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Social Reproduction and Child-rearing Practices: Social Class, Children's Agency, and the Summer Activity Gap

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This study contributes to the ongoing scholarly debate about the relative importance of parents' resources and values in influencing parents' child-rearing practices. Using ethnographic data on children's summer experiences, the authors examine how families from different ethnic and social-class backgrounds assemble child care and other activities for their children during summer vacation. The authors argue that social-class differences in the quality and quantity of children's activities do not stem largely from fundamental differences in parents' desires to help children develop or cultivate their skills and talents. Instead, these differences stem from parents' differential access to a wide range of resources, including money, the human capital to know how best to assess and improve children's skills, the cultural capital to know how best to cultivate children's talents, and the social capital to learn about and gain access to programs and activities. The authors also show that children's own values and temperaments, or "child capital," strongly influence children's activities, sometimes compensating for parents' lack of resources and sometimes impeding parents' efforts to construct stimulating summers for their children.

Sociologists have long been interested in the causes and consequences of ethnic and social-class differences in child-rearing practices. From early debates about whether working-class or middle-class families practice more permissive child rearing to more contemporary research on middle-class children's increasingly hectic schedules, scholars have repeatedly concluded that families from different social strata raise their children differently (Davis and Havighurst 1946; Elkind 2001; Kohn 1977; Lareau 2003). Scholarly research on the causes of these differences has yielded two competing theories: that differences in child-rearing practices stem from (1) parents' disparate values and

expectations for their children (Kohn 1977; Lareau 2003; Rubin 1976) or from (2) parents' unequal material resources (including the time and energy needed to focus on children) (G. Becker 1993; Corcoran 1995). In this article, we describe how families from different ethnic and social-class backgrounds assemble child care and other activities for their preadolescent children during summer vacation. Our analysis suggests that social-class differences in parents' values and expectations are less important determinants of high-quality summer experiences than are social-class differences in parents' resources and variation in children's own values and resources.

Summer vacation provides a unique window into the role of social class in children's lives (Entwisle and Alexander 1992; Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson 1997; Heyns 1978). Whereas schools constrain parents' and children's behavior by requiring them to follow particular institutional norms and routines during the school year, summer break has no mandatory, or even normative, structure. While school is in session, parents must ensure that their children attend school, and their family activities must take place outside school hours. During the school year, children must abide by a curriculum and a schedule that typically does not cater to their specific needs and requires them to focus on subjects that may neither interest nor challenge them.

During the summer, however, parents are responsible for structuring all their children's time. This "structure" can consist of leaving children to "entertain themselves" or arranging a medley of activities that fill up each week of the summer. And rather than being limited to developing the skills provided in their school curriculum, children have time over the summer to pursue their own interests and develop their particular talents. Because summertime represents a relatively unconstrained period in which parents and children co-construct their activities, it provides a unique vantage point from which social scientists can examine how families reproduce social inequality.

We begin by describing the theoretical landscape into which our study fits and the study's methodology. We then present our findings on how social-class differences translate into differences in summer activities. We not only examine the resources that parents use to construct summer experiences for their children, but highlight the influence that children have on the process. We conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Scholars have long debated the relative importance of "structure" (typically understood as economic resources or occupational position) and "culture" (typically understood as values or practices) in the reproduction of

inequality (see, e.g., Lewis 1966; Sewell 1992).¹ Lareau's (2000, 2002, 2003) ethnographic work has reinvigorated this debate by arguing that middle-class parents tend to engage in a "cultural logic of child rearing" that involves "concerted cultivation," whereas lower- and working-class parents emphasize the "accomplishment of natural growth." Although Lareau (2002) acknowledged that economic and educational resources play a role in creating social-class differences in children's experiences, she argued that middle-class parents tend to "enroll their children in numerous age-specific organized activities" and "view these activities as transmitting important life skills to children" (p. 748). In contrast, working-class and poor parents "believe that as long as they provide love, food, and safety, their children will grow and thrive" (p. 748). According to Lareau (2002), working-class and poor parents also "do not focus on developing their children's special talents" (pp. 748–49). In other words, although Lareau's work acknowledges that structural factors influence families' child-rearing practices, it suggests that even if middle-class and working-class parents had similar educational levels and incomes, middle-class parents would be more likely than working-class parents to nurture their children's talents and intellects actively.

Other studies have suggested, however, that poor and working-class parents do value "cultivating" their children. For example, many lower-income parents have high expectations for their children's academic success and educational attainment (Alexander and Entwisle 1988; Fordham 1996; Stevenson, Chen, and Uttal 1990). And at least some poor and working-class parents engage in practices that are aimed at developing their children's academic skills, even though they are often less able to realize their desires to cultivate their children's skills because of material constraints (Rosier 2000, 2001; Rosier and Corsaro 1993). Although useful, these studies have not explicitly compared the beliefs and practices of families from different class backgrounds, as Lareau has done, to try to assess the relative importance of parents' values and material circumstances in influencing children's socialization.

In this article, we bring a new set of comparative ethnographic data to bear on the question of *why* some children lead more active, organized, and varied lives than do others. Like Lareau (2002, 2003), our data indicate that middle-class children tend to have much more organized lives than do their lower- and working-class counterparts. And like Entwisle et al. (1997), our data indicate that middle-class children are more likely than are lower-class children to go on expensive vacations, attend summer camp, go to libraries and museums, participate in organized sports, and read over the summer. Yet in contrast to Lareau's data, ours suggest that middle-class children's greater participation in organized and varied activities stems more from parents' circumstances (i.e., family income, parental time, and parental knowledge) and from children's preferences and temperaments than from social-class differences in parenting philosophies or values.

Over the past few decades, several major theorists have developed the concepts of human capital (G. Becker 1993), cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), and social capital (Coleman 1988, 1990) to describe nonmonetary parental resources that confer advantages on children and tend to be correlated, albeit imperfectly, with financial capital. Our data indicate that these concepts are useful for understanding both between- and within-class variation in children's summer experiences. In particular, social capital, which we define as social networks,² occasionally crosses social-class lines, serving as a substitute for financial resources that economically disadvantaged children lack.

Despite the utility of these concepts, however, they are inadequate for understanding two important determinants of children's summer experiences. First, the flexibility of parents' work hours (and the amount of control that parents have over their work hours) constitutes an important family resource that does not fit neatly into any current category of "capital." Human capital theory incorporates the idea that parents' investment of time in their children helps develop children's human capital (e.g., children's academic skills). Yet, even among parents who work the

same number of hours per week, those who have professional jobs that allow them to set their own schedules and those who work nonoverlapping shifts are better able than are others to provide their children with varied experiences.

Second, although social reproduction theorists have focused almost exclusively on how parents "pass on" social class to their children, our data reveal that children play an important role in facilitating (or impeding) this process. Our results add to the growing literature on children's agency that has shown that even young children understand the dynamics of power (Corsaro 1992), influence their own socialization (Orellana et al. 2001; Thorne 1993), and sometimes resist adults' best intentions (Chin 2000). Because children from all social classes draw on a common subculture that tends to value cartoons, video games, and *Harry Potter* more than summer schoolwork, art museums, or elite vacations, their preferences often lead them to resist their parents' attempts to "improve" their experiences in adult-sanctioned ways.

In addition, children possess their own set of resources, or "child capital." These resources include children's own human capital (e.g., their attention span and academic skills), social capital (e.g., children known from school, as well as adults and children met in neighborhoods), and cultural capital (which sometimes enables children to know more about "kid activities" than their parents do). Because these resources often accrue to children more through their charisma and motivation than through their social class, differences in child capital tend to reduce the magnitude of social-class differences in summer experiences and, if anything, force middle-class parents to work even harder to reproduce their class advantage in their children.

METHODS

Setting and Participants

Because previous research suggested that poor and working-class children have less academically enriching summers than do

middle-class children (see, e.g., Entwisle et al. 1997; Heyns 1978), the original purpose of this study was to investigate social-class differences in children's summer experiences. Consequently, we wanted to study a group of students who came from a wide range of social-class backgrounds. However, because we also suspected that students' school-year experiences and geographic locations might have equally important (and confounding) influences on children's summer experiences, we sought a diverse group of students who attended one neighborhood elementary school, where, ostensibly, most of the enrolled students would live in adjacent neighborhoods and have similar access to neighborhood services.³

We sampled students who attended Mid-City Elementary School (the names and identifying features of schools, organizations, children, and parents have been changed to preserve the participants' confidentiality), a large, urban, southern California elementary school that enrolls children from both an upper middle-class neighborhood (with expensive single-family homes, many trees, and well-groomed yards) and a lower- to working-class neighborhood (with apartments and commercial buildings). Children who lived in the middle-class neighborhood were more likely to be white, while those who lived in the working-class neighborhood were more likely to be African American or first- or second-generation immigrants, most of whom were Latino. Although these neighborhoods differed considerably, they touched geographically, with most children living within walking distance of each other. A few children in our sample lived in poorer neighborhoods outside Mid-City's attendance area, and several others lived in adjacent working-class neighborhoods.

We deliberately sampled 40 children from the fourth-grade class to represent a range of children with varying academic skills and ethnic and social-class backgrounds.⁴ We report on the summers of 32 of these children.⁵ In addition, we surveyed the entire fifth-grade class about their summer activities when they returned to school in the fall. We used these data to compare the family backgrounds and summer experiences of our ethnographic sample with that of the fifth-grade cohort.

Table 1 describes the gender, ethnicity, language use, parental education, eligibility for free or reduced-priced lunches, test scores in the spring of fourth grade, and participation in several typical summer activities for Mid-City's fifth graders and for our ethnographic subsample. Although our ethnographic sample was somewhat more advantaged than was the entire fifth grade, both samples were remarkably diverse. Our ethnographic sample was 28 percent white, 13 percent Asian American, 25 percent African American, and 34 percent Latino. Half were eligible for free or reduced-priced lunches, and half spoke another language in addition to English at home.

Table 2 describes the social class, ethnicity, language skills, family structure, and residential neighborhood of each child in the study, as well as the child's primary caregiver over the summer and the caregiver's work status. Although sociologists have long disagreed about how to measure social class, for the sake of consistency, we defined social class on the basis of indicators that were used in previous studies of social class and children's summer experiences, namely, parents' educational attainment, income, and occupation. We defined middle-class families as those in which at least one parent had a four-year college degree or was in a professional or managerial occupation. We defined working-class families as those that had incomes above the poverty threshold but in which neither parent had a four-year degree or was in a professional or managerial occupation. Poor families were those that reported incomes below the poverty threshold, regardless of their education or occupation. (In 2000, when our data were collected, the poverty threshold for a family of four, with two children, was \$17,463; see U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000.)

As Table 2 indicates, over half the children in our study were poor or working class, and Latino, African American, and Asian American children spanned our three social-class categories. However, no white children in our study were poor, and white children were overrepresented in the middle class.

Although choosing students from Mid-City School allowed us to sample a diverse group

Table 1. Demographics, Academic Skills, and Summer Activities of the Entire Fifth Grade and the Ethnographic Subsample

Demographics	Entire Fifth Grade (<i>N</i> = 90)	Ethnographic Subsample (<i>N</i> = 32)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male (%)	50	47
Female (%)	50	53
<i>Ethnicity</i>		
White (%)	19	28
African American (%)	27	25
Latino (%)	40	34
Asian American (%)	14	13
<i>Speak Additional Language at Home</i>		
No (%)	38	48
Yes (%)	62	52
<i>Mother's Education</i>		
Less than high school (%)	17	15
High school graduate (%)	26	11
Some college (%)	28	33
College graduate or more (%)	29	41
<i>Eligible for Free or Reduced-price Lunch?</i>		
No (%)	41	48
Yes (%)	59	52
<i>National Percentile Scores in the Spring of the Fourth Grade</i>		
Total reading		
Mean	44.42	50.33
<i>SD</i>	30.24	30.83
Total math		
Mean	46.29	56.83
<i>SD</i>	32.10	32.62
<i>Typical Summer Activities</i>		
Went on vacation (%)	78	83
Went to sleepaway camp (%)	29	28
Went to day camp (%)	34	41
TV time (hours per day)	4.43	4.67
Number of books read	3.97	3.93

Note: Statistics for the entire fifth grade are based on *Ns* that range from 65 to 90 because of nonresponses on individual survey items. The sample for the scores on the fourth-grade test differs somewhat from the fifth-grade sample because some of the students who were tested in the fourth grade did not return to the school for the fifth grade. The students reported their typical summer activities in the fall of the fifth grade. TV time and number of books read were reported in categories, which we recoded to their midpoints.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Students in the Ethnographic Sample

Pseudonym	Social Class	Race-Ethnicity ^a	Language	Neighborhood	Family Structure	Primary Caregivers During the Summer ^b	Caregivers' Work Schedules
Kiran	Poor	Asian American	Bilingual, ELL	Mid-City (WC)	Two parent	Mother	At home (not employed)
Manuel	Poor	Latino	Bilingual, ELL	Mid-City (WC)	Two parent	Mother	At home (not employed)
James	Poor	Latino	Bilingual, ELL	Mid-City (WC)	Two parent	Mother/father	Both working, different schedules ^c
Terah	Poor	African American	English only	Mid-City (WC)	Single mother	Grandmother	Working full time
Mikaali	Working class	African American	English only	Mid-City (WC)	Single mother	Mother	Working full time
Maria	Working class	African American	Bilingual ^d	Outside (Poor) ^e	Single mother	Mother	Working full time
Jaycee	Working class	Latina	Bilingual, ELL	Mid-City (WC)	Two parent	Mother	At home less (not employed)
Carlos	Working class	African American	English only	Mid-City (WC)	Two parent	Mother/father	Both working, different schedules
Janelle	Working class	Latino	English only	Mid-City (WC)	Dual custody	Mother/father	Both working full time
Janelle	Working class	African American	Bilingual	Outside (Poor)	Dual custody	Mother/father	Both working full time
Daveon	Working class	African American	English only	Mid-City (WC)	Two parent	Mother/father	Both working, different schedules
Theresa	Working class	African American	English only	Mid-City (WC)	Two parent	Mother	Working full time
Michelle	Working class	Latina	English only	Mid-City (WC)	Two parent	Grandmother	At home (not employed)
Jose	Working class	Asian American	Bilingual	Mid-City (WC)	Two parent	Mother	Working full time
Jose	Working class	Latino	Bilingual	Outside (Imm. SFH)	Two parent	Mother	Working full time
Brian	Working class	Latino	Bilingual	Mid-City (WC)	Two parent	Mother	Working full time
Stephanie	Working class	Latina	Bilingual, ELL	Outside (Imm. SFH)	Two parent	Mother	At home (not employed)
Simon	Working class	Latino	Bilingual, ELL	Mid-City (WC)	Two parent	Mother	At home (not employed)
Katie	Working class	White	English only	Mid-City (WC)	Two parent	Father/siblings	Working at home/working part time
Kelly	Middle class	White	English only	Outside (WC)	Single father	Father	Working full time
Zack	Middle class	White	English only	Mid-City (MC)	Dual custody	Mother/father	Both working full time
Abel	Middle class	Latino	Bilingual, ELL	Outside (Imm. SFH)	Two parent	Grandmother	At home (not employed)
Kendra	Middle class	African American	Bilingual	Mid-City (WC)	Dual custody	Mother	Working full time
Paolo	Middle class	Latino	Bilingual	Mid-City (WC)	Dual custody	Mother	Working full time
Tim	Middle class	White	English only	Mid-City (WC)	Single mother	Mother	Working full time
Jonathan	Middle class	White	English only	Mid-City (MC)	Dual custody	Mother	Working part time (flexible)
David	Middle class	White	English only	Mid-City (MC)	Two parent	Father	Working at home full time (flexible)

continued

Table 2. Continued

Pseudonym	Social Class	Race-Ethnicity ^a	Language	Neighborhood	Family Structure	Primary Caregivers During the Summer ^b	Caregivers' Work Schedules
Kevin	Middle class	Asian American	Bilingual	Mid-City (MC)	Dual custody	Mother/father	Both working full time (flexible)
Sean	Middle class	Asian American	Bilingual	Mid-City (MC)	Dual custody	Mother/father	Both working full time (flexible)
Matthew	Middle class	White	English only	Mid-City (MC)	Two parent	Mother	Working part time (flexible)
Trey	Middle class	African American	English only	Mid-City (MC)	Dual custody	Mother/father	Both working full time
Rachel	Middle class	White	English only	Mid-City (MC)	Single mother	Mother	Working full time
Justin	Middle class	White	English only	Mid-City (MC)	Two parent	Mother	At home (not employed)

Note: ELL = English language learner, WC = working class, MC = middle class, Imm. SFH = single-family home in a largely immigrant area.

^a Five of the children in our sample are biracial. To mask their identities, we listed them according to how they tended to identify themselves.

^b Primary caregivers during the summer were often different from those during the school year. Children who lived with one parent during the school year often spent more time with the other parent or split their time more evenly during the summer. When children split time almost equally, we list their family structure as dual custody and their primary caregiver as mother/father. When caregivers worked full time, most children went to day care (except Rachel who had a nanny). In these cases, we listed the adult who made the day care arrangements as the primary caregiver.

^c Some families balanced child care and two full-time jobs by working opposite shifts (e.g., the mother worked days while the father worked nights).

^d Bilingual students spoke a language in addition to English but were fluent enough in English not to be categorized as ELL at school.

^e Students who lived outside Mid-City School's catchment area lived in several different neighborhoods. Students we denote as "Outside (Poor)" lived in high poverty neighborhoods. Students we denote as "Outside (Imm. SFH)" lived in single-family homes in largely immigrant areas.

of children with similar school-year experiences and similar proximity to neighborhood services, the unique diversity of the school suggests that the students who attend this school may not represent "typical" middle-class, working-class, and poor children. We elaborate on the implications of this sampling strategy in the Discussion section.

Data Collection

We conducted a qualitative study because we wanted to gather inductive data on children's summer experiences. Our goal was to observe "the world people actually act in every day" (H. Becker 1996:61). However, we found it difficult to conduct a traditional ethnography, in which fieldworkers are immersed in a geographically defined field, because students who had been part of a field (Mid-City School) scattered to various locations over the summer. Consequently, the fieldworkers had to divide their time among these locations, gathering less data on each child than they would have had they observed the children at school.

Consistent with ethnographic traditions, the fieldworkers tried to immerse themselves in the children's lives as much as possible. We observed many of the children more than twice and about a third of them more than five times.⁶ The length of the observations ranged from 2 to 12 hours, with a modal observation length of about 4 hours. Our two primary observations occurred at least a month apart. Because we wanted to observe a range of activities, we asked the children, when we first contacted them, what they typically did over the summer. We then arranged for at least one observation to take place in each child's home and at least one to take place during a typical "activity" for that child, which included day camps, summer schools, athletic competitions, play dates with friends, and family outings. When we made home visits, we often spent time playing and watching television with the children and sometimes stayed for lunch or dinner with the children's families. When we attended schools and camps, we attended for an entire day's session to get a sense of the full routine of the program. Because we wanted to observe the

children in the settings in which they spent the most time over the summer, the types of activities we observed varied greatly across the children.

When we observed the children, we asked them and their families to "do what you normally do," and we participated whenever we could to get a full sense of the activities and to keep up with the children.⁷ In our observations, we noted details about the children's environments, as well as their activities and behaviors. We paid keen attention to the extent of the children's engagement in their activities, the intensity of their interactions with other children, and the frequency and intensity of their interactions with adults. We also noted how much the children challenged themselves in activities (from reading to computer games) and any educational content in their games and activities (see Chin and Phillips 2003 for an analysis of differences in the intensity, social engagement, and supervision of children's activities).

Near the end of the summer, we conducted formal, audiotaped, and transcribed interviews with each child in the ethnographic sample. Through these open-ended, in-depth interviews, we tried to understand how families constructed and experienced summer from their perspectives (H. Becker 1996; Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). We first asked the children to review their summer activities (i.e., what they did, what they liked best, what they liked least) and then followed up with probes asking for detailed descriptions of activities that they had mentioned but that we had not observed (most often, we asked for details about vacations and sleep-away camps). The interviews lasted about an hour, and because the fieldworkers had created relationships with the children, most children talked easily. We also conducted interviews with the children's primary caregivers (some formally audiotaped and transcribed, others recorded in fieldnotes) concerning their summer arrangements for their children.⁸

Data Analysis

After we concluded the fieldwork, interviews, and postsummer surveys, we analyzed the

survey data, and two coders used Atlas.ti to organize and code the qualitative data. To ensure that we analyzed activities that previous researchers had theorized to be important aspects of summer vacation, as well as those that seemed unique to our data set or had particular "member's meanings" (Emerson 1983) to the participants, we used two simultaneous coding strategies. We coded according to a preestablished, activity-based coding schema that we developed using previous researchers' hypotheses about specific "gaps" in children's summer activities (especially those in Heyns 1978 and Entwisle et al. 1997), and we "open coded" (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995), which allowed us to add inductively generated codes that emerged from our data.⁹

When we examined differences in the codes across children's social-class and ethnic backgrounds, the most striking patterns we uncovered related less to the academic content of children's activities (which we were initially interested in) and more to the various, complex ways in which children from different social-class backgrounds came to be involved in different summer activities. To pursue this topic, we used a constant-comparison method (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to examine the activities that the children participated in, how they came to participate in these activities, the obstacles they encountered when they tried to engage in activities, and how all these processes were related to the children's social-class backgrounds. When we uncovered class-related patterns, we checked and rechecked them against the experiences of similar and different children to ensure that we were highlighting consistent trends in the data, rather than interesting idiosyncrasies.

CONSTRUCTING A SUMMER

The middle-class children in our study tended to have varied and often highly organized summer experiences. For example, David, whose father did public relations work—often from his home office—went to private summer school in the mornings and then to sports camp in the afternoons. He attended baseball camp for two weeks, vacationed in

Hawaii for a week, and then went to horse-back riding camp for two weeks. Rachel also had a varied summer even though she did not attend camp. Before she met the fieldworker, her mother (a physician who frequently gave Rachel "projects" to work on) asked Rachel to prepare a list of her summer activities. Rachel showed her fieldworker the list, which read:

Top 10 Things I Did This Summer: (1) I went to Italy; (2) I read a lot; (3) I went bike riding and got much better at it; (4) I had play dates; (5) There was a book club meeting at my house; (6) I got a new piano teacher, and my piano playing really got better; (7) I went online more often and improved my typing; (8) I made candy dots and gingerbread cookies; (9) I was involved in a C.U. [California University] research project; (10) I got my school supplies early, and I am looking forward to getting back to school.

Rachel's summer included a little bit of everything: travel, music lessons, academic practice, cooking, and bike riding.

Matthew and his brother also had a varied, relatively busy, summer. On a "free day," Matthew's family spent a day at the beach with friends. Janice, their mother who worked part time as a consultant, recapped their summer activities and plans to the other mothers this way:

We had sleep-away camp for two weeks—that was so great [to have the boys away]! Then Vacation Bible School for a week. Then I think we had a free week. This week they had Boy Scout Camp and swimming lessons—next week just swimming lessons. Then, after their grandparents come, they have Science Adventure Camp for a week. Then we all go to Hawaii for two weeks!

None of the working-class or poor children in our study had summers that were this full of organized and varied activities. The middle-class parents constructed their children's summers by combining vacations, day camps, lessons and other educational enrichment, and specified "free time." Constructing these summers required a combination of financial resources, parental time, parental knowledge, and a relatively safe environment (for activities like bike riding). The working-

class and poor parents tended to have fewer of each of these types of resources. Consequently, while the working-class and poor families often managed to assemble a few days or even several weeks of summer activities that resembled those of the middle-class families, none of the working-class or poor children in our sample experienced entire summers as active or varied as the middle-class children's.

Yet we found little evidence that these social-class differences in summer experiences stemmed from social-class differences in parents' preferences. Whether we infer parents' preferences for "concerted cultivation" (Lareau 2000, 2002, 2003) from their expressed values or from their behavior, our data suggest that the working-class and poor families were as focused as were the middle-class families on developing their children's skills and talents.¹⁰

Vacation

The availability of financial resources typically differentiated the middle-class children's vacations from those of the working-class and poor children. And although the middle-class children tended to go on more expensive vacations than did the working-class and poor children, parents from all social classes used vacations to expose their children to novel, occasionally educational, experiences. Rachel's trip to Italy provides an example of how the middle-class parents used their financial capital to impart human capital and elite cultural capital to their children. Not only could Rachel's mother afford to take time off from work and pay for travel expenses, but she invested considerable time and effort in making the trip both fun and educational for her daughter. Rachel explained that she learned about art, religion, architecture, and history as she shared her scrapbook with her fieldworker:

Rachel's scrapbook shows a picture of the coliseum. Rachel writes: "Rome-Roma. Today I went to the coliseum. That's where people and lions fought against each other. There were fake gladiators hanging around the ruins. Then we walked to the forum where we saw the Arch of Titus built by Jewish slaves. We

went to lunch afterward. Then we saw the brand-new Vatican Museum and Sistine Chapel. The paintings and carvings were so unbelievable. Then I saw the biggest church in the world. Then we went to the temple (without the tour). It was interesting. We went to dinner with a really nice lady from Sydney named Daniella. I bought a necklace. I stayed at the Summit. I give it a [rating of] 4 (1-5). I had a great first day."

Several of the other middle-class children in our sample went on less-elite vacations to which their parents added an educational component. When Matthew's family went to Hawaii, for example, they spent a lot of time snorkeling and looking for sea turtles, but his mother also insisted that they spend a day at Volcano National Park, taking the tour and learning about how the Hawaiian Islands formed.

Some of the working-class families also took vacations that included an educational component. Jaycee's family attended a family reunion in Michigan over the summer. Jaycee's father, a hospital custodian, and her mother, a part-time restaurant worker, support five children and intended to bring all five to the reunion. Thus, flying was out of the question. So, the family rented a van and drove cross-country. To make the most of the trip, they also stopped to see relatives in Tennessee and visited a number of historical sites along the way. Judging from the way that Jaycee described her experiences, her trip rivaled Rachel's, at least in terms of its significance to a 10 year old.

When I was in Tennessee, I saw the place where Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated—and it's EXACTLY the same! They haven't changed anything, the pillow—even the TV is on and they don't turn it off! And I said, "What if the battery goes out?" and they were like, "That does NOT happen." And we went to Elvis [sic] house . . . and our tour guide was this guy who was 82 years old and he KNEW Elvis. They rode his horses together."

Although the children in our sample wrote "black history" reports in school every year, Jaycee's visit to the Motel Lorraine in Memphis was her first up-close experience with this part of her cultural history.

Of course, not all families of limited means

could take their children on long road trips. But many parents did what they could. Like Rachel, Simon shared with us his photo album from his summer trip to the Grand Canyon. The Arizona trip fit within Simon's family's budget and time constraints, as this fieldnote excerpt indicates:

I explained to Simon's dad [who was struggling to start his own gardening business] that I was trying to find out what the kids were doing over the summer. He shook his head and sighed, "We have not been able to do that much—you know, with the business, I'm trying to get it started. And I have a regular job. I wait tables at Angelino's [a local restaurant]. There is not a lot of time . . . but you know, we did go to the Grand Canyon—and I want to go back—me and him [Simon]—and maybe Gabriella [Simon's older sister] . . . but we couldn't go down [hike down into the canyon] you know, with the baby." He said that if they could go back, he hoped they could hike down and camp at the bottom.

Although Simon's father was unable to take off a week or more for an extensive family vacation, he had a strong sense that they should do *something* and regretted that he could not do more.

The vast majority of the working-class and poor parents in our study were like Jaycee's and Simon's—they tried to take trips that would expand their children's horizons. Tammy's mother was an exception, however. She took Tammy and her cousins to Las Vegas. But, when they got there, Tammy's mother went to the casinos to gamble and left the girls in the room to watch television—just as they had done at home all summer long.

Camp

Differences in the children's camp experiences (and whether the children attended camp at all) stemmed from differences in both financial resources and parents' flexibility with their time. In general, the middle-class families in our study reported choosing the camps that they thought fit best with their children's needs and interests. The less-advantaged families, in contrast, spent more time researching prices, using social connections to obtain discounts, and driving to less-

convenient locations to find affordable activities for their children.

Brothers Sean and Kevin, whose mother was a fairly successful artist, attended tennis and basketball camps at the local university. The purpose of these camps was to improve the participants' skills in a specific sport. The basketball camp's pamphlet read:

C.U. Basketball Camp teaches you how to be a well-rounded, team-oriented basketball player. The sessions offer intense, specialized basketball instruction with an emphasis on the fundamentals of basketball including dribbling, passing, shooting, and rebounding. Our staff features "California University" coaches and experienced high school and college coaches. Fundamental instruction, individual, and team competition will be part of the camp's activities. Lectures on NCAA recruiting and academic requirements will be offered.

The boys' parents paid almost \$300 a piece for them to attend the sports camps (which ran from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.) for a week, but their mother thought that the money (and the time she spent picking them up every afternoon) was well spent, as the following fieldnote excerpt shows:

Sean and Kevin's mother said that they always go to summer camp, but that the "C.U. thing was a brand-new thing—it was like a tryout to see if they like it or not." Last year they went to SUPERSports Camp. I asked about what she liked or disliked about the C.U. camps, and she said she liked it because the boys actually learned basketball or tennis, and it wasn't mostly just the fooling around like at SUPERSport Camp, like shooting water guns. She said they learned a lot of skills.

And the children seemed to agree, as their fieldworker wrote in her fieldnotes:

Kevin tells me that they'd practice dribbling drills where you'd look at the basket and dribble the ball, a shooting drill where you'd shoot from three spots, and another dribbling drill where you'd dribble the ball around your back and pass it to your other arm. He said he really improved in dribbling.

In contrast, some working-class and poor parents felt that they simply could not afford camp. For example, when we visited Kiran

over the summer, she was bored because her neighbor (whom she usually played with) was away at camp. Kiran, whose family reported making less than \$10,000 a year, shook her head sadly, "I was going to go to camp, but it cost too much." Kiran spent most of her summer at home with her mother and younger brother.

Other working-class and poor parents shopped around for affordable camps, sometimes using their social capital to obtain discounts. Lavinia, Terah's mother, wanted her daughter to build on her interest in music. She learned about a weeklong music camp through her church and then began asking about possible scholarships. Although the camp typically cost \$175, their church subsidized most of the cost, so that Terah's mother, a part-time receptionist who was taking computer classes and searching for a full-time clerical position, paid only \$25. And, like the sports camp that Sean and Kevin attended, Terah's music camp was not only fun but skill focused, as this fieldnote excerpt indicates:

Terah tells me that twice a day she would have guitar lessons, for about an hour each lesson. They worked on songs that they would be playing in the "final concert." She also worked on reading guitar music, which she found easy because the notes were written out on top of the words to make it easier. She said that it was fun for her because she was "kind of ahead in it," along with only two other people. They were taught in a group, with individual help if one of the students wasn't following well or someone's guitar needed tuning. They learned "Peace on the River" and "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," and in junior chorus they sang, "He Is the Lord" and "I Believe."

Kendra's mother, like Terah's, also wanted to provide a stimulating summer experience for her daughter. Kendra, who came from a lower middle-class, divorced family, usually spent summers with her father. But because her father worked during the day, she complained that she was bored. The fieldworker noted the following telephone conversation in her fieldnotes:

I asked Kendra's mom how she decided on Kendra's camp. She said that she was tired of Kendra going to her dad's "and hanging out

with her 75-year-old grandma and her 98-year-old great-grandma" as she had in past summers. She explained, "I called her dad and I said, 'What are you doing for summer? Is she just staying home with your mom?' and he was like, 'Well, I have to be at work at 5:30 in the morning.' And I was like, 'Uh-uh—she's going to camp—you better keep up on your child support!'"

Although Kendra's mother could not afford her first-choice camp, she managed to get a discount at a camp across town (when the fieldworker drove to it, it took her 40 minutes each way), but she had a hard time getting out of work in time to pick Kendra up, as this fieldnote excerpt shows:

Kendra's mom said that her day was hectic, and she couldn't get out of work. She exclaimed, "I didn't get out of work until 5:20, and I was like 'I have to go get Kendra!' and they were like, 'Can't you just stay?' and I was like, 'I have to go get Kendra, or they'll just call the cops on her or something!'" I asked why she chose a camp so far away, asking, "Do you work up there?" She said no, but that the new receptionist that they have at work used to work there, so she had a lot of connections. Kendra's mother got a good deal through this woman, "It's usually like \$105 a week—and you know, I can't afford that . . . so Kendra's going for a lot cheaper than that!" I said that I had just been to the camp at Hillside [which is at the local park], and she said, "Oh, I wanted to put Kendra there . . . but that's expensive!" I asked how much, and she said that when she checked into it, it was something like \$135–\$150 a week, "and I just can't do that."

Kendra's mother's summer would have been easier if Kendra had just spent her weekdays at her father's house supervised by her grandmother and great-grandmother, but Kendra's mother went out of her way so that her daughter would not be bored. And according to Kendra's accounts, her mother succeeded, as this fieldnote excerpt indicates:

I asked Kendra what they did at the camp, and she said, "We go on field trips, like, every day." I replied, "Really? That seems impossible," and she said, "Well, Mondays and Fridays are park days, and we go to Washington Park and play . . . and on Tuesdays we go to Westvale Beach, and

Wednesdays are Adventure Days . . . that's when we wear our camp T-shirts and we go somewhere." I asked her where she had been and she said, "Like the Beachside Pier, or the IMAX theater [to see Wild California], or the zoo, or Northpark Water Park, or the South Beach Aquarium."

Like Kendra's mother, parents from all social classes found that creating a stimulating summer for their children required time as well as money. For example, Janice, Matthew's mother, spent the first week of vacation driving the "pickup" end of the car pool that took her children across town to Vacation Bible School. When they began Boy Scout Day Camp (at the north end of town), she drove the children from there to their evening swimming lessons at the community college (on the south side of town) every day.

Moreover, although "day" camps sometimes cost hundreds of dollars a week, many did not provide children with a full day of care. When the middle-class parents worked, they could substitute money for time—buying "extended care" hours at the camp or hiring a nanny to ferry children from one activity to the next. The working-class parents were more likely to rely on extended family members and extra effort to arrange "full-time" care for their children. Carlos's working-class parents, who were divorced and could afford only two weeks at a pricey sports day camp, arranged a fairly elaborate system for getting him to and from his activities, which, for the rest of the summer, included a free day camp and football practice. Because the free program did not begin until 10 a.m., they devised a system in which Carlos stayed with relatives in the morning, and then his mother took her lunch break early to pick him up and bring him to the free program. His father then picked him up after work and brought him to football practice and then to his mother's house.

Other parents simply could not manage the timing. Janelle's mother, a working-class single parent, explained in an interview how she found it impossible to find an affordable camp that satisfied her time requirements and preferences:

I ask Janelle's mom what she likes about summer vacation and she says, "I don't." I ask what she doesn't like, and she says, "What I don't like is depending on what[ever] avenues you have for your child. They have a lot of different programs, like Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCAs that the kids can go to while school is out, but the times don't work around the times that you work. So you have to bring 'em and pick 'em up at 3 o'clock. If you're a single parent, and you work from 8 to 5, 9 to 6, it's not—it doesn't work like that. It's just not convenient. And then, you know, depending on where they go, it's anywhere from \$90 to \$150 a week. And it's still from like 9 to 3. So after the kids get back at 3 o'clock, what do you do? There's not a lot of things we can do, as far as when school's out. So, I just don't like the way they have it set up as far as the YMCAs and the parks and all that. The times are not convenient for when you actually need the kids there, especially when you don't have anybody to pick your kid up. Coastal [Community College], they had summer school, which was from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. That was the only good program that I could find that I would have wanted Janelle to go to. And it was academics; it wasn't all Coaster America [a local amusement park]. They had academics. But their thing was—it was I think something like \$135 a week—and you still had to pay for lunch."

Although Janelle's mother put in the time to investigate day camps for her child, in the end, she chose not to enroll Janelle in camp. Janelle spent most of her summer watching television with cousins at her father's home.

Lessons and Activities

In addition to vacations and camp, the middle-class parents, in particular, filled their children's summers with organized lessons and other enrichment activities. Although money was a barrier that prevented some working-class and poor children from receiving the lessons they wanted in art and music, these children's parents used strategies similar to those they used to gain access to camps: They tried to use social capital to arrange discounted or free lessons for their children.

Just as Rachel had the most elite vacation of the children in our sample, she also received the most elite music lessons, as this fieldnote excerpt indicates:

Rachel's mom tells me that Rachel has been taking "really rigorous piano lessons." She says that the piano teacher is \$50 an hour and is a perfectionist who explains music thoroughly, even what the Italian words mean. She says other piano teachers don't tell them "the difference between staccato and legato." She says that Rachel has a "very world-class piano teacher," and she feels really privileged to have gotten her. She wanted Rachel to invest her efforts this summer in becoming a better piano player, and [says] that Rachel is doing really well.

Unlike Rachel's mother, Terah's mother, Lavinia, could not afford to buy her daughter a piano or pay for the high-quality lessons that Rachel received. But Lavinia was determined to find a way for her child to practice the piano over the summer. She bought her an electronic keyboard on a layaway program at the local electronics store, as this interview excerpt describes:

Lavinia tells me that she has been paying off a keyboard for Terah at Circuit City, and she should have it by the 15th or 16th. She says, "I got one that cost a little more, 'cuz I figured she's getting pretty deep. You know, the little bitty Christmas one, you know, that they get the kids? I think she should have a little more than that. So I got her a lot of stuff on it. Well, I told the man [at Circuit City], I said, 'She's into music—she says she's gonna be writing songs.' [She chuckles.] Hey, who knows? Don't knock it."

Lavinia also tried to arrange for Terah to continue her guitar lessons after she returned from music camp. Her pastor at church, a professional guitarist, not only gave Terah her own guitar (from his personal collection), but offered to give her lessons on Tuesdays, as long as her mother could get her to the church. Because Lavinia worked, she asked a friend who worked at home to give Terah a ride (offering to have Terah help him with some of his work in exchange).

Like Lavinia, other poor and working-class parents mobilized friends and acquaintances (and limited funds) to help their children develop their talents. For example, Manuel, whose five-person family earned less than \$18,000 a year, had an acoustic guitar that he played constantly over the summer. His

father, who also played the guitar, often brought home cassette tapes for Manuel to listen to and learn to play by ear. In addition, his parents arranged for a friend at their church to give Manuel lessons on an electric guitar that Manuel borrowed from another church member.

Sometimes the fieldworkers themselves became social capital. When we tried to arrange a visit with Kiran, her mother asked us to come on a specific day at a specific time. When the fieldworker arrived, Kiran's mother asked if the fieldworker would take the family (Kiran, her younger brother, and her mother) to the library where they were having a free art lesson. Their family had only one car, which Kiran's father drove to work every day. As the fieldworker wrote in her fieldnotes from that day:

When I arrived, Kiran said, "They have this thing at the Mid-City Library, and you can go there and they have cool things, and if you sign up you get this bag and then you can get this pencil." Her mom went to get a colorful plastic bag that was sitting on the TV stand—it said County Library on it. She pulled out a schedule with a number of events, including storytelling times and lectures about things like bugs. She pointed to a heading with today's date where it said that a teacher was coming in to teach them how to draw Pokemon figures. Kiran asked, "Will you take us?"

As with vacations and camps, many working-class parents mobilized enough resources to get their children access to art and music lessons—although none of these lessons came from "world-class" teachers, such as the one that Rachel's mother could afford.

Home Environment

As Kiran's plea suggests, some working-class and poor children spend much of their summer in circumscribed environments, which limits their day-to-day stimulation (see also Chin and Phillips 2003). Although summer vacation conjures up images of vacation and camp, children from all social classes spend at least some time over the summer hunting for ways to relieve their boredom. Finding stimulating solutions to boredom is typically easier

for children who can spend time playing outside in their neighborhoods, who have ample books and functioning computers at home, and whose parents actively supervise and facilitate their activities at home.

As scholars have pointed out (see, e.g., Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, and Aber 1997), one of the most crucial things that money buys is a home in a safe neighborhood. The children in our study who lived in safe neighborhoods spent more time entertaining themselves outside than did the children who lived in less safe neighborhoods. Jonathan and Zack spent much of their free time riding their new scooters around the neighborhood, practicing tricks, and improving their skills, and Justin and Rachel rode their bikes around the neighborhood. Bike riding even made the "Top 3" in Rachel's list of the "Top 10 Things I Did This Summer." In contrast, four of the children in our study had restrictive boundaries. While Abel and his brother at least got to play in the backyard, and Manuel and his sister were allowed to sit on the stoop outside their apartment, Mikaili and her sister were not allowed to leave their apartment at all while their mother was at work.¹¹

Even when they were cooped up at home, the middle-class children in our sample tended to have more access to books and (working) computers than did the working-class and poor children. Justin's fieldworker described the reading material she noticed as he gave her a tour of his house:

Right next to the stairs is Justin's parents' room. Outside their door are two shelves of paperback novels. Justin points out books by Orson Scott Card, whom he says he's met and gotten all his books signed by. . . . Also in the hallway are built-in shelves that run about five feet along one wall. There are about five shelves filled with hardback novels. Then there's Justin's room, which is white with red and blue paint along the edges and rails on the wall. . . . At the foot of his bed is a small rolling cart with more paperback novels. There's a phone on the wall next to Justin's bed. On the floor by Justin's bed are magazines in a set of stands. He tells me he reads, "Boy's Life, Cricket, which is a Mormon kids' magazine, [and] Disney Adventure sometimes." Shelves take up about two thirds of another wall, and they are also filled mainly

with books. I ask him if he's read most of the books, and he says mostly and starts pointing out some of them. He says that he's going to start *The Red Badge of Courage* because he has to read it for class. He says he likes *The Time Machine* [and] has read *Huckleberry Finn* twice. . . . There are three *Harry Potter* books, the fourth one he misplaced, although he tells me he finished it about two months ago.

In contrast, the poorer children had many fewer books. For example, when asked if she was reading anything over the summer, Jaycee excitedly picked up a book of "spells" (which seemed, to her fieldworker, to resemble aromatherapy recipes) that she had at her house. A friend of hers had left it, and Jaycee had been flipping through it all summer. (In fact, Jaycee showed it to the fieldworker again a month later.) The fieldworker saw no other books in the apartment.

Computers were another conspicuous item in nearly all the middle-class homes. In fact, most of the middle-class children in our study had their own computers in their bedrooms, which they used for games, e-mail, the Internet, and instant messaging. Although a little over half the poor and working-class children also had home computers, many of their computers were not as up-to-date as those belonging to the middle-class children (none of whom complained that their computers did not work). James, for example, complained about the speed of his computer (although he excitedly explained, "My dad's going to get me a new one with Internet!"), and his fieldworker noticed that his current computer was too old to run *Microsoft Windows*. Even worse, Tammy lamented that her niece had put a crayon in her computer and had broken it several months earlier, although it still occupied a prominent place in the living room.

Despite these social-class differences, many of the poorer families in our study went out of their way to get educational materials for their children over the summer. For example, Kiran's mother made an appointment with Kiran's fourth-grade teacher before the school year ended. She told the teacher that she wanted Kiran to do academic work over the summer but did not know where to get materials and could not

afford much. In response, Kiran's teacher used \$40 of her own money to buy workbooks at the teachers' supply store and sent them home with Kiran when school ended. Kiran's mother also haunted garage sales over the summer to get books for Kiran and her brother. Similarly, at the beginning of the summer, Mikaili's mother went to Office Depot and came home with new software for her daughters, including a CD-ROM encyclopedia and a CD-ROM about African American history. Simon's father proudly reported that he had taken Simon to the bookstore and asked him to pick out a book to read over the summer. And although Brian came across most of his summer reading by luck, when he stumbled across a box of books that the library was throwing away and he decided to bring them home, he and his mother went to several different bookstores looking for the fourth *Harry Potter* after he finished the third book in the series.

Even though many of the working-class and poor parents in our study explicitly stocked their homes with educational materials for their children's summer use, the middle-class parents in the sample generally seemed more knowledgeable about how to make academic activities more appealing to their children and had social networks with high levels of human capital that complemented and facilitated their efforts. For example, Rachel's mother organized a book club, composed of six girls (around Rachel's age) and their mothers. One of their books for the summer was *Letters from Rifka*. Rachel's fieldworker attended the book-club meeting at which the girls and their mothers got together at Rachel's house to discuss the book. Rachel's mother had even assigned "homework" to bring to this meeting. As the fieldworker reported in her fieldnotes from the evening:

Around 7:50 p.m., Rachel's mom reads a passage from *Letters from Rifka* before initiating the last part of the meeting, which was for each girl to share a story about immigration in her family. She asks, "Did everyone come with a story about ancestors who immigrated?" The storytelling starts with Madison, who talks about her great-grandparents' immigration from Ireland. Madison's mom helps her with

the specific details when she seems to have forgotten, like the name of the island where her great-grandparents came from. She says they came on a steamboat and went to San Francisco and ran a cigar shop and sold liquor "illegally" during prohibition. Jill starts to tell her story, but her mom ends up taking over. Each of the girls tells a story about immigration, with everyone else listening and asking questions.

Although many parents encouraged their children to read over the summer, this "book club" setting, replete with mother-daughter socializing and sharing, made practicing reading comprehension fun for Rachel (she listed it among her "Top 10" summer activities). Similarly, Justin's mother tried to expand on Justin's interest in volcanoes by enlisting the help of a knowledgeable family friend, as his mother mentioned in this interview excerpt:

He started a project on volcanoes. Stuff on that—how volcanoes work. He has this young woman who baby-sits him who knows all about volcanoes. That's her big thing. So when she comes over, they'll talk about it and write things down." I ask if this was her [mom's] idea. She said, "I just asked him if he wanted something to do during the summer to find out about something, and so he chose volcanoes. . . . He has a couple of books and a workbook on it.

Even in the realms of simple pleasure reading and academic practice, the middle-class parents seemed to have more knowledge about their children's capabilities and the supervision they needed. For example, Matthew's mother reported that she and Matthew were reading the latest *Harry Potter* book together every night—she said that it helped Matthew and his brother understand the rather dense plot. Many lower-class parents were not as well informed. We observed the following conversation between Theresa and her mother (who had not graduated from high school but had a general equivalency diploma):

Theresa's mother complained that Theresa did not read enough—although she tried to encourage her to read. Theresa bent her head down shyly, "I do read!" and her mom said, "You do not! We spent \$45 on those *Harry*

Potter books because you promised to read them, and you haven't read them at all!"

Theresa's mother did not know enough about her daughter's reading level and the difficulty of the *Harry Potter* books to realize that Theresa's reading skills were not strong enough for Theresa to understand the books. Consequently, although Theresa's mother invested precious dollars to encourage her daughter to read over the summer, she ended up resenting the purchase and assuming that Theresa was simply not motivated to read.

Similarly, after James's fourth-grade teacher noted on his report card that he had not mastered his times tables, James's parents encouraged him to work on them over the summer. But they did not insist on monitoring his practice, nor did they make sure that he had the materials he needed, as this field-note excerpt illustrates:

I noticed that James had multiplication flash cards on his desk. He said, "I'm worried about fifth grade—what if I don't know my times tables and I don't pass?" He said that he had been working on them every day. And then I asked him whether he did them on his own or whether his parents helped him: "No, I do it by myself. . . . It makes me too nervous when they do it—I just go like [he mimed holding them up to himself and then closing his eyes to memorize them]." I asked him if he just did them or if his parents told him to: "They tell me to. Every day they say, 'Did you do your times tables?'" I noticed, though, that he only had some of the 8s, 9s, and 4s.

James's parents wanted him to improve his math skills and cared enough to ask him frequently about his practice. But they did not realize that with the few flash cards he had, he was unlikely to master all his multiplication tables.

THE WILD CARDS: KIDS

James's situation raises an obvious question: How could James have acquired a full set of multiplication flash cards to help him improve his math skills over the summer? The most obvious answer to this question is that his parents needed the human capital to notice,

as the fieldworker did, that his set was missing most of the multiplication facts. Given that his parents encouraged his daily practice, his parents probably would have either made or bought him a complete set had they known that his set was inadequate. Another answer to the question of how James could have gotten a more complete set of flash cards—an answer emphasized less frequently in the literature on social reproduction—is that *James* could have complained to his parents and persuaded them to make or buy him a better set.

The data in our study suggest that this "child capital," which can be thought of as resources that inhere in children themselves, from their talents to their temperaments, sometimes compensates for the resources that parents themselves lack. With child capital, children can construct their own summers to some extent—taking the initiative, organizing their own activities, mobilizing their social networks, and using their imaginations to improve less-than-ideal summer circumstances. In other instances, when children lack child capital or explicitly resist adult-encouraged activities, they impede their parents' best attempts to make their children's summers more challenging or academically productive.

Child Capital

Left to their own devices, many of the children in our sample came up with numerous ways to make their summers more varied and interesting. Terah, who used her motivation to pursue activities and social engagements on her own, is a quintessential example, as this interview excerpt reveals:

I asked Terah to describe her summer, and she said, "It was fun. It was funner than I expected 'cuz all the summers before this, like, they were boring because I didn't know, like, that Mid-City Park has a pool that you can go in for free during the summer. I thought it costed [sic] money or something. Well, it costs money for adults, but it's only \$1.25. I didn't know that. And I know more, like, friends' phone numbers and addresses or something, so I connected with them this summer."

Terah relied extensively on her own social capital. Through school, Terah had become

one of Sean and Kevin's closest friends. She reported that they taught her all the songs they learned on the piano (their father, a musician, made sure that they had frequent, high-quality lessons). Sean and Kevin also took Terah with them to LEARN!, a computer-based enrichment center. Terah also went to concerts, a pottery studio, and the park with adults she had befriended (college students who lived in her apartment complex).

Even without extensive networks, many children conjured up a range of activities to entertain themselves. Abel and his brother, who could not leave their house and yard during the day, spent afternoons trying out different designs for paper airplanes and building Lego structures, rather than watching television. Abel also spent hours with a "cross-section" *Star Wars* book (the book showed large, extremely detailed, cross-sectional illustrations of the space craft from the movies), copying the pictures and trying to improve his drawing skills. Likewise, Katie and her friend spent their days pretending that their scooters were horses and making the 100 feet of sidewalk they were allowed to ride along into an imaginary kingdom. However, given the option to choose their own activities, not all children worked to expand their (sometimes limited) summer worlds. For instance, Tammy was allowed to go farther than either Katie or Abel, but used her freedom only to walk to the nearby convenience store to buy candy to eat while she watched television.

Child Resistance

Just as children can make parents' lives easier by entertaining themselves, children can also refuse to go along with their parents' plans for them. Although many of the parents in our study bought educational materials for their children to use over the summer, many of the children refused to use them, as the fieldworker noted during a visit to Simon's house:

We go into Simon's room, and he shows me the book *Earth Explored*, which his dad got him at the mall. He says that his dad makes him read for 10 minutes each day. While we are paging through it, he looks up and smiles.

On the dresser stands a radio that Simon says he listens to "Radio Disney" on. He says, "My dad is always trying to make me study—and I fake it—I just go in here and look at the pictures and hear the radio."

Likewise, when Justin's middle-class mother did not lean on him, Justin neglected to do the workbooks that she had gotten for him. At the beginning of the summer, she reported checking on him regularly, as this fieldnote excerpt shows:

[Justin's mom] says she bought him workbooks, one for going into fifth grade and one for sixth grade. She says he started in the middle of one and went as far as he could into Grade 6. She says he does that off and on. When she's really on top of things, he'll do it every day. If she doesn't remind him to do it, he won't do it. This summer he's done it probably 2 to 3 days a week, about 1–1½ hours each time, and "he seems to like it up until the point where it starts to get hard."

However, by the end of summer, she said, "Well, the workbooks. . . Oh, he started—he hasn't finished this 'cuz we've been so inconsistent."

Even when activities were not entirely academic, many children tended to choose fun activities over educational ones. For example, Mikaili and her sister spent hours playing with their Barbie computer game (in which they dressed Barbie in various outfits and choreographed dances for her), yet their African American history CD-ROM sat, still wrapped in plastic, on the floor next to their computer. Some children even refused to challenge themselves in nonacademic realms. For example, Zack's newly divorced (and thus, financially struggling) middle-class mother was willing to spend more money and exert more effort (driving, arranging car pools, and taking time off from work) to take him to the C.U. sports camp that Sean and Kevin attended. But Zack insisted that he preferred the SUPERSports camp (a general, more day care-focused sports camp) and refused to go to a more challenging, skill-focused camp.

Resources to Counter Resistance

Although motivated and unmotivated children came from all social classes, the work-

ing-class parents in our study were more likely to lack the resources (both financial and nonfinancial) to detect and overcome their children's resistance. For instance, both David's father and Simon's father wanted their sons to read more over the summer. Simon's father took him to the bookstore and insisted that he set aside 10 minutes a day to read, explaining to his son's fieldworker, "Simon is a good kid—the only thing is I worry that he spends too much time watching TV, you know. But," he shrugged, "I can't control what they do when I'm not here during the day." Similarly, David's father tried to lure David into reading, as he explained in an interview:

I thought to try to get him interested in reading, at least something that would be of interest to him, you know, he likes to play his Nintendo. So I thought, OK, one thing he'd like to do would be to read the instructions so that he could become better. . . . I had to beat him over the head in order to just read those directions. The same with his Pokemon—to get him to read the directions for Pokemon. He does not like reading.

Like Simon's father, David's father failed in his quest to get his son to read. But whereas Simon's father did not realize that his son was not reading (or simply may not have acknowledged that he knew because he felt like he had no other options), David's parents enrolled him in a private summer reading program because they knew that their efforts at home would not be sufficient.

Not only was David's summer school expensive, but David's father had to pick his child up at 3:00 p.m., something he could do because he worked from home. David's father also took him on outings to try to overcome his lack of interest in expanding his horizons. He described his efforts in an interview:

The only thing that he [David] does, that he voluntarily does, is play [gestures to the video games] or play with his army men. And those are the only kinds of things that come from within him—and the Pokemon stuff. But, like, he would never wake up in the morning and say, 'Let's go to the science museum.' I mean he's glad that he went . . . but. . . ."

Although some of the children in our sample, like Terah, were outgoing and tended to find interesting things to do on their own, many of the children were like David, content with playing video games and watching television. For the middle-class parents who worked, the cure to the "TV problem" was day camp. Kelly was one of the children in our sample who would have loved to stay home and watch television. Instead, her father enrolled her in the Hillside day camp (the expensive one that Kendra's mother could not afford). When we spent the day at camp with Kelly, we did not find her activities challenging, but the counselors did force the children to stay active. For instance, they began by having the whole camp participate in the following "song and dance":

The counselors lead them in a song. First, a counselor stood up and showed them the moves—he pointed to parts of his body and told them the name of that part in the song—eyes are "eye blinkers," noses are "nose blowers," the belly is a "bread basket." So, they put their hands on their shoulders and sang, "With my hands on my shoulders, what have we here [then they point to their eyes]? Those are my eye blinkers, my darling, my dear, eye blinkers, oh boy!" And so on and so on, with apple bobber (neck), coat hanger (shoulders), bread basket (belly), baby bouncers (thighs), knee knockers (knees), soccer kickers (feet) . . . and so on and so on. As they said each part, they had to point to that part—the whole thing moved pretty fast, like a tongue twister for body language.

Over the rest of the day, Kelly's group moved through four other activities: making lanyard crafts, cooking (making English muffin pizzas and milkshakes), playing red rover, and swimming.

In contrast, many working-class children with similar dispositions spent most of their time in front of the television set. For instance, Janelle, whose mother chose not to send her to day camp, had a more sedentary summer, as this fieldnote excerpt illustrates:

I find out from Janelle that during the summer she spends the day at her dad's house while her mom is at work. I ask her what she does there, and she tells me in a time-line manner. She says she goes there in the morning and

eats breakfast there, like cereal. She takes off the "pillow" from the parakeet cage to wake up the parakeet and also feeds the dog sometimes—he's a Rottweiler. She plays mostly with her 14-year-old girl cousin named Jerrell. They go outside, do cartwheels or play on the scooter, then come back inside and watch music videos on the channel The Box. Because her cable's been cut off for the last two weeks, she watches shows like *Boy Meets World*, *The Simpsons*, *Blind Date*, *Baby Blues*, *Drew Carey Show*, *Family Guy*, and *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*. On cable, she tells me that she likes to watch the Disney channel, Nickelodeon, Fox Kids, WB Kids, and *Angela Anaconda*—a show where their heads are cut out from magazines and look really weird.

Whereas motivated children managed to make the most of even a "housebound" summer, less-motivated children from all social classes, like David, Kelly, Janelle, and Simon, required parents or other adults to keep them active. With those types of children, families with more resources had a clear advantage.

DISCUSSION

This article has shown that children's summer vacations vary widely, largely because summer vacation has no mandatory structure. Under these conditions, we would expect to observe large social-class differences in children's activities, and we did. However, our study also highlights several less-obvious aspects of children's summer experiences. First, our data suggest that, at least by middle childhood, children play a much more important role in their own development—and thus in the social reproduction process—than most theorists have acknowledged. Compliant and motivated middle-class children help naturalize the social reproduction process by absorbing the resources that their parents shower upon them, while motivated and charismatic working-class and poor children, whose parents have fewer resources, use their own social capital, effort, and imaginations to substitute—at least to some extent—for their parents' lack of resources. Conversely, noncompliant, relatively unmotivated children make middle-class parents

work especially hard to reproduce their social status in their children. And similar working-class and poor children help naturalize the social reproduction process by doing little to expand on their own narrowly circumscribed experiences. In the end, children have the least-varied, least-stimulating summer experiences when they prefer to spend their time watching television or playing video games and when their parents permit them to do just that. Children have the most-varied, most-stimulating summers when they marshal their own social and creative resources and when their parents encourage and support them, with their own resources, as best they can.

Second, our data suggest that even though children's summer experiences are stratified by social class, most parents from all social classes aspire to develop their children's skills and talents. Whether we judge parents' values on the basis of their comments in interviews or their behavior, most parents from all social classes believed that they should actively nurture their children's development, and most tried to do so. Yet, relative to the working-class and poor parents, the middle-class parents tended to be more successful in constructing highly stimulating summers for their children because they tended to have greater financial resources, more-flexible jobs, and more knowledge about how to match particular activities to their children's skills and interests.

This argument challenges Lareau's (2000, 2002, 2003) contention that middle-class families make "a deliberate and sustained effort to stimulate children's development" (2003: 238), while working-class and poor families view "a child's development as unfolding spontaneously, as long as they were provided with comfort, food, shelter, and other basic support" (2003:238). Several explanations may account for our different results.

First, Lareau described child-rearing philosophies during the school year, while we focused on the summer. It is possible that families' child-rearing philosophies change seasonally, with middle-class families engaging in more concerted cultivation during the school year and less during the summer and

working-class families engaging in less concerted cultivation during the school year (because they expect the school to play that role) and more in the summer. Although we could not examine this possibility with our data, some of the middle-class families in our sample did emphasize that summer should be a time to relax (implying that it should be different—perhaps less focused on cultivation—from the school year). As Rachel's mother put it, "In summer, I think it's so important to give the kids a rest and a break from an academic and rigorous life and maybe even bored."

Second, regional and ethnic differences between our sample and Lareau's may account for the differences in our results. Lareau sampled African American and white families from a midwestern university town and a northeastern metropolitan area. We sampled African American, Latino, Asian American, and white families (including first- and second-generation immigrants) from a large western city. It is possible that social-class differences in cultivation are smaller in the West than in the Midwest or Northeast. It is also possible that working-class and poor Latinos and Asian Americans, especially those from immigrant backgrounds, focus more on cultivating their children than do working-class and poor whites and African Americans.

Third, and probably most important, Lareau's study and ours used different sampling strategies. Although both studies used purposive sampling, Lareau's sample was probably biased *toward* finding between-class differences in child-rearing philosophies, whereas ours was probably biased *against* finding such differences. Lareau's sampling strategy maximized between-class differences by selecting "observation" families on the basis of their social-class backgrounds and child-rearing practices simultaneously. Lareau (2003:264) deliberately sampled middle-class, working-class, and poor families for observation by using interviews to "identify certain kinds of experiences and family traits (especially the number of organized activities, the strength of kinship ties, and the depth of family-school relationships) as broadly characteristic of each social class." Moreover, she minimized within-class differences by select-

ing families, within each social-class category, who were similar along dimensions such as family structure. For example, even though her interview sample included within-class diversity in family structure, all the middle-class families she observed were intact, two-parent families, but none of the poor families was.

In contrast, our sampling strategy minimized between-class differences in child-rearing strategies because we sampled children from one school. These children and their families probably differed less than they would have if we had sampled them from several extremely different schools and communities. For example, none of the poor students in our sample received public assistance (although one mother had done so in the past). And some of the poor and working-class parents who sent their children to Mid-City Elementary School deliberately chose the school and thus may have placed a higher priority on education than did other poor or working-class parents.¹² Moreover, many of the middle-class parents in our sample could have afforded to send their children to private school but instead sent them to Mid-City, which may indicate that these parents valued education less than did some other middle-class parents.¹³

In addition, our sampling strategy maximized within-class differences because we deliberately sampled a wide range of children, from various ethnic, academic, and social-class backgrounds, without considering the students' activities and home environments or their parents' child-rearing practices. In the end, the children we categorized as working class included those from non-English-speaking immigrant families who lived in working-class neighborhoods, as well as those with single parents who lived in blighted inner-city neighborhoods. Likewise, the children we categorized as middle-class included those from college-educated one- and two-parent families with moderate incomes, as well as those from wealthy one- and two-parent families.

Because of these sampling differences, *actual* social-class differences in child-rearing philosophies are probably smaller than those that Lareau (2002, 2003) reported and are

probably larger than we have reported here. The best way for future research to adjudicate between the conflicting claims of these two studies would be to conduct a large ethnographic study with a randomly selected, nationally representative sample of parents and children. Because such a study would probably be prohibitively expensive, a good alternative would be for researchers to conduct myriad studies of the association between social class and child-rearing philosophies in a wide range of locations, using a wide range of sampling designs. This "replication" strategy should, over the long run, lead to a more accurate understanding of why middle-class children have more varied and stimulating lives than do their working-class and poor counterparts.

CONCLUSION

Over the past few decades, sociologists of education have found that over summer vacation, children from poor and working-class backgrounds tend to lose ground academically relative to their middle-class counterparts (Cooper et al. 1996; Entwisle and Alexander 1992, 1994; Entwisle et al. 1997, 2004; Heyns 1978, 1987; Phillips and Chin 2004). Although our study did not examine the academic impact of children's summer activities, it does have implications for future research that is aimed at understanding disparities among children that emerge or widen over the summer.

Methodologically, our qualitative data clarify why surveys that simply ask about children's participation in various activities, such as whether children went on vacation, attended camp, or practiced academic skills over the summer, will likely miss much of the social class-related variance in children's experiences. These nominally similar activities are so heterogeneous that surveys must ask much more detailed questions about the content of activities and how well they were supervised for sociologists to model the causes of differential summer learning.

Substantively, our study raises the possibility that summer inequities in *nonacademic*

learning may be even more egregious than the academic disparities that past research has emphasized. Because norms about summer "vacation" dictate that it should provide a "break from school," few children—from any social-class background—do rigorous, sustained academic work or practice, other than reading, over the summer (see also, Heyns 1978). Instead, parents use summer as a time to augment the education that children receive during the school year. Over the summer, many children learn more about their religion; develop their talents in music, art, and sports; and gain exposure to new environments that not only provide entertainment, but may stimulate their future interest in music, art, science, history, and culture.

But stark class differences exist in the quantity of these opportunities. Whereas middle-class children who express an interest or talent to their parents typically receive an opportunity to develop it, working-class and poor children rely more heavily on challenging themselves, being lucky in finding free programs, and having friends who can help them develop their talents. Moreover, middle-class children, especially those in families in which their parents or nannies can spend time shuttling them from one activity to the next, have the opportunity to develop numerous talents and gain exposure to a wide array of new environments over the summer. These social-class differences probably produce both a "talent development gap" and a "cultural exposure gap," which, if exacerbated each summer, contribute to disparities in children's future life chances.

In terms of policy implications, the findings of this study suggest that narrowing social-class disparities in children's summer experiences requires multiple interventions. Obviously, parents need access to affordable programs with schedules that coincide with their work schedules. But many families also need information. Some parents do not know what kinds of materials they should buy to enrich their children's summers (or where to get such materials), what types of "talent-development" programs are available (and offer scholarships or discounts), or even how to make a vacation enriching and educational.

Moreover, at least by middle childhood,

children are their own untapped resources. Consequently, one way to improve children's summers would be to make activities more accessible to the children themselves by advertising scholarships and low-cost summer programs, as well as activities at nearby parks, libraries, pools, and recreation centers, directly to children (rather than simply sending information to parents). Schools and community centers could also provide space where children could meet with friends, classmates, and local adults to build and use their own social networks. Overall, although our research suggests that many parents use their own resources as best they can, a great deal of "child capital" remains underutilized and may represent an opportunity to reduce inequalities in children's summer experiences.

NOTES

1. In addition, scholars have debated the extent to which cultural differences arise in response to structural disparities and how quickly cultures respond when structural conditions improve. See Corcoran (1995) for a discussion of this debate and how it has evolved over time.

2. Scholars have used the term *social capital* to describe a wide range of concepts, including social networks, social reciprocity, and family relations (see, e.g., Coleman 1988, 1990). In this article, we use *social capital* to refer to the friends, neighbors, and acquaintances who connect parents or children with monetary or nonmonetary resources.

3. Sampling children from this integrated school allowed us to include children from a wide range of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds while holding constant many of their school-year experiences. Chin studied the children at this school for the entire school year preceding the summer that this study took place. We continued to study these children because we suspected that knowledge of their school-year experiences might improve our understanding of their summer experiences.

4. We sampled fourth graders (students who would enter the fifth grade the following fall) for two reasons. First, because Cooper et

al.'s (1996) meta-analysis suggested that children experience more differential academic loss in the summers after the third grade, we wanted to sample a grade in which the processes leading to this divergence might be the most pronounced. Second, because Heyns's (1978) study suggested that independence over summer vacation may be related to children's learning experiences, we wanted to observe children who were old enough to have some independence in their activities.

5. Before the summer began, we contacted 40 children and their parents. Two families declined to participate. Three other children planned to spend the entire summer out of town (at camp or visiting another parent). We replaced these five children with comparable children and observed all 40 children at least once. However, because of scheduling difficulties, extended vacations, and four children not returning to Mid-City School in the fall, we conducted at least two, distinct observations (each at least two hours long) with only 32 of the children.

6. The number of observations per child varied for two reasons. First, when children had a wide range of experiences over the summer, we tried to sample as many of those experiences as possible. Second, over the summer, many of the children instigated additional observations by inviting us to sports competitions, performances, and various outings. Other children, in contrast, had day care and travel plans that made scheduling difficult.

7. The fieldworkers even kept Razor Scooters in their cars, so they could ride with the children if that is what the children did during the visit.

8. In fieldnote excerpts, we use quotation marks to denote pieces of conversation that fieldworkers reconstructed—from jottings and memory—as close to verbatim as possible.

9. We created an initial list of 62 codes that specifically corresponded to previous findings in the summer learning literature, such as "bike," "boundaries," "camp," "vacation," "library," "reading—self-motivated," "reading—forced," and "rules." Through open coding, we developed an additional list of

134 codes, including "adult friends," "being friends with people not usually friends with," "easy things," "initiative," "transportation," and "wanting to be signed up." When we finished our first round of coding, we went back through the data and recoded earlier documents with the newly generated codes.

10. We do not intend to imply, however, that *all* families worked hard to cultivate their children's skills and talents. Although many did, others, from all social-class backgrounds, did less than they could have.

11. The parents had various reasons for requiring the children to stay inside. Mikaili's family lived in a very poor area outside the Mid-City neighborhood. Mikaili cited frequent crime in their complex as the reason they were confined to the house while their mother was at work. Abel and his brother lived in an immigrant neighborhood that did not seem less safe than the neighborhood in which most of our working-class and poor children were allowed to roam. However, after Abel was bitten by a stray dog while walking to "the liquor" on the corner, he and his brother were restricted to the house and yard.

12. In fact, two students in our sample (one poor and one working class) attended Mid-City School illegally, having explicitly chosen it over their assigned neighborhood school. However, when we discussed their choice of a neighborhood with the working-class and poor families who lived within Mid-City School's catchment area, most did not cite the school as a reason for their choice. Some of the students' parents grew up in the neighborhood and chose to raise their own families there. Several others said that they chose the neighborhood because it was safer than the less-expensive areas in town (which they commonly referred to as "the ghetto").

13. However, most of the middle-class parents carefully investigated private schools before they decided that the possible benefits of private school were not worth the cost (often more than \$12,000 a year)—at least not for elementary school. Many of these parents planned to reconsider their decision before their children began middle school. In addition, several middle-class parents explicitly stated that they wanted their children to experience the "ethnic diversity" at Mid-City

School because knowing how to get along with people from different backgrounds would be crucial for success in an increasingly multicultural world.

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