Author(s)/Höf.:,   Auður Magndís Auðardóttir

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Auður Magndís Auðardóttir
ama@hi.is
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3959-2731
Department of Education and Diversity
University of Iceland
Skipholt 37
105 Reykjavík
Iceland

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse working-class mothers' narratives of social interactions among parents at their children's schools. A special focus is paid to the emotions that arise in such interactions and their role in the reproduction of class. A narrative analysis of six stories of white, working-class mothers of compulsory school aged children was carried out. The study is set in Iceland, which gives a unique opportunity for classed and gendered analysis of parental communities as the country is at the forefront of gender equality in the world. Additionally, the compulsory school system is still relatively unsegregated. Findings show that the parental communities reproduce the symbolic violence endured by the working-class mothers within the field of education. Accounts of resistance and anger are present in some of the accounts but affective responses such as inferiority and shame are all-encompassing and contribute to the reproduction of class.

Keywords: Parental communities, mothering, qualitative method, class, gender

Introduction

Contemporary families are faced with increased demands for involvement in their children's schooling. This includes active school choice, homework assistance, and school-based involvement in, for example, parents' associations (Vincent 2017; Griffith and Smith 2005; Bæck 2010; Reay 2005b; Auðardóttir and Kosunen 2020). Same literature explores both the gendered and the classed dimensions of parental educative work and how these reproduce class and gender inequalities and augment social differences. We know that mothers are primarily responsible for this educative work (Griffith and Smith 2005) and that their access to recourses to fulfil this role is highly contingent upon their class status (Reay 2005b). Interactions with other parents are hard or impossible to escape when it comes to school involvement, such as at events at the school, and also play a vital role when managing children's friendships (Byrne 2006). It is, therefore, important

to study mothers' experiences of social interactions with other parents at their children's school, but this aspect has been somewhat neglected in previous studies which tend to focus on parent-teacher interactions.

The aim of this study is to analyse narratives from working-class mothers about their experiences of social interactions among parents at their children's schools. This is done through a narrative analysis of six stories of white, working-class, native Icelandic mothers of compulsory school aged children. In the analysis, I examine the mothers' social and academic experiences with the school system in their childhood as a prologue to their experiences as mothers of school aged children. The study is set in the Reykjavik metropolitan area which gives the study an important background for at least two reasons. Firstly, the city is still less geographically segregated along class lines than most other European cities (Magnúsdóttir, Auðardóttir, and Stefánsson 2020). Many studies on parental interactions are set within cities that have more geographical divisions along class lines than Reykjavík. That is, they tend to focus on working-class families who live and educate their children within schools that are disproportionately working class (see for example Hanafin and Lynch (2002)). While this is important, it is also of interest to examine working-class parental experiences within school communities that are heterogeneous and thus presumably more likely to create understanding and cohesion across class lines. Secondly, the study is set in a country that is at the forefront of gender equality on a global basis (World Economic Forum 2020). To examine working-class motherhood in a country often praised for valuing gender equality is interesting as it allows us to interrogate the notion of the 'utopia of equality'. It also adds to our understanding of the intersections of class and gender in connection to educative work.

The theoretical point of departure is inspired by a Bourdieusian approach to class reproduction and symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Drawing on the work of Diane Reay (2015, 2005a), I analyse manifestations of reproduction of class through social interactions between parents with an emphasis on the emotions generated in this process. A key concept in the analytical work is symbolic violence and its manifestations and reproduction through parental interactions.

Educative work is often understood as mainly evolving around practices within the home, such as homework assistance, or cooperation between teachers and parents. It is essential to note that communications within the parental communities of schools is also an important venue for educative work. Socialising with other parents, exchanging information, and using strategic alliances with other parents are important factors in educative work and can have high relevance for the wellbeing of the children in the school setting (Calarco 2014; Li and Fischer 2017; Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau 2003). This study, thus, defines social interactions with other parents as one form of parental educative work. Therefore, it is important to understand the classed and gendered nuances of parental communities.

In this article I first discuss previous studies that have examined parental educative work as the result of increased consumerism and the classed, gendered and emotional dimensions of these trends.[1] Following the literature review is an overview of the study design, that includes information about the analytical process, the background of the participants and the social

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[1] The literature review of this articles makes mostly use of UK and US studies on educative work and the reproduction of class. Wherever possible I have added Icelandic references, but this area of research has been given close to no attention by Icelandic scholars. The Icelandic context is bound to be somewhat different from the UK and US social and classed context and therefore the relevance must not be taken at a face value. However, given the scant studies on the Icelandic context it will have to suffice for now. This lack of Icelandic studies on the matter further underscores the importance of this study.

composition of their school communities. I will then turn to the findings of the analysis and then bring the article to an end with concluding remarks.

Consumerism, class, and motherhood

I build on studies that look at the discourse of individual responsibilities where parents, most notably mothers, are the subject of consumerism (Olmedo and Wilkins 2016; Vincent 2017). Consumerism highlights individual parental responsibility to make the right/best educational choices for their individual child. Any rejection of this personal responsibility is seen as a failure to live up to the expectations around the responsible parent (Wilkins 2010; Olmedo and Wilkins 2016). Thus, mothers see it as their motherly duty to seize every opportunity to reproduce or improve their, and their child's, class status through parental choices and practices (Vincent 2010; Olmedo and Wilkins 2016). Class is here understood in a Bourdieusian way, as relational and as accumulated social, cultural and economic capital. The reproduction of social and cultural capital is of special interest here because, while you can easily bequeath your economic wealth to your children, you need educational strategies to ensure the transmission of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, 1977). Under consumerist ideologies, parental practices in Iceland as well as in other affluent countries, have thus moved beyond 'providing food, shelter, and love' (Vincent 2017, 543). These practices are gendered and intimately connected to the social construction of the responsible mother (Vincent 2010, 2017).

Mothers' claims to the status of the responsible parent under the consumerist ideologies are highly contingent upon their class status (Reay 2005b; Berg and Peltola 2015). Studies from Scandinavia, the UK and the US show that university educated parents are more involved in their children's schoolwork and more often take part in home-school co-operation (Bæck 2010; Lareau 2000; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2013). Contrary to popular belief, mothers' interest in and emphasis on educating their children is not just a middle-class phenomenon. The difference

between middle-class and working-class mothers is rather to be found in their access to the resources that enable them to fulfil the consumerist definition of the responsible parent (Reay 2005b). Yet, policy makers continue to focus on privileged parents when setting examples of good parenting. They do not account for class-based access to symbolic power and resources for parenting that undermine the parenting practices of working-class parents (Dermott and Pomati 2015; Gewirtz 2001). As a result, working-class parents, especially mothers, are often seen as deficit or lacking in ambition and/or skills (Reay 2020). Similarly, the definition of the respectable and good parent is intimately connected to class, gender and ethnicity where those who do not follow middle-class parenting styles are deemed to be 'other' and less respectable (Berg and Peltola 2015).

Parental educative work and parent communities

An important part of the consumerist ideologies of parental practices and a fundamental feature of the 'respectable parent' is taking part in parent communities in connections to their children's schooling. An increased emphasis on parental educative work has been documented throughout affluent countries in the world (Vincent 2017; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2013), including the Nordic countries like Iceland (Helgøy and Homme 2017; Magnúsdóttir 2013; Kristoffersson 2009; Jónsdóttir 2013). Parents, in particular mothers, are increasingly pushed towards more intimate communications with other parents at the children's schools or extra-curricular activities. A recent study with Icelandic compulsory school staff found that a staggering 98% of them said that it was desirable to have parents attend social events in the school (Jónsdóttir 2013). Furthermore, there are indications that the increased emphasis on parental involvement in children's schooling is now, also in Iceland, used by the middle- and upper-class mothers to secure the social and academic success of their children (Auðardóttir and Magnúsdóttir 2020; Auðardóttir and Kosunen 2020). A recent study also highlighted the importance of organisation, structure, positivity and educative

work in the social construction of the 'good and worthy' parent, in particular mother, in Iceland (Auðardóttir and Rúdólfsdóttir 2021).

Studies on parental communities in the United States suggest that they can be sites of exclusion and hostility around intersections of gender, sexuality, race and class although they can also provide connection and inclusion (Goldberg, Allen, and Carroll 2020; Li and Fischer 2017). Working-class and poor parents tend to have fewer ties to people that they trust regarding school related information (Fong 2019). Because of their entitled mentality around educative work and schooling, middle-class parents tend to become more of insiders in school settings and share information on school affairs with other, typically middle-class parents (Calarco 2014; Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau 2003). As a result, in mixed school settings, working-class parents tend to know fewer of the fellow parents at their children's school, which renders them as somewhat of outsiders in school settings. (Calarco 2014). These types of classed parental interactions within schools have not been studied in Iceland.

This value system, where working-class parenting practices and working-class knowledge are systematically undermined and set up as a defect is embedded in our school systems (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau 2003). Within the school system, parents who hold relatively more social and cultural capital that is valued by other parents, by teachers and by society in general, hold symbolic power and are able to use this power to gain an advantage within the school setting (Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau 2003). Symbolic violence then takes place when the dominated come to take their subordination as a natural and just way of being and when the social space in question (here the educative work in the form of parent-to-parent communications) is structured around the symbolic capital of the middle and upper classes. The middle-class parents therefore need only to 'play the game' to maintain their hierarchical positions and subsequently

the subordinate position of the working-class families. Here, 'the game' refers to attending school events, partaking in parental cooperation and generally socialising with other parents of children in the school. In the process of symbolic violence, all participants agree upon the fairness of 'the game' and misrecognise the fact that it is designed around the symbolic capital of the dominant groups, here middle-class parents.

Feelings of Class

Reay (2015, 21) argues that social class scholars tend to strip 'the affective out of accounts, sanitising the pain and pleasure' in their analysis of symbolic violence and the reproduction of class. Scholars who have drawn from theories of affect argue for the necessity of analysing and unpacking feelings when exploring hierarchies, social justice, and symbolic violence (Ahmed 2004; Slobodin 2019; Reay 2015; Skeggs 2004). Several scholars who analyse classed relations from a feminist and critical approach have found that shame is one of the central feelings in the analysis of symbolic violence (Reay 2005a). Loveday (2015) argues that shame has become misrecognised as a deficiency of the self rather than a consequence of the symbolic violence endured by both women and the working classes, and thus in particular working-class women.

I find Chase and Walker (2013) theorisation on shame useful. They claim that shame is a co-construction between internal judgement, anticipated judgement by others and the actual verbal or symbolic judgement of others who are deemed superior to the person sensing shame. Naturally, maternal shame is of special interest to this paper. Slobodin (2019, 217) points out that

> [t]oday's mothers (particularly in Western cultures) operate under a social gaze which expects them to meet the cultural, moral standards of 'good' motherhood. The actual and internalized judging gaze of society and the perception of not meeting these standards are often the source of maternal shame.

This, coupled with the consumer culture definition of 'good' motherhood (Olmedo and Wilkins 2016; Vincent 2017) and the subsequent increased emphasis on educative work, makes it necessary

to study shame when analysing gendered and classed dimensions of parental involvement in their children's schooling.

The Study

The qualitative data consists of six semi-structured interviews with working-class mothers conducted in 2017. All of them are white and native Icelandic. Thus, it is not possible to explore diverse accounts from different ethnic or racialized groups in this study. A total of 14 interviews with working-class mothers were collected for the research project titled Parental Practices, Choices, and Responsibilities in the Icelandic Field of Education funded by The Gender Equality Fund. For this sub-study I have selected six of the interviews for narrative analysis. This selection was done based on the content of the interviews. This type of selection is an established part of qualitative research (Erel and Ryan 2019). Analysing individual stories thoroughly can facilitate a nuanced understanding of societal issues on micro, meso and macro levels (Neale, Henwood, and Holland 2012). In those six interviews, the mothers were especially vocal about their interactions with other parents at their children's schools.

Narrative analysis gives me tools to understand the participants' experiences in a nuanced manner and identify similarities between the accounts while also contextualizing their experiences in their background stories (Murray 2015). It also gives me the freedom to explore how the different elements in the narratives are connected, to analyse short stories within the longer stories and to examine the tone being used, the images the narrators draw upon, and the underlying values what values, all key components of narrative analysis (Murray 2015). In the analytical process I followed Murray's (2015) recommendations. First, I familiarized myself with the content of the interviews and wrote a short summary of the narrative(s) in each interview in a descriptive way. I then read across the summaries, identifying key issues, similarities or discrepancies. At this point, I turned to a more interpretative analysis, linking the elements of the narratives to the theoretical

literature presented in the section above. I found that the most useful approach was to first analyse the structure of the stories; to identify vertical patterns, sequences, and the connections between different elements of each story. The small sample size and the vertical analysis allowed me to understand the experiences of the participants sequentially (Crouch and McKenzie 2006). That is, the analysis is informed by their individual narrative accounts of past circumstances. I then added a thematic approach to the analysis and constructed recurrent themes across the stories (a horizontal analysis) which allowed me to identify similarities across the narratives and build a cohesive argument. In this way, the structural and thematical analyses reinforce one another (Riessman 2008).

Selection and Background of Participants

For recruitment, advertisements were placed on social media and within work rehabilitation centres asking parents of compulsory school aged children who had no or short formal education after compulsory education and low household income to participate. The mothers received 5,000 ISK (approximately 37 GBP) as a compensation for their time. I use the term working class for the six mothers. There does not exist a quantitative definition of class for Icelandic society as in the UK (NS-NEC). I therefore rely on relational, qualitative ways of understanding class as is often done in Bourdieusian studies, for example Lareau, Adia Evans, and Yee (2016). To illustrate this, I will proceed to give detailed information on the background of the participants. Four of the six mothers did not have an education past compulsory school, although all but one had entered secondary school and then dropped out. Adda recently finished a 1.5 years programme for a diploma to be a cook. Freyja has a secondary vocational education (3,5 years at a secondary level), although she has never held a job that caters to that education. Most of them were living around or

below the official guidelines for the minimum family cost-of-living standards in Iceland[2]. They all had an 8-11 year-old child, which was the prerequisite for participation in the study, but five of them also had an at least one older child, showing substantial experience in being a parent with a compulsory school-aged child. Their 8-11 year-old children went to five different public schools in the Reykjavik metropolitan area.

To understand the social context of each school I have processed descriptive quantitative data derived from Statistics Iceland specifically for this study.[3] In four of these schools, the families belonging to the bottom two quintiles of income distribution[4] are a bit overrepresented (43-46% where you would expect a rate of 40%). In one school, this group is underrepresented at 34%. Around and over half (49-62%) of the homes in the five schools have a university educated parent while 8-14% of the homes have parents with only compulsory school education.[5] According to the data from Statistics Iceland, these demographics are typical for schools in the Reykjavik metropolitan area and demonstrate how heterogeneous the parental communities are. All in all, the schools are all socially mixed in terms of income and the education of the parents.

All of the mothers have been employed at some time in their lives, although four of them were not working at the time of the interview. All of them have or have had jobs that are considered working class, typically care work such as being an assistant at a preschool or a care giver at a nursing home. Out of the four who are not currently working, one is looking for a job, two are in

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[2] See guidlines without housing cost here: https://www.stjornarradid.is/verkefni/felags-og-fjolskyldumal/neysluvidmid/reiknivel-fyrir-neysluvidmid/$Neysluvidmid2018/Index/
[3] This data is not public.
[4] The income quintiles are calculated based on all families with school aged children in Reykjavik metropolitan area and Akureyri using the OECD modified equivalence scale. Statistics Iceland collected this data from annual tax reports.
[5] Information on the parents' education level is derived from Statistics Iceland's census that currently maintains information on the educational background of 90% of Icelandic citizens and for 60% of foreign citizens residing in Iceland. For the remaining 40%, a hot deck imputation is used to estimate their education based on gender, age, country of origin, and year of moving to Iceland.

work rehabilitation after dropping out of the job market due to physical and/or mental illness and one is on disability benefits. None of the participants had a university educated parent when growing up. This speaks to a generational working-class history. The interviews were conducted in Icelandic and the translations for this article are mine. The participants have been given pseudonyms.

Findings

In this section, I will explore the findings of the narrative analysis. This is done in three subsections. Firstly, I will analyse the beginnings of the mothers' narratives where they describe their first interactions with the school system. This analytical process is important for understanding how the mothers' former experiences with schools as institutions could inform both their views of and their emotional responses to it today (Lareau 2011; Bourdieu 1990). Secondly, I will explore the mothers' accounts of revisiting the school system, now as mothers of school aged children. Both sections became to be through the structural analysis of the narratives. Thirdly, as a result of a thematic approach to the analysis, I will dive into the mothers' responses and resistance to the symbolic violence they experience.

The Beginnings

All of the interviews started with me encouraging the mothers to tell me the story of their childhood education. These stories all entailed social exclusion, lack of support, and physical or verbal violence. They all mention both the academic side of the schooling and the social interactions within the school. The mothers all encountered difficulties in their studies and did not get support from neither teachers nor their parents, which in some cases resulted in them viewing themselves as stupid.

> I have both dyslexia and dyscalculia. At the time those terms did not exist. So, I
> was just illiterate and stupid. So, I was sent to special education and I hated it.
> (Selma)

> There was class A, B… and I was in class E. I was the lowest one. We were streamed according to our ability to learn. (Freyja)

In all of the mothers' stories the beginnings were laden with a sense of inferiority that came from their early experiences with the educational system. Feelings of inferiority and superiority are all encompassing in school life in general and strongly related to class hierarchies (Reay 2005a). Within schools, cleverness, and thus superiority, becomes associated with the middle classes (Lawler 2000). Streaming and settings, as Freyja and Selma had experienced, are examples of how this association is materialised within the school settings. In this way streaming and settings reproduce social class and racialized power relations within the school and later in wider in society (Archer et al. 2018; McGillicuddy and Devine 2018, 2020; Zevenbergen 2003). Archer et al. (2018) and McGillicuddy and Devine (2020) also report feelings of shame and stigmatisation among the students of the lowest set, similar to what we see in the life stories of the mothers in this study. This deep sense of inferiority and shame lies at the heart of the symbolic violence of the school system.

The six mothers had eerily similar beginnings to their stories of social encounters within the educational system. All except Selma told stories of direct exclusion and bullying.

> I was excluded from the group during all my school years. I was bullied. (Freyja)

> I was excluded by my classmates. We were 10-12 kids in the class, and they just ignored me. It was very difficult. In the end, I had to be home-schooled (Kamilla)

> It was just pain. I wasn't able to get to know the other kids properly. I also lived on one of the streets in the neighbourhood where there were only old people. (Adda)

Kamilla, Freyja, Andrea and Klara mentioned bullying and placed the blame for it firmly with the perpetrators. They saw their social situation in childhood as painful, but they did not associate it with their working-class status. While Adda also spoke of pain, she felt somewhat responsible for

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her situation. In her mind it was her that was not able to get to know the other children and was just unlucky to live on a street where there were fewer children. Selma was not actively excluded or bullied but described herself as very shy and reserved. In effect, she was excluded from the activities in which her friends took part in.

> *I was very shy. I spent my time looking at my friends doing their hobbies, like watching them dance, but I did not take part myself (Selma)*

All in all, we can conclude that the six mothers were treated as both academically and socially inferior in their interactions with the educational system. The social and cultural capital they entailed was not valued within the school system nor with the social group, which resulted in exclusion and feelings of shame, pain and personal deficiency.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) theorised on symbolic violence as institutional power, that is, as embedded within the structure of the curriculum and culture of the school system. The narratives of the mothers in this study show that symbolic violence is also felt emotionally in social interactions within the peer group. The bullying, the shyness, and the exclusion are testimonies to the mothers' marginal position in society (Walton 2011). Their working-class habitus is seen as lacking and is devalued by their peer group. Marginalisation and bullying in school has been found to reinforce societal hierarchies along economic, political, social and cultural lines (Juva 2020; Forsberg and Horton 2020). While the lifelong ramifications of symbolic violence in the accreditation process is obvious, the symbolic violence in peer interactions also has longstanding social and emotional effects.

The School System Revisited

Let us now analyse what happened when the mothers reencountered the school system through parental cooperation in their children's schools. One of the most striking narrative connections I encountered in the data was the continuation of symbolic violence and shame through the mothers'

social interaction with other parents. This exclusion was both fuelled by shame and begot shame, creating a vicious cycle of continued symbolic violence. I will use Selma as an example. Throughout the interview, she degraded herself, called herself forgetful and really hoped that her children would not end up the same as she was. Talking about social events at the school and how it is to meet other parents Selma said that:

> I feel like I am inferior because I am not … I don't have any education […] I just feel inferior and just think, 'Oh nobody wants to talk to me, I should just go'. (Selma)

Selma's account was typical for the working-class mothers and most of them described similar feelings of inferiority, shame, and exclusion from the group of parents, in the same way they described the social exclusion they experienced as children.

This is in line with literature that shows that, in a socially mixed settings, working-class parents tend to know fewer of the fellow parents than do the middle-class parents (Calarco 2014; Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau 2003). However, previous studies have neglected the emotional aspect of how this is felt by the working-class parents. The symbolic violence echoes through Selma's account. 'I don't have any education' she stated when explaining her feelings of inferiority and shame in her interactions with other parents. This also highlights the role of the accreditation process in creating those feelings. 'I just think, oh nobody wants to talk to me', she added, anticipating a judgement and underscoring the co-constructive nature of shame (Chase and Walker 2013).

As a child, Kamilla experienced such vicious bullying that she had to be home schooled. Today, she is on disability benefits and is younger than many of the other parents. Like Selma, she did not feel at home at social events in the school. Even if everybody was polite, she was socially excluded by the other parents.

> I feel different [from the other parents] [...] I am younger, and I am ill, so I feel different. I feel like, if you see a group of white ducks and all of a sudden there is a black duck there. I feel like the black duck. I don't fit in. [...] Everybody is polite but not many people speak to me [at events]. (Kamilla)

This powerful symbol of the black duck in a group of white ducks speaks of her shame and social exclusion. It is similar to the idiom of a black sheep in a family of white sheep. In this expression the black sheep refers to a person in a family who is considered to be a disgrace. This is in line with previous studies that show that shame is one of the central feelings that results from symbolic violence within the school system and wider society (Reay 2005a; Yoder and Lopez 2013; Skeggs and Loveday 2012). From the participants in this study, we see examples of how this plays out in parental networks in school settings. Freyja was also outspoken about the social exclusion she experienced when interacting with other parents:

> I really want to [be involved in the parents' association], but after my experience with the other parents, I don't dare to [...]. More parents are needed. They encourage parents to volunteer, but I don't dare because I have gotten this attitude [from other parents], 'Oh Freyja, we won't listen to her'(Freyja).

In some of the stories the children experienced similar social exclusion as their mothers did. In the story of Adda, we see that the social exclusion was reproduced in her daughter's social life, continuing the intergenerational marginalisation. When Adda herself was friendless as a child her mother provided her with company so that she would not feel as lonely. At the time of the interview, Adda in a continued intergenerational solidarity, provided social support for her daughter.

> There is a social event for parents together with the kids once a month. And my daughter, she is just alone somewhere in a corner [at those events], and then I don't really talk to the parents because I have to stay with her so that she isn't just completely alone. (Adda)

The social capital of the parental community is inaccessible to Adda, which further fuelled her daughter's isolation. As we see in the excerpt, her daughter's isolation then contributed to her mother's exclusion creating a vicious cycle of social class reproduction. Her use of the word

'corner' is telling. Standing in the corner is an expression often associated with being guilty of something shameful and in a school-setting was formerly known as a mean of publicly shaming an unruly child. Again, we see a co-construction of shame as the result of past and present exclusion (Chase and Walker 2013; Skeggs and Loveday 2012).

Klara also felt isolation and shame through interactions with the other parents. She attributed it mostly to her status as a single mother living in poverty which underscores how economic marginalisation is experienced affectively (Skeggs and Loveday 2012). At the time of our interview, her daughter's 9th birthday was just around the corner and she absolutely did not want to invite the classmates to her apartment because 'they come from better places', meaning single family homes with more material privilege. Klara told me that she had 'foisted herself' as a co-host on parents who were about to throw a party for two of her daughter's classmates. By this, she showed the courage and resourcefulness working-class parent's often display in the face of structural barriers to parental cooperation (Yoder and Lopez 2013).

Acting from a marginalised position she tried to improve her situation within the field of the parental community. However, the key word here is 'foisted' (i: troða sér). She did not feel invited, and when discussing the logistics of the party with the other hosting mothers, she felt uneasy and marginalised. She decided not to 'butt in' on how the party would be, and in the end, it was way above Klara's budget, leaving her even more uncomfortable. As a result of her lifelong endurance of symbolic violence and shame about her financial situation, she did not voice her opinions and the violence continued.

The social media usage of the parents of her daughter's classmates also contributed to Klara's subordinate position and shame. After telling me that she did not have any money for domestic or overseas travels, she noted that:

> Everybody goes abroad for summer vacation except us […] and there is this Facebook group for the parents, and there they put photos of their vacation 'We were in Arabia. We were traveling here, and here!'. And I just think 'ookaaay?' 'We are doing this, we are doing that'. There is a lot of rivalry among the parents. 'If you buy this then I am going to buy double as much!' (Klara)

The anecdotes of the expensive birthday party and the photos posted in the parents' Facebook group from overseas travels serve as examples of Klara's marginalised position that she attributes to her poverty. Although she did not use the term working class, she knew that her situation was not fair and that the other parents' value system was arbitrary. Her daughter, only eight years old, was also aware of the subordinate position and refused to host her birthday party at home in their apartment which would expose their poverty to her classmates. The shame is reproduced intergenerationally, though Klara courageously took both social and financial risk to minimize it through the birthday endeavour.

Andrea was one of the very few mothers who directly addressed her class situation, using the words middle class and elite proactively in the interview.

> [At school events] I feel like, like the parents group themselves together … based on where they live. Or if they are middle class, poor or higher. […] I feel like we are different … because we are not middle class or elite. (Andrea)

Andrea lived in a neighbourhood that has both streets with single-family homes and streets with mostly large apartment buildings with lower-income inhabitants. Where people live, within the neighbourhood, is an indicator of social class. In Scandinavia, where people are less used to being vocal about class situations, locality is often used as a signifier of social class (Öhrn 2012). Andrea's comment above shows a micro manifestation of this within her neighbourhood. She added that some of the parents who live in villas 'don't look down on us although we live in an apartment building', implying that other parents do.

Andrea was also one of the very few who recognized the symbolic violence she had endured in school and its effects on her willingness to take part in parental involvement. When asked why she had not been involved she answered:

> I had a very low self-esteem after the compulsory school. I thought I couldn't do anything and that I wasn't good at anything and that I would not be able to contribute. This is what stopped me. I was, of course, very broken after the compulsory school. (Andrea)

Again, we see the feelings of inferiority, of shame and of internalized judgements that echo from the mothers' childhood throughout their lives as mothers of school aged children. It is interesting to contrast Andrea's and the other participants' explanations on their hesitation to partake in parental involvement with Olmedo and Wilkins (2016); Wilkins (2010, 2011) theorisation on the consumerism of parental practices. They maintain that any refusal to engage as a consumer in an educational market, for example by actively seeking out social interaction that could benefit your child within the school, is seen as a moral transgression of parental duties. Andrea's and the other mothers' hesitation towards parental cooperation is clearly affected by the symbolic violence enacted upon them throughout their schooling. However, our current social climate of consumerism of parental practices, that we also see signs of in Iceland (Auðardóttir and Kosunen 2020; Auðardóttir and Magnúsdóttir 2020), frames their hesitation as immoral and a failure to live up to the expectation for the responsible mother.

Andrea was, however, at least partially able to negate this moral judgement. At the time of the interview Andrea had been taking part in work rehabilitation programme after being unemployed for a long time. This programme had changed her views of herself and her ability to learn (she took some secondary school courses there), and this, she told me, was why she felt confident enough to volunteer as a participant for this study. Andrea was able to name and label her exclusion from the group of parents as a consequence of her class status and her class status and her feelings of inferiority as a result of the symbolic violence she endured in compulsory

school. By doing this, she was able negate a personal responsibility for her social situation and simultaneously disavow shame, at least to some extent.

On the whole, the findings on the experiences of the working-class mothers within parental communities echo other studies that show that social ties among parents of school children is primarily a middle-class phenomenon (Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau 2003). The findings of this sections, that is the participants' accounts of their childhood educational experiences and the affective implication of the symbolic violence, add to our understanding on the reproduction of the classed hierarchies within school settings and wider society.

Responses and Resistance

This last section of the findings explores the responses and resistance to the symbolic violence in the mothers' accounts in a thematic way. These responses can be divided into three themes: (1) Recognition of structural injustice, (2) recognition of individual injustice, and (3) a deficiency of the self. In most of the accounts there were examples of all three responses to the situation although to a varying degree. The two participants who most readily saw the structural injustice of their stories and situations were Andrea and Klara, whose stories I have analysed thoroughly above. Both of them have been in work rehabilitation, which includes psychological therapy, education and a focus on mental and physical well-being. They both attributed their structural vision of the injustice to the rehabilitation and the social support and sense of self-worth they got through it. Andrea went so far as to use the term 'class' (i. stétt) and exhibited some level of class consciousness when describing the social divisions within the parental community and the neighbourhood. This speaks to her deep insights into the classed inequalities of her immediate community and how those are translated into geographical divisions and distinctions within the parental community of her children's school.

Skeggs and Loveday (2012) argue that affects caused by injustice, such as feelings of shame and isolation, become understandable when they are connected to idea, cause, source or an object, such as the concept of class. Deploying their argumentation, we see that by using the analytical concept of class Andrea is able to make sense of her suffering and social isolation as an unjust structural problem. Her understanding of the societal and structural sources of her feelings of inadequacy is in stark contrast to the individualism of consumer culture where parents are made responsible for shaping their feelings (Cappellini et al. 2019), opportunities and engagement in schooling (Wilkins 2011) and where structural problems are seen as personal failures.

Freyja recognised her past and previous situation as individual injustice she had encountered and was the only participant who openly showed anger. The anger was directed at the other parents in the community at her son's school for excluding her, at employers for firing her and at her own parents for being violent and neglectful. She did not address her poverty or short formal education in connection to the systemic injustice she has endured but rather saw it as bad fortune or connected to her not being conventionally attractive. Throughout the interview she continually referred to herself as a good student, a respectable woman, and a loving mother. By this she directs her anger away from herself and does not believe she is at fault, stupid or lacking in some way. It shows the nuances of the emotional responses to symbolic violence that she is able to refute the shame to some extent by replacing it with righteous indignation (Reay 2015) but without the class consciousness that Andrea has. Freyja's anger should be viewed in light of the class relations and the symbolic violence that she has been subject to. As such it is a legitimate response 'to class relations, to being misrecognized as valueless and judged unjustly' (Skeggs and Loveday 2012, 483).

Adda, Kamilla and Selma had mixed responses. They partially referred to systematic injustice, but mostly, they took their situations as testimonies of their own faults, stupidity and lack of social skills. This does not come as a surprise as much of educational research has focused on the educational failure of working-class children and blamed their working-class parents (Reay 2020) which speaks to how mainstream these ideas are. In the stories of these participants Loveday's (2015) argument on how shame is not recognized as the consequence of symbolic violence but rather taken as a personal fault, is crystallized.

An example of the entanglement of different responses to their situations is to be found in Selma's story. She exhibited shame by repeatedly referring to herself as stupid and forgetful while frequently turning to sarcasm when she described her interactions with the school system as a mother.

> Some of the other parents are shy like me. Others I don't feel like interacting with. One of the mothers is very hard-working [at the parental work at school]. Then at a meeting, there were two new mothers who volunteered to be class representatives and she said: 'Oh yes, let's applaud them!' and I just [makes her voice comically weird] 'Ohhh yes [claps her hands] but what for?' [laughs]. (Selma)

Selma's, somewhat sarcastic, short story testifies to her ability to see through the arbitrariness of the hierarchies within the parental group. Why are we applauding the parents who volunteer? The message of her story is that this practice is funny and stupid, something that Selma masterfully projected with a sarcastic tone. Irony and sarcasm are here used as rhetorical method for portraying a critical stance in situations of unequal power relations (Fernandez and Huber 2001; Auðardóttir and Rúdólfsdóttir 2021). She also hinted at the mutual insurance of the 'hard-working' parents. It is not a coincidence that she noted that the mother who suggested that the group of parents should applaud the new mothers for volunteering had herself been active in the same type of parental work. By this gesture, an informal hierarchy within the parental community is created and

recreated. Selma saw through it and did not want to take part in it: '*I don't feel like interacting with them'.* All in all, Selma's account is a criticism of the social construct of the responsible mother (Vincent 2017) aimed at exposing the arbitrariness of it.

Concluding Remarks

This study is set within a culture that increasingly emphasises parents as active consumers and advocates for their children within educational settings. In that way, parents, in particular mothers, are made responsible for being actively involved in the parental communities in schools and for making the most of the social capital it offers. Any refusal to take on this motherly responsibility is seen as a failure to live up to the expectations for the accountable parent (Wilkins 2010; Olmedo and Wilkins 2016). We already know that working-class mothers have less resources to fulfil this role due to financial hardship and limited access to the knowledge valued by the educational system (Reay 2005b; Griffith and Smith 2005). The findings of this study show that some working-class mothers have limited access to the parental communities due to continued symbolic violence within the school setting and within wider society. This symbolic violence is affectively experienced within the parental communities as shame, fear of judgement and a sense of inferiority. As the narrative inquiry shows, the beginnings of the mothers' educational journeys are filled with emotions of inferiority and shame as they inhabited pathologized spaces within the field of education as children (Reay 2015). These spaces are then reproduced within that same field when they enter it as the mothers of school children.

Much of the research within the sociology of education has dealt with the ramifications of increased class and ethnic segregation between schools and geographical locations. The unspoken promise is that a socially mixed and diverse neighbourhood school where the different social classes learn and live together would be the ideal and perhaps even the panacea for our troubled educational systems. The opportunity to study such school communities still exists in Iceland,

where geographical concentration of privilege and disadvantage is still much less developed than in most other European countries (Magnúsdóttir, Auðardóttir, and Stefánsson 2020) and privatization of the educational system is rare (Auðardóttir and Kosunen 2020; Dovemark et al. 2018). The findings of this study suggests that, within parental communities, the promise of the harmonious neighbourhood school is not fulfilled.

The working-class mothers who took part in this study experienced continued psychological trauma within the field of education which severely restricted their opportunities for social engagement at the school. Importantly, this is the first study on the affective responses to class inequalities in Iceland, a country that is sometimes portrayed as a utopia of equality (Einarsdóttir 2020). Due to this, the literature context I have embedded by findings in are mostly from the UK and US societies where class disparities are arguably steeper than in Iceland. My findings on the affective responses to class marginalisation within parental communities in Iceland seem to be similar to what UK and US scholars have found. Even in a 'utopia of equality' and within socially mixed schools, class marginalisation is acutely affectively felt by the mothers.

The findings indicate that an intersectional understanding of gender equality in Iceland is important. Iceland prides itself on being at the forefront of gender equality in the world (World Economic Forum 2020; Einarsdóttir 2020). The mothers who took part in this study do not have access to this equality nor to the claim of respectability as mothers due to their pathologized positions within the field of education that results from their working-class background. The increased parental demands on behalf of the school system are gendered and intimately connected to the social construction of the responsible mother (Vincent 2010, 2017). These demands create a hierarchy of parents, and in particular of mothers, which then begets maternal shame with mothers who fail to meet those demands (Slobodin 2019), disproportionately working-class

women. In this way the parental communities at the schools reproduce both gendered and classed distinctions through continued symbolic violence towards the working-class mothers.

This research provides an important snapshot of the inner lives of working-class mothers who face continued symbolic violence within parental communities. From the findings we can draw the conclusion that a more nuanced understanding of emotions of parental educative work is needed. In particular, we need to understand how these emotions create and recreate class. The findings show that it is important to not only note the tangible inequality of resources between parents of different classes but also the emotional ramifications of the symbolic violence embedded in educational systems (Yoder and Lopez 2013) and how these play out in parental communities. For the participants in this study, emotions, as felt and lived within the parental communities, contribute to the reproduction and making of class. This study further adds validity to the claim that setting privileged parents up as examples of good parenting for the allegedly less-capable parents to follow and copy is an immoral policy (Dermott and Pomati 2015; Gewirtz 2001) that only deepens the emotional trauma endured by working-class mothers.

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