrast, when Wendy is told to hit the boy who is pestering her (when the teacher isn’t looking) or Billy Yanelli is told to physically defend himself, despite school rules, they are not learning how to make bureaucratic institutions work to their advantage. Instead, they are being given lessons in frustration and powerlessness.

WHY? THE SEARCH FOR EXPLANATIONS

As I discuss shortly, some commentators today decry the “overscheduled” lives of children; they long for the days when most children had unstructured lives, filled with informal play. But this is a romanticized view of the family in the past. Although there have always been important social class differences in childhood, for much of U.S. history, children played an important economic role in family life. For example, in colonial America, a boy of six or seven was expected to move out of his parents’ home to live with a skilled craftsman as an apprentice. As the country gradually industrialized, children’s small, “nimble fingers” were useful in factory work. Children also were economic assets on family farms. According to a 1920 study in North Dakota, children helped herd cattle and dig holes for fence posts. They also had daily responsibilities, as this description of a nine-year-old boy’s chores shows: “Built the fires in the morning, swept the floor of a two-room house, and brought in fuel and water; in addition, before he made a two-mile trip to school, he helped feed stock (five horses and twelve cows) and chopped wood; in the evening he did the chores and washed dishes.” Children, especially working-class and poor children, also helped with the informal paid labor their mothers did, such as laundry and “sewing, embroidering, flower making, and tag tying”; most older siblings looked after younger siblings, as well. Children did have some time for unstructured leisure, but it was limited.

Viviana Zelizer shows that through the end of the nineteenth century and into the early decades of the twentieth century, these practices were accompanied by beliefs supporting the importance of children working hard. If anything, the concern was that without specific training in “useful work,” children might grow up to be “paupers and thieves.” In children’s books and magazines, in which stories stressed “the virtues of work, duty, and discipline,” Zelizer notes, “The standard villain ... was an idle child.” The period after 1920 saw a dramatic decline in children’s economic contributions, however, as child labor laws were put into place and a new vision of the “economically useless but sentimentally priceless child” took hold.
Thus, although a definitive account of historical changes in children's leisure practices remains to be written, it appears that it was for only a relatively brief historical period that children were granted long stretches of leisure time with unstructured play. In the period after World War II, white and Black children were permitted to play for hours on end with other neighborhood children, after school, during evenings, and on weekends. Other than going to church, the few organized activities children participated in (e.g., music lessons or Scouts) began at a later age than is typical today. The "institutionalization of children's leisure" and the rise of concerted cultivation more generally are recent developments. Today's parents are not transmitting practices they learned in their families of origin. Parents of the eighty-eight children in our study were born in the 1930s and 1960s. None reported having had a very active schedule of organized activities as a child. Rather, the middle-class parents in this study and, possibly throughout the country, appear to have been raised according to the logic of the accomplishment of natural growth.

In attempting to understand this historical shift, particularly the institutionalization of children's leisure and the emphasis on "intensive mothering," commentators often point to the impact of modern life, especially the impact of increasing "rationalization." This view, termed the "McDonaldization of society" by George Ritzer, finds an increasing standardization of daily life, with an emphasis on efficiency, predictability, control, and calculability. Ritzer notes that these principles from the world of fast food have been adapted to other parts of social life, including Kidsports Fun and Fitness Club, Kinder Care, Kampgrounds of America, Toys 'R' Us, and other stores. Family life, too, is becoming increasingly rationalized, being invaded by not only public schools, the courts, social service workers, gardeners, housekeepers, day-care providers, lawyers, doctors, televisions, frozen dinners, pizza delivery, manufactured clothing, and disposable diapers, but also, and more critically, by the ideology behind such institutions, persons, and products. They bring with them . . . the logic of . . . impersonal, competitive, contractual, commodified, efficient, profit-maximizing, self-interested relations.

Busy affluent parents can hire chauffeurs to take children to their organized activities, hire educators at "Learning Centers" in shopping malls to help children do homework and improve in school, and hire personal shoppers to help buy and wrap holiday gifts. The services available for birthday parties (e.g., a special room at McDonald's, an overnight at a science museum, or a professional party coordinator) are signs of the increasing rationalization of family life.

The rationalization of children's leisure is evident in the proliferation of organized activities with a predictable schedule, delivering a particular quantity of experience within a specific time period, under the control of adults. That children's time use has shifted from unstructured play to organized activities does not mean that families no longer have fun during their leisure hours. Many find the time spent together during soccer and baseball games, for example, to be very enjoyable. The point is that areas of family life are growing more systematic, predictable, and regulated than they have been in the recent past. Forces that have converged to bring about this change include increasing concerns about the safety of children who play unsupervised on local streets, rises in employment (resulting in adults being at home less), and a decline in the availability of neighborhood playmates due to a dropping birth rate and the effects of suburbanization, especially the increased size of homes and decreased density of housing.

Greater emphasis on the use of reasoning in the home, particularly as a form of discipline, as well as interventions in institutions, can also be seen as a form of rationalization, particularly the well-documented trend of "scientific motherhood." Still, any analysis of the rise of concerted cultivation must also, I believe, grapple with the changing position of the United States in the world economy,
and the accompanying decline in highly paid manufacturing jobs and increase in less desirable service-sector jobs. This restructuring makes it very likely that when today's children are adults, their standard of living will be lower than that of their parents. It means that there will be fewer "good jobs" and more "bad jobs," and that the competition for them will be intense. Moreover, since children must be successful in school to gain access to desirable positions, many middle-class parents are anxious to make sure their children perform well academically. Institutional gatekeepers, such as college admissions officers, applaud extracurricular activities. Thus, many parents see children's activities as more than interesting and enjoyable pastimes. They also provide potential advantages for children in the sorting process.

[...]

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

In his thoughtful book *The Price of Citizenship*, historian Michael Katz shows that in recent years Americans' conception of welfare has grown excessively narrow. A preoccupation with public assistance to the poor has led Americans to overlook two other important forms of social distribution: social insurance programs and taxation policies. Yet in size and scope, social insurance programs, particularly Social Security and Medicare, dwarf the cost of payments to poor families. Moreover, these programs have been effective in reducing the percentage of poor among the elderly. It is very likely that the state could take similar steps to reduce inequality among American families. State intervention would probably be the most direct and effective way to reduce the kinds of social inequality described in this book. For example, a child allowance, similar to what Sweden and other Western European nations provide, would likely be very effective in eliminating child poverty and reducing the gap in economic and social resources. As David Karen points out, increasing the "safety net" for poor and working-class families would be helpful:

> Anything that can be done to provide a safety net for the poor (and working class) will increase the resources of ... children and therefore make it possible for them to engage in some of the activities that they're currently excluded from. This exclusion takes place not only because they don't have the money to participate but also because parental time is so limited. If parental time (say, thanks to fewer hours at work) were more available, there might be more access to participation. Under this rubric, I'd put things like universal health care, state-supported daycare, (and) a guaranteed minimum income.

In addition, an increase in federal and state recreation monies would be useful since, in interviews I conducted with directors of recreation programs in the regions surrounding Swan and Lower Richmond schools, it was clear that as the township became more affluent, more elaborate recreational programs were available. Vouchers for extracurricular activities and transportation to activities (e.g., music lessons, art lessons, sports programs, and specialized summer camps) are another possibility. A problem is that neighborhoods are often relatively homogenous by social class. Consolidating neighborhoods so that working-class and poor children become part of more affluent neighborhoods would be likely to increase access to desirable facilities. What is far less likely, however, is the existence of the political will to support this redistribution of wealth. Instead, Americans, as is their wont, are likely to remain preoccupied with more individual solutions. Since, however, the problems differ by social class, the solutions do as well. Below, I review some of the possibilities.

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**Slowing It Down: Policy**

The frenetic schedule of school, work, and family reports. As a result, there is little time left to resist the scheduling of children's schedules or even to think about the actual nature of those schedules.

It is Tuesday at 6:45 a.m. Carol, a mother usually lets her school-age daughter Belinda to gymnastics for a piano lesson. From it seems that Belinda's schedule is filled up too, with religion, piano lessons, and music, "She's pretty worn out by today, but there's nothing [to be so busy]. But for now.

The authors are outraged..."%

We sense that our family is too rushed for our kids, but we don't have the time... someone else is adding... the children to make sure they...

Resistance is spreading... First,.. based in Wayzata, an activities to make family... penalizing children who... incipient movements have... that family life is in a... appointment books, professional... unhappy...

Some parents proudly announce not only one activity at a time...

A systematic critique of the... emerged. Indeed, many parents are... Doubts about the values... Problems stemming from... well covered by professional... Loving Boundaries for Your... are signaling the need for... tales of rude, obnoxious, they, as children, may...

... unable to convey appreciation... and craving adult intervention... solution the experts offer... support within her or himself to...

... children, and to resist the...
Slowing It Down: Policy Implications for Middle-Class Families

The frenetic schedule of some middle-class families is a topic that increasingly bubbles up in media reports. As a result, there is an emerging social movement of professionals and middle-class parents to resist the scheduling of children’s lives. Books, including *The Over-Scheduled Child*, insist that children’s schedules are out of control:

It is Tuesday at 6:45 A.M. Belinda, age seven, is still asleep. School doesn’t start until 9:00 A.M. and her mother usually lets her sleep until 7:30 A.M. But not on Tuesdays. That’s the day Belinda has a 7:30 A.M. piano lesson. From it she goes directly to school, which lasts until three. Then the babysitter drives Belinda to gymnastics for the 4:00–6:30 p.m. class. While Tuesday is the busiest day, the rest of the week is filled up too, with religious school and choir practice, ballet, and (Belinda’s favorite) horseback riding. “She’s pretty worn out by the end of the day,” her mother laments . . . “I’m not really sure it is a good thing [to be so busy]. But I want to give her the advantages I didn’t have.”

The authors are outraged by this kind of schedule:

We sense that our family lives are out of whack, but we aren’t sure why. We know we are doing too much for our kids, but we don’t know where it might be okay to cut back . . . every time we . . . turn [around] . . . someone else is adding something new to the list of things we are supposed to be doing for our children to make sure they turn out right.

Resistance is spreading. At the collective level, grassroots organizations such as “Family Life First,” based in Wayzata, Minnesota, are pressuring coaches and adult leaders of other organized activities to make family time a priority (by, for example, not scheduling events on Sundays or not penalizing children who miss games while on family vacations). Ridgewood, New Jersey, gained national attention when citizens declared a community-wide (voluntary) “Family Night” and arranged for children’s organized activities (and homework) to be canceled for the evening. These incipient movements have in common an explicit recognition that children’s schedules are absurd, that family life is in thrall to a frenzy of “hyper-scheduling.” Decrying the development of children’s appointment books, professionals call for children to have more opportunities for unstructured play. At the individual level, parents are encouraged to set strict limits on children’s activities. Some parents proudly announce on websites that they require their children to limit themselves to only one activity at a time.

A systematic critique of parents’ role in supervising and intervening in institutions has not yet emerged. Indeed, many professionals actively recruit and encourage parental involvement in school. Doubts about the value of extensive reasoning with children, on the other hand, are mounting. Problems stemming from the blurring of boundaries between parents and children are especially well covered by professionals and the media. With titles such as *Parents in Charge: Setting Healthy, Loving Boundaries for You and Your Child* and *I’ll Be the Parent, You Be the Child*, professionals are signaling the need for parents to provide directives to children. The books provide cautionary tales of rude, obnoxious, and ungrateful children who refuse to be polite to guests, who feel that they, as children, may decide when they will or will not join the family for dinner, and who are unable to convey appreciation for the gifts they receive. Describing these children as out of control and craving adult intervention, the authors call for parents to “set limits and make decisions.” The solution the experts offer calls mainly for individual action: each parent is encouraged to look within her or himself to find the necessary strength to take charge, to give clear directives to children, and to resist the temptation to seek their children’s approval.
Ironically, the new agenda for middle-class parents, whether expressed collectively or individually, amounts to a reinstatement of many of the elements of the strategy of the accomplishment of natural growth. For overburdened and exhausted parents, the policy recommendations center on setting limits: reducing the number of children’s activities, scheduling family time, making family events a higher priority than children’s events, and generally putting the needs of the group ahead of the needs of the individual.

**Gaining Compliance with Dominant Standards: Implications for Working-Class and Poor Families**

For working-class and poor families, the policy recommendations center on trying to gain advantages for children in institutional settings. Some programs stress the importance of reading to children, bolstering vocabulary, and addressing “summer setback” (a reference to working-class and poor children’s tendency to lose academic ground when they are out of school while middle-class children’s academic growth spurs ahead). Here, it is important to bear in mind the ever-changing nature of institutional standards (phonics is “in” one year, whole language the next; computers are promoted and then challenged). Providing children with the resources needed to comply with institutional standards may be helpful, but it leaves unexamined the problematic nature of class-based childrearing methods themselves. It is possible that policies could be developed to help professionals learn how to be more sensitive to differences in cultural practices and how to “code switch”; they, in turn, might be able to teach children to “code switch” as they move between home and encounters with institutions. One promising development is the success of programs that offer to working-class and poor children the kinds of concerted cultivation middle-class children get at home. Examples include intensive interventions in high schools and in “I Had a Dream” philanthropic ventures through which schools and private tutors take on the roles often carried out by middle-class parents (and the tutors they hire). These programs have improved children’s school performance; reduced suspensions, behavior problems, and teen pregnancies; and increased college admittance rates. Many have shown to double the high school graduation rates of students. Other interventions have produced similarly positive results. In some, for example, high school teachers provide low-income students with tours of college campuses, remind them about key deadlines, and help them fill out college applications. Programs such as these, as well as more traditional programs, such as “Big Brother/Big Sister,” have improved school experiences.

In sum, policy recommendations for working-class and poor children do not address hectic schedules or the need for greater parental control, as those for middle-class children do. Rather, they focus on gaining institutional advantages for children by encouraging parents to use reasoning to bolster their children’s vocabulary and to play a more active role in their children’s schooling.

**NOTES**

1. Choosing words to describe social groups also becomes a source of worry, especially over the possibility of reinforcing negative stereotypes. I found the available terms to describe members of racial and ethnic groups to be problematic in one way or another. The families I visited uniformly described themselves as “Black.” Recognizing that some readers have strong views that Black should be capitalized, I have followed that convention, despite the lack of symmetry with the term white. In sum, this book alternates among the terms “Black,” “Black American,” “African American,” and “white,” with the understanding that “white” here refers to the subgroup of non-Hispanic whites.

2. Some readers have expressed concern that this phrase, “the accomplishment of natural growth,” underemphasizes all the labor that mothers and fathers do to take care of children. They correctly note that working-class and poor parents themselves would be unlikely to use such a term to describe the process of caring for children. These