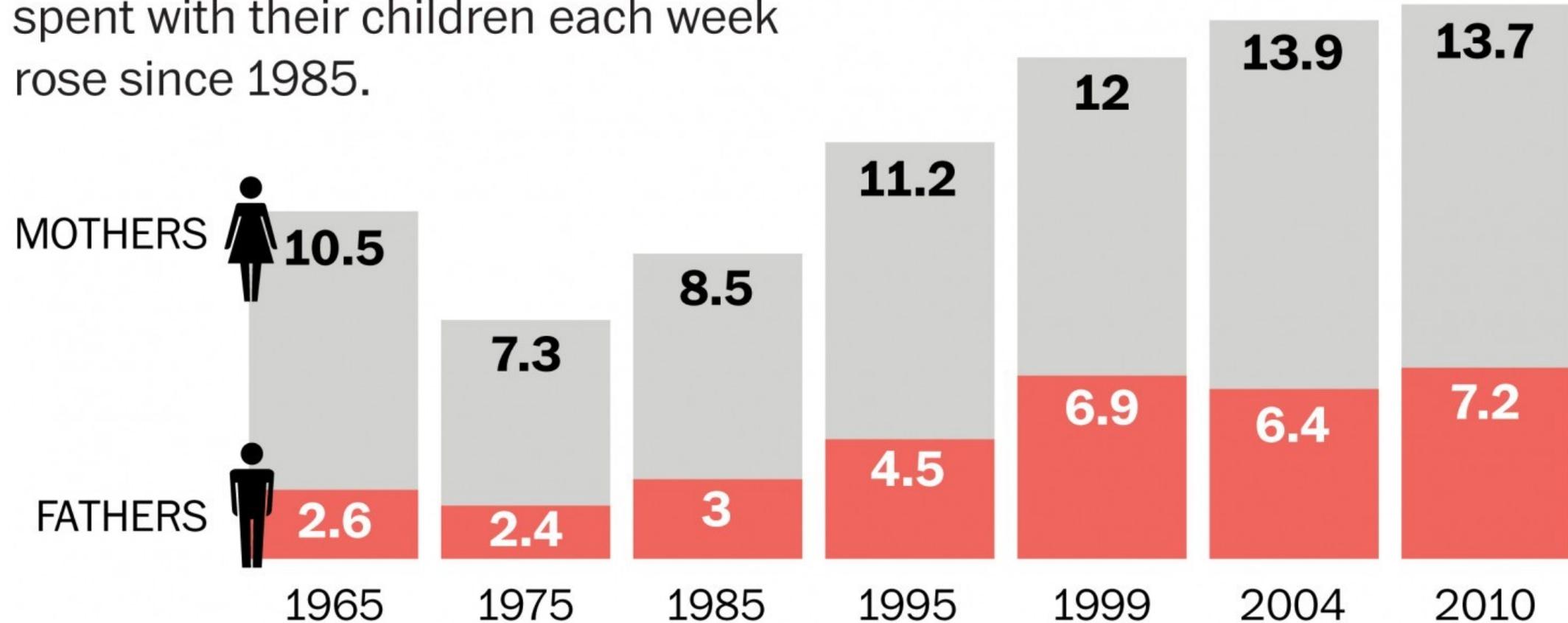


# Poverty, Parenting, and Child Health

Benjamin G. Gibbs, PhD  
Brigham Young University

# Spending time with the kids

The average number of hours parents spent with their children each week rose since 1985.



Source: Journal of Marriage and Family

THE WASHINGTON POST

Is everyone practicing “intensive parenting”?

# Social Class Shapes Parenting

## Concerted Cultivation

## Natural Growth

### Key Elements

Parent actively fosters and assesses child's talents, opinions, and skills.

Parent cares for child and allows child to grow

### Organization of Daily Life

Multiple child leisure activities orchestrated by adults

Child 'hangs out' particularly with kin

### Language Use

Reasoning/directives  
Child contestation of adult statements  
Extended negotiations between parents and child

Directives  
Rare for child to question or challenge adults  
General acceptance by child of directives

### Interventions in Institutions

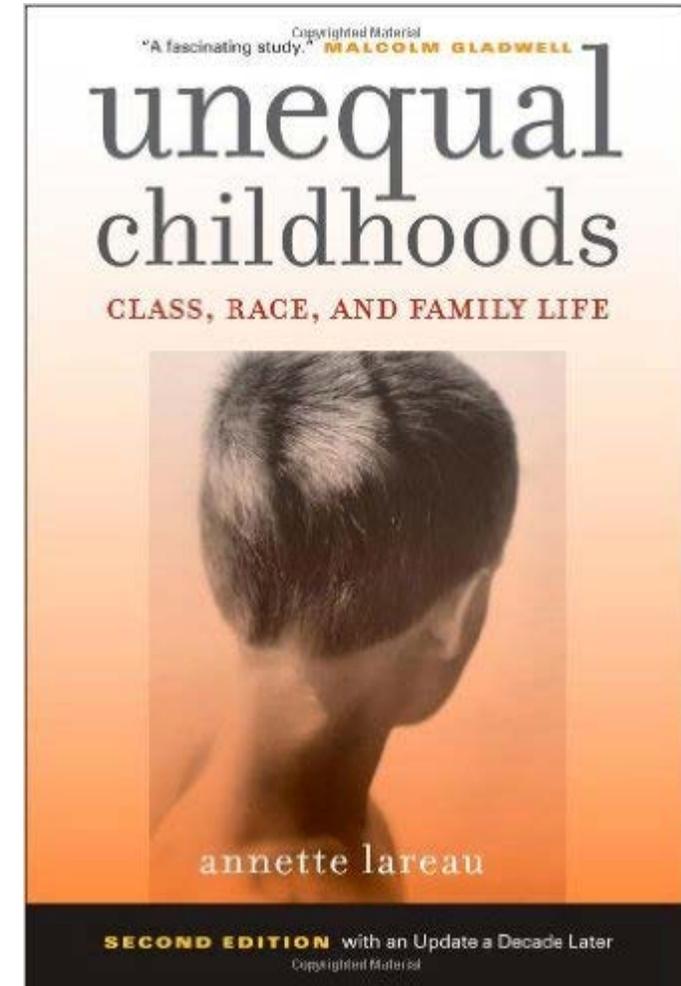
Criticisms and interventions on behalf of child  
Training of child to take on this role

Dependence on institutions  
Sense of powerlessness and frustrations  
Conflict between childrearing practices at home and at school

### Consequences

Emerging sense of entitlement on the part of child

Emerging sense of constraint on the part of the child.



# Class-Based Differences in Child Investments

- Books, computers, high-quality child care, summer camps, private schooling, etc.
- Highest differences for music lessons, travel, and summer camps.
- Between birth to age six, children from high-income families will have spent **1,300 more hours in novel contexts.**

Enrichment expenditures  
In 2008 dollars



Source: Greg Duncan and Richard Murnane, "Wither Opportunity," 2011. Figure 1.6.

# Three Findings

## Socioeconomic status, infant feeding practices and early childhood obesity<sup>†</sup>

**B. G. Gibbs and R. Forste**

*Department of Sociology, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, USA*

- Infants predominantly fed formula for the first 6 months were about **2.5 times more likely to be obese at 24 months of age** relative to infants predominantly fed breast milk.
- The **early introduction of solid foods (< 4 months)** and **putting the child to bed with a bottle** also increased the likelihood of obesity.





## Birth Weight and Early Cognitive Skills: Can Parenting Offset the Link?

Jamie L. Lynch<sup>1</sup> · Benjamin G. Gibbs<sup>2</sup>

- Low birth weight, especially VLBW, has a **persistent negative association with cognitive development that cannot be easily offset by parenting behaviors after birth.**
  - The relationship is partly developmental; LBW babies have higher infant mortality [a 25 % chance of death within the first year], are more likely to be born with immature lungs, incur birth asphyxiation and periventricular hemorrhage along with other severe medical conditions that impact brain development.
- We estimate that about **50 % math skill gap by birth weight is attributed to socioeconomic status and related factors.**

## Breastfeeding, Parenting, and Early Cognitive Development

Benjamin G. Gibbs, PhD, and Renata Forste, PhD

- **Parent sensitivity, cognitive stimulation, and warmth are linked to child intellectual development. This means that:**
  - Parents are sensitive to a child's cues, emotions, and abilities
  - Parents engage the child in activities that promote learning and actively convey warmth through expressions and physical touch
  - Parents read to their child most every night
- Although breastfeeding has important benefits in other settings, **the encouragement of breastfeeding to promote school readiness does not appear to be a key intervention point.**
  - Promoting parenting behaviors that improve child cognitive development may be a more effective and direct strategy for practitioners to adopt, especially for disadvantaged children.



# Social Class Shapes:

- infant feeding practices
- the incidence of VLBW
- parent sensitivity to a child's learning cues

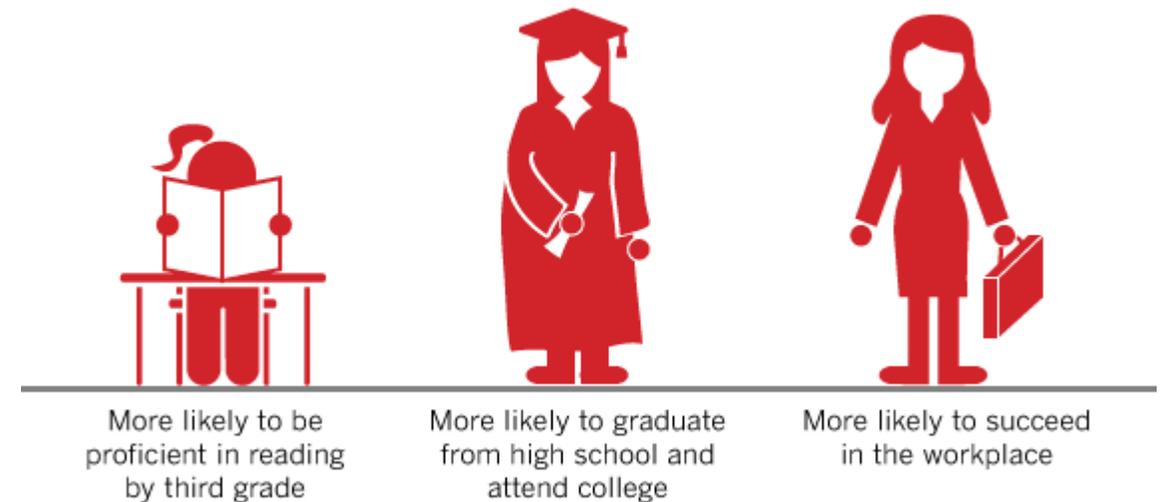
For more research, see  
[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Benjamin\\_Gibbs/publications](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Benjamin_Gibbs/publications)

# Conclusions

- School readiness matters (6% rate of return on investment)
  - 55% of high achievers at school-entry are still high achievers 8 years later
  - 47% of low achievers at school-entry are still low achievers 8 years later

Graduates of a high-quality pre-k program are:

- Social class shapes readiness
- Policies
  - **Invest** early
  - **Develop** cognitive/noncognitive skills
  - **Sustain** support
  - **Integrate** programs





Contact me with any questions:

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