Book Review/Compte rendu

Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life, Second Edition with an Update a Decade Later*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, 480 pp. $US 24.95 paper (978-0-520-27142-5)

The second edition of Annette Lareau's award-winning Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life was released in 2011, adding more than 100 pages of new material. At its heart, the second edition tells two stories — one empirical, and the other a cautionary tale of qualitative methods.

In the first edition of *Unequal Childhoods*, Lareau demonstrated that working-class and poor families enacted the "Accomplishment of Natural Growth." Their children participated in few, if any organized leisure activities, and had extensive interactions with kin. Parents used directives in speaking to children, and saw a clear boundary between the activities of adults and children. Regardless of race, working-class and poor parents did not tend to intervene with institutions on their children's behalf. In contrast, middle-class parents supported "Concerted Cultivation," developing children's talents through organized leisure activities and lessons, eliciting children's thoughts, and actively intervening in institutional settings. Lareau began her data collection for *Unequal Childhoods* in 1989, intensively observing twelve families between 1993 and 1995. The passage of time takes nothing away from this new edition, nor does it mitigate the impact or resonance of its findings. The book's lasting contribution is Lareau's conclusion that the childrearing patterns persist over time.

Unlike in the 1990s, when she interviewed schoolteachers and other relevant adults, Lareau was unable to triangulate her family interviews with other data, and did not complement her interviews with intensive visits, naturalistic observations, nor interviews with employers, college professors, or others. For the second edition, she conducted 2-hour interviews with each of the 12 young adults (6 white, 5 African-American, 1 biracial), and usually interviewed at least one parent and a sibling.

The follow-up interviews with the twelve original children tell the most important story of the second edition: how their lives unfolded from the age of nine or ten. Lareau offers a detailed qualitative panel study of sorts, documenting life trajectories of the twelve children —

now aged 19–21 — and the larger patterns their stories illuminate. Lareau questioned whether the class-based differences in childrearing she witnessed when the children were younger persisted into adulthood. The answer is a resounding "yes." Some of these youth struggled — academically and otherwise — to graduate from high school, as four of the eight working-class and poor students dropped out. Others, with talent and determination to attend college, were not able to make the transition. Working-class and poor parents desperately wanted their children to attend college, but lacked the resources, connections, and know-how to effectively help their children with the labyrinthine American college application process. Despite their and their parents' hopes for college attendance, only one of the eight working class or poor youth persisted as a college student. Six are living with family members and working full-time in a variety of jobs, with one working-class girl married and a full-time homemaker.

Three out of the four middle-class children studied graduated from high school, and are attending Ivy League colleges. The remaining student, Melanie Handlon, whose academic struggles were chronicled in the first edition of *Unequal Childhoods* ultimately abandoned community college for cosmetology school, leaving her parents disappointed, and her mother wishing she had intervened more in Melanie's schooling. The second edition of *Unequal Childhoods* is a testament to the lasting effect of parents' intervention in institutional settings. Middle-class parents took it upon themselves to actively manage and monitor their children's transition from high school to college. For instance, one middle-class mother approached her son's high school to "fight" to change the timetable of the courses offered, to enable her son to take two particular advanced placement courses that had previously been offered in the same time slot. Once in college, parents persisted in offering advice, helping their children choose their classes, and so forth. Parents with informal knowledge of the college system, who see it as their role to actively intervene successfully transmit advantage to their adult children. Overall, middle-class parents continued the pattern of concerted cultivation: watching closely and helping children along whenever possible.

Yet, the trajectories of the lives of these young adults attest that just as middle-class advantages does not guarantee college attendance, children from humbler social class origins can also gain entry to college in the US. Jessica Irwin, a biracial child from a working-class family achieved top grades in high school, and went on to attend university on scholarship. Unfortunately, Lareau chronicled detailed case studies of the lives of only nine of the twelve children she observed due to space constraints with the first edition. Owing to space constraints, Jessica was

one of the three children whose ethnographic observation was not included in the original book, so readers remain in the dark as to how she navigated the transition to college. The larger story of social reproduction — working-class and poor children's overall inability to translate their efforts into postsecondary achievements — is well-documented.

The original substantive conclusions of the first edition are strengthened by a nuanced, sophisticated focus on methodology. Lareau reflects on her research choices, after she followed up with the 12 families a decade later. She provides a detailed, unflinching chronicle of the families' reactions to her findings. Positive reactions — as when one middle-class girl realized only after reading Lareau's book the extensive efforts her mother expended on her behalf as a child — are atypical. Lareau unabashedly reveals the often scathing conversations where families questioned her interpretations, conveying that Lareau ultimately failed to "get" or understand their lives. Other families felt she misrepresented them; one working class father told her: "You slurred us, Annette; you made us look like poor white trash" (p. 323). These traumatic encounters comprise an unexpected drama, as they prompt Lareau to wrestle thoughtfully with questions of what responsible research is, and an evaluation of how qualitative sociological research is often conducted. Many qualitative researchers can undoubtedly find themselves in the dilemmas Lareau lays bare. Instructors take note; this chapter is a dramatic, thought-provoking inquiry into the dilemmas — ethical and otherwise — of qualitative research, and an essential addition to any methods syllabus.

Lareau also includes a quantitative element, a 9 page chapter that attempts to answer the question (plagued by qualitative researchers everywhere) of whether her small sample is a representative one. This chapter juxtaposes her qualitative data with a close examination of a nationally representative survey of the time use of children aged 6–12, collected in 1997. The quantitative data support Lareau's findings about class and children's participation in organized activities, but suggest a racial difference in time spent with kin. Those who may previously have seen Lareau's conclusions as making too much out of a too-small data set may be persuaded after reading this chapter.

Wilfrid Laurier University Linda Quirke

Linda Quirke is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo. She is interested in how childrearing varies by social class, including how parents make decisions regarding their children's physical activity, and how schools incorporate physical activity into the school day.
lquirke@wlu.ca