

ENGINEERED STRUGGLE AND “EARNED” SUCCESS

Preparing Black and Latino Students to Attend Elite Boarding Schools

Amanda Barrett Cox

*Department of Sociology and Graduate School of Education, University of
Pennsylvania*

Abstract

This paper examines how a nonprofit organization prepares low-income Black and Latino/a students to attend elite boarding high schools. Using ethnographic data, I investigate how the program engineers the experience of academic and emotional struggle for students, how students experience these struggles, and what students learn from this process. I find that the program’s academically-induced emotional rollercoaster serves to strengthen students’ confidence in their academic skills and their ability to persist in the face of academic challenges—a valuable emotional asset for the students as they enter elite boarding schools. However, I argue, the feeling students emerge with of having earned their successes (and failures) may ultimately serve to reproduce the individualistic, meritocratic discourses that support the patterns of social inequality the program helps its students sidestep.

Keywords: Elite Education, Schooling, Social Mobility, Pipeline Programs, Meritocracy

INTRODUCTION

Schools are vehicles for both social mobility and the reproduction of social inequalities. As many public schools have struggled to fulfill the social mobility promise of schooling, particularly for low-income students and students of color, a number of organizations—sometimes referred to as “pipeline” programs—have sought to increase the number of these students in elite private schools. Research suggests that students of color and students from low-income families will need a variety of social, cultural, and emotional skills to succeed in elite educational environments (Horvat and Antonio, 1999; Jack 2014, 2015; Kuriloff and Reichert, 2003). However, little is known about how pipeline programs prepare students to enter these predominantly White, affluent spaces that are very unlike the schools and communities to which the students are accustomed. In these explicitly academic programs, what types of non-academic lessons do students

Du Bois Review, 15:2 (2018) 467–488.

© 2018 Hutchins Center for African and African American Research

doi:10.1017/S1742058X18000279

learn? More broadly, as these programs offer students avenues for social mobility, how might such preparation sharpen or neutralize students' potential critique of elite educational institutions and the structures of inequality that support them?

In this paper I use a single pipeline program, Launch (a pseudonym), as a case study.¹ Using data from an ethnographic study of the organization, I investigate a theme that emerged in my data: the relationship between the academic curriculum and the emotional experiences of students at Launch. After discussing relevant literature on the meritocratic view of education, the role schools play in reproducing inequality, and the emergence of pipeline programs, I focus first on the ways in which Launch creates an academic environment in which students are nearly guaranteed to struggle. Next I investigate students' emotional reactions to the experience of academic struggle. Finally, I explore what Launch students learn when they overcome the self-doubt and frustration they felt as a result of their academic struggles in the program. I find that the academically-induced emotional rollercoaster of Launch strengthens students' confidence in their academic skills and their ability to persist in the face of academic challenges—a valuable emotional asset for Launch students as they enter elite boarding schools. However, I argue, the lessons students learn at Launch about earning one's successes (and failures) may reinforce the myth of a meritocratic society and, thereby, help mask the role that elite education plays in reproducing patterns of social inequality that the program helps its students sidestep. These findings contribute to the limited empirical literature on pipeline programs and to the more robust theoretical literature on mechanisms of social reproduction via elite schooling and the role pipeline programs may play in this process.

SCHOOLS, MERITOCRATIC IDEOLOGY, AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

The meritocratic view of education sees schools as institutions that create a level playing field, rewarding and promoting students based on objective measures of academic skills and knowledge regardless of a student's social status. With its emphasis on impartial measures of technical and cognitive skills, American education occupies a societal position as “the institution that tries hardest to achieve the meritocratic ideal” (Labaree 1997, p. 57). Meritocratic principles are baked into the basic model of modern schooling: graded curricula, simultaneous instruction, and individual evaluation, which partially buffer students from the effects of ascriptive characteristics such as age, race, and social class and place them in a “meritocratic game” (Labaree 1997, p. 57). In such a system, so the meritocratic ideology goes, regardless of a student's initial social status—whether rich or poor, Black or White, girl or boy—schools will reshuffle students based on their levels of individual academic achievement, resulting in a new hierarchy that is independent of each student's initial social status. Such a meritocratic system seems well suited to prepare and channel individuals fairly and justly into the hierarchical division of labor within a capitalist society, thereby allocating social and economic rewards based on individual merit rather than initial status (Bowles and Gintis, 1976).

Decades of research indicate that this view of a meritocratic educational system is more myth than reality. While schools serve as vehicles for social and economic mobility (both up and down the stratification ladder) for some students, an extensive body of research spanning the fields of sociology, anthropology, sociolinguistics, and education has found that they more often contribute to the reproduction of existing social inequalities. Following the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1990), studies have repeatedly found that schools reward the skills, knowledge, and

dispositions of the dominant class. Although middle- and upper-middle-class students must still compete for academic success, research suggests that the playing field is sloped in their favor.

For example, schools have been found to reward the childrearing norms of middle-class parents (Calarco 2014; Lareau 2011) and the help-seeking practices of middle-class students (Calarco 2011); to assign students to advanced classes based on non-academic factors, such as parental requests, rather than relying solely on students’ grades and test scores (Brantlinger 2003; Lareau 2011; McGrath and Kuriloff, 1999; Useem 1992); to privilege White and middle-class cultural norms that may alienate students of color and working-class students and ultimately contribute to their academic disengagement (Carter 2005; Willis 1977); and to engage in teaching practices that align with class-based linguistic patterns (Heath 1983). All of this research exists alongside studies that document significant disparities in the quality of schools that students of different races and social classes attend (Hochschild 2003; Logan et al., 2012). Taken together, this body of research paints a picture of a seemingly meritocratic system that tends to advantage the already advantaged, to privilege the already privileged—a system that David Labaree describes as offering “unlimited possibilities and restricted probabilities” (1997, p. 64). If and when reshuffling along axes of social and economic inequality occurs, it is despite the workings of the education system—not necessarily because of them.

Studies of elite educational institutions confirm these general findings: they too contribute to the reproduction of existing inequalities and are particularly powerful reproducers of the class privilege that has allowed the majority of their students to attend them (Cookson and Persell, 1985; Gaztambide-Fernández 2009; Khan 2011; Kingston and Lewis, 1990; Massey et al., 2003). However, as race-conscious admission policies and financial aid expanded at the nation’s selective colleges and universities throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, further back in the education pipeline, elite boarding schools followed suit by crafting populations of students who were from diverse racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds and by maintaining robust financial aid budgets to support this effort. Thus, with 24% students of color and a median of 32% of students receiving financial aid (National Association of Independent Schools 2016), boarding school populations today look markedly different than the wealthy-White-Protestant-male student bodies of the elite New England boarding schools of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Cookson and Persell, 1985). Attendance at an elite private school often catapults socially and economically disadvantaged students into elite colleges and universities (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 2003). Therefore, while these schools are sites for the social reproduction of the elite, they are also vehicles for significant social mobility for a small proportion of their students (Khan 2011; Massey et al., 2003; Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 2003).

PIPELINE PROGRAMS

As many public school districts have failed to provide high-quality education for low-income students and students of color, a growing number of organizations—such as A Better Chance, Prep for Prep, the TEAK Fellowship, and High Jump—have sought to increase the number of these students in elite private schools. While some pipeline programs help students and their families identify and apply to selective private schools, others offer students longer-term preparation in the form of academic classes spanning entire summers and/or weekday afternoons and Saturdays throughout the school year. It is these more comprehensive programs that provide a steady flow of

students from diverse racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds into the nation's most elite private secondary schools (Gaztambide-Fernández 2009; Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 2003). For example, the Wight Foundation, Oliver Scholars Program, Prep for Prep, and New Jersey SEEDS provide eleven to fourteen months of academic preparation for students prior to helping them apply to the programs' "partner schools," which are among the oldest, wealthiest, and most selective boarding schools in the country (see Gaztambide-Fernandez 2009a for the relative "eliteness" of boarding schools).

Studies that have explored the experiences of students who are race and class minorities in elite educational institutions have found that the elite-schooling experiences of these students differ from those of their more privileged and White peers (Gaztambide-Fernández 2009); Horvat and Antonio, 1999; Howard 2008; Jack 2014; Kuriloff and Reichert, 2003). Upwardly mobile students of color in elite schools often encounter cultural norms and expectations that differ from their own, feel increasingly estranged from their families and friends back home, and feel marginalized or excluded by their more privileged peers (Granfield 1991; Howard 2008; Jack 2014; Kuriloff and Reichert, 2003). A handful of autobiographies, memoirs, and journalistic accounts of people of color who attended elite secondary schools and colleges support these scholarly findings regarding the subjective experience of upward mobility via elite schooling (Anson 1987; Cary 1991; Monroe 1989; Rodriguez 1982; Suskind 1998).

This body of research suggests that low-income students and students of color attending elite schools may face significant social, emotional, cultural, and academic barriers in these predominantly White and affluent environments. However, research has yet to investigate how the increasing number of pipeline programs are preparing students from diverse backgrounds to enter these rarefied educational environments. To my knowledge, Rory Kramer's (2008) case study of a program he refers to as RISE is the only study of a pipeline program. He finds that RISE teaches students to adapt to the elite schools they will attend by adopting what he calls the "diversifier mindset." This mindset involves students' finding satisfaction in teaching their more privileged classmates how to interact with people from different races and class backgrounds. Kramer argues that this mindset is beneficial for individual students because it enables them to envision themselves as "more mature or experienced than their fellow students" (2008, p. 303). However, Kramer argues, the diversifier mindset entails RISE students' adapting to elite environments rather than learning how to challenge and change those environments. Such adaptations, Kramer suggests, may negate some of the benefits that might otherwise be gained by diversifying elite educational institutions.

As Kramer (2008) suggests, explicit preparation of students of color to enter elite spaces may convey lessons, such as the diversifier mindset, that neutralize the potential for students' critique of these spaces and the structures of inequality that support them (see also Fordham 1991 on "racelessness"). Furthermore, instances of individual mobility may serve to legitimate existing social inequalities by providing evidence of the supposed fairness of a meritocratic system based on contest mobility (Bourdieu 1977; Charles 2008; Turner 1960). Alternatively, explicit preparation of students of color to enter elite spaces may prepare them to recognize the mechanisms that heap privilege upon the already privileged, thereby exposing the vast inequalities that lurk beneath a supposedly meritocratic system.

In Kramer's (2008) study, it is the RISE program's occasional special workshops, which include skits and informal discussions, that teach students the diversifier mindset. However, the majority of students' time in RISE and other pipeline programs is spent in academic classes. Therefore, it is not clear how the bulk of these organizations'

programming—namely, their academic curriculum and classes—may prepare students to enter elite schooling environments. In addition to the academic preparation they provide, what role do the academic aspects of pipeline programs play in preparing students to enter elite schools? What types of non-academic lessons may be conveyed through the academic aspects of these programs? Building on Kramer’s (2008) study of a single pipeline program, this paper shines light on another such program and investigates the lessons students learn as a result of the organization’s academic program.²

RESEARCH SITE AND METHODOLOGY

Launch is one of a dozen or more organizations that place low-income students and students of color in private day and boarding schools (and, in some cases, selective public schools). Launch is one of the oldest programs of its kind, and its basic model of intensive, long-term academic preparation can be seen in many of the other pipeline programs that have emerged over the past few decades. The demographics of Launch students are similar to those who participate in other pipeline programs, and the organization’s success in placing students in elite high schools is similar to that of other pipeline programs that offer students year-long (or longer) academic preparation. These aspects of Launch make it a suitable case-study site for investigating the role that the academic aspects of pipeline programs may play in preparing low-income students and students of color to enter elite schools, and for exploring what non-academic lessons may be conveyed through the academic aspects of such programs.

Launch recruits high-achieving Black and Latino 7th-grade students who are from low- or moderate-income families and are attending a public, charter, or parochial school in a large, Northeastern city. Students undergo a selective admissions process that includes an application, an IQ test, two additional standardized tests, a writing sample administered by the organization, and two (in some cases, three) rounds of interviews. The organization admits less than 10% of the students who apply for admission.

Once admitted to Launch, students begin the organization’s 14-month preparatory program, which includes two summers of academic classes and mentoring and an intervening school year of mandatory Saturday classes and weekday tutorials. The 60–65% of students who successfully complete the preparatory program are placed in groups of two to seven students in a dozen or so boarding high schools.³ As Launch students progress through high school, the organization offers them continued support in the form of college counseling, summer internships and travel opportunities, a leadership-development curriculum, social gatherings, and alumni events. Boarding school graduation rates among Launch students are consistently at or above 95%, and college graduation rates for Launch students consistently exceed 85%. Of the nearly 3,000 Launch students who have graduated from college since the organization was founded, over 90% have attended the country’s most competitive colleges, and more than one-third of Launch college graduates have graduated from an Ivy League college.⁴ Additionally, over 40% of Launch college graduates are pursuing or have completed an advanced degree.⁵

The eight-week summer session, which serves as the entry point for students just beginning the program and the final stage before students enter boarding school, consists of academic classes, a mentoring meeting, and a recreation period. For six weeks Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. until 5:30 p.m., the summer session takes

place at an elite, private day school in the city in which Launch students live. For two weeks in the middle of the summer session, the program takes place in residence on a boarding school campus. Many within the Launch community consider the summer sessions, and the two-week residential period in particular, the “heart and ethos” of the program.

The summer session includes both rising eighth graders (first-summer students), who will return in the fall to complete a final year at their current schools, and rising ninth graders (second-summer students), who will enter a boarding school in the fall (see Table 1). The summer session also includes teachers, administrators, and mentors. The mentors are former Launch students who have completed the 14-month program

Table 1. Launch Participants and Data Sources

Launch Participants	Characteristics	Race/Ethnicity
Students (115)	~14-15 years old Rising 8 th graders (first summer; n=70) Rising 9 th graders (second summer; n=45)	Black or Latino/a African Americans and children of immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa, and Central America
Mentors (11)	~18-22 years old Alumni/ae of Launch Currently in college	Black or Latino/a African Americans and children of immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa, and Central America
Administrators (6)	Former boarding school teachers or Launch alumni/ae	Black or Latino/a (except 1 White)
Teachers (9)	Teachers in private boarding or day schools	White or Latino/a
Data Sources	Details and Activities	
Participant-Observation (~500 hours)	Daily, 8 weeks (including 2 weeks living on a boarding school campus) For 6 weeks: ~8:30am to ~5:30pm each weekday, plus occasional evening events For 2 weeks: ~7am to ~10pm each day (including weekends) Included all facets of the program: teacher-preparation week, new-student orientation, meetings (teachers, mentors, parent-teacher), academic classes, lunch, recreation period, after-school detention, study hall, interactions in the hallways and dorms, evening socializing with teachers, mentors, and administrators	
Interviews (28; average length: 90 minutes)	Group interview with all Mentors (1) Individual interviews: Mentors (11) Administrators (6) Teachers (9) Boarding school Librarian (1)	
Organizational Documents (Various)	Promotional materials, internal documents, written communication with families, program rules, mentors' written evaluations of students' progress	

Note: This table first appeared in (Cox 2016b).

and are either current boarding school students or recent boarding school graduates who are now in college. The mentors are employed by Launch for the summer and serve as teachers’ aides and as advisors and role models for the current Launch students. Each mentor is assigned a group of mentees (usually between five and seven students) to meet with daily and oversee throughout the summer session.

Data Collection and Analysis

This paper draws from an ethnographic study of Launch’s summer session. I gained access to the organization through an acquaintance who had completed the Launch program nearly two decades ago and who put me in touch with the program’s director. After communicating with the director and other Launch administrators, I was granted access to the program as a part-time teacher and researcher.⁶ As a White woman in my early thirties who has taught in private day schools and a boarding school attended by Launch students, I blended in with the other Launch teachers (see Table 1). My workload was adjusted to be about two-thirds that of the other teachers to give me time to complete observations and interviews.

I collected data primarily via participant-observation and interviews with each of the mentors, teachers, and administrators. At the director’s request, I did not conduct formal interviews with students participating in the summer session.⁷ Therefore, my findings regarding students’ experiences in the program come from observations, informal conversations with current Launch students, and Launch mentors’ and alum-administrators’ accounts of their own experiences in Launch and at boarding school. In addition to my role as a teacher, I was a participant-observer in a variety of formal and informal settings (see Table 1). During the two weeks of the summer session that took place on a boarding school campus, I lived with Launch students in a dorm.

Being a teacher in the program had advantages and disadvantages in relation to my research. My status as a teacher afforded me access to settings I would likely not have been permitted to observe if I were only a researcher. On a practical level, it allowed me to keep a laptop and notebook close at hand, enabling me to jot down notes and record observations relatively inconspicuously throughout the day. However, my being a teacher may have distanced me from the students I taught, many of whom seemed uncomfortable interacting with teachers, especially during the first few weeks of the program. In contrast, my teacher status gave me no authority over the mentors, who seemed comfortable around me and interested in my research. I detected no overt indications that the racial and ethnic differences between me and the students and mentors impacted my relationships with them. However, such a possibility cannot be ruled out entirely.

Throughout the summer, I spent over 500 hours in contact with students and faculty in the program. I wrote fieldnotes daily, often several times a day to capture events and interactions shortly after they occurred. I conducted a total of twenty-eight semi-structured interviews, each of which was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim (see Table 1).

During the course of data collection, I read and re-read fieldnotes, wrote analytic memos about emerging themes in the data, and adjusted my interview questions to incorporate emerging insights and lines of inquiry into subsequent interviews and observations. In interviews with mentors and alum-administrators, I asked about the interviewees’ experiences as students at Launch, their adjustment to and experiences at boarding school, and their current role within the organization. Although I had begun the project with an interest in how pipeline programs transmit new forms of cultural capital to students, the themes of academic intensity and emotional struggle were ones

that emerged early in my observations and interviews, and these were among the themes that I tracked throughout my research. The relationship between these two themes became increasingly clear as I coded my data.

Using Atlas.ti I coded my interview transcripts and fieldnotes with a combination of pre-defined codes based on theoretical concepts (e.g., cultural capital, emotion management) and grounded “open codes” developed through line-by-line coding (e.g., familial language, emphasis on cohort unity, dealing with academic challenges) (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Using multiple sources of evidence from many different participants, I triangulated my data to cross-check patterns and emerging ideas and to search for disconfirming evidence (Yin 2003).

ENGINEERING STRUGGLE

“Academic boot camp” was the phrase most frequently used by Launch mentors, teachers, and administrators to describe the program’s summer session. Similar to a military boot camp, Launch purposefully creates an environment in which students are nearly guaranteed to struggle. As I illustrate below, Launch students enter the program feeling confident (though unchallenged) in their intellectual abilities, and they are quickly faced with an academic environment that is designed to shake their confidence.

Feeling Confident, Being “Chosen”

Students admitted to Launch have undergone a highly selective, multi-stage process. They have been selected based on their performance on a state-wide standardized test; their grades in school; their performance on a second standardized test, an IQ test, and writing samples administered by Launch; their responses to questions on the Launch application; and their performance in several rounds of interviews with Launch administrators. According to the director of the program, each student admitted to the program has an IQ close to or above 120 and grades in the high 90s.

Given this selective process, it is not surprising that many, if not all, of the admitted students begin the program feeling very confident in their academic abilities. As one mentor asserted about Launch students, “They’re smart, and they’re used to being singled out as the smartest or the brightest.” A mentor named Sofia voiced a sentiment she felt was shared among the Launch students with whom she had entered the program: “I think I speak for a lot of people when I say we came from places where we were kind of on top of the class.” Olivia, another mentor, echoed this feeling when she described how she had felt when she began Launch: “I felt like I was the best of the best.” Similarly, Marcus explained that he too had been confident upon beginning Launch since he was “used to being the kid who would answer the questions right.”

The program’s opening orientation bolstered students’ self-confidence. At the beginning of the orientation, Launch’s admissions officer explained to the new cohort of students and their parents that the group of seventy students had been selected from an initial pool of over 1,000 applicants. The Launch director, speaking several minutes later, explained to the audience that the newly admitted students are about to join “one of the most elite groups in the country” and that after completing Launch they will go on to “the most elite high schools in the world.” He continued, speaking directly to the newly admitted students, “And don’t think ‘elite’ is a bad word. It’s not. And if you do what we ask of you, that adjective will be accurately used to describe every stage of your education.” He told the new students that the Launch summer session is going to be the hardest thing they have ever done, that it is going to challenge them in

ways they have never been challenged, and that it will make them doubt their own intelligence and begin to think that they were admitted to the program by mistake. He concluded by telling the students that whether they complete Launch’s 14-month preparation program is up to them, but that there is no doubt that they are intellectually capable of succeeding in the program and at boarding school. Speaking for the Launch admissions process, he proclaimed matter-of-factly, “We don’t make mistakes about ability.”

The half dozen administrators who spoke during the orientation echoed the director’s emphasis on both the intensity of the academic challenges the students would face at Launch and the students’ intellectual capacity to meet those challenges. They described the program as “very challenging” and requiring “hard work.” One administrator told the newly admitted students, “Being smart is not enough. Now you’ll have to work hard.” He told them that they have “a lot of fire power and now will be asked to use it.” Echoing this message, the head mentor nodded emphatically as she told the students, “You are all talented and you all deserve to be here.” Over and over and from many different speakers, the newly admitted Launch students (and the cohort of second-summer students who were also asked to attend the orientation) were reminded that they are intellectually capable, would be academically stretched in the coming weeks, and would need to work hard to meet these challenges.

Struggle, By Design

Launch follows through on its promise to provide students with a challenging academic experience. The program purposefully creates an environment in which students are nearly guaranteed to struggle academically. Through frequent quizzes, daily homework checks, and aiming for a grade distribution similar to the Bell Curve, Launch teachers are expected to create an academic environment in which few students receive the A’s to which they are accustomed and many students work late into the night to complete the overwhelming amount of homework assigned each day.

The program’s demanding academic curriculum serves several purposes. First, it is meant to equip individual students with the content knowledge and skills they will need at boarding school but are unlikely to acquire at the schools they currently attend. It must also prepare them to handle the academic workload they are likely to encounter at boarding school. Second, as the Launch director explained, the program’s academic curriculum also serves organizational purposes: to maintain its reciprocal relationship with the elite schools its students will attend, Launch must consistently prepare students well. The organization’s relationship with these schools would likely be jeopardized if Launch students consistently perform poorly in boarding school classes. To ensure that these schools continue to reserve spaces for and offer generous financial aid packages to Launch students each year, the program’s students must be able to meet the schools’ academic expectations, and the program must maintain its high boarding school graduation rate, which the director reported as being consistently in the high 90s, “95, 96, 97 percent.”

Against the backdrop of these overarching goals, the more immediate purpose of the program’s academic curriculum—that is, the purpose more often mentioned by administrators and mentors, and the effect most observable among students—was the experience of struggle and the resulting emotional turmoil students underwent as they recalibrated their sense of their academic selves. Not only must Launch students have the academic knowledge and skills that will enable them to meet the academic expectations and handle the homework load at their boarding schools, but even more importantly, they must also *feel* that they are capable of meeting the academic challenges they

will face there. Launch administrators and mentors understood the program's academic curriculum as a tool for inducing an emotional process and recalibration in Launch students, as a way (in the words of the director) "to teach them that they are smart enough to do this, to compete with these kids, to go to boarding school." It is this emotional resource that Launch's academic work is meant to generate in individual students.

Administrators and mentors shared a belief that Launch students must experience and learn to overcome academic struggles and self-doubt. According to the Launch director, the program is intended to be a "safe place" for students to experience feelings of deflation and challenges to their egos, to their sense of their intelligence, and to their commitment to academic work. It is better, he explained, that students experience feelings of self-doubt and learn to overcome them in Launch rather than in the boarding schools they will eventually attend, where the director fears students are not guaranteed to receive as much support through their struggles. One administrator, who completed Launch nearly two decades ago, explained that the greatest challenge of the summer session is to "convince" the incoming students that they can be successful in the program "even when they begin to doubt themselves." She understood the overwhelming academic demands of the summer session as meant to "help the kids really see their true potential." When parents were concerned about their children's low grades in the program, she assured them that Launch expects students to struggle: "We're not pushing them beyond their ability, but we're pushing them beyond what they've been asked to do before." Another administrator responded to parents' concerns by asserting, "Your child is going to struggle. They need to learn to ask for help."⁸

Launch mentors had vivid memories of their own academic struggles in the program. Zuleika, who attends an Ivy League university, told me emphatically, "Launch is the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life." Nicolas, another mentor attending an Ivy League university, recalled:

Launch was the first time that I felt like, 'Wow, this stuff is beyond me, and I have to stay on top [of it].' And still, even with me staying on top, there was still stuff that I was confused about, that I didn't know, that I [had] never had before.

Marcus, another mentor, remembered thinking the amount of homework he was assigned at Launch was a prank. He explained:

It hit me like a brick the first day, just the amount of—when they said, 'Okay, here's your homework,' and I'd be writing the homework down, and still writing the homework down. It was just like, 'Why are they giving so much stuff?' I thought it was a prank.

He recounted the nightly workload:

So they give you 60 pages of reading on top of psychology homework, on top of history readings, on top of I-don't-know-how-many math problems, probably 100 sometimes a night. They would give all this to you in a night and you'd think, 'What in the world is this program doing?'

Current Launch students encountered similarly overwhelming academic demands. Students spoke about staying up past midnight or waking up at dawn to complete their homework. In a meeting held for parents, one mother explained that since beginning Launch, her daughter had been working until 2 a.m. or 3 a.m. each morning to complete her homework. Other parents nodded their heads in agreement as the mother spoke. "My son, too," and "Uh huh, mine also," parents chimed in.

During the two weeks in residence at the boarding school, the volume of work and the intensity of students’ efforts to complete it were evident: on nights when I made rounds through one of the girls’ dorms, I saw students working late into the night, and as I headed out for an early run most mornings, I saw students awake and working on homework at 6 a.m. Students continued their work during breakfast, lunch, and dinner in the dining hall. The following fieldnotes excerpt depicts a typical breakfast scene, in which students attempted to cram as much work as possible into every moment before or between classes:

I count the students in the room (33) and see that only 4 of these 33 are not actively working on homework of some sort. The students are leaning over their copy of *Great Expectations* with a pen in one hand and a fork or spoon or piece of toast in the other hand. Others are flipping through notecards or leaning close to the person sitting next to them while they quiz them from a textbook open between them. Some students have a spiral notebook or three-ring binder resting atop an open geometry textbook as they scribble equations and draw diagrams. At one point a boy gets up and lugs his thick geometry book across the room so he can help another boy finish a problem.

Scenes such as this one were common throughout the summer session. Students worked hard to keep up with a barrage of daily assignments and quizzes, and most used their scarce non-class time not to socialize or relax but to squeeze in a few more math problems or pages of reading.

EXPERIENCING STRUGGLE

As illustrated above, Launch creates an academic environment in which both the difficulty and volume of work are such that students are nearly guaranteed to struggle. Launch mentors experienced this aspect of the program when they themselves were preparing to enter boarding school. They recalled their feelings of frustration and self-doubt when they encountered academic struggles at Launch. Mentors spoke of Launch as a place where they were forced to “learn humility” (a phrase used by several mentors), where for the first time in their lives they were intellectually challenged, surrounded by other high-achieving and motivated classmates, and suddenly had to face the reality of not being the “smartest” student in the class. Olivia, who felt like she had been “ten steps ahead of everybody else” in the middle school she had attended, captured an emotional trajectory that was voiced by many of the mentors when she explained the emotional intensity she had experienced as a Launch student:

It’s just mentally, just—you’re just distraught for a long time, or at least for me I was distraught with all the work. And it’s not even just that it’s a lot of work. It’s just your whole view of yourself, your whole confidence level—it just decreases because you go from thinking you know everything to—you go from thinking that you’re the best, you’re on top, to Launch telling you, ‘No, you’re not the only one.’

Like Olivia, Kyle also struggled emotionally as a result of the academic demands he encountered at Launch:

While I was in Launch, I struggled with the fact that I wasn’t the smartest, and that kind of got to me. And I struggled with the fact that I had to stay up ‘til three

in the morning to do work, and the fact that I was getting three to four hours of sleep every day. That kind of made me angry at times because I was like, ‘Why is this such a struggle for me? Why do I have to struggle?’

Initially unable to adjust to the feeling that he “wasn’t the smartest,” Kyle decided to quit the program during his first summer session. However, after a conversation with the program director and a phone call from his mentor, Kyle decided to continue in the program.⁹ Thinking back to his conversation with Launch’s director, Kyle said, “I think the thing that got me was that he believed in me, and that there were people that believed in me.” Kyle ultimately felt that the academic struggles he faced at Launch played an important role in preparing him for boarding school. When asked what he thinks he needed to be prepared to attend one of the most prestigious secondary schools in the country (and the world), Kyle replied:

I definitely needed to know that I was going to struggle. If I didn’t know that going to [my boarding school], I probably wouldn’t have made it through, because when I got there...and I took my first English class, I probably got the worst grade I’ve ever gotten. I was down for a while, but then I knew that I had experienced the same thing in Launch. I got my worst English grade ever in Launch, so it was like, ‘Okay, I’m fine, just got to work harder.’ That was a skill that I definitely learned at Launch.

As Launch teachers returned homework assignments and quizzes with grades well below the A’s that students were accustomed to receiving in their regular schools, and as students obtained information about how their own performance was stacking up against that of their classmates, it became clear that many of the current Launch students were facing an internal struggle similar to Kyle’s. Over the course of the summer, through conversations with mentors and administrators, I became aware of at least a dozen first-summer students who, at various time throughout the summer, had considered quitting the program. Onani was one such student. After seeing Onani sobbing as she talked quietly with her mentor Sofia one morning, I asked Sofia how Onani was doing. Sofia replied, “Academically she’s having a hard time. She’s just struggling. She thinks she’s the stupid one. And her grades don’t quite tell her otherwise.” Sofia, who had worked as a mentor the previous summer also, said Onani’s feelings of deflation and self-doubt are common among Launch students during their first summer session in the program. She said that several of her current mentees had expressed similar feelings to her, and that her mentees during the previous summer had also struggled with feelings of self-doubt and deflation after receiving low grades.

Like Onani, Sofia had also struggled academically as a Launch student. By her own account, Sofia had had “a tough time with math” at Launch, and she had received a disappointingly low midterm grade in her geometry class during her first summer session. She recalled how her experience of struggle was important in teaching her that she could handle the academic demands at Launch and later at boarding school. In response to my question, “What do you think you needed most to be prepared to go to boarding school?” Sofia responded without hesitation:

I would say that what I needed most was to know that I could do what was asked of me or required of me, that I could do it, that I could get a hold and be really confident in the material that I was learning. And I think as a mentor, it’s my job to make sure that my mentees—not even just my mentees, but just any kid that comes to me—[that] they know that their position, their spot in Launch, it wasn’t

an accident and they were chosen to be here for a reason, and that they can handle it...that’s what I think Launch gave me that was most beneficial when I went off to school—was that I can do it.

Like many of the other mentors, Sofia and Kyle felt that being academically challenged, struggling with the resulting feelings of self-doubt, and persisting and ultimately proving to themselves that they were capable of meeting the challenge was a crucial process they needed to undergo prior to entering boarding school.

Also like Sofia, many of the mentors felt that one of their most important jobs as mentors was to help the current Launch students come to realize that they can make it through the program. Calvin, another mentor, explained his understanding of the purpose of the mentors in a way that echoed comments made by other mentors throughout the summer: “We’re here for the kids that don’t think they’re going to make it.” He continued:

Because these kids, they need the constant reassurance that ‘You guys are soldiers. You’re 12 years old, staying up ‘til like two, three in the morning doing work that people in high school do.’ Like, they need to constantly be told that...emotionally and mentally we’ve got to drive these kids....It all comes down to reassuring them that they’re soldiers.

Calvin’s analogy of Launch students as “soldiers” highlights the program’s emphasis on the importance of individual perseverance through struggle.

The experiences of Olivia, Kyle, Onani, Sofia, and many other Launch students and mentors confirm a Launch administrator’s view that first-summer students are generally “in shock” from the amount of work they are required to complete and that students generally respond to this shock in one of two ways: they either “shut down” or “push harder.” Observations of current Launch students and retrospective accounts of mentors’ experiences at Launch indicate that the common trajectory among Launch students is to initially shut down and doubt their intellectual abilities when faced with academic struggles and then to ultimately push harder and complete the program. Below I discuss what Launch students learn from this experience of struggle, self-doubt, and pushing harder.

LEARNING FROM STRUGGLE: “EARNING” SUCCESS

In addition to providing students with academic skills and knowledge, Launch’s academic curriculum transmits lessons about the connection between hard work, individual achievement, and academic success. The overwhelming lesson that Launch students learn from their academic struggles in the program is that academic success (and, by extension, many other types of success) must be earned. Sofia voiced a sentiment that many of her fellow mentors echoed: “Launch really reinforced this: that anything in this life you have to earn it. If you want something, you have to work for it. You have to earn it.” Josh, another mentor, also felt that his academic struggle in Launch had made him feel as if academic accomplishments must be earned. He described heading to boarding school with the feeling that he was “finally tak[ing] my reward of 12 months’ work.” Tanisha, another mentor, also felt that Launch had taught her that consistent hard work and dedication are the ingredients for eventual academic success. “Stamina,” she told me, was one of the things Launch taught her. She continued:

Stamina—you've got to be able to have the mindset to say, 'I'm going to stick with this until I see an end result.' And that is probably, I'd say, one of the hardest things that Launch taught me....You just have to dedicate yourself to knowing you're going to see the fruits of your labor eventually.

Like Tanisha and the other mentors, students who completed the summer session also seemed to feel as if they had accomplished something, as if they had earned their continuing place in the program and, for second-summer students, their quickly approaching departure for boarding school. Students who make it to the final day of the summer-session exams have endured eight weeks of relentless academic demands and unflinching accountability measures meant to detect every missed assignment and failed assessment. While some students may have harbored fears that their performance in their classes would result in their being asked to leave the program, most seemed to feel that simply making it that far was a victory in itself—they did not quit, they did not give up. Fieldnotes depicting the scene on the last day of the summer session suggest that Launch students and mentors consider making it through the summer session to be a triumph, a major accomplishment:

During the last few minutes of the history exam I am proctoring, I and the students taking the exam begin to hear clapping and cheering in the hallway. I look out the windowpane of my classroom door and then walk out into the hallway to see what's going on. I see mentors standing in the hallway against the wall next to the classrooms in which they had just finished proctoring various exams. The mentors are smiling and clapping and nodding their heads up and down rhythmically. The mentors seem to form what is almost a solid line of clapping down the hall as students begin to trickle one-by-one and in small groups out of classrooms after completing their last exam. The mentors are high-fiving and fist-bumping students and giving them thumbs-up as they walk by. Some mentors are hugging students. Students are walking joyfully and triumphantly out of the classrooms. Some hold their arms up in the air in the shape of a 'V.' Some pump their fists in the air. The students high-five and hug each other. I hear many 'Congratulations' coming from mentors. Students are saying, 'We're done! We're done!' and 'We made it!' as they hug or jump up and down next to each other....The mood is joyful and festive, as if a major victory has just been achieved, a major feat accomplished.

The feeling of immense accomplishment that results from completing the summer session—particularly a student's first summer session, which is considered by Launch administrators, teachers, and mentors to be more challenging and overwhelming for students than their second summer session—was one that resonated deeply among Launch alums, whether mentors or administrators. In the orientation for the incoming cohort of Launch students and their parents, the administrator who was among the first few cohorts of Launch students to complete the program and go on to boarding school ended one of her speeches by telling the audience proudly and emphatically, "Launch is where I learned that I can do absolutely anything I put my mind to." This unwavering confidence in one's own ability to persist and succeed, as a result of having persisted and succeeded in the face of the academic demands encountered at Launch, was something many of the mentors described to me throughout the summer. Similar to the way in which Sofia credited her struggles at Launch with teaching her "that I could do it, that I could get a hold and be really confident in the material that I was learning," Marcus also saw his academic struggles in the summer session as leading him to (re)gain a sense of self-confidence and feel that he "could do anything":

So you work on these things that are way beyond your age level so that you can see exactly how much you can accomplish. Because once you finish the program, at our [Launch] commencement, when I was walking off stage, I felt I could do anything, simply because there was all this stuff packed into 14 months and I not only survived it, but I learned a lot from it.

Olivia, another mentor, also emerged from Launch with a powerful sense of confidence in her ability to meet the challenges that lay ahead of her as she was poised to begin her sophomore year at a prestigious liberal arts college and was looking ahead to medical school:

I’d be terrified if I hadn’t been through Launch, if Launch hadn’t—because Launch breaks you down, but then at the same time as it’s breaking you down, it’s showing you how awesome you are. So if Launch hadn’t shown me how awesome I am, I would not be able to take—I mean, like that the fact that I need to do well to get into med school—like all these things I wouldn’t be taking as coolly or as smoothly as I’m taking it now.

For several of the mentors whose parents had not completed high school, their successes in Launch seemed to feel even more powerful to them, even more undeniably *theirs* since they had succeeded at academic tasks that they had faced without parental help other than love and emotional support. For example, Sofia described her mother as being incredibly supportive as she progressed through Launch and into boarding school. She recalled knowing that the academic help her mother was able to give her was limited since her mother had not completed high school in her native Caribbean country. As Sofia explained, these circumstances further bolstered the sense of self-confidence and self-reliance that she gained from her experiences in Launch:

My mom didn’t even finish high school, so I didn’t have any help when I was in Launch, none whatsoever when I left Launch. So I had to do everything on my own, and when you know what you’re made of, it gives you, like you have so much confidence. You have confidence in what you can do and what you are doing and just where it’s all going to take you. So I have faith in how everything’s going to end up in myself, just because I came to Launch.

An overwhelming theme in the mentors’ narratives of their Launch experience was that they had faced the challenges Launch presented to them, they had worked hard, and through their hard work, they had earned their successes in the program, their robust feelings of self-confidence, and their place at their boarding school. The mentors’ sense of their accomplishments echoed the words of the director to the incoming cohort of students: “Launch will not GIVE you anything. Everything you get from this program, you will EARN.” Through Launch, mentors explained to me over and over again, they had learned that success must be earned through a combination of hard work and perseverance, and that they are capable of earning it.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As the preceding sections illustrate, Launch students undergo a rigorous selection process meant to ensure their high intellectual ability. They begin the program feeling confident and are repeatedly reminded by administrators and mentors that they have

been “chosen,” “handpicked,” and that they are capable of doing well at Launch and in boarding school. They encounter an academic curriculum designed to ensure that they struggle, and they experience and overcome feelings of frustration and self-doubt. They ultimately complete the program and go on to boarding school with a powerful feeling of self-confidence and a belief that it is individual hard work that will determine their success, academic and otherwise.

On the level of individual students, the emotional processes that are induced by Launch’s academic curriculum and lead to renewed or increased self-confidence are likely to serve students well when they enter boarding school. For nearly all of the mentors, their experiences of academic struggle and persistence in the face of self-doubt at Launch were important ones for them to have before entering boarding school. Having equipped these individuals with the ability, in Olivia’s words, to face future academically daunting experiences more “coolly” or “smoothly” than they might have otherwise, the challenging academic environment of Launch may be seen as transmitting the resource of emotion management to students (Hochschild 1979, 1983).

According to Arlie Hochschild (1979), emotion management involves an individual’s “inducing or inhibiting feelings so as to render them ‘appropriate’ to a situation” (p. 551). Based on accounts from Launch mentors and several alum-administrators, the emotional processes many students undergo at Launch do indeed help them regulate their feelings in beneficial ways in response to situations they encounter at boarding school (and later in college).¹⁰ While students’ experiences in Launch are unlikely to insulate them entirely from future feelings of self-doubt or possible “shutting down” when they experience academic struggles, the mentors felt that the “pre-shock” they had endured at Launch in many ways inoculated them against potentially overwhelming emotional reactions that they may have experienced for the first time at boarding school or in college. In this way, the academically-induced emotional rollercoaster of Launch appears to be beneficial for individual students and may spare them at least some of the emotional costs—particularly those related to self-doubt in the presence of more academically-prepared classmates—associated with attending an elite educational institution (see e.g., Gaztambide-Fernández 2009; Horvat and Antonio, 1999; Howard 2008; Ispa-Landa 2013; Khan 2011; Kuriloff and Reichert, 2003). These emotional lessons may also protect students from experiencing some of the negative outcomes, such as academic under-performance and academic disengagement, that may result from stereotype threat (Steele 2010b), which may be especially powerful for students of color in the context of elite boarding schools.

Launch’s academic program also conveys a message about merit, hard work, and academic success. Having been admitted to the program on the basis of their prior academic achievements, students likely arrive at Launch with a belief in the education system as one that distributes rewards based on individual merit.¹¹ Launch repeatedly tells students that they are smart and capable of doing well at Launch and in boarding school, and that it is individual hard work that will determine their success. “Being smart is not enough. Now you’ll have to work hard,” an administrator warned admitted students. If students do not believe this upon entering Launch, the program’s academic gauntlet ensures that they leave with the meritocratic belief that academic success in elite educational environments, if not in the schools they currently attend, must be earned. Thus, whether or not Launch plants the initial seed of this belief in students, it certainly nourishes its growth via an intensive, 14-month experience.

While Launch mentors knew that their socioeconomic status (as indicated by their parents’ levels of education, occupations, and incomes) and their race and/or ethnicity were different from those of the majority of their boarding school classmates, their discussions among themselves and with me revealed almost no critique of the systems

of social inequality that bolster the elite boarding schools and colleges they attended or are attending. Of all of the mentors, Sofia was the one who seemed most aware of these issues. She spoke most readily about the “entitlement” she saw among her more privileged classmates at the boarding school she had attended. She seemed able to juggle a narrative of individual hard work and persistence with an understanding of a larger educational (and economic) system that allows some individuals to reach similar levels of success with much less hard work than others.

Sofia said of her more privileged boarding school classmates, “The kids around me had a stronger sense of entitlement. They just felt like it should be given to them, like, ‘This “A” should have been given to me, even though I spent like [only] an hour doing this paper, [only] an hour researching.’” Sofia described many of her classmates as appearing to feel as if they could “cruise on through” their classes without the careful planning and hard work that Sofia felt she put into her classes and extracurricular activities. She also expressed an understanding of the ways in which her more privileged boarding school classmates were positioned differently in terms of the previous schools they had attended and their social connections:

You know, work has been easy for them or something. I think it’s partially the [previous] school they came from, and it’s also partially just because they were privileged. They feel like if a teacher gave them a bad grade, [they would respond,] ‘I’m gonna call my aunt, who put together this anthology, and she’ll tell him [the teacher] that my essay was worth more than a B-.’

Despite recognizing these inequalities based on students’ positions within class-based structures, Sofia maintained a belief in the importance of hard work, a belief she said was reinforced by Launch: “If you want something, you have to work for it. You have to earn it.”

Unlike Sofia, the other Launch mentors did not offer critiques of the social and economic structures within which their boarding schools are embedded and that provide advantages for the majority of their boarding school peers. This silence may not be surprising given the institutional context of Launch and the boarding schools it prepares students to attend. Research suggests that the discourse of individual responsibility for success that Launch promotes is one that may be particularly strong in middle- and upper-middle-class school settings, such as the ones Launch students will experience at boarding school (Demerath and Lynch, 2008; Khan 2011, 2012; McLeod and Yates, 2006; O’Flynn and Petersen, 2007).

The individualistic earning-your-success feeling that Launch generates in students is similar to the meritocratic ideology that Shamus Khan (2011) found among students attending the elite boarding school he studied. These students embraced a rhetoric of meritocratic achievement even as they benefitted from unearned advantages. Based on this study, Khan argues that the “new elite,” unlike their historical predecessors, have moved from an ethic of exclusion to one of inclusion. He writes, “What is crucial is that no one is explicitly excluded” (Khan 2011, p. 197). Instead, he continues, “What matters are individual attributes and capacities, not durable inequalities. From this point of view, those who are not successful are not necessarily disadvantaged; they are simply those who have failed to seize the opportunities afforded by our new, open society” (Khan 2011, p. 197). Khan’s research suggests that Launch’s message of meritocratic achievement may align Launch students with the views they are likely to encounter at boarding school, views that effectively mask the privileges that have allowed the majority of boarding school students to arrive at those schools.

Thus, even as Launch helps students evade patterns of social inequality that would otherwise disadvantage them, students' experiences in the program may reinforce a story line that undergirds durable patterns of inequality. Against the backdrop of the American Dream and society's championing of individual talent, effort, and hard work, the notion of individual responsibility for "earning" success that Launch inculcates in students may ultimately serve to strengthen the myth of a meritocratic society that rewards individuals based on their talents and efforts (see e.g., McLeod and Yates, 2006; Walkerdine 2003; Youdell 2004). The message of "earned" success masks the degree to which these very students come to be seen—and perhaps see themselves—as evidence that the system in fact works for those willing to work hard enough, and leaves behind those who lack the proper work ethic or individual talent. By eschewing a more structural understanding of success (or failure), this meritocratic message may blunt Launch students' recognition and critique of overarching social, political, cultural, and economic systems that contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities along predictable lines of race, ethnicity, and social class.

Although some studies suggest that individuals may not recognize the overarching structures in which they are embedded and which advantage some and disadvantage others (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; MacLeod 2009), other studies suggest that, like Sofia, students of color attending elite schools may come to recognize structural inequalities (Khan 2011; Kuriloff and Reichert, 2003).¹² For example, Carla, a Black student who was a senior at the elite school Khan (2011) studied, explained that, rather than an increase in her knowledge or skills leading to a boost in her grades since her freshman year, it was instead her learning how to, in her words, "bullshit" that led to her receipt of high grades on her academic papers. "I didn't get smarter. I learned how to say the same thing, only different. Not my way, yours," she explained to Khan (2011, p. 103). Carla was able to recognize and master the "hidden curriculum," the unwritten rules of her boarding school, and it was this mastery, not her intellect or hard work, that enabled her to excel at boarding school.

Similarly, the Black boys in Peter Kuriloff and Michael Reichert's (2003) study at an elite day school saw differences in the distribution of academic and athletic awards as based more on race- and class-based differences than on individuals' merits. These students developed a collective understanding of the race and class dynamics in their school. Like Carla in Khan's study, they emerged with a "critique of the school's hidden curriculum as well as agreement about the value of mastering it" (Kuriloff and Reichert, 2003, p. 764). These studies suggest that students of color attending elite schools may develop critiques of the social structures that benefit many of their more privileged classmates. However, as Kramer (2008) argues and as my data suggest, the lessons learned or reinforced in pipeline programs—whether the diversifier mindset at RISE (Kramer 2008) or belief in the connection between hard work and success at Launch—may neutralize these potential critiques, leaving students unwilling or unable to cast a critical eye on the broader structures in which they have succeeded.

Based on what I observed at Launch and what I heard in interviews and conversations with Launch alums (both mentors and administrators), students' experience in the program seems to neutralize critiques of the kind that Khan (2011) and Kuriloff and Reichert (2003) found among students of color in the elite schools they studied. While programs such as Launch support the educational advancement and emotional adjustment of individual students entering elite schools, they may prevent these students from challenging processes that create persistent patterns of social inequality. As pipeline programs seek to diversify the social, political, and economic elite and prepare a new face of leadership, the lessons students learn in the course of this preparation may ultimately reinforce the ideologies undergirding the social inequalities that these programs help students sidestep.

Corresponding author: Amanda Barrett Cox, Department of Sociology, 3718 Locust Walk, McNeil Building, Ste. 113, Philadelphia, PA 19104. Email: abcox@upenn.edu

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author thanks Nora Gross, Charlotte Jacobs, Rand Quinn, and Kathleen Riley for helpful comments on early drafts of this paper. Thanks also go to Prudence Carter for input on the design of the study, to Annette Lareau for countless conversations during and after fieldwork at Launch, and to anonymous reviewers at *Du Bois Review* for feedback that strengthened the paper. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2015 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association.

NOTES

1. “Launch” and all other proper names are pseudonyms. In some descriptions I have altered identifying details to protect the organization’s and individuals’ identities.
2. By focusing on the relationship between Launch’s academic curriculum and students’ emotional experience, I do not mean to imply that the emotional lessons and the meritocratic messages about success that I highlight in this paper are the only non-academic lessons students learn from their academic experiences at Launch. Elsewhere I focus on the program’s lessons about feeling rules (Cox 2016a), its emphasis on help-seeking and social support among peers, and the way in which the program equips students with forms of social and cultural capital that will benefit them once at boarding school (Cox 2017).
3. According to the Launch director and in agreement with my observations at Launch, except for a few discipline-related issues that lead to students being asked to leave the program, the majority of students who drop out of Launch do so voluntarily, and the bulk of these students leave within the first few weeks of their first summer session. However, as I witnessed, some students leave the program after more than thirteen months, just a few weeks before they would otherwise be heading to boarding school. I was not able to follow-up with any students who left the program during the summer of my data collection.
4. “Most competitive” category is based on Barron’s *Profiles of American Colleges 2016* (Barron’s Educational Series 2015).
5. To protect the identity of the organization, I rounded these figures, which include Launch students who have attended either a boarding or day school. Data in this paper come from my study of the Launch program that prepares students to attend boarding schools, not day schools. My conversations with Launch’s boarding school program director give me no reason to believe that the rates of college attendance or the types of colleges attended differ significantly among Launch students who attended a boarding or day school. Because I was unable to obtain disaggregated data, I report the aggregated numbers so the reader may get a sense of Launch students’ educational trajectories.
6. I also secured the necessary approvals from my university’s Institutional Review Board.
7. The director’s one request was that my research not place additional demands on the current Launch students, who struggle to meet the program’s demands. Therefore, I was not permitted to conduct formal interviews with students who were participating in the summer session. Nevertheless, through interactions and conversations with students, I had ample access to their informal comments in daily life.
8. Research suggests that lower-income students are less likely than their middle-class peers to seek help from teachers, and as a result they are often academically disadvantaged (Calarco 2011, 2014; Croninger and Lee, 2001). Thus, Launch’s academic curriculum conveys valuable lessons about asking for help alongside the emotional lessons about overcoming academic struggle.
9. Kyle went on to attend a top-tier boarding school and an Ivy League university.
10. This paper focuses on emotion management related to academic struggles. As I explore elsewhere, Launch also equips students with knowledge of the feeling rules they are likely to encounter at boarding school (Cox 2016a) and with emotion-management skills related more specifically to being a racial and social-class minority at their boarding schools (Cox 2017).

11. I am thankful to an anonymous reviewer for emphasizing this possibility.
12. I am thankful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this tension in the research literature.

REFERENCES

- Anson, Robert (1987). *Best Intentions: The Education and Killing of Edmund Perry*. New York: Random House.
- Barron's Educational Series (2015). *Profiles of American Colleges 2016*. Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Educational Series.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1977). Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction. In Jerome Karabel and A. H. Halsey (Eds.), *Power and Ideology in Education*, pp. 487–511. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, and Jean-Claude Passeron (1990). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bowles, Samuel, and Herbert Gintis (1976). *Schooling in Capitalist America*. New York: Basic Books.
- Brantlinger, Ellen (2003). *Dividing Classes: How the Middle Class Negotiates and Rationalizes School Advantage*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Calarco, Jessica McCrory (2011). "I Need Help!" Social Class and Children's Help-Seeking in Elementary School. *American Sociological Review*, 76(6): 862–882.
- Calarco, Jessica McCrory (2014). Coached for the Classroom: Parents' Cultural Transmission and Children's Reproduction of Educational Inequalities. *American Sociological Review*, 79(5): 1015–1037.
- Carter, Prudence (2005). *Keepin' It Real: School Success Beyond Black and White*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cary, Lorene (1991). *Black Ice*. New York: Knopf.
- Charles, Maria (2008). Culture and Inequality: Identity, Ideology, and Difference in "Postscriptive Society." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 619: 41–58.
- Cookson, Peter W. Jr., and Caroline Hodges Persell (1985). *Preparing for Power: America's Elite Boarding Schools*. New York: Basic Books.
- Corbin, Juliet M., and Anselm Strauss (1990). Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1): 3–21.
- Cox, Amanda Barrett (2016a). Correcting Behaviors and Policing Emotions: How Behavioral Infractions Become Feeling-Rule Violations. *Symbolic Interaction*, 39(3): 484–503.
- Cox, Amanda Barrett (2016b). Mechanisms of Organizational Commitment: Adding Frames to Greedy Institution Theory. *Sociological Forum*, 31(3): 685–708.
- Cox, Amanda Barrett (2017). Cohorts, "Siblings," and Mentors: Organizational Structures and the Creation of Social Capital. *Sociology of Education*, 90(1): 47–63.
- Croninger, Robert G., and Valerie E. Lee (2001). Social Capital and Dropping out of High School: Benefits to At-Risk Students of Teachers' Support and Guidance. *Teachers College Record*, 103(4): 548–581.
- Demerath, Peter, and Jill Lynch (2008). Identities for Neoliberal Times: Constructing Enterprising Selves in an American Suburb. In Nadine Dolby and Fazal Rizvi (Eds.), *Youth Moves: Identities and Education in Global Perspective*, pp. 179–192. New York: Routledge.
- Fordham, Signithia (1991). Racelessness in Private Schools: Should We Deconstruct the Racial and Cultural Identity of African-American Adolescents? *Teachers College Record*, 92(3): 470–484.
- Gaztambide-Fernandez, Rubén A. (2009a). What Is an Elite Boarding School? *Review of Educational Research*, 79(3): 1090–1128.
- Gaztambide-Fernández, Rubén A. (2009). *The Best of the Best: Becoming Elite at an American Boarding School*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Granfield, Robert (1991). Making It by Faking It: Working-Class Students in an Elite Academic Environment. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 20(3): 331–351.
- Heath, Shirley Brice (1983). *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell (1979). Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure. *American Journal of Sociology*, 85(3): 551–575.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell (1983). *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Hochschild, Jennifer (2003). Social Class in Public Schools. *Journal of Social Issues*, 59(4): 821–840.

- Horvat, Erin McNamara, and Anthony Lising Antonio (1999). “Hey, Those Shoes Are Out of Uniform”: African American Girls in an Elite High School and the Importance of Habitus. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 30(3): 317–342.
- Howard, Adam (2008). *Learning Privilege: Lessons of Power and Identity in Affluent Schooling*. New York: Routledge.
- Ispa-Landa, Simone (2013). Gender, Race, and Justifications for Group Exclusion: Urban Black Students Bussed to Affluent Suburban Schools. *Sociology of Education*, 86(3): 218–233.
- Jack, Anthony Abraham (2014). Culture Shock Revisited: The Social and Cultural Contingencies to Class Marginality. *Sociological Forum*, 29(2): 453–475.
- Jack, Anthony Abraham (2015). (No) Harm in Asking Class, Acquired Cultural Capital, and Academic Engagement at an Elite University. *Sociology of Education*, 20(10): 1–19.
- Khan, Shamus (2011). *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul’s School*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Khan, Shamus (2012). Elite Identities. *Identities*, 19(4): 477–484.
- Kingston, Paul W., and Lionel S. Lewis (Eds.) (1990). *The High-Status Track: Studies of Elite Schools and Stratification*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Kramer, Rory (2008). Diversifiers at Elite Schools. *Du Bois Review*, 5(2): 287–307.
- Kuriloff, Peter J., and Michael C. Reichert (2003). Boys of Class, Boys of Color: Negotiating the Academic and Social Geography of an Elite Independent School. *Journal of Social Issues*, 59: 751–769.
- Labaree, David F. (1997). Public Goods, Private Goods: The American Struggle Over Educational Goals. *American Educational Research Journal*, 34(1): 39–81.
- Lareau, Annette (2011). *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Logan, John R., Elisabeta Minca, and Sinem Adar (2012). The Geography of Inequality: Why Separate Means Unequal in American Public Schools. *Sociology of Education*, 85(3): 287–301.
- MacLeod, Jay (2009). *Ain’t No Makin’ It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Massey, Douglas S., Camille Z. Charles, Garvey Lundy, and Mary J. Fischer (2003). *The Source of the River: The Social Origins of Freshmen at America’s Selective Colleges and Universities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- McGrath, Daniel J., and Peter J. Kuriloff (1999). “They’re Going to Tear the Doors Off This Place”: Upper-Middle-Class Parent School Involvement and the Educational Opportunities of Other People’s Children. *Educational Policy*, 13(5): 603–629.
- McLeod, Julie, and Lyn Yates (2006). *Making Modern Lives: Subjectivity, Schooling, and Social Change*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Monroe, Sylvester (1989). *Brothers: Black and Poor—a True Story of Courage and Survival*. New York: Morrow.
- National Association of Independent Schools (2016). *Facts at a Glance*. Washington, DC: National Association of Independent Schools. <<http://www.nais.org/Statistics/Documents/TABSfactsAtAGlance201516.pdf>> (accessed May 1, 2017).
- O’Flynn, Gabrielle, and Eva Bendix Petersen (2007). The “Good Life” and the “Rich Portfolio”: Young Women, Schooling and Neoliberal Subjectification. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 28(4): 459–472.
- Rodriguez, Richard (1982). *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez: An Autobiography*. Boston, MA: D.R. Godine.
- Steele, Claude M. (2010). *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Suskind, Ron (1998). *A Hope in the Unseen: An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Turner, Ralph H. (1960). Sponsored and Contest Mobility and the School System. *American Sociological Review*, 25(6): 855–867.
- Useem, Elizabeth L. (1992). Middle Schools and Math Groups: Parents’ Involvement in Children’s Placement. *Sociology of Education*, 65(4): 263–279.
- Walkerline, Valerie (2003). Reclassifying Upward Mobility: Femininity and the Neoliberal Subject. *Gender and Education*, 15(3): 237–248.
- Willis, Paul (1977). *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Yin, Robert K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Amanda Barrett Cox

- Youdell, Deborah (2004). Engineering School Markets, Constituting Schools and Subjectivating Students: The Bureaucratic, Institutional and Classroom Dimensions of Educational Triage. *Journal of Education Policy*, 19(4): 407–431.
- Zweigenhaft, Richard L., and G. William Domhoff (2003). *Blacks in the White Elite: Will the Progress Continue?* New York: Rowman & Littlefield.