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Foundations of Educational Inequality: Cultural Capital and Social Reproduction

THE PAST THREE DECADES have seen the increased use of the term "cultural capital" in classrooms, research articles, and discussions in education. In a recent section of a doctoral seminar that I was teaching, multiple students talked about "cultural capital" with regard to higher education environments. When I asked these students how to define the term, they looked to their colleagues and offered collectively competing, and even contradictory, definitions of the concept. No one linked the notion of cultural capital to a larger theory of social stratification or reproduction. Some students referred to cultural capital as a type of cultural socialization, others referred to it more in terms of academic credentials, and still others admitted that they used the term to refer to the learning of social norms but that they really did not know what it meant. My anecdotal evidence of a term that may have lost its meaning is corroborated by scholarly work. It is as if cultural capital submits a framework of a house without a foundation or any blueprints about how to proceed in the construction. This monograph is an attempt to buttress a theoretical understanding of the cultural capital construct and its applicability to educational research and practice.

In educational research, cultural capital has increasingly been used as a theoretical foundation and analytical tool to study the manifestation of social inequality in educational processes and outcomes (DiMaggio, 1982; Lareau, 2003; McDonough, 1997; Nora, 2004; Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; Walpole, 2003). Yet it seems that there may be as many treatments of "cultural capital" as there are people who claim this as a theoretical framework or a substantive topic of their work. Scholars exploring primary and secondary

schooling have used cultural capital to investigate such issues as the effect of parental involvement or investments in education on students' educational success (Cheadle, 2008; Lareau, 1987); parental socialization toward high-status culture that is rewarded in schools (Kalmijn and Kraaykamp, 1996; Lareau, 2003); the effects of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, or competences on grade point averages or achievement (Cheadle, 2008; DiMaggio, 1982; Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999); and cultural participation or involvement in schooling (Dumais, 2002). It appears that researchers studying higher education have both taken cues from and worked in tandem with those highlighting primary and secondary schooling. In higher education research, cultural capital has been used to examine and shed light on such factors as the influence of cultural capital on college choice (Freeman, 1997; Nora, 2004; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini, 2004; Perna, 2000); access to and success in higher education (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2001; Davies and Guppy, 1997; DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985; Horvat, 2001; McDonough, 1997; Steelman and Powell, 1989); the college transition process (Walpole, 2003); and college student retention (Tierney, 1999). This monograph interrogates the origins of this theoretical construct along with the ways that it has been adapted in educational research, the goals of which are to:

Demystify the many definitions and misconceptions of cultural capital so that scholars and practitioners can better understand it;

Examine some of the strengths and limitations of the scholarship and thinking on cultural capital;

Offer suggestions for ways that cultural capital can be expanded or better used as a theoretical concept or topic of study in educational research in the future; and

Contemplate the implications of the cultural capital research for educational practice.

Given the increasing use of cultural capital in educational research, it is important to carefully consider the origins of this idea. In particular, it is necessary to tease out the range of possibilities for using cultural capital along with the limitations of the current theory. That is, if this theoretical idea is not fully

understood in its initial intent, it is possible to *mis*use it, resulting in misinterpreted research findings and the absence of nuances in the interpretation of data. If the limitations of the current applications and interpretations of cultural capital can be better understood, it may be possible to expand the notion of cultural capital to make the theory more relevant to other issues such as race, gender, and identity. Used appropriately, cultural capital holds the promise of providing an excellent theoretical source for research, particularly research that centers on topics related to class issues, social stratification, or attempts to understand the perpetuation of equality more generally. This chapter proceeds with an examination of the genesis of theoretical and empirical work on cultural capital.

Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was the architect of the concept of cultural capital (1971/1977, 1979a/1984, 1979b/1987; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964/1979, 1970/1977). Subsequently, scholars across disciplines have proffered theoretical treatments of cultural capital in an effort to shed light on applications and potential cracks in the uses of the concept (Horvat, 2001; Kingston, 2001; Lamont and Lareau, 1988; Musoba and Baez, 2009). Before broaching the task of uncovering Bourdieu's development of cultural capital and the adaptations of the construct in educational research, it is important to remark briefly on the scholar himself and on his approach toward the academic discipline of sociology.

Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology

Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) was arguably one of the most prolific and important sociologists of recent history (Robbins, 1991; Swartz, 1997). He is commonly classified as a conflict theorist. Conflict theory, born out of Marxist thought, typically asserts a perpetual class conflict and struggle. Like Karl Marx and his followers, Bourdieu asserted the importance of the economic structure in perpetuating and maintaining inequality. Similar to the two-class structure that Marx identified, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, Bourdieu was concerned that even with the growth of a *petite bourgeoisie* (middle class),

the dualistic class structure between dominant and dominated persisted in many ways. Bourdieu (1979a/1984) asserted that in the continuation of the perpetual class struggle, class exists only through a struggle for distinction.

Marx indicated that one cannot "transcend the limits of one's own mind," meaning that one's acceptance of one's condition may keep one from moving away from it (Bourdieu, 1979a/1984, p. 244). Bourdieu expanded on this notion, suggesting that the class conditions may be doubly limiting by limiting or expanding material conditions that lead to particular practices that may perpetuate material inequalities (such as parenting and schooling) and by providing a world view or legitimation of one's condition that may further maintain these unequal material conditions. Bourdieu was discontented that the physical, material, and economic conditions did not adequately explain the perpetuation of inequality and the more subtle way in which people's seemingly "normal" behaviors or "choices" helped to maintain the social stratification. He extended the earlier Marxist arguments beyond "economic constraints" (Musoba and Baez, 2009, p. 156). Bourdieu expanded Marx's ideas in the context of modern views of meritocracy, the notion that one's opportunities are predicated on one's abilities or merit. The notion of meritocracy is associated with advanced industrial societies and compulsory education, neither of which was instituted when Marx was writing. This examination of meritocracy allowed Bourdieu to scrutinize the way that economics and schooling intersect in perpetuating unequal social conditions. It seemed to Bourdieu that there was something consistent with the lifestyle of people in different class strata, and he made it his project to study this intangible system of preferences.

Bourdieu was essentially concerned with providing evidence that the agency-structure dichotomy, or the idea that the social structure determines one's life chances with or without one's volition, was a falsehood (Horvat, 2001). In other words, he attempted to highlight the *interaction* of agency and structure, or the way that one may be able to use agency to influence social structures in some instances while being affected, even unconsciously, by the social structure in other instances.[1] He was interested in privilege and the way it was perpetuated and reinforced in society. Bourdieu attempted through his work to tender insight into how inequality is generated and maintained. Bourdieu contemplated the agency-structure interaction in part through his

study of symbolic power, or power that is often masked, unrecognized, or posed as a cultural norm in a manner that maintains social stratification. Thus, Bourdieu was concerned with those cultural mores, rules, norms, or symbols that aid in the reproduction of and resistance to social inequality.

Cultural Capital Briefly Defined

Cultural capital, developed by Bourdieu as a partial explanation for the less tangible or less immediately visible inequalities, is related to the class-based socialization of culturally relevant skills, abilities, tastes, preferences, or norms that act as a form of currency in the social realm (Bourdieu, 1979a/1984). Cultural capital can be grasped as those culturally based resources that can act as a form of "capital." Culturally based resources can include such things as cultural awareness, knowledge about educational institutions (schools), educational credentials, and aesthetic preferences (such as taste in music, art, or food) (Swartz, 1997). It also includes skills, abilities, or mannerisms, which are primarily habituated and may not be consciously noticed. The aim of his study of these cultural resources was to demonstrate that one's culture can act as a "power resource" (Swartz, 1997, p. 75) in social settings where one can exchange cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, norms, preferences, or mannerisms for social rewards such as acceptance, recognition, inclusion, or even social mobility. Yet the definition of cultural capital was not simplistic, even at its inception.

As Bourdieu's thinking and empirical work developed, his theory of the reproduction of inequality, of which cultural capital was a part, changed too. In his earlier work in the 1960s, cultural capital could be defined as informal academic standards that also are class attributes of the dominant class, consisting of such factors as informal knowledge about education, linguistic competence, and specific attitudes or personal style (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964/1979). In the early 1970s, Bourdieu refined his definition of cultural capital as academic standards and class attributes to include linguistic aptitude, previous academic culture, formal knowledge of general cultural, and diplomas (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970/1977). Then in the late 1970s, Bourdieu altered his definition of cultural capital to an indicator and a basis of class position, including cultural attitudes, preferences, and behavior that are conceptualized as "tastes" used for social selection (Bourdieu, 1979a/1984). Bourdieu distinguished among

three types of cultural capital: embodied (one's sense of culture, traditions, norms), objectified (things that one owns), and institutionalized (recognition of particular tastes, norms, or values within institutions such as schools).

Cultural capital is primarily acquired in two ways, according to Bourdieu (1979a/1984): through one's social origin (family) and through education (schooling). Cultural capital that is acquired through social origin helps to explain the intergenerational transference of lifestyle or class privilege. Although cultural capital could be acquired through education, primarily formal education in this case, many interpretations of the theoretical idea suggest that it is more difficult to acquire cultural capital *only* through education. Thus, the cumulative acquisition of cultural capital is implicit: one who acquires high-status cultural capital through family origin and through education will be more privileged in society generally. Additionally, formal schooling often reinforces the cultural capital of family origin. More simply stated, teachers, administrators, and others in a school system may reward, perhaps unconsciously, a student who has acquired cultural capital from her or his family over a student who has not (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970/1977).

In the end, Bourdieu's research focused primarily on those who already have acquired the valued or legitimated cultural capital within a particular setting. The metaphor of a card game suggests that cultural capital affects the cards that one holds in the game. Some of the cards are simply "dealt" to a person (acquired through one's background and sometimes by education, largely not by choice), and some of the cards are deliberately requested or exchanged (acquired more consciously through education), at least in some games (such as Texas Hold 'Em and Omaha Hold 'Em). Yet only some cards are recognized or valuable in the game in a particular context. Each round of the game determines which cards are ultimately valuable. Namely, in one round of the game, a particular hand might be really valuable (a pair of queens might win the hand), but in the next round, the cards from the last game may not hold as much value (the pair of queens might not be valuable because someone has three queens). Cultural capital would maintain that some people are always given the hands that are necessary for a particular round of the game. Thus, while everyone is playing cards and attempting to get the best hand possible, some have an advantage in that they already have been dealt a better hand for

the round in which they are playing. This discussion brings up two additional questions: Who determines the rules of the game, and who gets to decide which game is played? This dilemma is at the heart of cultural capital analysis: it begins to call attention to those who get to decide which game is played, the rules of that game, and the cards that will or will not hold value.

Given this varied and complex definition, cultural capital is predicated on a series of other concepts, particularly on the notion of *field* and *habitus.* It is through the interplay of these concepts that Bourdieu began to assemble his full theory of social reproduction of inequality. The impression of cultural capital, habitus, and field is linked to Bourdieu's descriptions and empirical work on the ideas of taste, social distinctions, and social capital. Many scholars employ only portions of Bourdieu's theoretical scaffolding (such as cultural capital), leading to some distortions or mistreatment of the theoretical constructs (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Horvat, 2001; Lamont and Lareau, 1988). With this caveat in mind, the remainder of this chapter examines, at least momentarily, Bourdieu's full theoretical structure and the ways in which the concepts link to his larger explanation of the reproduction of inequality.

Field

Cultural capital depends on the idea of "field." The field is the space in which cultural competence, or knowledge of particular tastes, dispositions, or norms, is both produced and given a price. The field determines the properties, internalized as dispositions and objectified as economic or cultural goods, that are valid, active, or pertinent in a given social setting (Bourdieu, 1979a/1984). A field is *not* universal; many fields exist. A field is class based and often takes the objectifiable form of a school or a family. It is only within a particular field that cultural capital holds value, produces an effect, or even exists. Fields "present themselves systematically as structured spaces of positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position within these spaces and . . . can be analyzed independently of the characteristics of their occupants" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 72).

Relating the concept of field to the notion of conflict between classes, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) note, "A field is simultaneously a space of conflict and competition . . . in which participants vie to establish monopoly over the . . . effective capital within it" (p. 17). Consistent with the perpetual

discord between classes or statuses in conflict theories, a field is a "space of conflict or competition" (Horvat, 2001, p. 207), the space where people compete for which practices are valued over others.

It is through the theorizing of field and the conflict inherent in it that Bourdieu underscores the fact that cultural capital is a *social relationship*. Those cultural dispositions, skills, abilities, norms, or preferences that are considered "cultivated" (high-status socioeconomically) in a particular social setting are valid only in relation to a particular field.

Bourdieu's notion of field can perhaps also be compared to a card game; cultural capital would be the cards that one could play in the game. He uses this metaphor and notes, "There are no general laws of fields, those being the necessity of commonly understood stakes of the game and players willing and able to play the game" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 72). Like a game, each field has its own rules or systems of valuation that determine the conditions of entry or inclusion (for example, educational credentials, particular mannerisms or tastes, economic capital) and the social relations in it (for example, who is valued or recognized, whose voice is valued, whose cultural norms are recognized or rewarded) (Topper, 2001). Continuing with the metaphor of a poker game, the field might be representative of a particular game (for example, Seven Card Stud, Texas Hold 'Em). The rules might differ in each game, which dramatically alters the value of the hand that one is dealt (and whether or not one can exchange cards). Thus, one's cultural capital might be very useful in one field and essentially meaningless in another. Or the field could be a casino. One could not cash in the chips from another casino for credit or money. The chips from another casino are essentially worthless in that particular "field." Likewise, one might not be able to "cash in" one's cultural capital in some settings. In educational settings, this argument implies that although all students may come in with "cultural capital," only certain students will be able to exchange (consciously or not) this cultural capital for something of value (such as recognition of their abilities or grades).

Habitus

Integrally linked to field is the sum total of one's cultural capital, the series of dispositions that one has internalized and that one will employ, referred to by

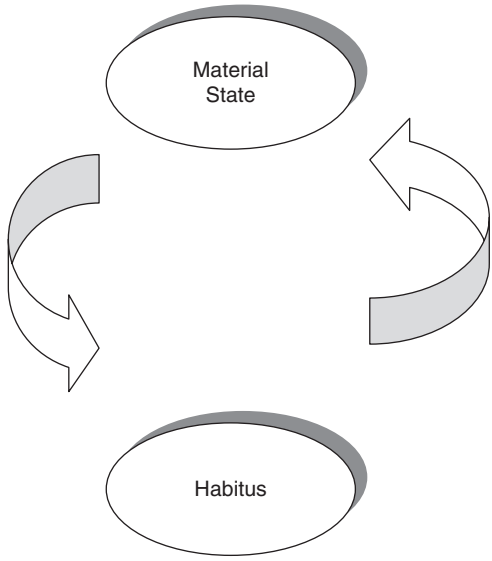
Bourdieu (1979a/1984) as one's "habitus." This habitus or cumulative collection of dispositions, norms, and tastes "functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions*" (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 82–83). Habitus becomes a generative practice, the meaning that is given to one's perceptions. It is the capacity to produce classifiable practices and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate practices and products. Thus, habitus is a "structuring structure" that organizes practices and perceptions of those practices and a "structured structure" that is a division into logical classes based on these dispositions (Bourdieu, 1979a/1984, p. 170).

Important to the notion of habitus is that it ultimately functions below the level of consciousness and language. The socialization toward a particular habitus begins in early childhood (Swartz, 1997) but continues well into adulthood as individuals internalize, perhaps without explicit consciousness of having done so, the "rules" that govern the field of interaction and their place in it. This socialization connects to field in that one's "knowledge and recognition of the immanent laws of the field, the stakes and so on" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 72) are *manifested* as habitus. One's seemingly benign dispositions are actually integral to the reinforcement and creation of the social stratification and one's location in it. As Horvat (2001) put it, habitus is "the mechanism by which an individual interprets possible actions" (p. 209).

In the game metaphor, if cultural capital offers cards to play and field presents the setting where the game is played (or the game itself), habitus provides the approach that one takes to playing one's hand. It influences one's perceptions of the odds of winning or losing and when one feels it is necessary to fold a hand. If cultural capital deals some cards from the bottom of the deck to some players, then a specific habitus for a specific player may have better or worse odds in the larger game. Or, more potently, if some players are given a different type of card altogether (for example, Tarot cards for playing poker), they may not even be able to really play the same game as their competitors.

Habitus connotes the "objective relationship between objectivities" (Bourdieu, 1979a/1984, p. 101). More plainly put, habitus refers to categories of perception and appreciation in the social realm. Habitus is "embodied class" (p. 437). The "schemes of habitus" are embedded in the most automatic gesture techniques of the body, particular ways of walking, talking, or physical

FIGURE 1
Habitus and Material States



gestures (p. 466). The schemes of habitus act as the primary forms of classification, predominantly below the level of consciousness of language, beyond one's control or will. Through this embodiment of class, habitus engages the fundamental principles of the social world, expressed through the division of labor, the division of work, and the division of domination. That is to say, those in particular class strata display particular physical gestures that connect with their position in the division of labor. Habitus appears "natural" but is actually a complex system of classification and division, a division of bodies and relations between bodies (p. 466).Through this embodiment of class, habitus is integrally linked to material conditions. Although differences in material states (for example, economic conditions) initially lead to differences in habitus, the actions taken because of habitus work to propagate and reinforce stratification between economic positions. Figure 1 demonstrates the perpetual and integral link between the material economic conditions and habitus.

Habitus relates to the cultural capital that one recognizes as available in social settings. One's dispositions, habitus that is used as a form of currency

in social relationships, can be rewarded or sanctioned in a particular field. For instance, particular gestures are recognized in a school setting as appropriate, while others are considered distasteful, inappropriate, or awkward. A teacher, perhaps without even realizing it, may "reward" a student who gestures in a particular way by distributing grades, placing students in groups, tracking students in primary or secondary schooling (see, for example, Oakes, 1985), or something that is seemingly benign like simply enjoying a particular student. Yet all these interactions may be an unconscious reward for the student's habitus, demonstrated through his or her cultural capital (demonstrated preferences, tastes, skills, abilities, or norms). Habitus dispositions call about a whole system of conditions that are classified as a "lifestyle" (Bourdieu, 1979a/1984, p. 172). This notion of lifestyle is manifested through the notion of taste, according to Bourdieu. Particular school settings can reward a certain habitus that allows for students to earn greater cultural capital (see, for example, Cookson and Persell, 1985; Horvat, 2001).

Taste

Preferences are manifested through the concept of taste. Tastes are acquired dispositions (that is, one aspect of habitus) to differentiate and appreciate everything from cultural artifacts (art, books, media) to food or clothing to mannerisms, behaviors, or styles of speaking. Bourdieu (1979a/1984) identified three "zones" of taste: legitimate or upper class, which are the least accessible and drive the standard against which all other tastes are measured; middle brow, which primarily belong to the middle class; and popular, which are most accessible and therefore least rewarded in social settings (p. 16). Taste is the propensity and capacity to appropriate a class of classified, classifying objects or practices (p. 173). Taste is the generative formula of lifestyle. Taste can be unconscious or conscious, and it is transmutated into signs, symbols, and value judgments.

Taste transforms classified practices into classifying practices, meaning that as one exhibits a particular taste (employing a classification), one is really making a symbolic expression of class status (turning the classification into something that next works to classify). As Bourdieu (1979a/1984) put it, "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (p. 6). The demonstration of a particular set of tastes classifies a person into particular social strata. "Art and cultural

consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences" (Bourdieu, 1979a/1984, p. 7). By exhibiting particular tastes, one is both "being perceived" as belonging to a particular social status and actually "being" part of that social stratum by manifesting the particular taste (p. 483).

Hence, taste is a "match-maker" (Bourdieu, 1979a/1984, p. 243). Although it may seem accidental that two people of a similar social stratum or class have similar tastes in music, clothing, food, or art, people in a particular class condition may actually be in some ways socialized to acquire and employ that taste. It is the practice of producing and rewarding this taste, the *social relation* of this practice, that explains the way that taste can have a hand in the perpetuation of inequality. Taste is the practical mastery of distributions where one can intuit what is likely to occur in the social realm. It is a social orientation, a sense of one's place. It implies a practical anticipation of social meaning that one can reasonably assume as one exhibits a particular taste, he or she will be rewarded or recognized in a particular way in a social setting.

Like habitus, taste is connected to field. Particular tastes are considered "normal" or emphasized more than others in a field such as a school or family. Habitus is the accumulation of one's tastes as dispositions. Hence, taste, rooted in the field from which one is acting and the habitus or one's set of dispositions, can act as cultural capital, a form of social currency, in the social realm. The social interaction that is the demonstration of taste facilitates social distinctions.

In educational settings, taste can act as a form of social currency but also as a bridge to new knowledge. If a student already knows and values particular referents in a discussion of literature or art, for example, one can benefit more from a lecture or discussion than someone who does not already have those referents. It is one of the ways that taste translates into currency, not only in the social realm but also in the "meritocratic" realm of schooling or college campuses.

Social Capital

The concept of cultural capital is often conflated with the term "social capital" (McNeal, 1999). Bourdieu (1979a/1984) conceived of social capital as "social connections, honorability and respectability" that work as a form of capital in social settings (p. 122). Bourdieu's social capital implies a sense

of obligation between people. Like cultural capital, social capital is only relevant in the field in which it is a part. Having particular social connections that can be rewarded as a type of capital in one social setting may or may not ensure that these social connections are rewarded in another setting or field.

Cultural capital could interact and work together with social capital to perpetuate privilege in that one's social capital, one's social connections, drives the availability of cultural capital that one acquires and the cultural capital that is recognized in a particular field. Thus, one's social network becomes a type of "credential" in social settings (Bourdieu, 1979b/1987, p. 249). Habitus (a set of dispositions) and cultural capital (culturally relevant tastes, preferences, skills, and abilities) are rewarded and sanctioned in social settings. Social capital (networks, social obligations, and connections) may help one to locate places (or interactions) in a given field where cultural capital and habitus will be rewarded.

Continuing with Bourdieu's game metaphor, if cultural capital affords one particular cards to play and habitus indicates one's approach to playing the game, social capital specifies where one starts in the game relative to one's social relationships. With an accumulation of social capital, one may get a head start in the game. As a form of capital, cultural capital game cards operate differently when one knows that the casino owner will "comp" some people more chips if they lose (social capital). Or if some people know the dealer (social capital), they could be given inside tips on how to play their cards.

Social Distinctions

One of the primary efforts of Bourdieu's work was to identify the way in which distinctions are made in the social world. These social distinctions are connected with symbolic power, the power that is often "misrecognized as arbitrary" (Bourdieu, 1994, p. 170). Social distinctions then are primarily defined "in and through a given relation between those who exercise power and those who submit to it" (p. 170). In her analysis of Bourdieu's work in light of higher education scholarship, Horvat (2001) provided the example of the increasing number of applications to elite colleges to explain the way that symbolic power might work in the field of education. Symbolic power of this sort appears natural, normal, and correct, and it is widely accepted, particularly by those in the dominated classes (Horvat, 2001).

In his aptly titled landmark book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste,* Bourdieu (1979a/1984) presented the results of a survey that was developed after an extended ethnographic and interview study. The survey, taken by 1,217 French people in 1963, aimed to identify cultural dispositions, the consumption of cultural goods, and cultural competence. It measured everything from personal styles of furniture and dress to preferences in food, music, art, theater, and reading material. The *distinction* was a difference in "taste" that Bourdieu defined as "an acquired disposition to differentiate or appreciate . . . to establish and mark differences by a process of distinction" (p. 465). He continued, "It functions as a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place' guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods [that] befit the occupants of that position" (p. 465).

Distancing himself from Marx's two-class structure, Bourdieu (1973) claimed that society was structured into three classes or positions: the lower position, including agricultural, tradespeople, and workers; the intermediate position, consisting of heads and employees of industry and intermediate office staff; and the higher position, consisting of higher office staff and professionals. Cultural habits, practices, and preferences, in Bourdieu's thinking (1979a/1984), are linked to one's level of education and only secondarily to one's social origin.[2] Yet only some cultural habits are considered to be "cultured" in society (p. 73). This idea ultimately indicates that "cultural capital" is primarily the possession of the elite in society, those with high class status, which may have been the reason that many adapted cultural capital in this way (for example, DiMaggio, 1982).

Cultural wealth, a way to signify social distinction, is the amassing of cultural capital, or "cultured" habits belonging only to the higher status positions in society; it is accumulated and bequeathed from one generation to the next (Bourdieu, 1979a/1984, p. 73). Although theoretically available to everyone, cultural wealth is only *really* available to those who can appropriate it for themselves. Specifically, only certain people have the "means of appropriation" to be able to decipher particular cultural codes and habits (p. 72). Bourdieu (1979a/1984) used the term "cultural competence" to explain the code by which one can appropriate cultural practices and norms.

Social distinctions are often beyond or beneath consciousness or choice (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). It is through the notion of social distinction, particularly when these distinctions are implicit or tacit, that Bourdieu's discussion of symbolic violence becomes clear. As Horvat (2001) put it, "These unrecognized distinctions perpetuate symbolic violence" (p. 206). Following this argument, people are dominated in and through these social distinctions, but they may not realize it or they may accept it as natural and fair. Thus, "cultural preferences . . . are accepted without recognition of them as an exercise of power but rather are seen as normal cultural expressions that exist within the natural social order" (p. 206).

Symbolic violence relates to the facade of choice in Bourdieu's theoretical apparatus. Those in dominated classes accept their domination in part through what *appear* to be a series of chosen preferences or tastes, physical gestures, or cultural artifacts. For example, one begins to "crave" or "desire" everything from clothing, music, art, or even the food that one's class location would require. This taste and the "choices" associated with it actually work to *maintain* the class stratification. Bourdieu (1979a/1984) explained that often those in classes that require manual labor desire fattier food that would be necessary to fuel their bodies for physical labor, for example. Even if some of the people in this class achieve upward economic mobility and no longer do manual labor, often they will still crave this fattier, cheaper food. Or those in the middle class may develop a "preference" for saving money, acting humbly (not too ostentatious, not too outspoken, for example), or working hard (if one works harder, one can do better in society) so that even if they begin to make more money, their preferences will keep them associated with those in the middle class, simultaneously perpetuating the social order. Bourdieu interpreted this process as "symbolic violence," because class or group preferences appear limiting or because preferences contribute to social exclusions.

Summary: The Social Conditioning Formula and Cultural Capital

Bourdieu outlined a theoretical scaffold of which cultural capital is only one layer in the full structure, suggesting a complex definition for the idea of cultural capital. Pulling together the concepts of cultural capital, habitus, and

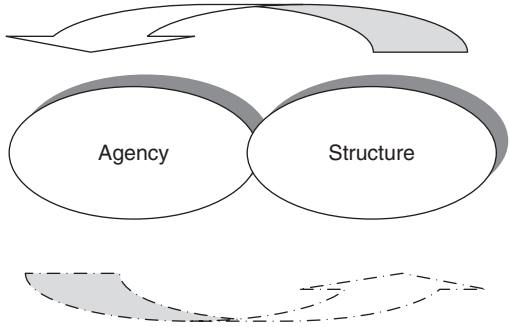
field, Bourdieu (1979a/1984, p. 101) asserted a social conditioning formula to explain the way that one's lifestyle may be structured. Hence, one's habitus (system of dispositions) times cultural capital (tastes, preference, norms) plus the field in which one is a part (school or family, for example) is equal to the actions or practice that one exhibits in a particular lifestyle (Bourdieu did not include social capital in the social conditioning formula):

$$[(\text{Habitus})(\text{Cultural Capital})] + \text{Field} = \text{Practice}$$

In their review of cultural capital as it applies to higher education, McDonough, Ventresca, and Outcalt (1999) maintained that practice is aimed at securing resources. The acquisition and securing of resources is certainly one aspect of the social conditioning formula, but it is only one piece of the puzzle. Practice, or social action, is the combination of one's set of dispositions (habitus) and one's culturally located preferences, tastes, skills, or abilities in a particular setting (field). The social conditioning formula maintains that practice is fluid and dynamic, an interaction between one's acquired habitus and cultural capital with the social structure, highlighting the interactive process between agency and structure in which Bourdieu took interest. Bourdieu contended that the complexity inherent in this social conditioning formula works to conceal the structure of one's lifestyle and the symbolic space that this lifestyle inhabits in the social realm. Practice is about securing resources, but it is also about classifying lifestyles and being classified into lifestyles that position people in the social structure. It all happens in subtle ways, often below the level of consciousness or apparently so "normal" that it goes unnoticed.

The social conditioning formula suggests that the interaction between agency (individual volition, will, choice) and structure (institution, field, social structure) is not meant to be static, implying that although the structure does at times limit agency because of one's unconscious acceptance of it, Bourdieu's framework still has room for resistance. Figure 2 is one interpretation of the relationship between agency and structure in Bourdieu's theoretical structure. Bourdieu's framework does imply that the structure is at play before one is able to demonstrate agency, represented by the solid arrow between structure and agency. Yet some space for one's agency still exists, perhaps through resistance, to influence the structure in some way. This potential is represented by

FIGURE 2
Interaction between Agency and Structure



the dashed arrow between agency and structure in Figure 2. At other times, agency and structure intersect, suggested by the overlapping circles in the figure. This intersection or overlap is important to Bourdieu's stance against the dichotomous interpretation of agency and structure. The overlapping circles here imply a bridge between agency and structure. Yet, implied in Bourdieu's work is the idea that one's agency or the actions one sees as available are somehow limited because of and through one's tacit, unconscious acceptance of the existing stratification in the structure. Thus, the intersection of agency and structure in this figure represents both the idea of a bridge between the two and a visual illustration of the limits to one's sense of agency.

Bourdieu (1990) summarized the interplay between agency and structure through his notion of *doxa,* saying "agents never know completely what they are doing and that what they do has more sense than they know" (pp. 68–69). Thus, although agency exists and this agency could in some ways influence structure, the structure may influence agency and individuals in ways that often go unnoticed or are taken for granted. The education system is one location where the agency and structure interaction can be explored.

Cultural Capital and Education

Educational institutions present an excellent location to understand the way that cultural capital is reinforced, rewarded, and acquired. The role of education in Bourdieu's view (1973) is to convert social hierarchies into academic hierarchies,

playing a legitimation function to perpetuate the "social order" (p. 83). Although education does facilitate the acquisition of some cultural capital, those students who early acquired the forms of cultural capital valued by the dominant groups will be more highly rewarded. They are also situated in schools or colleges to generate even more of this valued cultural capital.

The school system recognizes particular cultural competencies, which can be expended as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979a/1984). Educational institutions then reward those students who are already equipped with the cultural and social capital (through their social origin) that the system presupposes and legitimates (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970/1977) through the process of making it appear that the reproduction of social hierarchies is based on gifts, merits, or skills (p. 83). Bourdieu (1973) asserted that those cultural habits carried out by families and those practiced by schools work in a "harmonious" way so as to transmit a set of cultural norms, a "cultural heritage" that appears to be the property of the entire society (p. 73). These privileged forms of cultural capital are embedded in the social reproduction process through education: education reinforces symbolic relationships that establish and maintain power distinctions between the classes by reproducing the distribution of cultural capital among different classes (Bourdieu, 1971/1977).

The cultural capital that education implicitly "teaches" to students is closer to the dominant society, according to Bourdieu. For example, pedagogic actions in education may require an initial familiarity with the dominant culture. Yet education does *not* transmit an explicit understanding of dominant culture, nor does it convey an implicit valuing of dominant culture. Thus, Bourdieu (1973) argued, education requires of everyone what it does not give—an understanding of and ability to appropriate dominant culture. It can be measured by Bourdieu's demonstration of statistics indicating that those richest in cultural capital become more and more overrepresented as the level of education increases.

In other words, Bourdieu (1973) asserted that some students have available to them "imperceptible apprenticeships" through their families that ready them for higher levels of education than others. Hence, he claimed, those students with negative predispositions toward schooling will most often result in self-elimination at some point (leaving high school, believing oneself to be a

bad student, leaving or not attending college, for example). Bourdieu's claim is that these students anticipate that they will be sanctioned for not possessing the cultural capital that is rewarded by the educational system—the cultural capital of the dominant class—and they react to this anticipated rejection. It follows then that the "laws of the academic market" establish aspirations by determining the extent to which those aspirations can be satisfied by a particular class of people (p. 83). As Bourdieu and Passeron (1970/1977) argued, "The most hidden and most specific function of the educational system consists in hiding its objective function, that is, marking the objective truth of its relationship to the structure of class relations" (p. 208).

Institutions of higher education (and arguably many K–12 schools as well) are ultimately the property of the ruling class. Higher education, Bourdieu (1973) argued, conceals this fact under what Bourdieu called a "cloak of a perfectly democratic method of selection . . . based on talent and merit" (p. 84). Educational attainment is linked to cultural capital as well; one's level of education corresponds with one's available cultural wealth (Bourdieu, 1973). Bourdieu's notion of the educational system as part of the system of reproduction indicates that educational institutions "cannot easily serve egalitarian functions" (Musoba and Baez, 2009, p. 162). Thus, the real success of educational institutions, although often implicit, is in how many students the system sorts out with the effect of establishing and maintaining "distinctions as cultural capital" (p. 163). In Bourdieu's framework, the real success of educational institutions from the perspective of the dominant groups is in how many students the system filters away from it.

It is important to keep in mind here that Bourdieu was most interested in explaining the processes of the French higher education system, which was a "sponsored" system[3] (Turner, 1960), populated by far fewer students proportionately than in the United States. In the United States, the larger, more accessible "contest" system (Turner, 1960) creates more potential strains or fault lines for egalitarian sentiments. For instance, the "cooling out" functions of community college are unnecessary in Bourdieu's higher education system, where people would need "sponsorship" (primarily through their social origin, social networks, and so forth) to gain access to higher education in the first place.

Essentially, what Bourdieu and his colleague, Jean-Claude Passeron (1970/1977), argued is that education plays the role that heredity transmission, the "right of blood" or privilege, played in social orders previously. They asked, "Does [education] not contribute towards persuading each social subject to stay in the place which falls to him *by nature,* to know his place and hold to it?" (p. 210). This view essentially means that education appears to offer credentials based on merit when in reality these credentials may simply be rewards for displaying a particular cultural capital. Education, in this theoretical reasoning, has a direct role in the perpetuation of social stratification, in part through teaching people to accept their place in the social strata and in part through rewarding the cultural capital of those who are already of higher status.

This system of perpetuating, rewarding, and bestowing cultural capital in educational institutions may occur unwittingly to students, teachers, and parents. In the preface to the 1990 printing of *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1970/1977), Bourdieu concluded that the study "sought to propose a model of the social mediations and processes [that] tend, behind the backs of the agents engaged in the school system—teachers, students and their parents—and often *against their will,* to ensure the transmission of cultural capital across generations and to stamp preexisting differences in inherited cultural capital with a meritocratic seal of academic consecration by virtue of the special symbolic potency of the *title* (credential)" (pp. ix–x). In this way, the school or higher education institution imposes seemingly "legitimate exclusions and inclusions [that] form the basis of the social order" (p. x). Thus, this "huge classificatory machine," as Bourdieu called it, may work despite or amid the best intentions of those in it.

This description of the educational system seems to center more on the *lack* of agency of students, teachers, administrators, or parents, which is one reason that Bourdieu's full theoretical model is necessary to understand a thorough treatment of cultural capital in educational settings. For instance, the concept of field maintains that cultural capital is relevant only in the field in which it is recognized or valued. One could ascertain that agency may stem from engaging in different fields or, in attempting to change the field itself, ultimately altering the types of cultural capital that would be recognized or

valued. Bourdieu's point, though, is that reproduction, enacted through education, is an interaction between one's agency and one's structure. Hence, the real agency in his logic may be in this interaction itself.

Promises and Pitfalls of Cultural Capital in Educational Research

It is amid the blueprint of Bourdieu's crafting of and empirical work on cultural capital that I examine the way that this concept has been used in educational research. What follows is a review of the extant research that employed cultural capital as a theoretical construct or a substantive topic of study. The next chapter presents a review of this work with a careful eye toward the definitions and uses of cultural capital. In quantitative terms, I consider the way that cultural capital is operationalized or what variables are used as proxies for cultural capital. On the part of qualitative analysis, I examine how cultural capital is used as an analytic tool or interpretive framework. I also explore the particular methodologies of the studies, the country contexts in which the studies are placed, and the attention that the studies give toward race and gender analysis. "Strikes and Gutters: Examining Applications and Interpretations of Cultural Capital" begins to identify some of the misconceptions, pitfalls, and limitations of cultural capital as it applies to educational research. For example, although an increasing body of work uses this notion, the definition of cultural capital is often unclear or even contradictory, and few scholars use Bourdieu's full theory of reproduction. Yet even in the company of these challenges, this theory still holds promise for scholars and practitioners who desire to use it. The concluding chapter outlines recommendations for future research on cultural capital, with the hope of expanding and strengthening the concept across methodological approaches. Additionally, this closing chapter suggests some implications of the research for educational practice. What follows then is an examination of whether the promises or alternatively the pitfalls of cultural capital have been achieved.