



The Perils of Parenting Style

Penn sociologist Annette Lareau says that the way middle class parents interact with their children promotes an “emerging sense of entitlement” that better equips them for success in the world. **By Kevin Hartnett**

One afternoon in 1993, Annette Lareau—then on the faculty of Philadelphia’s Temple University and now the Stanley I. Sheerr Term Professor of the Social Sciences at Penn—arrived at the home of Katie Brindle, a white nine-year-old girl who lived with her mom in a rundown apartment building in a working class part of town. Lareau had chosen the Brindles to participate in an ambitious ethnographic study focused on how parents of different socioeconomic positions raise their children. She was interested particularly in whether any observable contrasts could shed light on one of the central riddles in sociology: just why it is that kids tend to grow up to occupy a similar social class position as their parents.

Earlier that day Katie had formulated a plan to build a dollhouse. With the help of her grandmother she’d gathered empty cardboard boxes and then set to work on the kitchen counter with scissors and glue. But by the time Lareau arrived at the Brindle’s home the project was in disarray. Lareau watched as Katie carried the ramshackle structure high over her head into the living room where her mother was watching television. Katie placed the boxes on the rug and asked for help. Her mom’s answer was

short and to the point. “Nah,” she said. Standing off to the side, Lareau noted that Katie was “silent but disappointed” by the response.

When Lareau reflected on this interaction she realized that something profound had taken place. For nearly a year she’d journeyed to soccer games with middle class families, ridden the city bus with single moms on their way to collect food stamps, and hung out in suburban kitchens and working class living rooms as families went about their days. With each of the families Lareau had paid close attention to the ways that parents approached their children’s development, and after a while she’d noticed a pattern: While middle class parents rarely missed an opportunity to cultivate their children’s interests, poor and working class parents tended to view child’s play the way Katie Brindle’s mom did, as something best left to children.

In 2003 Lareau published her results in a powerful book called *Unequal Childhoods* that has reshaped the way sociologists think about family dynamics and inequality (the second edition, including a decade-later update, was published September 1). Lareau extrapolated from her ethnographic observations to a far-reaching analysis

of the structure of society, arguing that there is a categorical difference between how middle and lower class parents approach childrearing, and that these differences lead to the reproduction of social class position from one generation to the next. Following her analysis she wrote, “It is not impossible for individuals to significantly change their life position but it is not common.”

The scope of Lareau’s ideas, combined with the vivid observations that support them, have garnered her a rare degree of crossover status as a scholar whose work has become influential in both academia and popular discourse. *New Yorker* contributor and pop-intellectual king Malcolm Gladwell devoted several pages to Lareau’s research in his 2008 chart-topper *Outliers*; his assessment of *Unequal Childhoods*—“a fascinating study”—graces the cover of the new edition. Lareau is also a favored scholar of David Brooks, who has featured her research in his *New York Times* column and in his current bestseller *The Social Animal*. Both Brooks and Gladwell cited Lareau as having produced some of the most powerful evidence in support of the idea that individual life outcomes owe more to cultural and contextual forces than to personal factors like grit, initiative, or innate skill.

Lareau's impact in the academy has been more controversial but no less pronounced. *Unequal Childhoods* has sold more than 60,000 copies—Stephen King numbers by the standards of an academic press—and it has become a requisite text in sociology courses on inequality and the family. More generally it has moved the research agenda in a field that until recently focused more on race and gender. “Annette, I think, is largely responsible with her book for shifting attention back to a concern about social class differences,” says Frank Furstenberg, the Zellerbach Family Professor and Lareau's colleague in the Sociology Department. “Her analysis really is very penetrating in how patterns of class get laid down in ways that affect children's behaviors and sense of agency.”

But the more attention Lareau has received, the more some of her peers have questioned whether her conclusions outstrip her data. While Furstenberg agrees with Lareau's argument in broad outline, he thinks that the strict lines she draws between middle and lower class parents are unlikely to hold at the population level. “I'm not sure that I am utterly convinced about where she's drawing the [class] boundaries or whether there are strict boundaries in parenting patterns,” Furstenberg says. “There are certainly very sharp differences, and she has described and captured those. Where we would draw the lines to find them I think you cannot tell from her rather modest sample.”

Lareau has heard these criticisms, in forthcoming journal articles that challenge her conclusions, and in audience questions at the venues where she's presented her work. She has agonized over the practical limitations she faced—that she couldn't observe more families or observe them for longer—and she knows her arguments have unsettled a lot of people, not least of all the families she observed. But at the same time she maintains a deep commitment to the explanatory power of ethnography. “Longitudinal studies using qualitative methods are rare,” Lareau wrote in a 2010 paper, “but the findings offer much more depth and insight into social processes than nationally representative data sets can provide.”

Lareau was born in the early 1950s amid the surge of post-war upward mobility. “My mother was a school teacher and my dad was a school teacher,” she says. “They both went to college on the GI bill. That was a very important aspect of their lives. My father was extremely proud of his college degree.”

When Lareau graduated from UC-Santa Cruz in 1974 she planned to follow her parents into education and become a kindergarten teacher; with her height and commanding bearing it's not hard to imagine her controlling a room full of six-year-olds. But circumstances conspired against that career choice. “There weren't jobs, because the Baby Boom had moved through and there was a glut of school teachers,” Lareau says. She went to graduate school at Berkeley instead, where she found a different outlet for her interest in education. “At that point there was a black box, where there was a correlation between parents' social class position and school outcomes, but people didn't really understand why it was the case. And that really captured my interest and imagination.”

Lareau may have missed her chance to become a kindergarten teacher, but her familiarity with elementary school classrooms proved essential for gaining access to the families she ultimately studied in *Unequal Childhoods*. In 1993 she began visiting third grade classrooms in a poor urban neighborhood in a “large northeastern city” and in a nearby middle class suburb, with the goal of introducing herself to the children she hoped to study before she introduced herself to their parents. (In order to protect the identities of her subjects Lareau changed their names and referred to where they lived in general terms only.) Lareau chose third-graders because, as she wrote later, “I wanted children who were young enough for their parents to still be heavily involved in managing their lives (and thus transmitting social influences to them) and yet old enough to have some autonomy regarding their free time.” Lareau helped with arts and crafts projects and brought in cookies for Valentine's Day. Before long the students were running to greet her when she arrived in the morning.

A typical ethnography might have involved observations of a single family for a year or longer. Lareau was after

something different. She says, “I don't think ethnography can ever be scientific,” but she did want to include enough families to make it reasonable to generalize from observations. She proposed visiting each family 20 times in a month, at different times in the day, and with at least one overnight stay. Based on the classroom observations and interviews with the students' parents, Lareau identified 19 families who fit her research criteria. Of those she hoped a dozen would agree to her request. “Before making the telephone calls [asking if they'd participate] I would pace the floor anxiously and my heart would pound,” Lareau wrote in *Unequal Childhoods*.

Lareau wanted to study four families each from the poor, working, and middle classes, and in order to achieve that distribution she had to be somewhat flexible about how she defined her categories. “You agonize a lot about it, it's hard and there's no perfect answer,” she says about the process of figuring out how to slot each family. “I had a small sample, and when you have a small sample you don't have a lot of options.” She settled on an admixture of income, education, and occupation combined with her own feel for each family's class position. Her first round of recruiting calls yielded nine families, and to fill in the final three spots she had to relax her criteria slightly. She had particular trouble finding a black middle class family (most of her top choices declined based on privacy concerns) which led her ultimately to settle on the Williams family even though their son Alexander would be the only child in the study not in public school (he attended a nearby private school) and their household income exceeded \$300,000.

The inclusion of families like the Williamses is one of Paul Kingston's main critiques of Lareau's study. Kingston is a sociology professor at the University of Virginia and the leading academic voice arguing that social classes don't pertain in America. In 2000 he published a book called *The Classless Society*, which contends that the correlation between key characteristics like income, education, and occupational status is insufficient to support the existence of cohesive social classes in America. He argues that

Lareau's inclusion of the high-earning Williams family (as well as another family with a real income above \$270,000 a year) skewed her sample in a way that accentuated class distinctions. "If you look at her analysis ... she's contrasting two extremes, and you don't really get an impression of what's going on in between," Kingston says.

The material circumstances of the 12 families did vary widely, from single-parent welfare homes to Ivy League educated households. Most families fell somewhere in between, but Lareau observed that, without exception, parenting styles fell into one of two categories. Middle class

parents practiced what she calls "concerted cultivation," actively inculcating in their children the skills and habits viewed as constitutive of success in America, while lower class parents took a less hands-on approach. She called their parenting style "the accomplishment of natural growth," a view of childrearing in which parents provide the conditions for development (love, food, safety) and otherwise let kids develop on their own.

In *Unequal Childhoods* Lareau focused on three areas where the differential effects of concerted cultivation and natural growth parenting were particularly acute: organized extracurricular activi-

ties, the use of language in the home, and the readiness of parents to intervene in school on behalf of their kids. In all three of these areas the middle class approach can be described as *more*: more activities, more frequent and sophisticated chatter around the dinner table, more parents ready to step in to get their kids assigned to specific teachers or enrolled in special programs.

Lareau is quick to say that "all childrearing methods have advantages, and I think they all have drawbacks," and she's emphatic that the distinctions she draws imply nothing about the degree to which parents love and are devoted to their children. At the same time, she argues that given the standards by which institutions like schools and workplaces evaluate talent, concerted cultivation confers substantial benefits on middle class children. These range from concrete, quantifiable advantages like larger vocabularies and broader skill sets to more subtle ones, like the experience of performing in public and being part of a team that kids gain through organized sports.

Lareau observed that the biggest difference between middle class parents was not what they did, but why they did it. In middle class homes Lareau found that parents used language as a developmental tool. Typical were the parents of Alexander Williams, the black middle class boy, who thought of conversations and debates with their son as an opportunity to "promote his reasoning and negotiation skills." In one anecdote recorded in *Unequal Childhoods* from around the Williams family dinner table, Alexander engages in spirited verbal play with his parents:

Terry (Alexander's father): Why don't you go upstairs to the third floor and get one of those books and see if there is a riddle in there?

Alexander: (Smiling) Yeah. That's a good idea! I'll go upstairs and copy one from out of the book.

Terry: That was a joke—not a valid suggestion. That is not an option.

Christina (Alexander's mother): There is a word for that you know, plagiarism.

Terry: Someone can sue you for plagiarizing. Did you know that?

Alexander: That's only if it's copyrighted.

Lareau found exchanges like this one to be the dominant style of communica-



CANDACE DICARLO

Lareau: "Because social class is a significant force, existing social inequality gets reproduced over time, regardless of each new generation's aspirations, talent, effort, and imagination."

tion in middle class households and she argues that they convey substantial class-based advantages to children like Alexander. “In the book I talk about how Alexander Williams was having dinner and his father introduces the word *plagiarism* as a teachable moment,” Lareau says. “Plagiarism is a word that could be on the SAT. He’s 10-years-old and hearing it at home. That’s a big advantage.”

In lower class homes Lareau observed that language use was sparser, and more instrumental. In the home of Harold McCallister, a poor black boy living in public housing, Lareau found that language served “as a practical conduit for daily life not as a tool for cultivating reasoning skills.” A representative interaction was one in which Harold’s mom directed him to “Eat! Finish the spinach!” rather than persuade him about the nutritional content of vegetables.

Lareau sees these types of interactions as evidence of a mismatch between the culture in lower class homes and the standards of schools, which she considers a “sorting mechanism” for opportunity in America. “I remember I interviewed this mom, and she couldn’t figure out why her kid was held back in first grade,” Lareau says. “She said everything was fine except for the one little thing about her daughter’s reading. Well, if you can’t read you can’t do school. The mom was a lovely lady, she loved her kid very much, but the fact that reading was really, really, really important ... She said, ‘It’s just this one little thing about her reading.’”

The difference between Harold’s and Alexander’s experiences with language was about more than the educational attainment of their parents, Lareau argues. Or at least if the explanation stopped there you would miss the crux of the matter. The real reason, she says, is cultural and class-based: lower class families don’t think of children as peers, so they don’t talk to their children as peers. She argues that it’s a justifiable position to take, just as it’s justifiable for middle class parents to regard their children as conversation partners. But, she writes, “One unintended consequence of this approach is that poor and working-class children typically do not develop the same range of verbal skills their middle-class counterparts acquire.”

As a result of all the attention to their development, Lareau argues that middle class children come to display “an emerging sense of entitlement”—a bedrock belief that their individual preferences are valuable and that it’s not unreasonable to adjust the world to suit them. By contrast, she says, lower class children manifest an “emerging sense of constraint”—a view that the best they can do is adapt themselves to their limited life circumstances.

To highlight this point Lareau cites recent classroom observations made by Jessica McCrory Calarco, one of her graduate students. “There are these working class kids and middle class kids who have the same teachers,” Lareau says. “The working class kids have a question and they’ll raise their hands, and then they’ll sit there for four minutes while the middle class kids will pick up their things and go trotting across the room and say, ‘Mr. Feldman, Mr. Feldman,’ interrupting him.”

Lareau theorizes that the distinct parenting styles she describes in *Unequal Childhoods* hold categorically: to be middle class is to practice concerted cultivation almost as surely as to be a Christian is to believe in Jesus. These class-based dispositions explain how social class reproduces itself from one generation to the next, and she argues that they arbitrate opportunity in America more powerfully than any other demographic characteristic, including race. In the early 2000s Lareau conducted a series of follow-up interviews with the children from from *Unequal Childhoods* that emphasized for her just how hidden class-based inequality is in America. “When I interviewed the [middle class] young adults when they were 19 and 20, it was invisible to them all the help that they’d been given in life—they really thought they’d earned it,” she says. “And God knows they worked hard with homework and studying, going to practices; they did a lot, but they had also been given many gifts in life, gifts that other children were not given.”

On Penn’s campus there are organized groups for students who identify as women, Asian, black, queer, and Latino, among others. These groups serve a variety of purposes, and one is

to provide a sense of community for types of students who have not traditionally been at home at elite institutions like an Ivy League university. When Lareau considers this list she sees one group missing: an organization for students with lower class backgrounds. “White working class kids who come to college often flounder and they have whole sets of issues as first-generation college students,” she says. “But it’s very hard for those white students to find each other.”

Social class is not a readily recognized category in part because it’s hard to say what exactly it is. Sociologists rely typically on some combination of income, education, wealth, and occupation to measure class position, but there’s no rule for how to combine them. That makes it hard to compare the high-school graduate who owns a painting business and clears a hundred grand a year with the librarian with an advanced degree earning half that. Karl Marx is credited, along with Max Weber, with codifying the idea of social class, but one imagines that when he toured Europe in the 1840s it was easier to see where everyone stood than it is in America today, where forces like immigration, mobility, and the overall high standard of living scramble the social picture.

Given the churn of American society, it’s common for sociologists to talk about class as a continuum instead of a set of strict categories. “I think of social class as more of an opportunity zone that varies by social location,” says Furstenberg. “So I’m not sure whether there are class boundaries or whether it’s a gradient that extends all the way up.”

This is precisely the view Lareau disagrees with. Where sociologists like Furstenberg see a continuum, she sees a few bright lines that separate large portions of the population from each other. Lareau is one of the leading contemporary interpreters of the 20th-century French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who is considered one of the foundational voices in social-class theory along with Marx and Weber. Bourdieu argued that a social class is defined by its “habitus,” or its own particular ways of thinking and behaving. Lareau calls this idea “class-specific dispositions” and she argues that when you see people’s lives up close, as she did in *Unequal Childhoods*, it becomes clearer

that “the observable differences in how people act can be meaningfully and faithfully grouped into categories without violating the complexity of daily life.”

The reason many sociologists don't recognize class distinctions, Lareau says, is because they rely on research methods that aren't nuanced enough to see them. “You have to take the data you're given, and the measures of social class on surveys are pretty skimpy, pretty inadequate in my opinion,” Lareau says. “You have to deal with the gradient because that's the way the data comes.” Most quantitative data in sociology comes from national surveys like the National Survey of Family Growth, which is conducted annually by the Centers for Disease Control and gathers data from tens of thousands of Americans on topics like infertility, pregnancy, contraception, and divorce. The questions that can be asked on these surveys need to be easy to answer, they need to produce data that can be easily categorized, and they need to allow for apples-to-apples comparisons across survey respondents, all of which are necessary constraints but which effectively limit the type of insight that surveys can produce.

A common survey question relevant to the types of differences Lareau studies is, “How many books do you have in your home?” It's a straightforward question that lends itself to statistical analysis, and it reveals a linear relationship consistent with the idea of class as a gradient: More highly educated people have more books in their homes, but there's nothing categorical that separates families at any particular point along the line. But Lareau argues that if surveys included more substantive questions that are harder to analyze statistically—like “Describe the techniques you use when reading to your child”—social class divisions would emerge more clearly.

The limited perceptiveness of quantitative analysis is one reason that Lareau became an ethnographer. At Berkeley in the 1970s she met the acclaimed urban ethnographer John Ogbu, who used participant-observation research to conclude that internalized low expectations were a primary driver of underachievement among black youths. “Ethnography as a research tool allows one to bring people to life,” Lareau says. “I remember he [Ogbu] told me you should feel like we're right on your shoulder, looking

over your shoulder. And I think that's partly what ethnography does, it can show people's everyday lives.”

Because of the differences in how information is collected, ethnographic conclusions can be hard to assess alongside quantitative research. In order to gain widespread acceptance, quantitative research needs to be reproducible and generalizable: Other scholars need to be able to run the numbers and say, “I find what you find,” and there needs to be good reason to think that what's true for a group of survey respondents holds for the population as a whole. Social scientists evaluate research against these criteria because conclusions that hold up against them are, generally speaking, more likely to be true than conclusions that do not.

By this standard, ethnography is not a particularly accurate way to create knowledge. Lareau says of her observations in *Unequal Childhoods*, “If somebody had a similar research question and they were for various reasons able to be in those exact sites again, I would think they would find the same results, more or less.” Of course, those exact sites no longer exist as they did almost 20 years ago. And while Lareau's 12 family sample was large for an ethnography, and diversified by race and gender, it's impossible for ethnographic research to meet the standards of generalization used by quantitative scholars. Lareau argues, however, that a narrow view of what counts as methodological rigor has limited the way sociologists think about a range of topics, from social class to public education.

In a 2010 essay in the *Teacher's College Record* Lareau argued that education research has suffered in the last decade as a result of a push to study student performance using scientific methods that she says don't translate well to schools. The 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is closely identified with standardized testing of students, but it also laid out very specific methods that researchers need to use in order to qualify for federal funding. Most notably, NCLB privileged randomized control trials—in which one group of students receives an intervention like after-school tutoring while a control group of students does not—as what it termed the “gold standard” of education research.

Randomized control trials are the best way to produce accurate results in a

laboratory, but Lareau argues they don't work well in settings where researchers cannot control all the variables. “The kind of clean experimental manipulation of ‘conditions’ or ‘treatments’ called for in experimental research is hard to do in real-world settings outside an experimental laboratory,” she wrote in the *Teacher's College Record*. “Nowhere are these problems more apparent than in the implementation of randomized-controlled trials in the ‘naturalistic’ settings of schools.”

Lareau cites an experiment in the Chicago public schools as an example of how randomized control trials can go wrong. The experiment called for a group of schools to pilot a program for at-risk youth while a control group continued its pre-existing practices. As it happened, though, several principals in the test group failed to implement the program while several in the control group went ahead with the program anyway because they thought it would help their students. Beyond that basic confusion, other significant disruptions took place which limited the explanatory power of the study. These included “frequent changes in principal leadership, high levels of teacher turnover, shifts in administrative policy, and the placement of one-sixth of the schools in the city on probation.”

Lareau argues that social scientists make a mistake when they rely too heavily on methods that are vulnerable to these types of confounding factors. “There needs to be a realistic and critical assessment of the limits of randomized controlled trials and the relatively narrow forms of knowledge that can be gained from their use,” she wrote. She argues that as a field sociology would better understand the social mechanisms that influence people's lives if it lent greater legitimacy to the kind of knowledge that is produced through “[s]mall, intensive, non-random case studies” of the sort she undertook in *Unequal Childhoods*.

Almost 15 years after Lareau met the 12 children in *Unequal Childhoods*, she tracked them down for one last round of interviews. By then they were in their early twenties and there was no longer much suspense about where they'd end up in life. The middle class kids were

situated, with one exception, in fields like medicine, business, and academia. All of the poor and working class children were either unemployed or working in low-skill jobs. One was a waiter in a chain restaurant. Another was a union painter. Katie Brindle, the girl who'd struggled to build a dollhouse on her own as a fourth grader, had moved to Florida and was working in a nightclub.

The fact that there were so few surprises is strong evidence, says Lareau, that individual initiative isn't the sole or even primary ingredient of success in America. In the second edition of *Unequal Childhoods*, which contains a chapter on these follow-up interviews, Lareau writes:

"Does social class matter in American society? Let us assume, for the sake of argument that it does not. If that is so, then young people's educational and work outcomes should be the result of their own aspirations, abilities, efforts, perseverance, and imagination ... Because social class is a significant force, existing social inequality gets reproduced over time, regardless of each new generation's aspirations, talent, effort, and imagination."

The second edition also contains a frank discussion of how the publication of her research complicated Lareau's relationships with the families she'd studied. Lareau gave each family a copy of the book soon after it appeared in 2003 and several parents reacted angrily. One of the poor mothers told Lareau that she felt "invaded" by the unsparing lens through which Lareau had viewed her family. A working class mother told Lareau that she'd expected the final product would be a glossy coffee table-style book, with flattering pictures and vignettes. When she read Lareau's stark prose she lashed out, saying, "You slurred us, Annette, you made us look like poor white trash."

Lareau has managed in recent years to mend her relationships with all but the Williams family, who've cut off contact completely, and each year she sends the children she studied a Christmas card with a \$20 bill tucked inside. Lareau is currently at work on what she calls a "practical guide to ethnography," which will contain advice on how to manage the delicate relationships that develop during participant

observation research. But at the same time she acknowledges it's never easy to be the subject of ethnographic research. Speaking about *Unequal Childhoods*, she says, "People's imagined sense of self was different than the sense of self they read about, and that was a painful gap."

National data show that there's more mobility in American society than Lareau observed. A 2006 report from the Center for American Progress (CAP) found that 58 percent of children who are born into the poorest families end up doing better than their parents, while the same percentage of the richest children end up descending the economic ladder. The same CAP study showed that America has lower social mobility than almost every developed country besides England. Even so, class position in the US is less deterministic than a strict reading of Lareau's argument might suggest.

Paul Kingston, the University of Virginia sociology professor who argues that America doesn't have social classes, questions how accurate it is to generalize from Lareau's work to the US population as a whole. "I don't find it terribly convincing to base a big statement about the existence of classes on analyzing a few families," he says.

But even scholars who believe Lareau's ideas are not supported by large-scale data acknowledge that *Unequal Childhoods* has changed the debate. Kingston reviewed the pre-publication manuscript of *Unequal Childhoods* at Lareau's request and was one of the first to predict the book would make a splash. Today he assigns it to his students and says, "If you engage in the whole issue of why richer kids do better in school than poorer kids, it's routine to reference her. She's definitely a star." Or as Lareau's colleague Furstenberg—who also disagrees with the idea of fixed social classes—puts it, "I've seen too much when I look around of what she sees not to notice more after I've read her book."

Not all ethnographers would care about having their findings confirmed quantitatively, but it's important to Lareau. The second edition of *Unequal Childhoods* contains analysis of survey data about participation in organized activities. The results generally support Lareau's observations, with one caveat—it turns out that children of

mothers with high-powered careers actually spend less time in extracurricular activities than children of moms who spend more time at home. The quantitative support is particularly significant to Lareau given that several forthcoming studies challenge her conclusion. One study, to be published in the *Sociology of Education*, cites interviews with working class parents who say they support extracurricular activities but simply lack the resources to act on this preference. This challenges Lareau's contention that the basic difference between middle and lower class parents is fundamentally dispositional. In response Lareau says that many of these forthcoming interview studies don't probe deeply enough to see where dispositions diverge: Maybe working class parents would love to have their kids play basketball, but she says the really relevant question is *why* they think organized sports are important.

Lareau has recently begun to focus her research interests elsewhere, towards studying how public school quality affects where young people of different socioeconomic classes decide to buy a home. "We live in a stratified world and one of the most consequential decisions is where people decide to live," Lareau says, "and I'm interested in that moment in the reproduction of the system." The study is being conducted through interviews rather than participant observation research because, Lareau says, "It turns out to be pretty hard to observe people when they're deciding where to live." Her preliminary analysis reveals that while race was not a determinant of parenting style, it is a significant driver of where people choose to live.

Meanwhile, other sociologists will be busy continuing to look for evidence that confirms or dispels Lareau's conclusions on the impacts of parenting style. The conversation will take place through formal channels—conferences, journal articles, peer review, colloquia—but it will also be animated by the intuitive curiosity Lareau's work prompts, and by the way it's impossible not to see every conversation on the playground between a parent and a child differently after you've read *Unequal Childhoods*. ♦

Kevin Hartnett, a freelance writer, lives in Philadelphia with his wife and two young children.