Cultural capital in educational research: A critical assessment

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Abstract. In this article, we assess how the concept of cultural capital has been imported into the English language, focusing on educational research. We argue that a dominant interpretation of cultural capital has coalesced with two central premises. First, cultural capital denotes knowledge of or facility with "highbrow" aesthetic culture. Secondly, cultural capital is analytically and causally distinct from other important forms of knowledge or competence (termed "technical skills," "human capital," etc.). We then review Bourdieu's educational writings to demonstrate that neither of these premises is essential to his understanding of cultural capital. In the third section, we discuss a set of English-language studies that draw on the concept of cultural capital, but eschew the dominant interpretation. These serve as the point of departure for an alternative definition. Our definition emphasizes Bourdieu's reference to the capacity of a social class to "impose" advantageous standards of evaluation on the educational institution. We discuss the empirical requirements that adherence to such a definition entails for researchers, and provide a brief illustration of the intersection of institutionalized evaluative standards and the educational practices of families belonging to different social classes. Using ethnographic data from a study of social class differences in family-school relationships, we show how an African-American middle-class family exhibits cultural capital in a way that an African-American family below the poverty level does not.

Cultural capital is widely recognized as one of the late Pierre Bourdieu's signature concepts. Indeed, twenty-five years after texts such as Bourdieu and Passeron's *Reproduction* were first translated, they continue to play a significant role in English-language sociology. The concept of "capital" has enabled researchers to view culture as a resource – one that provides access to scarce rewards, is subject to monopolization, and, under certain conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next. As a result, emphasis on cultural capital has enabled researchers in diverse fields to place culture and cultural processes at the center of analyses of various aspects of stratification. In Bourdieu's own work, the concept was used most prominently in research on education and consumption and taste.[1]

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English-language researchers have applied and developed the concept in these areas as well as others.[2] Not all of the work has been favorable. Halle[3] found the concept to be of limited value in his study of paintings and art in New York homes. Lamont[4] critically assessed the concept in her work on symbolic boundaries. Nevertheless, although not as predominant as the "sister concept" of social capital, the impact of the concept of cultural capital in studies of inequality is beyond dispute.

Bourdieu developed the concept of cultural capital in the context of his educational research, and it is in the sociology of education that it has had its most sustained impact on English-language audiences. Indeed, Bourdieu's arguments concerning culture are now a staple of textbooks in the sociology of education.[5] Moreover, in nearly all economically advanced countries, schools play a crucial and growing role in the transmission of advantage across generations.[6] Therefore, any comprehensive assessment of the concept of cultural capital must necessarily come to grips with its role in education.[7] In this article, we scrutinize the English-language literature on cultural capital and education and find it to be wanting.[8] We argue that a dominant interpretation, resting on two crucial premises, has emerged concerning cultural capital. First, the concept of cultural capital is assumed to denote knowledge of or competence with "highbrow" aesthetic culture (such as fine art and classical music). Second, researchers assume that the effects of cultural capital must be partitioned from those of properly educational "skills," "ability," or "achievement." Together, these premises result in studies in which the salience of cultural capital is tested by assessing whether measures of "highbrow" cultural participation predict educational outcomes (such as grades) independently of various "ability" measures (such as standardized test scores). We find this approach inadequate, both in terms of Bourdieu's own use of the concept and, more importantly, with respect to what we see as its inherent potential. We therefore suggest the need for a broader conception that stresses the micro-interactional processes through which individuals comply (or fail to comply) with the evaluative standards of dominant institutions such as schools.[9]

Our article is organized in the following fashion. The first section reviews a number of studies, demonstrating that a dominant interpretation of the concept of cultural capital has developed. Second, we return to Bourdieu's writings on education to discern where these premises stand vis-à-vis his discussions of cultural capital and schooling. We suggest that the "highbrow" interpretation was not essential to

Bourdieu's conceptualization of cultural capital. We therefore assert that it has unnecessarily narrowed the terrain upon which cultural capital research operates. Furthermore, we find little in Bourdieu's writings to support the premise that cultural capital is understood to be distinct from (and causally independent of) "skill" or "ability." To the contrary, this assumption appears to be characteristic of sociological perspectives (such as the status attainment tradition) alien to Bourdieu. In the third section, we attempt to develop a broader conception of cultural capital. We provide what we see as the core elements of a definition. Our conception emphasizes micro-interactional processes whereby individuals' strategic use of knowledge, skills, and competence comes into contact with institutionalized standards of evaluation. These specialized skills are transmissible across generations, are subject to monopoly, and may yield advantages or "profits." This conception is one that we feel to be more in keeping with Bourdieu's understanding and, more importantly, has greater potential than the dominant interpretation. In order to illustrate this conception, we briefly present ethnographic data on the relations of families of young children and their contact with various institutions, including the school, in the final section. Here, we also note some studies that have drawn on conceptions of cultural capital closer to our own view.

The dominant interpretation of cultural capital

Table 1 presents a chronological list of English-language educational studies that make use of the concept of cultural capital, and which reflect to varying degrees what we consider to be the "dominant interpretation." We have selected articles and books that present the results of empirical research in education, broadly conceived, resting on an explanatory framework that *explicitly and centrally* invokes cultural capital. The list represents our judgment concerning the most influential research and (in the case of articles) publications.[10] (Works that use the concept of cultural capital in an alternative fashion are listed on Table 2, and are discussed in more detail at a later point.)

In our view, the dominant interpretation of cultural capital in educational research can largely be traced back to the work of Paul DiMaggio, and in particular, his 1982 article on the relation between cultural capital and school success. In this work, DiMaggio conceives of cultural capital as a factor capable of more completely filling out models of the "status attainment process."[11] He interprets cultural capital in terms of

Table 1. Selected examples of educational research using the concept of cultural capital

Year	Author	Title/source	Definition of cultural capital	Measurement of cultural capital	Differentiates cultural capital from
1982	DiMaggio	Cultural Capital and School Success, *ASR*	"instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed"	*attitude (i.e.,* students' interest in art, music, and literature as well as a self-image scale "I am a cultured person") *activities* (students created arts, performed, attended arts events, read), *information* about literature, music, and art (e.g., famous composers)	ability (vocabulary test score)
1985	DiMaggio and Mohr	Cultural Capital, Educational Attainment, and Marital Selection, *AJS*	"interest in and experience with prestigious cultural resources"	*attitude (i.e.,* students' interest in art, music, and literature as well as a self-image scale "I am a cultured person") *activities* (students created arts, performed, attended arts events, read), *information* about literature, music, and art (e.g., famous composers)	general ability (composite measure of achievement and ability tests), high school grades
1985	Robinson & Garnier	Class Reproduction among Men and Women in France, *AJS*	"linguistic and cultural competence" … Purchasing and borrowing books, attendance at museums, theater, concerts, styles of speech and interpersonal skills	educational credentials [would have preferred involvement in art, music, and literature and linguistic and interaction style]	

Table 1. (Continued)

Year	Author	Title/source	Definition of cultural capital	Measurement of cultural capital	Differentiates cultural capital from
1986	De Graaf, P.	The Impact of Financial and Cultural Resources on Educational Attainment in the Netherlands, *SoE*	"appropriate manners and good taste" … Values of formal culture and *beaux arts* (classical music, theater, painting, sculpture, and literature)	parents' reading (library visits per month, hours of reading) and parents' cultural visits (theater visits, museum visits, historical building visits)	
1990	Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan, and Shaun	Cultural Resources and School Success, *ASR*	"informal academic standards by which teachers reward more general skills, habits, and styles"	work habits, disruptiveness, appearance and dress, days absent, basic skills	Basic skills (Iowa Test), coursework mastery (district social studies test), grades
1990	Ganzeboom, De Graaf, & Robert	Cultural Reproducation Theory on Socialist Ground, *RSSM*	"cultural assets, in general … control over cultural resources and disposal over cultural resources" [definition of cultural reproduction theory rather than cultural capital *per se*]	cultural consumption: parents: cinema, theater, and museum trips in youth; reading in youth; *son*: reading frequency, theater, museum, and concert trips	educational attainment
1990	Katsillis and Rubinson	Cultural Capital, Student Achievement and Educa-tional Reproduction: The Case of Greece, *ASR*	"competence in a society's high status culture, its behavior, habits, and attitudes"	attendance at theater and lectures, visits to museums and galleries	academic achieve-ment (i.e., gpa), previous gpa on earlier diplomas

Table 1. *(Continued)*

Year	Author	Title/source	Definition of cultural capital	Measurement of cultural capital	Differentiates cultural capital from
1995	Mohr and DiMaggio	The Intergenerational Transmission of Cultural Capital, *RSSM*	"prestigious tastes, objects, or styles validated by centers of cultural authority, which maintain and disseminate societal standards of value and serve collectively to clarify and periodically to revise the cultural currency"	16 measures of students' participation in, attitude towards, and knowledge about arts and literature: interest in attending symphony concerts, plays, arts events, and reading as well as self-evaluation "I am a cultured person"	
1996	Aschaffenburg & Maas	Cultural and Educational Careers: The Dynamics of Social Reproduction, *ASR*	"dominant cultural codes and practices, linguistic styles, aesthetic preferences, styles of interaction" … institutionalized as legitimate	*Child cultural capital*: classes in music, arts,dance, art or music appreciation/ *Parent cultural initiatives*: play music, go to museums, go to art performances, encourage child to read	
1996	Kalmijn and Kraaykamp	Race, Cultural Capital, and Schooling: An Analysis of Trends in the United States, *SoE*	"high status cultural signals, such as attitudes, behaviors, preferences, and credentials, … commonly used for social and cultural inclusion and exclusion"	did parent attend performances of plays, classical music, go to art museums, encourage child to read	educational attainment
1999	Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell	Race, Cultural Capital, and Educational Resources: Persistent Inequalities and Achievement Returns, *SoE*	"widely shared, high status cultural signals" and "tangible household educational resources" (pictures, books, etc.)	cultural trips, cultural classes, household educational resources	

Table 1. (Continued)

Year	Author	Title/source	Definition of cultural capital	Measurement of cultural capital	Differentiates cultural capital from
2000	De Graaf, De Graaf, and Kraaykamp	Parental Cultural Capital and Educational Attainment in the Netherlands, *SoE*	"widely shared high-status cultural signals (behaviors, tastes, and attitudes)"	*Parental cultural capital:* beaux arts (museums, music and dance performances, plays)	parental educational attainment, parental "human capital" (reading behavior)
2001	Sullivan	"Cultural Capital and Educational Attainment" *Sociology*	"familiarity with the dominant culture in the society, and especially the ability to understand and use 'educated' language" … importance of linguistic competence	*children's cultural capital:* activities (i.e., type and amount of reading, type of tv program, type of music, museum, concert, play), test of cultural knowledge, vocabulary test scores, *parents' cultural capital:* children's reports on parents' reading, newspapers taken, type of music, and cultural activities	
2002	Dumais	Cultural Capital, Gender, and School Success: The Role of Habitus, *SoE*	"linguistic and cultural competence' and broad knowledge of culture that belongs to members of the upper classes"	asked parents if you or child ever: attended concerts, went to art museums; has your child ever taken art, music, or dance classes outside of school, borrowed books from library	ability test scores, gpa
2002	Eitle and Eitle	Race, Cultural Capital, and the Educational Effects of Participation in Sports, *SoE*	"high status cultural signals, such as attitudes, behaviors, preferences, and credentials, … commonly used for social and cultural inclusion and exclusion"	trips to museums, art, music, dance classes	Achievement test scores, grades

AJS = American Journal of Sociology; *ASR* = American Sociological Review; *RSSM* = Research in Social Stratification and Mobility; *SOE* = Sociology of Education.

the Weberian notion of "elite status cultures" – that is, as the "specific distinctive cultural traits, tastes, and styles" of individuals who share a "common sense of honor based upon and reinforced by shared conventions."[12] Cultural capital is thus definitionally yoked to "prestigious" cultural practices, in DiMaggio's interpretation.[13] The particular traits, tastes, and styles constitutive of cultural capital are "arbitrary," in the sense that "status honor 'may be connected with any quality shared by a plurality.' "[14] The concept is operationalized as a latent factor that, within the constraints of available data, can be indirectly discerned via measures of attitudes towards and participation in "high" culture. DiMaggio's assumption – attributed to Bourdieu and others – is that any (net) association between cultural capital and students' grades stems from tendencies of "teachers … [to] communicate more easily with students who participate in elite status cultures, give them more attention and special assistance, and perceive them as more intelligent or gifted than students who lack" the requisite traits, tastes, and styles.[15]

DiMaggio's article is also notable for the particular place it assigns to cultural capital in the process of status attainment. Indeed, much of the article is devoted to demonstrating that his measure of cultural capital is associated with the grades students receive independently of standardized test scores, and to comparing the magnitudes of these effects. Cultural capital is thus understood to be conceptually and causally distinct from what DiMaggio refers to throughout as "measured ability." Cultural capital, in other words, is seen as a supplementary resource – one that is ancillary to "ability" – that students may draw on in interests of school success. This leads DiMaggio to hypothesize that cultural capital should exercise its greatest effects on students' grades in "nontechnical subjects":[16]

> English, History, and Social Studies are subjects in which cultural capital can be expected to make a difference; standards are diffuse and evaluation is likely to be relatively subjective. By contrast, Mathematics requires the acquisition of specific skills in the classroom setting, and students are evaluated primarily on the basis of their success in generating correct answers to sets of problems.[17]

Thus, in DiMaggio's explanatory model, the causal power of tastes and styles flourishes precisely to the extent that that of "technical" skill recedes. As a result, the model may be said to rest on a quasi-Weberian distinction between rational and traditional aspects of educational evaluation. These aspects are assumed to be both *analytically and empirically* separable.[18]

DiMaggio followed up the 1982 article with two co-authored pieces that further pursued the subject of cultural capital. The first undertook a longitudinal analysis of the effects of cultural capital measures during high school on an array of subsequent outcomes (college attendance, graduation, etc.).[19] The second attempted to untangle various aspects of the transmission of cultural capital.[20] Both drew on the same definition and same measures of cultural capital.

It is our contention that DiMaggio's work – and in particular, the first two articles – set the stage for much (but not all) of the English-language research on cultural capital that followed. More specifically, we argue that the majority of subsequent researchers have taken over the two assumptions that we have thematized: a conceptualization of cultural capital in terms of prestigious, "highbrow" aesthetic pursuits and attitudes, and an insistence that it be conceptually and causally distinguished from the effects of "ability." Together, we maintain, these two assumptions have crystallized into what can be described as a dominant interpretation.

Most of the remaining articles in Table 1 conceptualize cultural capital in terms similar to DiMaggio's notion of an "elite status culture." For example, Kastillis and Rubinson, Kalmijn and Kraaykaamp, Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell, De Graaf, De Graaf, and Kraaykaamp, and Eitle and Eitle, all invoke "high status" practices or cues in specifying the meaning of cultural capital.[21] Similarly, De Graaf refers to "appropriate manners" and familiarity with the "*beaux-arts.*"[22] Robinson and Garnier share a similar understanding of cultural capital – one closely tied to participation in "highbrow" cultural forms – although in their case a lack of indicators compels them to measure it via educational credentials.[23] Elsewhere, however, we find much broader definitions. Ganzeboom, De Graaf, and Robert, for example, allude simply to cultural "assets" and "resources"; similarly, Aschaffenburg and Maas invoke the notion of "dominant cultural codes."[24] Nevertheless, in both of these articles the list of *indicators* used to construct measures of cultural capital is heavily tilted towards "highbrow" (and "middle-brow") cultural activities. For Dumais, the knowledge and competence constitutive of cultural capital are tied – at a definitional level – to the "culture that belongs to members of the upper classes"; and here again, the indicators by means of which a measure is constructed primarily capture "highbrow" participation.[25]

Just as the majority of the cultural capital research in Table 1 exhibits an interpretation of cultural capital that derives from or remains consistent with the one originally advocated by DiMaggio, many also share his insistence that cultural capital stands apart from "skills" or "ability." Thus, Ganzeboom, De Graaf, and Robert, Kastillis and Rubinson, Kalmijn and Kraaykaamp, Dumais, and Eitle and Eitle all develop explanatory models that control for some aspect of educational performance – such as test scores or grade point average – that can be taken as indicators of skills or ability.[26] The latter, in turn, are understood to be distinct from cultural capital.[27]

It would be a mistake, however, to suggest that the approach to cultural capital these articles take does not vary. For example, in a study of English pupils in their final year of compulsory schooling, Sullivan examines students on a broad range of possible components of cultural capital including activities (i.e., reading, television, music, and cultural participation), cultural knowledge, and language (i.e., test scores).[28] She attempts to determine inductively which cultural practices and skills should be deemed "capital" and why. Her data lead her to suggest that reading, rather than arts participation, is significant, and that its effect is due to the provision of "intellectual resources which help pupils at school" rather than status "prejudice" on the part of teachers. These intellectual resources – "cultural knowledge" and "vocabulary" – begin to dissolve DiMaggio's sharp distinction between a status culture, which revolves around prestige, and "ability," which revolves around technical skill and knowledge. In a related vein, De Graaf, De Graaf, and Kraaykamp attempt to decompose cultural skills and knowledge (broadly conceived) into reading behavior, on the one hand, and participation in highbrow cultural pursuits, on the other.[29] When reading behavior turns out to be the more powerful factor in their explanatory model, the authors equivocate over whether to conceptualize it as an alternative dimension of cultural capital, or as an altogether different factor – that is, as "human capital."[30]

A different understanding animates the work of Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan, and Shaun.[31] Eschewing the notion of an elite status culture, they conceptualize cultural capital in terms of "informal academic standards by which teachers reward more general skills, habits, and styles." They measure it by means of indicators of school behavior, academic habits, and motivation (for example, homework completion, dress, and disruptiveness). For Farkas et al., these "noncognitive" characteristics influence students' grades indirectly, by contributing to

the acquisition of "cognitive" capacity. However, they also influence grades directly, via teachers' propensity to perceive and reward students for "good citizenship," above and beyond what would be warranted by their mastery of course material. In certain respects, the distinction between cultural capital and "ability" reaches its logical conclusion in Farkas's recent extension of this work.[32] Here, a basic sociological framework is proposed that recognizes four forms of capital: alongside of economic and social capital, "noncognitive" skills, habits, and styles are identified with cultural capital, while "cognitive" capacity is identified with "human capital," understood in terms similar to those of economists.[33]

Thus, the articles in Table 1 are rife with variations in analytic focus, conceptualization, and argument. Nevertheless, nearly all are fundamentally guided by one of the assumptions that were identified in DiMaggio's original work on cultural capital, and many of the articles are characterized by both assumptions. This research, in other words, tends to conceptualize cultural capital in terms of "highbrow" status practices, and on this basis, assumes that it exerts effects independently of "skills," "technical ability," or the like. It is on these grounds that we refer to a dominant interpretation.

Revisiting Bourdieu's writings on cultural capital

As the cultural capital literature has accumulated, consideration of Bourdieu's writings on education has largely receded.[34] It is therefore reasonable to ask where the core assumptions of the dominant interpretation stand with respect to Bourdieu's own conception of cultural capital and its role in the educational process. It must be emphasized that in raising this question, we are not advocating fidelity to Bourdieu as an end-in-itself.[35] Rather, we believe that such an exercise may help to clarify certain points of confusion. Ideally, we hope that it will help to facilitate a more robust use the concept of cultural capital in educational research.

Cultural capital and "highbrow" pursuits

The "highbrow" conception attains a prima facie plausibility from Bourdieu's own interest in status collectivities, understood as lifestyle groups that form around affinities of cultural consumption. In partic-

ular, *Distinction* goes to great lengths to document the existence in France of status groups characterized by coherent lifestyles.[36] This study presents compelling empirical evidence that "highbrow" interests and pursuits form an essential component of the "art of living" characteristic of the dominant class. The text is replete with examples of how taste in home furnishings, clothing, food preferences, musical interests, and other cultural dimensions assumes variable contours in different fractions of French society. Nevertheless, *Distinction* establishes only a diffuse plausibility for the assumption that familiarity with "highbrow" culture is of fundamental importance in providing advantages to students in the educational system. To be sure, *Distinction* devotes considerable attention to the role of education in facilitating status group membership through the provision and certification of cultural competences. Nevertheless, this text allots very little consideration to the educational process itself. In other words, Bourdieu does not here elaborate the process by which "inherited cultural capital" contributes to educational outcomes (or what he likes to term "scholastic cultural capital"). But it is precisely the question of the impact of cultural capital on educational outcomes that the English-language literature tends to pursue. Thus, *Distinction* provides only indirect support for the "highbrow" interpretation.

Much of the impetus for the "highbrow" interpretation of cultural capital appears to have instead come from the widely-cited article "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction" (written in 1971), a translation of which appeared in Karabel and Halsey's influential 1977 collection of essays on education.[37] In this article, Bourdieu provides a definition of cultural capital that makes no reference to "highbrow" interests and practices: the term is said to denote "instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth worthy of being sought and possessed."[38] (DiMaggio quotes this definition in his 1982 study.) The essay does, however, employ a variety of measures of arts participation – including museum visits, reading habits, theater attendance, classical music appreciation, and the like – as "sufficient" indicators of cultural capital. It would appear that it is Bourdieu's use of these indicators that has inspired much of the English-language appropriation of the cultural capital concept.

Nonetheless, close inspection of this essay does not unambiguously warrant such an appropriation. For we also find Bourdieu stating here that the educational system's ability to reproduce the social distribution of cultural capital results from "the educational norms of those

social classes capable of imposing the … criteria of evaluation which are the most favourable to their products."[39] He elaborates this claim by declaring that

> It is in terms of this logic that must be understood the prominent value accorded by the French educational system to such subtle modalities in the relationship to culture and language as affluence, elegance, naturalness, or distinction….[40]

Bourdieu's remarks highlight two important issues. On the one hand, he did see a congruity between the aptitudes rewarded by the school and the styles and tastes that engender status group inclusion among members of the dominant class: the "subtle modalities in the relationship to culture" that he names do indeed recall the cultural attributes of the dominant class as described in *Distinction*. On the other hand, Bourdieu also indicates that this concept of cultural capital was intended to reflect the peculiarities of the French context that was being analyzed. Thus, the question arises whether Bourdieu considered congruity between educational norms and status practices to be *essential* to the concept of cultural capital, and, if so, whether they necessarily take a "highbrow" aesthetic form.

Bourdieu's later expositions of cultural capital provide little support for this possibility. Indeed, his essay "The Forms of Capital" – his most sustained elucidation of the meaning of the concept – contains no mention of an affinity for or participation in highbrow cultural activities.[41] Instead, this discussion asserts, in highly generic terms, that any given "competence" functions as cultural capital if it enables appropriation "of the cultural heritage" of a society, but is unequally distributed among its members, thereby engendering the possibility of "exclusive advantages."[42]

Examination of Bourdieu's writings thus suggests that the association of cultural capital with "subtle modalities in the relationship to culture and language [such] as affluence, elegance,… or distinction" – and by extension, with participation in "highbrow" cultural activities – may well have been intended to apply only to the French context. Lamont and Lareau explicitly drew attention to this possibility some fifteen years ago when they argued that before the *effects* of cultural capital could be analyzed in a given context, its *content* had to be empirically specified.[43] Nevertheless, relatively little work in educational research has attempted a specification of this sort.[44] Ironically, strong empirical evidence has been presented indicating that the exclusive respect tradi-

tionally accorded to "highbrow" cultural pursuits has largely dissolved, at least in some English-language countries.[45] It thus seems unlikely that in these contexts the distribution of unequally distributed, highly valued, and monopolized cultural resources that shape school success is primarily, or best, captured by measures of "highbrow" cultural participation.

Cultural capital and "ability"

The second dimension of the dominant interpretation – the assumption that cultural capital is both conceptually distinct from and causally independent of "technical" skill or knowledge – is, if anything, more problematic. Indeed, consistent with earlier critics, we would maintain that this assumption results from adherence to the premises of the U.S. tradition of status attainment research, in which "ability" and related concepts tend to play a prominent role.[46] We can identify nothing in Bourdieu's writing that implies a distinction between cultural capital and "ability" or "technical" skills. Instead, we argue that he considers them to be irrevocably fused.

At a prima facie level, Bourdieu's critical stance towards Becker and other theorists of human capital suggests caution concerning the separation of cultural capital and technical knowledge or ability.[47] Bourdieu writes that human capital theorists'

> studies of the relationship between academic ability and academic investment show that they are unaware that ability or talent is itself the product of an investment of time and cultural capital.[48]

More concretely, however, statements can be located throughout Bourdieu's writings that directly address the assumption that cultural capital is distinct from technical skills or ability. Thus, for example, in a foray into the sociology of science, he asserts:

> to attempt to distinguish those aspects of scientific competence (or authority) which are regarded as pure social representation, symbolic power, marked by an elaborate apparatus of emblems and signs, from what is regarded as pure technical competence, is to fall into the trap which is constitutive of all competence, a *social authority* which legitimates itself by presenting itself as pure technical reason.... In reality, the august array of insignia adorning persons of "capacity" and "competence" – the red robes and ermine, gowns and mortar boards of magistrates and scholars in the past, the academic distinctions and scientific qualifications of modern researchers ... – modifies

> social perception of strictly technical capacity. In consequence, judgments on a student's or a researcher's scientific capacities are *always contaminated* at all stages of academic life, by knowledge of the position he occupies in the instituted hierarchies.... [49] [emphasis in original]

Bourdieu maintains here that to attempt to differentiate the effects of factors linked to status from those linked to a pure "technical competence" is to "fall into [a] trap." More specifically, his (admittedly cryptic) argument has two interrelated dimensions. First, he insists that claims of technical competence act as a strategic *resource*, by means of which individuals may seek to legitimate their position in a status hierarchy. Secondly, he asserts that evaluations of technical competence are inevitably affected (or "contaminated") by the status of the person being assessed.

Bourdieu's view on this question finds clearer expression in *The State Nobility*, his last major work on education, and a text that has largely gone uncited in the English-language cultural capital literature. In a section of this work entitled "The Ambiguities of Competence," [50] Bourdieu undertakes a discussion of credentials, or what he elsewhere calls "institutionalized" cultural capital. [51] The section is concerned, in particular, with the relation between credentials and jobs, asking on what grounds school certificates provide access to positions.

In taking up this question, Bourdieu explicitly distances himself from a "technocratic" account, in which credentials transparently verify the "knowledge and skills" necessary for effective or efficient job performance. However, he also rejects the "radical nominalism" according to which credentials signify nothing more than the social elevation of their bearers. [52] In contrast to both, Bourdieu maintains that, from a sociological perspective, credentials must be understood to certify simultaneously two forms of competence on the part of the holder. On the one hand, Bourdieu does acknowledge that certificates and degrees do guarantee a technical capacity. On the other hand, however, certificates and degrees also attest to a "social competence," understood as a sense of social dignity on the part of the holder (and a corresponding capacity to set herself apart from others). The competence underlying the credential, in other words, has both a technical dimension and a status dimension. Bourdieu's argument is precisely that these two forms of competence cannot be disentangled, and that cultural capital therefore includes both *indissolubly*. First, he asserts that,

> dominants always tend to impose the skills they have mastered as necessary and legitimate and to include in their definition of excellence the practices at which they excel.[53]

Secondly, and more broadly, he maintains that actors themselves continuously distinguish between the "technical and the symbolic," or between attributes of "skill" and attributes of status. The impetus for the distinction that they draw between these two forms of "competence" lies in their strategic interests – interests that vary according to their labor market position:

> what is ascribed to skill and to dignity, to doing and to being, to the technical and the symbolic, varies greatly according to the hierarchical position of title and jobs to which they give access.[54]

Consequently, the boundary separating "technical" from "social" competence is at least partly a social construct: it is a result of conflicts between actors pursuing opposing interests. Thus, for Bourdieu, to attempt to partition the different dimensions of competence on analytic grounds is to lose sight of this contestation.

In our view, these remarks on the relation between credentials and jobs are an accurate gauge of Bourdieu's more general view of cultural capital. As such, they reveal how far apart he stands from the interpretation that animates much of the English-language literature.[55] Effects of "status," for Bourdieu, are not distinct from those of "skill" (or by extension, "ability"). Cultural capital amounts to an irreducible amalgamation of the two.

Although we have devoted considerable space to a demonstration that the dominant interpretation of cultural capital is inconsistent with Bourdieu's own thoughts on education, it is not our intention to dismiss the body of research undertaken on the basis of this interpretation out of hand. To the extent that researchers have been able to isolate substantial effects for cultural capital – understood in terms of "highbrow" cultural orientations and partialled from measures of "skill" or "ability" – their work presents striking evidence of the continuing power of status to have an impact on educational processes. Nevertheless, for the reasons outlined above, we do not believe this research has exhausted the potential contained in the cultural capital concept.

Towards an expanded conception of cultural capital

If what we have termed the "dominant interpretation" is deemed problematic, what are the alternatives? In seeking to answer this question, we turn first to a group of studies that have largely or entirely avoided the dominant interpretation. These studies are more consistent with our own view of cultural capital. Nevertheless, they have not, by and large, attained the same visibility as some of those in Table 1. Nor have they been integrated into the intellectual debates on cultural capital. (For example, these studies generally are not cited in the articles in Table 1 or in Kingston's recent review piece on cultural capital.)[56] As a result, they have not triggered a general reconsideration of the cultural capital concept. In the second part of this section, we therefore attempt a reassessment.

Alternative accounts of cultural capital and education

The studies in Table 2 cover different topics and seek to answer different questions. Consequently, differences are apparent in their understandings of cultural capital, highlighting the difficulty of producing a parsimonious definition. However, similar themes are apparent across these studies that, we believe, point the way towards a coherent alternative account of cultural capital.[57]

Patricia McDonough uses the concept of cultural capital in her qualitative study of influences on the college choice process. The study compares and contrasts the resources that schools offer to students in the course of this process. Most of it is devoted to a discussion of what she calls "organizational habitus." Nevertheless, she also directly addresses the role of "parental cultural capital" in certain places. For McDonough, cultural capital comprises the "first-hand" knowledge that parents have of the college admission process, particularly knowledge that they do not get from schools (e.g., a detailed understanding of the significance of SAT scores, the possibility of raising SAT scores through tutoring, and the availability of private college counselors to tutor children and guide them through the college admission process, as well as the initiative to secure private tutors).[58] By contrast, Diane Reay, in *Class Work*, a study of mothers of school-age children in London, defines cultural capital as "confidence to assume the role of educational expert, educational knowledge, effectiveness in getting teachers to respond to ... complaints, ability to compensate for perceived

Table 2. Additional studies of cultural capital in educational research

Year	Author	Title/source	Definition of cultural capital	Measurement of cultural capital
1996	Smrekar	*The Impact of School Choice and Community in the Interest of Families and Schools*	"social and cultural resources… [of] linguistic styles, authority patterns, dispositions from the home of habits, objects, and symbols affirmed by schools"	difficulty helping with homework for some, familiarity (or lack thereof) with teachers' technical language, material resources (i.e., books, transportation)
1997	McDonough	*Choosing Colleges: How Social Class and Schools Structure Opportunity*	"a symbolic good … precisely the knowledge that elites value yet schools do not teach"	knowledge of non-school college counselors, SAT tutors, timing of applications, and the importance of enrollment of children in organizations with ample resources to guide students through college application process
1998	Reay	*Class Work: Mothers' Involvement in their Children's Primary Schooling*	"a broad array of linguistic competenceies, manners, preferences, and orientations… subtle modalities in the relationship to culture and language"	confidence to assume role of educational expert, educational knowledge, effectiveness in getting teachers to respond to their complaints, ability to compensate for perceived deficits in children's schooling
1999	Lareau and Horvat	Moments of Social Inclusion and Exclusion: Race, Class, and Cultural Capital in Family-School Relationships, *SoE*	"parents' cultural and social resources become forms of capital when they facilitate copliance with dominant standards in school interactions"	"parents' large vocabularies, sense of entitlement to interact with teachers as equals, time, transportation, and child care arrangements to attend school events during the school day"

Table 3. (Continued)

Year	Author	Title/source	Definition of cultural capital	Measurement of cultural capital
2001	Blackledge	The Wrong Sort of Capital: Bangladeshi Women and Their Children's Schooling in Birmingham, UK, *Intn't Journal of Bilingualism*	cultural resources in the home that facilitate adjustment to school, especially linguistic structures	speaking English, feeling comfortable approaching the teacher, reading English, writing English, reading a story at bedtime
2003	Carter	"Black" Cultural Capital, Status Positioning, and Schooling Conflicts for Low-Income African American Youth, *Social Problems*	"cultural attributes, codes and signals… a set of tastes, schemes of appreciation and understandings… for linguistic, musical, or interactional styles"	(students' reports of) language use, especially slang, clothing styles, silence or talkativeness in class, interactional styles with teachers; argues that there are "non-dominant" styles that provide currency and status in community settings that are not valued at school

SoE = Sociology of Education

deficits in children's schooling."[59] In a related vein, Blackledge shows how mothers from Bangladesh living in England assiduously instruct their children in Bengali, but do not have sufficient English language skills to assist with homework. Despite these mothers' intensive efforts, they are not viewed as being sufficiently devoted to their children's education by the teachers, since their efforts do not comply with teachers' standards for parent involvement. Thus, Blackledge considers competence with the English language a form of cultural capital.[60] Back in the United States, Lareau and Horvat discuss a school in a midwestern community in which teachers place a premium on parents taking a positive and trusting attitude in their interactions with educators. However, the legal history of racial discrimination, including patterns of racial segregation in the town's schools, make it difficult for some African-American parents to comply with educators' standards of appropriate parent-school relationships. Yet, when African-American parents display anger or frustration about racial insensitivity in the schools, educators dismiss these parents as unhelpful and "difficult." In this instance, being white made it easier for parents to comply with the standard of a trusting, non-hostile relationship with the school.[61] In a somewhat different vein, Prudence Carter asserts that there are "dominant" and "non-dominant" forms of cultural capital, in the sense that certain cultural resources facilitate students' ability to "maintain valued status positions within their communities."[62]

Despite their differences, these studies do share (albeit to varying degrees) a clear focus on the *standards* that educators use to evaluate students or their parents. Furthermore, these works do not uncritically accept given institutional standards as legitimate, and then seek methods for boosting parents' and students' compliance with them (in contrast to authors such as Epstein and Hart and Risley).[63] Instead, they examine the ways in which cultural resources help families comply with these standards. This double vision, encompassing both institutional standards and the actions of individuals in complying with them, is critical to any discussion of cultural capital in our view, and points the way towards an expanded definition of cultural capital. Thus, our definition differs from the dominant definition in important ways. The elements that are considered under the rubric of cultural capital are broader. Indeed, the prospect that teachers reward students' competence in highbrow aesthetic culture becomes merely *one* empirical possibility among many others. There is also a renewed focus on institutional standards more broadly conceived than art and music. In all cases it is necessary to document the formal and informal standards

used to allocate rewards. Second, academic skills have to be drawn under the purview of cultural capital research. In other words, measures of academic performance should not be excluded from cultural capital research. Indeed, following Bourdieu, we must examine the factors involved in the creation of these standards.

Reconsidering cultural capital

Some fifteen years ago, Lamont and Lareau attempted to dissect the concept of cultural capital and its varying uses. In the course of doing so, they developed a definition of cultural capital in terms of "institutionalized, i.e., widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion."[64] According to this interpretation, the existence of cultural capital presupposes a strong social consensus concerning those status signals deemed worthy of recognition. Additionally, Lamont and Lareau also criticized the incorporation of cultural capital into status attainment models, insisting that such analyses overlook a significant dimension of conflict that was clearly part of the original concept: the constitution of cultural capital, they argued, takes the form of micro-political contests over legitimation of particular status signals.[65]

In the ensuing years, it is striking that many of those who have appropriated this definition have stressed the key phrase "high status cultural signals," while downplaying the terms that flanked it – notably "institutionalized," on the one hand, and "attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials," on the other. This appears to have led researchers to view the Lamont and Lareau definition as consistent with a "highbrow" interpretation of cultural capital, despite the fact that they explicitly argued against such an assumption when the concept is to be applied to a context outside of France.[66]

We are therefore inclined to expand the definition of cultural capital. As we noted earlier, in our view the critical aspect of cultural capital is that it allows culture to be used as a resource that provides access to scarce rewards, is subject to monopolization, and, under certain conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next. Moreover, it is critical to stress the socially determined character of cultural capital. We therefore return to Bourdieu's explication of cultural

capital in terms of "the educational norms of those social classes capable of imposing the ... criteria of evaluation which are the most favorable to their" children.[67] This motif – the imposition of evaluative criteria – is one that recurs throughout Bourdieu's work, in his discussions of social exchanges situated within fields operating as cultural "markets."[68] In our view, it comprises the core of the cultural capital concept. As such, it implies a relative lack of independence – a "heteronomy"[69] – in the relation between the school system and a class (or classes) capable of carrying out such an imposition.[70] At the same time, however, it also implies that the competencies that function as cultural capital are not fixed once and for all.

This account of cultural capital is highly abstract. Hence, its use necessarily presupposes empirical documentation of particular evaluative criteria. There are two important components. First, studies of cultural capital in school settings must identify the particular expectations – both formal and, especially, informal – by means of which school personnel appraise students.[71] Secondly, as a result of their location in the stratification system, students and their parents enter the educational system with dispositional skills and knowledge that differentially facilitate or impede their ability to conform to institutionalized expectations. Studies must document variations among students and parents in their ability to meet the standards held by educators.[72] Moreover, although a consensus may well hold over the nature of the expectations at any given moment, students and parents are also differentially endowed with the knowledge and skills that enable them to influence the way that they are applied for evaluative purposes.[73] It is these dynamics that we believe must be captured in cultural capital research. In addition, as noted above, we believe that technical skills, including academic skills, should not be excluded from any discussion of cultural capital. Although we have no doubt that status signals form one element of the competencies that students and parents are able to leverage, they do not exhaust the issue.

Cultural capital and interactions with institutional agents

To illustrate our understanding of cultural capital, we present some empirical material from Annette Lareau's research based on in-depth interviews with the mothers and fathers of 88 white and African-American families, intensive observations of 12 of those families, and for most children, school observations when the children were 9 and

10 years of age.[74] In this discussion, we seek to demonstrate the importance, at the micro-interactional level, of skills and competencies consistent with our understanding of cultural capital, as well as social class differences in their distribution.[75] We begin by addressing the question of the evaluative standards operative in various institutional arenas that young children come into contact with, and then we proceed to detail the attempts of parents from different social classes to promote their children's success within these arenas. To be sure, Bourdieu's concepts cannot be isolated from one another. Thus, in addition to cultural capital, our presentation draws on various ideas that were central to Bourdieu's thought, including those of class-specific dispositions (habitus) and a generalized strategic conception of agency.

Institutionalized standards

Conceptions of children have changed over time.[76] Moreover, professionals have significantly altered their advice about the appropriate methods of child rearing.[77] These changes in the norms surrounding childrearing also carry over into parents' interactions with key professionals and institutions. Thus, for example, as Hays has noted, professionals have gone from instructing mothers to follow dutifully and acquiescently the advice of doctors to (with the advent of Dr. Spock) norms centered on "trusting oneself."[78] Indeed, professionals and semi-professionals have established standards of responsibility for parents covering different aspects of children's lives, ranging across schools, leisure activities, and institutions such as health care.[79] Generally these standards stress the importance of parents being "active," "involved," "assertive," "informed," and "educated" "advocates" for their children.[80] In doing so, these professionals and semi-professionals have to create a historically specific set of evaluative criteria against which the performances of parents (and by extension, their children) are judged. However, what the professionals and semi-professionals have failed to grasp, in our view, is that the various childrearing skills and practices that they elevate are not evenly (or randomly) distributed across social classes.

In summary, although a full exposition of this approach must be outside of this article, the emphasis on the importance of active parent involvement in a wide variety of settings is virtually universal and widely praised. However, as we show below, social class affects the likelihood of parents' compliance with these institutional standards. In their encounters with institutional officials, middle-class parents ex-

hibit a unique sense of entitlement; and in seeking to realize their (perceived) prerogatives, they pursue interactional strategies and deploy cultural resources that are absent among their working-class and poor counterparts. Because these institutional settings call for active, engaged, and assertive parents, middle-class parents appear to be more capable of effective compliance. In the space below, we compare the experiences of the parents and guardians of a middle-class African-American girl and an African-American girl living in a public housing project, when they undertake institutional interventions on behalf of their children. The mothers are interacting with different institutions; their daughters attend different schools. Nevertheless, profound differences are observable in the micro-interactional skills that they display.

The Marshall family

The Marshalls are a middle-class, African-American family who live in an expansive suburban home (valued at around $200,000) located on a quiet, circular street in a predominantly white suburban community, situated near the boundaries of a major city. Mr. and Ms. Marshall are both college graduates. Ms. Marshall has a Master's degree and works in the computer industry. Her husband is a civil servant. They have two daughters: ten-year-old Stacey and twelve-year-old Fern.

Ms. Marshall routinely shepherded her daughters through institutions and intervened when problems emerged. In one case of particular interest, Stacey was not admitted to her school's gifted program (she missed the cut-off score on the entry test by two points). Ms. Marshall determined that the school district would accept scores from private testing services. Using her informal networks, she located someone who offered the service and paid $200 to have her daughter re-tested. She then took the scores back to the district, and, even though Stacey still was just below the cut-off, advocated on behalf of her daughter to an administrator. Ms. Marshall was ultimately successful, and Stacey was admitted to the gifted program. This example illustrates both the strategies and techniques that Ms. Marshall used to supervise, monitor, and intervene in her daughters' lives, a pattern we observed with other middle-class parents, black and white. The results of these interventions can be significant. Gifted programs, for example, enable children to be exposed to special curricula. They also mark them as unusually "talented," which may shape teacher expectations. Track placement in elementary school is influential in shaping track place-

ment in middle school and high school. In all of these ways, Ms. Marshall gained a payoff for her daughter. What must be emphasized, however, is that it was the district's willingness to accept private testing and the administrators' readiness to respond to parental entreaties that rendered her strategy effective.

Additionally, not only did the middle-class parents in our data routinely intervene in various institutions on behalf of their children, they also clearly transmitted the required skills to them, as well. Children watched their parents deal with institutional officials concerning matters both serious and minor. In the space below we discuss in detail the interventions that Ms. Marshall made in her daughter's gymnastic program. We also observed her engage in similar actions in other settings, such as a doctor's office; and she reported yet others to us concerning her daughters' school (the data on this family were collected during the summer). It is our view that the skills and strategies Ms. Marshall used so effectively in the gymnastics program are very similar to those she used with other institutions, and in particular, the children's school. Moreover, as we show, she also directly trained her children to develop their own nascent skills in calmly but directly pursuing their interests with people in positions of authority.

Stacey had begun gymnastics in a township program in which she had excelled. According to Ms. Marshall, however, the transition to a private gymnastics club was difficult:

> Suddenly, the first day in [gymnastics] class, everything that Stacey did, you know,... even, even though she was doing a skill, it was like, "Turn your feet this way," or..."Do your hands this way." You know, nothing was very, very good or nothing was good, or even then just right. She [Tina, the instructor whom Ms. Marshall believes to be of Hispanic descent] had to alter just about everything [Stacey did]. I was somewhat furious....

When the class ended and she walked out, Stacey was visibly upset. Her mother's reaction was a common one among middle-class parents: She did not remind her daughter that in life one has to adjust, that she will need to work even harder, or that there is nothing to be done. Instead, Ms. Marshall focused on Tina, the instructor, as the source of the problem:

> We sat in the car for a minute and I said, "Look, Stac," I said. She said, "I-I," and she started crying. I said, "You wait here." The instructor had come to the door, Tina. So I went to her and I said, "Look." I said, "Is there a problem?" She said, "Aww... she'll be fine. She just needs to work on certain

> things." Blah-blah-blah. And I said, "She's really upset. She said you-you-you [were] pretty much correcting just about everything." And [Tina] said, "Well, she's got – she's gotta learn the terminology."

Ms. Marshall acknowledged that Stacey wasn't familiar with specialized and technical gymnastics terms. Nonetheless, she continued to defend her daughter in her discussion with the gymnastics instructor:

> I do remember, I said to her, I said, "Look, maybe it's not all the student." You know, I just left it like that. That, you know, sometimes teaching, learning and teaching, is a two-way proposition as far as I'm concerned. And sometimes teachers have to learn how to, you know, meet the needs of the kid. Her style, her immediate style was not accommodating to – to Stacey.

Ms. Marshall thus asserted the legitimacy of an individualized approach to instruction, and her assumption that the instructor should adapt to the needs of the child. Although her criticism was indirect ("Maybe it's not all the student. . . . ."), Ms. Marshall made it clear that she expected her daughter to be treated differently in the future. In this case, Stacey did not hear her mother speak with the instructor, but she did know that her feelings were being transmitted in a way that she, as a young girl, could not do herself.

Moreover, in other moments Ms. Marshall directly trained her daughter to prepare for encounters with institutional agents. For example, although quite talented in gymnastics, Stacey had been unable to execute one key movement (called a "kip") on the parallel bars. Ms. Marshall objected to how Tina (who called Stacey "lazy") was managing the problem. She and her daughter therefore decided that Stacey should decline the invitation she had received to be part of the club's "elite" gymnastics team. In the course of doing so, Ms. Marshall trained her daughter – in a way that a manager might prepare for an important meeting – to think through her response to Tina ahead of time:

> Before Stacey went to the next class, I said, "What are you gonna to say to them, if they ask you why?" And she said, "I'm . . . ." You know, I said, "I think you better sit down and think about it." "'Cause," I said, "They might ask you." And sure enough, they did. . . . And we talked about it. I said, I said, "It might be feasible for you to just say that you just decided that you weren't ready for it." You know. And leave it at that.

The response from the instructor to Stacey's prepared statement served to antagonize Ms. Marshall further:

> I remember Stacey came out that night from class, and she – she got in, crying. She said, "You were right. She did ask me." And I said, "Well, what did you say?" She said, "We told 'em that I just didn't think I was ready for it." And I said, "Well, what did they say?" She said, "Tina just went Humm" [said in a disdainful, haughty voice]. You know, like that. And here I'm thinking to myself, well, I don't really think that was appropriate.

In this case, Ms. Marshall was unable to avoid difficulties in her daughter's institutional experience. What she did do, however, was transmit to Stacey a sense of entitlement in her dealings with institutional agents. Furthermore, she taught her daughter to rehearse interactions in advance and to assess critically the stance of people in positions of authority. Other middle-class parents in our study undertook similar "training" exercises with their children. In doing so, they transmitted to them a sense of entitlement and a propensity to intervene as well as a set of techniques for doing so. Indeed, the process of transmission revealed tightly interlocked dispositions concerning institutional agents and particular "skills" oriented to managing interactions with them that were characteristic of the middle-class families in our data. It is our contention that techniques and "skills" of this sort may be fruitfully conceptualized as a form of cultural capital.

To be sure, possession of this capital (and the associated dispositions) did not automatically entail its activation. To the contrary, there was typically a considerable amount of both hesitating and strategizing in middle-class parents' decisions to intercede on behalf of their children. Ms. Marshall, for example, routinely waited and watched before intervening.[81] Nevertheless, middle-class parents – and in particular, mothers – regularly sought to improve institutional outcomes for their children. And, in the course of doing so, they also sought to instill in the children the skills needed eventually to undertake such interventions on their own behalf, as well as a taken-for-granted belief that they were entitled to use these skills. A different pattern, however, emerged with working-class and poor families in our study, as the case study from the Carroll family reveals.

The Carroll family

Ten-year-old Tara Carroll and her twelve-year-old brother Dwayne live with their maternal grandmother in a three-bedroom apartment. Two uncles also stay at the apartment, one living there more or less full time and the other intermittently. Tara and Dwayne's mother, Cassie, has her own apartment but she is in regular, daily contact with her children. The two were born during a particularly difficult time in their mother's life; among other things, she was struggling with a drug problem. Thus, Tara and Dwayne have lived from birth with their grandmother, who, as their guardian, receives public assistance (AFDC) to help her pay for their food, clothing, and shelter.

Cassie's situation had recently improved. She had a job with a collections company, making telephone calls to try to recover money owed by credit cardholders with outstanding debts. She now shared some childcare responsibilities with her mother.[82] All interaction with the school, for example, fell to Cassie. She conscientiously attended parent-teacher conferences and other school-related events. The children's father was in prison, and although they saw him from time to time before he went to jail (and sometimes accompanied their mother when she made trips to the prison), he did not play a significant role in their lives. At the time of our data collection, Tara was a fourth grader at Lower Richmond School.[83]

A number of adults helped facilitate Tara's school experience. Her grandmother, Ms. Carroll, got her up and ready for school each day. In the afternoon, she supervised her homework. Ms. Carroll had a house rule (not always followed) that her grandchildren could not go out and play until their homework was complete. Indeed, the adults in Tara's life often stressed the importance of doing well in school. Although resources were very tight, Tara's mother scraped together the money – over $200 – to purchase the program "Hooked on Phonics" (advertised on television). She also regularly attended parent-teacher conferences. Thus, both Cassie and Ms. Carroll wanted to help Tara succeed educationally. Indeed, the importance of showing interest in school was a common theme in the Carroll home. Ms. Caroll repeatedly stressed to her daughter the importance of going to school, as she noted in an interview:

> It's good to show interest. And like I told my daughter Cassie, take time off. Go up there and check on your kids and see what's going on so you won't be in the dark. Work with those teachers and when they know you're concerned it makes them feel good and they'll be more concerned. They're human. You understand what I'm saying.

In addition, in their routine interactions, family members stressed the importance of being assertive and "fighting for your child," as in this exchange one weekday afternoon between Ms. Carroll and Tara's aunt, Patty:

> Mrs. Carroll did say to Patty, "Did you hear about Dwayne? Did Cassie tell you? They said Dwayne is teaching the other kids. He does not need to be in that class." Patty said, "Yeah, he is a smart kid." Mrs. Carroll said, "I knew he shouldn't; he was on the honor roll. I don't know how it happened." Patty said, "Cassie should have said something right in the beginning. They should not have done that." Mrs. Carroll said, "When it's your child, you have to fight." Patty said, "Yeah."

Thus, the Carroll adults appeared to hold an ideology that parents should "fight" for their children when the school did not act in their best interests. Yet despite their acceptance of dominant norms concerning childrearing, the Carrolls did not handle their child's schooling in the same manner as their middle-class counterparts.

For example, in a parent-teacher conference, Tara's mother listened with interest, volunteering that she had bought her daughter "Hooked on Phonics." However, she was far less assertive than most of the middle-class mothers we observed. Thus, during the conference, the teacher persistently pronounced Tara's name differently than the family did at home. (Rather than calling her "Ti-ray," she called her "Tar-rah.") At one point, the teacher got up the from the conference table and, still talking, walked over to her desk to pick up a piece of paper, all the while referring to "Tar-rah." Under her breath, Tara's mother whispered, "It's Ti-ray, Ti-ray" in a frustrated tone; but when the teacher returned, she did not correct her pronunciation. Nor did Tara's mother ask detailed, substantive, questions, or probe, test, or challenge the teacher about her daughter's educational experiences. In short, she turned responsibility over to the teacher. This contrasted with her behavior in other settings, in which we witnessed Tara's mother being quite vocal and assertive. Thus, the difference in her demeanor cannot be attributed to her personality.[84]

At least in part, the lack of assertiveness that Tara's mother exhibited stemmed from the fact that some of the information provided by the teacher was difficult to follow. Although seeking to be friendly and approachable, the teacher, an African-American woman, often used jargon such as "word attack skills" and "written comprehension" in the conference:

> Teacher: This is her reading test, which in 4th grade is comprehending. That's what I want to see, not only – she can pronounce any word. Her word attack skills are very good so she can read above her reading level, but what I'm really concerned with is if she understands what she's reading. And right now she does.... She is a solid 4th grade reader, both in reading and in comprehension.... She came up in written comprehension from a "C" to a "B" because what I'm looking for is more grown up writing and some more organization to her writing and this, on the back, is her first draft and she rearranged things and this is her second draft. You can see a big difference.

Thus, full participation in the interactions such as this one presupposes a degree of competence with educational terminology that is by no means universal among parents.[85] In the course of the conference, the teacher – adhering to dominant educational standards – also stressed the importance of parent involvement, requesting active educational assistance on the part of the mother:

> The math, that's the only thing. Keep drilling her with the math, with her basic skills so that she's more comfortable with it and that just comes from drilling. With word problems, the thing that you can do with her is what I do with my daughter cause my daughter's weakness is math, also. That's not uncommon for a kid to have a weakness in math or in another subject.

Unlike middle-class parents, however, Tara's mother did not follow up this suggestion by asking questions. She did not quiz the teacher or push her own agenda, as middle-class parents were prone to do. Her passivity, however, was not the result of indifference. Instead, our data suggest that it stemmed from a combination of her belief that education was the province of professional educators, rather than parents, and her sense of deference towards persons in positions of institutional authority.

As we have noted, Tara Carroll's mother and grandmother acknowledged that they were expected to promote Tara's educational success actively. They did not, however, have the same resources to bring to bear as their middle-class counterparts: unfamiliar with educational jargon, Tara's mother was unsure how to fulfill their expectations. Similarly, despite recognizing its legitimacy, she was disinclined to

adhere to the norms of "active" parental involvement by challenging officials in positions of authority or advocating on behalf of her child. As a result, Tara's encounters with institutions such as the school were significantly different from those of Stacey Marshall.

Conclusion

In this article we have attempted to assess the results of the importation of the cultural capital concept into English-language educational sociology. We have argued that over the course of the last two decades, a dominant interpretation has developed. This interpretation rests on two assumptions, first codified in the work of DiMaggio: that the concept of cultural capital refers exclusively to knowledge of or competence with "highbrow" cultural activities, and that as such, it is distinct from, and causally independent of, "technical" ability or skill. Our review of the literature supports the contention that these assumptions have pervaded much of the research on cultural capital.[86] Furthermore, we have attempted to demonstrate that the dominant interpretation cannot claim strict fidelity to Bourdieu's own understanding of cultural capital, and thus need not be taken for granted by researchers seeking to use the concept. Finally, on the basis of our reading of Bourdieu's work, we have attempted to develop an alternative interpretation of cultural capital that does not restrict its scope exclusively to "elite status cultures," and that does not attempt to partition it – analytically or empirically – from "human capital" or "technical" skill. As we have shown, this approach stresses the importance of examining micro-interactional processes whereby individuals' strategic use of knowledge, skills, and competence come into contact with institutionalized standards of evaluation. Students and parents differ, we assert, in their ability to comply with institutionalized standards of evaluation or, put differently, they have different skill levels for managing institutional encounters. We have stressed that these specialized skills are transmissible across generations, are subject to monopoly, and may yield advantages or "profits." Status signals, including "highbrow" competence, may indeed be one element of the competences that students and parents draw on in their institutional encounters, but we do not feel that these signals exhaust the issue.

Our interpretation of cultural capital is considerably more abstract than the dominant interpretation. It emphasizes that aspect of Bourdieu's thought that we consider fundamental to his discussions of

cultural capital: the direct or indirect "imposition" of evaluative norms favoring the children or families of a particular social milieu. As such, any use of this interpretation necessarily presupposes a careful documentation both of the particular evaluative criteria that operate in a given institutional arena, and of the factors affecting the application of these criteria to students of different social backgrounds. We find this interpretation appealing because it permits maximum empirical variation, while still retaining the core idea that culture can function as "capital." In particular, because it is centered on the existence and operation of evaluative norms associated with a specific location in the stratification system, this interpretation is tied to the idea of a (relative) monopoly over cultural skills and competences that can yield "profits." To suggest the potential usefulness of this interpretation, we have provided a concrete example of research guided by it.

We hope to see work in cultural capital continue, but with a much broader scope, in keeping with the approach that we have suggested. As noted above, academic skills should not be excluded from the purview of cultural capital research. Academic skills are, instead, part of what we should be conceiving of as cultural capital. (It is also important to understand how academic skills are constructed and legitimized as meritorious, as Bourdieu suggested.) But other questions loom. One important area of future investigation is the question of how markets for cultural capital are constructed. Kevin Dougherty noted the need to

> theorize about the role social groups play in shaping organizations so that they [organizations] will demand certain cultural attributes monopolized by those very groups.... A given possession only becomes capital if a market has been constructed in which that possession is demanded and therefore can yield a return.[87]

Thanks in large part to the legacy of Bourdieu, the premise that culture cannot be ignored in studies of stratification is now broadly accepted throughout much of sociology. The concept of cultural capital has been central to the development of this theoretical orientation. For this reason, the evaluation and assessment of the cultural capital literature is warranted, and we hope that our attempt to develop such an appraisal will trigger further reflection on the part of researchers seeking to understand the relation between education and stratification in "advanced" societies.

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Notes

1. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture,* trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1990 [1970]); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984 [1979]).
2. See, for example, Bonnie Erickson, "Culture, Class, and Connections," *American Journal of Sociology* 102/1 (July 1996): 217–251; Michèle Lamont, *Money, Morals, and Manners: The Culture of the French and American Upper-Middle Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Bethany Bryson, "Anything But Heavy Metal," *American Sociological Review* 61/5 (1996): 884–899; and David Halle, *Inside Culture: Art and Class in the American Home* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993); as well as numerous educational researchers discussed below.
3. Halle, *Inside Culture*.
4. Lamont, *Money, Morals, and Manners*.
5. Jeanne Ballantine, *The Sociology of Education: A Systematic Analysis* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 80–81; Cornelius Riordan, *Equality and Achievement: An Introduction to the Sociology of Education* (New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 1997), 66.
6. Michael Hout, "More Universalism, Less Structural Mobility: The American Occupational Structure in the 1980's," *American Journal of Sociology* 93/3 (1988): 1358–1400.
7. Thus, in this article, we focus on the literature in sociology of education; we do not provide an analysis of cultural capital in other research areas such as the sociology of culture.
8. Our article here obviously is indebted to an earlier piece, written by the first author with Michèle Lamont, which examined cultural capital in the American context: Michèle Lamont and Annette Lareau, "Cultural Capital: Allusions, Gaps and Glissandos in Recent Theoretical Developments," *Sociological Theory* 6 (Fall 1988): 153–168. However, it does diverge from the earlier piece in certain respects: it incorporates more recent studies, it focuses exclusively on the conception of cultural capital in sociology of education (rather than critically evaluating the concept and its use in a variety of areas of sociological research), and it centers

theoretical attention on the importance of institutional standards in any definition of cultural capital, stressing this point somewhat more sharply than the earlier article had. Lamont's subsequent work has maintained an emphasis on status signals deriving from the earlier paper, extending it to a focus on moral boundaries. See Lamont, *Money, Morals, and Manners*; Michèle Lamont, "Introduction: Beyond Taking Culture Seriously," *The Cultural Territories of Race,* ed. Michèle Lamont (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); and Michèle Lamont, *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class and Immigration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

9. Others, including George Farkas, have stressed the importance of micro-interactional processes in cultural capital research: "[This research] … argues for future attempts to deepen our understanding of the micro-processes underlying stratification outcomes by providing data on the way that gatekeeper judgments are constructed from a myriad of day-to-day interactions." George Farkas, R. Grobe, D. Sheehan, and Yuan Shuan, "Cultural Resources and School Success: Gender, Ethnicity, and Poverty Groups Within an Urban District," *American Sociological Review* 55 (1990): 127–142: 128. However, in his empirical research, Farkas emphasizes the importance of work habits, an element that differs from the factors that we considered to be critical to any conception of cultural capital, as our discussion below reveals.
10. Research centered on other Bourdieusean concepts (e.g., habitus) is excluded from the list, as is research that, in our view, runs together distinct concepts (e.g., cultural capital and social capital). Strictly for reasons of space, we also have excluded studies by authors already represented on the list, on the grounds that the additional studies were very similar to those included *with respect to the questions considered here*.
11. Paul DiMaggio, "Cultural Capital and School Success," *American Sociological Review* 47 (April 1982): 189–201, 199.
12. DiMaggio, "Cultural Capital and School Success," 189.
13. See especially page 191 of DiMaggio, "Cultural Capital and School Success."
14. Ibid., 189–190, quoting Weber.
15. Ibid., 190.
16. Ibid., 199.
17. Ibid., 194.
18. We must note that Bourdieu often drew a distinction between "traditionalistic" and "rationalized" systems of institutional education in his early work. However, in contrast to DiMaggio (and many of the English-language sociologists who followed), Bourdieu did not ground this distinction in the *content* of the culture inculcated or evaluated by the school (that is, in a distinction between "technical" and "non-technical" subject matters and competences). Rather, a "rationalized" pedagogy, for Bourdieu, was defined as one in which the degree of cultural continuity or discontinuity between the home and school milieus was explicitly accounted for in the school's pedagogical practice (e.g., Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction,* 53). Thus, the particular content of the culture inculcated and evaluated by the school was irrelevant to his formulation. We return to this question in the following section.
19. Paul DiMaggio and John Mohr, "Cultural Capital, Educational Attainment, and Marital Selection," *American Journal of Sociology* 90 (1985): 1231–1261.
20. John Mohr and Paul DiMaggio, "The Intergenerational Transmission of Cultural Capital,"*Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 14 (1995): 167–199.

21. John Kastillis and Richard Rubinson, "Cultural Capital, Student Achievement, and Educational Reproduction," *American Sociological Review* 55 (April 1990): 270–279; Matthias Kalmijn and Gerbert Kraaykaamp, "Race, Cultural Capital, and Schooling: An Analysis of Trends in the United States," *Sociology of Education* 69 (1996): 22–34; Vincent J. Roscigno and James W. Ainsworth-Darnell, "Race, Cultural Capital, and Educational Resources: Persistent Inequalities and Achievement Returns," *Sociology of Education* 72 (July 1999): 158–178; Tamela McNulty Eitle and David Eitle, "Race, Cultural Capital, and the Educational Effects of Participation in Sports," *Sociology of Education* 75 (2002): 123–146; and Nan Dirk De Graaf, Paul M. De Graaf, and Gerbert Kraaykaamp, "Parental Cultural Capital and Educational Attainment in the Netherlands: A Refinement of the Cultural Capital Perspective," *Sociology of Education* 73 (2000): 92–111.
22. Paul M. De Graaf, "The Impact of Financial and Cultural Resources on Educational Attainment in the Netherlands," *Sociology of Education* 59 (1986): 237–246.
23. Robert V. Robinson and Maurice Garnier, "Class Reproduction Among Men and Women in France," *American Journal of Sociology* 91 (1985): 250–280.
24. Harry B.G. Ganzeboom, Paul De Graaf, and Peter Robert, "Cultural Reproduction Theory on Socialist Ground," *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 9 (1990): 79–104; Karen Aschaffenburg and Ineke Maas, "Cultural and Educational Careers: The Dynamics of Social Reproduction," *American Sociological Review* 62 (August 1997): 573–587.
25. Susan A. Dumais, "Cultural Capital, Gender, and School Success: The Role of Habitus," *Sociology of Education* 75 (2002): 44–68.
26. Ganzeboom, De Graaf, and Robert, "Intergenerational Transmission of Inequalities in Hungary"; Kastillis and Rubinson, "Cultural Capital, Student Achievement, and Educational Reproduction"; Kalmijn and Kraaykaamp, "Race, Cultural Capital, and Schooling"; Dumais, "Cultural Capital, Gender, and School Success"; and Eitle and Eitle, "Race, Cultural Capital, and the Effects of Sports."
27. Paul Kingston discusses many of these same studies in a critical essay, "The Unfulfilled Promise of Cultural Capital Theory," *Sociology of Education* Extra Issue (2001): 88–99. Kingston is troubled by the lack of empirical evidence documenting the power of cultural capital in educational research, and by this research's conceptual variety at the definitional level. As our article makes clear, we see more intellectual coherence in the "dominant approach" than does Kingston. Because the concept of cultural capital that the majority of the literature uses is narrow and incomplete, we maintain that it is premature to conclude that the concept is of limited value on the grounds that a more robust theoretical foundation might yield different empirical results.
28. Alice Sullivan, "Cultural Capital and Educational Attainment," *Sociology* 35/4 (2001): 893–912.
29. De Graaf et al., "Parental Cultural Capital and Educational Attainment."
30. See page 96 of De Graaf et al., "Parental Cultural Capital and Educational Attainment."
31. Farkas et al., "Cultural Resources and School Success: Gender, Ethnicity, and Poverty Groups within an Urban District."
32. Farkas does, however, break with an implicit assumption of much of the literature in his argument that cultural capital (in his sense of the term) is causally related to "cognitive" skills.
33. George Farkas, "Cognitive Skills and Noncognitive Traits and Behaviors in Stratification Processes," *Annual Review of Sociology* 29 (2003): 541–562.

34. David Swartz, "From Human Capital to Cultural Capital: The Influence of Pierre Bourdieu on American Sociology of Education," 2002, Radio Broadcast, France Culture, on the World Wide Web at *http://www.radiofrance.fr/chaines/france-culture/speciale/speciale.bourdieu/index.php.* Accessed 15 April 2003.
35. We thus mention, only in passing, that the majority of English-language literature on cultural capital departs from Bourdieu in a number of ways that are not discussed in this article. First, nearly all researchers who have taken up the cultural capital concept – with the partial exception of Mohr and DiMaggio (Mohr and DiMaggio, "The Intergenerational Transmission") – weld it to a notion of social class that is largely alien to Bourdieu. Secondly, throughout his career, Bourdieu rejected the assumptions about causality inherent in standard multivariate techniques; in contrast, the majority of English-language cultural capital researchers make use of these techniques. On both issues, see Elliot B. Weininger, "Class and Causation in Bourdieu," ed. Jennifer Lehmann, *Current Perspectives in Social Theory* (Amsterdam: JAI Press, 2002), 21: 49–114; and Elliot Weininger, "Pierre Bourdieu on Social Class and Symbolic Violence," in *Alternative Foundations of Class Analysis*, ed. Erik Olin Wright (forthcoming, Cambridge University Press).
36. Bourdieu, *Distinction.*
37. P. Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," Jerome Karabel and A. H. Halsey, editors, *Power and Ideology in Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 487–511.
38. Ibid., 488.
39. Ibid., 495.
40. Ibid., 495.
41. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986) 241–258.
42. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," 245, esp. note 6.
43. Lamont and Lareau, "Cultural Capital."
44. A partial exception to this oversight can be found in research that attempts to determine inductively which facets of culture merit the appellation "capital." See Sullivan, "Cultural Capital and Educational Attainment." However, insofar as an element of culture is elevated to the status of capital solely on the basis of its superior predictive power in such studies (vis-à-vis an outcome such as grades), the actual mechanisms implicated in cultural capital "effects" remain obscure.
45. See, for example, Richard Peterson and Roger M. Kern, "Changing Highbrow Taste: From Snob to Omnivore," *American Sociological Review* 61 (1996): 900–907; and Bryson, "Anything but Heavy Metal," for the U.S. case; see Michèle Lamont and Virag Molnar, "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences," *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002): 167–195, for a discussion.
46. Lamont and Lareau, "Cultural Capital."
47. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital."
48. Ibid., 244.
49. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Specificity of the Scientific Field," trans. Richard Nice, *French Sociology: Rupture and Renewal Since 1968*, ed. Charles Lemert (New York, Columbia, 1981) 257–292, 258 (emphasis in original).
50. Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, trans. L. Clough (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 116–123.
51. Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital."
52. Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996 [1989]), 119.

53. Bourdieu, "Masculine Domination Revisited," 119.
54. Ibid., 119.
55. This point holds irrespective of whether or not one judges Bourdieu's arguments compelling.
56. Paul Kingston, "The Unfulfilled Promise of Cultural Capital Theory."
57. As various reviewers have noted, the books and articles listed in Table 2 primarily use qualitative methods, while those in Table 1 use quantitative methods. It is possible that the capacity of qualitative methods to capture routine aspects of daily life facilitated the development of a broader understanding. Still, although our conception of cultural capital (elaborated below) is particularly amenable to qualitative techniques, we do not claim an intrinsic connection. To the contrary, the potential of quantitative research is as yet not fully developed, largely as a result of the fact that most such studies have had to draw on data that were not collected explicitly for the purpose of analyzing cultural capital. Indeed, researchers adhering to the "dominant interpretation" have often noted the constraints that derive from having to undertake secondary analysis.
58. For example, McDonough writes, "parents had first-hand college information that they brought to bear on their daughters' choice processes and they have other relevant cultural capital. For example Mr. Ornstein knew his daughter's SAT scores … could be improved through formal coaching, and he hired a private counselor to help identify schools at which those SAT scores would not be an admission hinderance." Patricia M. McDonough, *Choosing College: How Social Class and Schools Structure Opportunity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997): 150. See also Peter W. Jr. Cookson and Caroline Persell, *Preparing for Power* (New York: Basic, 1985).
59. Reay studies 33 mothers whose children attend a working-class or a middle-class school in London. In her book, she discusses extensively the work of Annette Lareau, especially *Home Advantage: Social Class and Parental Intervention in Elementary Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000 [1989]). Reay argues that, compared to Lareau, it is necessary to focus on the gendered nature of parent involvement, on differences in the character of schools located in working-class and middle-class communities, on the active and involved nature of working-class mothers in their children's school lives, and on variations within working-class and middle-class families. See Diane Reay, *Class Work: Mothers' Involvement in Their Children's Primary Schooling* (London: University College London, 1998). Still, both Lareau and Reay conclude that the role of parents, and especially mothers, in activating cultural capital is critical to understanding class differences in children's school experiences.
60. Adrian Blackledge, "The Wrong Sort of Capital," *International Journal of Bilingualism* 5/3 (2001): 345–369.
61. Annette Lareau and Erin McNamara Horvat, "Moments of Social Inclusion and Exclusion," *Sociology of Education* 72 (January 1999): 37–53.
62. Prudence Carter, "'Black' Cultural Capital, Status Positioning, and Schooling Conflicts for Low-Income African American Youth," *Social Problems* 50/1 (2003): 136–155, 137.
63. Joyce Epstein, *Schools, Family and Community Partnerships* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001); Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of Young American Children* (Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes, 1995). However, the work by Claire Smrekar, *School Choice in Urban America: Magnet Schools and the Pursuit of Equity* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999) is less critical on this point than the other studies in Table 2.

64. Lamont and Lareau, "Cultural Capital," 156.
65. Ibid., 159–161.
66. Ibid.
67. Bourdieu and Passeron, "Cultural Reproduction," 495.
68. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. G. Raymond and M. Adamson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 67–72.
69. Bourdieu, *Distinction,* 88.
70. To be sure, such an "imposition" need not be direct, but can instead be carried out by what Bourdieu referred to as "agencies of consecration." See Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 96.
71. Studies would document the criteria for advancement in schools, such as skills needed to get good grades and score highly on tests, as well as other formal and informal ways that educators evaluate students. In the study of the influence of family background on schooling, for example, it is also important to document the ways in which educators presume that parents have the educational skills to assist children with homework, help children organize their time for school projects, drive children to stores to get materials for school projects, ask informed, detailed questions in parent-teacher conferences, and otherwise comply with educators' standards. The key is to study parents' actions *in the ways schools define* as crucial, as well as parents' efforts to promote school success in ways that educators do not value. For example, educators' standards lead them to value parents who read to their children nightly in elementary school more highly than parents who scrape together scarce economic resources to purchase educational equipment such as "Hooked on Phonics" (advertised on television). Not all parents' actions to support education are given equal weight by educators.
72. What might this mean? To take only one area, researchers would study variations by social class in terms of parents' detailed, accurate knowledge of how organizations work. This might include questions of how parents' level of knowledge about how to request special services, such as gaining access to the gifted program or their knowledge of teachers' reputations and strategies for getting their children placed with a particular teacher. Educators often use specific language terms that they expect parents to know (such as "auditory reception problems" or even "vocabulary development") that exceed the linguistic skills of many parents. Parents who do understand these terms, or have the sense of entitlement to ask for a definition, gain advantages over those who do not. In a related vein, parents also differ in the skills they have, sometimes rooted in their workplace experiences, to approach institutional settings to make requests. Educators have a preferred way of being approached by "clients," one that stresses parents' deference and their expression of "concern." Thus, parents' familiarity with the schools' organizational routines, educators' linguistic terms, and the micro-interactional standards for professional-client interaction are all aspects that need to be studied in an effort to understand cultural capital in families' efforts to advance young children's academic careers.
73. See Lareau and Horvat, "Moments of Exclusion."
74. See Lareau, "Invisible Inequality." Portions of the discussion of the Marshall family appeared in Annette Lareau's book, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003). The author is grateful to University of California Press for permission to reprint those sections here. The families were drawn primarily from public schools in a midwestern community and from one city and one suburban school in a large Northeastern metropolis. The

study began when children were in third grade with classroom observations. Letters were sent to parents; separate two-hour interviews were held with mothers and fathers as well as educators. Families were from middle-class, working-class, and poor homes. Class was defined by parents' work situations and their educational levels. A subsample of 12 families was recruited for additional study. When children were in fourth grade, there were intensive home observations of these families including the two described in this article. (The families were paid $350 for their participation.) The observations included from about 12 to 14 visits to the first three families in the study (including the Carroll family) but then increased to 20 visits, usually daily, for the remaining nine. The first author was assisted in the research by a multi-racial team of research assistants. Because the classrooms did not provide sufficient numbers of children for all of the conceptual categories, particularly for black middle-class families and poor white families, additional families were recruited outside the school from social service agencies, other schools, and informal social networks. For these families, including the Marshall family, we do not have observations at school. For additional methodological details, see Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*.

75. Briefly, Lareau argues in "Invisible Inequality" and *Unequal Childhoods* for the existence of social class differences in the logic of childrearing. She asserts that in middle-class families, black and white, a coherent pattern can be observed, that she terms "concerted cultivation." This cultural orientation entails a focus on parents' active development of children's skills and talents. By contrast, working class and poor families, both black and white, exhibit an orientation to what she terms the "accomplishment of natural growth." In this case, parents feel compelled to keep children safe and provide them with shelter, food, and love; but they then presume that children will grow and thrive spontaneously. Her book, *Unequal Childhoods*, elaborates these differences across different domains of daily life, including leisure time, language use, and interaction with representatives of institutions. We hasten to add here that there are differences within social class in how these broad cultural orientations are enacted: some parents are shy, some are outgoing, some are anxious, some are more relaxed, etc. While space does not permit us to take them up here, they are detailed in *Unequal Childhoods*.
76. Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1962); Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).
77. Julia Wrigley, "Do Young Children Need Intellectual Stimulation? Experts' Advice to Parents, 1900–1985," *History of Education Quarterly* 29/1 (Spring 1989): 41–75.
78. Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).
79. For a discussion of cultural capital that emphasizes the historicality of educational standards, see Jan C. C. Rupp, and Rob de Lange, "Social Order, Cultural Capital and Citizenship: An Essay Concerning Educational Status and Educational Power Versus Comprehensiveness of Elementary Schools,"*Sociological Review* 37 (1989): 668–705. Rupp and de Lange understand cultural capital in terms of "resources of knowledge and culture" and the power to determine which elements of knowledge and culture will function as resources. However, they do not always recognize the role that professionals may play, especially in the contemporary period, in mediating between social classes and particular institutions.
80. U.S. Department of Education, "What Works," (1996) Washington, D.C.
81. See Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*, chapter 9, for a detailed discussion of the children's

complaints that "Art" the bus driver was "racist." There was an initial period of hesitation on the part of Ms. Marshall, but after the children provided additional evidence, she ultimately pursued the matter with district officials.

82. There is some ambiguity in the roles each woman plays in the children's lives. Cassie, for example, often defers to her mother on key decisions, such as whether Tara and Dwayne could be in the study. On the other hand, Ms. Carroll often defers to her daughter. Thus, when the children complain about attending a tutoring project in the housing development office, she accepts Cassie's decision that they need not participate: "I guess they didn't like it.... They said [the adult tutors] had attitudes.... And so they complained to their mother about the attitudes, and she said, "Don't send them down there." So I don't.... I think they just didn't want to go. Period. I didn't take it to heart. I really didn't take it seriously. I just didn't send them."
83. Both her third- and fourth-grade teachers adored her. They described her (privately) as one of their favorites.
84. This teacher viewed Tara's mother in very positive terms, as she reported after the conference: "[Tara's mother] cares about her kids, she definitely does. She cares about her kids. She's always been interested. Tara is one that is going to be all right. She's gonna make it.... Tara's a great kid, I mean, definitely a great kid. She has trouble with math but other than that she'll be OK. She'll get it. She's real sweet. I hope it works out for her mom to get out of [the housing project]. That would be really good for her and Tara, too."
85. Of course, not all middle-class parents immediately know what terms such as "word attack skills" mean; however, their overall level of educational competence is far higher than that of working class and poor parents. As policy reports routinely decry, rates of illiteracy are very high in America. In our observations, working-class and poor parents, even high school graduates, frequently could not, for example, figure out a child's height if it was given in inches, would stumble over the word "heredity," did not know what a "tetanus shot" was, and so forth. Displays of this sort of competence (as well as the confidence to ask questions) were integral to the interactional style of middle-class parents in conferences with teachers (see Elliot B. Weininger and Annette Lareau, "Translating Bourdieu into the American Context: The Question of Social Class and Family-School Relations," *Poetics: Journal of Empirical Research on Literature, the Media and Arts*, forthcoming).
86. In his first article on the subject, DiMaggio stated that observational documentation of the "elite status culture" he assumed to be operating was necessary before cultural capital research could progress. DiMaggio, "Cultural Capital and School Success," 191. Lamont and Lareau subsequently declared that such a project was essential to the vitality of the concept: "[d]ocumenting the socially and historically specific forms of American cultural capital is now an urgent empirical task" (Lareau and Lamont, "Cultural Capital," 162). Nevertheless, despite the fact that both of these articles are widely cited in the educational literature, researchers who adhere to the dominant interpretation of cultural capital have made little effort in this direction.
87. Personal communication, Kevin Dougherty, letter to authors, June 12, 2003.