Moments of Social Inclusion and Exclusion Race, Class, and Cultural Capital in Family-School Relationships

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This article presents a case study of parents' involvement with their third-grade children. Using interviews and classroom observations, the research revealed how some black parents, deeply concerned about the historical legacy of discrimination against blacks in schooling, approach the school with open criticisms. Since educators seek a positive and deferential role for parents in schooling, race appears to play an independent role in parents' ability to comply with educators' requests (although social class also mediates the ways in which black parents express their concerns). The results highlight the difference between possession and activation of capital and the value accorded displays of capital in particular settings. Taken together, the findings suggest the importance of focusing on moments of inclusion and exclusion in examining how individuals activate social and cultural capital.

Scholars who are interested in how schools replicate existing social inequalities have found the concept of social reproduction to be useful, especially as articulated in the work of Bourdieu and his associates (Bourdieu 1977a, 1977b, 1984, 1990; Wacquant 1992, 1993). One of Bourdieu's major insights on educational inequality is that students with more valuable social and cultural capital fare better in school than do their otherwise-comparable peers with less valuable social and cultural capital. The social reproduction perspective has proved especially useful in attempts to gain a better understanding of how race and class influence the transmission of educational inequality.

However, a key dilemma that confronts those who seek to understand how the reproduction of inequality occurs in schools has been where to focus the debate. Exactly how is inequality perpetuated in school settings? Much of the literature has identified important class differences in parents' and students' attitudes or behaviors toward schools and has shown that these class differences affect children's progress in school (Brantlinger 1993; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Lareau 1989; McDonough 1997; Useem 1992). As valuable as this line of research has been, these theories do not always attend to individual interactions and interventions that more accurately characterize the students', teachers', and parents' interactions in schools. In other words, these studies have identified cultural and social factors that contribute to educational inequality but have not advanced knowledge of the process whereby social and cultural resources are converted into educational advantages. Thus, the picture that emerges from them is incomplete and overly simplistic.

Despite these difficulties, the overall perspective of social reproduction, with its focus on conflict, change, and systemic inequality, is still worthy of attention. Bourdieu's method allows for a more fluid interplay and better understanding of the relationship between structure and agency

than do other theoretical perspectives. Although the theoretical potential of offering an intricate and dynamic model is embedded in Bourdieu's original conceptual work, the empirical research has often been disappointing. The translation of the theoretical model into "variables" has often decontextualized key concepts from the broader theoretical mission (see Wacquant 1992 and 1993 for a discussion of these issues).

Still, Bourdieu has always remained attuned to the strategies and actions that individuals follow in their daily lives. Nevertheless, he has not always been sufficiently aware of variations in the ways in which institutional actors legitimate or rebuff efforts by individuals to activate their resources. Nor has he given sufficient attention to the moments of reproduction and exclusion. Although both these points are clearly implied in Bourdieu's work, we see it as an important clarification.

In sum, the empirical work on social reproduction, despite the original theoretical richness of Bourdieu's writing, has not sufficiently recognized three important points. First, the value of capital depends heavily on the social setting (or field). Second, there is an important difference between the possession and activation of capital or resources. That is, people who have social and cultural capital may choose to activate capital or not, and they vary in the skill with which they activate it. Third, these two points come together to suggest that rather than being an overly deterministic continual process, reproduction is jagged and uneven and is continually negotiated by social actors.

We find it helpful to point to moments of "social inclusion" and "social exclusion" (Lamont and Lareau 1988). To understand the character of these moments, one needs to look at the context in which the capital is situated, the efforts by individuals to activate their capital, the skill with which individuals activate their capital, and the institutional response to the activation. These factors, working together, can produce moments of reproduction or moments of contestation, challenge, and social change.

In this article, we highlight three aspects of the reproduction process: the value attached

to capital in a particular social context, the process through which individuals activate their social capital, and the legitimacy the institutions accord these displays. In our analysis of these patterns, we explicate specific moments of inclusion and exclusion that have been muffled by the overly global approach to the process of social reproduction.

In exploring these theoretical issues, we investigate the complex topic of the relative influence of race and social class in aspects of children's school experiences. Although previous research (Lareau 1989; Spade, Columba, and Vanfossen 1997; Useem 1992) stressed the importance of social class in shaping family-school relationships, in this article, we show how race acts to mediate the importance of class and has an independent theoretical significance in shaping family-school relationships. We suggest that it is more difficult for black parents than white parents to comply with the institutional standards of schools.[1] In particular, educators are relentless in their demands that parents display positive, supportive approaches to education. The historical legacy of racial discrimination, however, makes it far more difficult for black parents than white parents to comply with such demands. Although social class seems to influence how black and white parents negotiate their relationships with schools, for blacks race plays an important role, independent of social class, in framing the terms of their relationship.

THEORETICAL TOOLS

In this section, we present a brief overview of the conceptual model developed by Bourdieu and his associates (Bourdieu 1977a, 1977b, 1984, 1990; Wacquant 1992, 1993). Bourdieu himself has stressed the situational fluidity that defies simplistic definitions of key concepts (Brubaker 1993). In addition, as Robbins (1991) noted, he seeks to offer a particularly dynamic model, capturing "a bird in flight." We realize that we flirt with an overly reductionist approach here, but, particularly for the uninitiated reader, believe that a discussion of the core elements of the model is essential (for other secondary discussions, see

Buchmann 1989; Calhoun, LiPuma, and Postone 1993; Robbins 1991).

Briefly, the notion of capital exists in Bourdieu's method of viewing the social world. In his approach, all behavior is situated within a field of action, which has its own system of valuation and practice. The habitus can be viewed "as a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which . . . functions at every moment as a matrix of *perceptions, appreciations, and actions*" (Bourdieu 1977b:82-83; italics in the original). However, habitus can be understood only in light of the dominant practices in the broader society. Bourdieu has used the term field to capture the "rules of the game" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

In addition, individuals have strategies or practice. Practice in the field of interaction is shaped by multiple, interacting forces, including the rules governing the field and the relative position of players in the field. In a given field of interaction, different forms of capital have various values. As Bourdieu showed, the value of these resources can take many forms. Much attention has been paid to the concrete and potentially measurable benefits of social relations to promote advancement (social capital), cultural knowledge or resources (cultural capital), or economic resources (economic capital). But Bourdieu also has clearly highlighted the symbolic value of various displays in the social space (Bourdieu 1977a, 1977b, 1977c, 1984, 1985, 1987a, 1987b; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).[2]

Using Bourdieu's theory allowed us to draw two critical distinctions regarding the notion of capital in the process of social reproduction. First, all individuals have social capital to invest or activate in a variety of social settings or fields. However, all social or cultural capital does not have the same value in a given field. In addition, although the difference between possession of forms of capital and activation in specific settings is compatible with Bourdieu's model, Bourdieu (1984) did not draw sufficient attention to it. In this article, we stress that to be of value in a given field, social and cultural capital must be activated. The ability to activate social and cultural capital and the way in which it is acti-

vated influence its value in a field of interaction. The analogy of a card game, often used by Bourdieu (see, for example, Bourdieu, 1976), illustrates these two points.

In a card game (the field of interaction), the players (individuals) are all dealt cards (capital). However, each card and each hand have different values. Moreover, the value of each hand shifts according to the explicit rules of the game (the field of interaction) that is being played (as well as the way the game is being enacted). In other words, a good hand for blackjack may be a less valuable hand for gin rummy. In addition to having a different set of cards (capital), each player relies on a different set of skills (habitus) to play the cards (activate the capital). By folding the hand, a player may not activate his or her capital or may play the cards (activate the capital) expertly according to the rules of the given game. In another game, the same player may be dealt the same hand, yet because of a lack of knowledge of the rules of the game play the hand poorly. Thus, in analyzing social settings, researchers must attend to the capital that each individual in a given field has, as well as each individual's ability and skill in activating the capital.

METHOD

The study was conducted in Lawrence (a fictitious name, as are all the names used here), a small Midwestern town with a population of about 25,000. Located two hours from a metropolitan center, the town's commercial base is dominated by farming, coal mining, light manufacturing, retail stores, state government offices, and a university. At the time of the study, the public school system enrolled approximately 1,500 elementary and junior high school students in six schools. Of these students, 52 percent were white, 44 percent were black, 3 percent were Asian, and 1 percent were Hispanic. Forty percent of the children were classified as low income (eligible for the free-lunch program or receiving public assistance).[3]

Of the six schools in the Lawrence school district, one is a school that enrolls only children in kindergarten; four are elementary

schools, two for children in Grades 1-3 and two for those in Grades 4-6; and one is a junior high school. Of the four main elementary schools, one is in an all-black section of town, and the other three are in predominantly white areas (although one school is near a black housing area).

Quigley Elementary School, with around 200 students in Grades 1-3, is located in an overwhelmingly white and affluent part of town. Most of the staff members—the superintendent, principal, teachers, and janitors—were white; only one first-grade teacher and the school secretary were black. The first author, a middle-aged white woman, conducted participant-observation in each of two third- grade classrooms twice a week from September to December 1989 and less frequently (for example, three times per month) from January to June 1990. Both teachers, Mrs. Erickson and Mrs. Nelson, were white middle-aged women, each with about 25 years of teaching experience. Each classroom had 30 children. In the spring, the demographic data on each classroom were stratified into groups by race and social class (based on relatively crude and often inaccurate information on the parents' occupations from the children's emergency cards).

A sample of 24 children was chosen for in-depth interviews—12 white children (5 girls and 7 boys) and 12 black children (7 girls and 5 boys). Separate two-hour interviews were held in the children's homes with the parents and guardians.[4] The first author conducted most of the interviews, and a black graduate research assistant conducted several inter-views with black families. Although there were many informal exchanges between the researchers and the children, the children were not formally interviewed. However, in their interviews, the teachers spoke at length about each of the children in the study.

As Table 1 reveals, social class (see the definition in the table) and racial membership were heavily confounded in the study (as they are in the general population). That is, we essentially compared white middle-class families and black working-class and poor families. About one-quarter of the children lived in single-parent households, a living arrangement that was heavily interwoven with social-class position. That is, all the poor children came from single-parent homes, but only one of the children in the working- class group and none of the middle-class children did.

In all, interviews were conducted with 40 parents and 9 educators (a principal, superintendent, school board member, school secretary, and 5 teachers). Interviews were also conducted with 26 other adults who were working in the community. These adults included civil rights officials (such as the head of the local NAACP chapter and the executive director of a local community center in a black neighborhood) and city officials (such as the city manager and a social worker), who spoke about the broader racial context. In addition, the first author spent one week in the library of the local newspaper reading the newspaper's articles on racial issues, particularly racial tensions in the schools from 1950 to 1990. Although the results of such an intensive case study cannot be generalized to a broader pop-

Table 1. The Distribution of Children in the Study, by Race and Social Class

Social Class	White (n = 12)	Black (n = 12)	Total (N = 24)
Middle class	9	3	12
Working class	3	4	7
Poor	—	5	5

Note: Middle-class families are those in which at least one parent has a college degree and is employed in a professional or managerial position. Working-class families are those in which at least one parent graduated from high school (or is a high school dropout) and is steadily employed in a skilled or semiskilled position, including lower-level white-collar work. Poor families are those in which the parents are on welfare; most of these families are high school dropouts or graduates.

ulation, they can be used to challenge and modify conceptual models in the field.

Broader Racial Context

As a small Midwestern town with a minority population, Lawrence underwent considerable change in the 1950s and 1960s in how blacks were treated. Interviews with civil rights leaders and a review of newspaper articles revealed that many local businesses, including restaurants and movie theaters, practiced racial segregation or exclusion. As a result of demonstrations and pressure to alter these patterns, which began in the 1950s, most businesses altered these racial practices between 1958 and 1964. Discrimination in employment, which was pervasive and generally excluded blacks from all but custodial, domestic, and laborer positions, was slower to be eradicated.

With regard to the schools, Lawrence historically operated a black high school and a white high school. In 1964 the black high school was closed, and the students were sent to the white high school. The parents of the third-grade students, both white and black, remembered the time as turbulent, with open racial hostility among the students. The elementary schools, which drew from neighborhoods, were also racially segregated. In 1968 the district began a controversial busing program that was still in existence at the time of the study.

Since the parents in the study were born between 1941 and 1966, with most born in the 1950s, the majority remembered some of these changes. Many of the black parents began their school careers in segregated schools. Virtually all their parents and grandparents experienced legalized segregation.

At the time the data were collected, there were concerns about the current and past unequal treatment of black children in the Lawrence schools. Frustrated by what they perceived as insensitivity by the school district and angered by the demotion of the only black administrator from principal to teacher, a group of black parents organized a school boycott to protest racial injustice in Lawrence in September 1987. On the first day of the boycott, about 25 percent of the black chil-

dren did not attend school, and on the second and third (and final) days, about 15 percent were absent.

This boycott and a series of meetings between the district officials and black leaders were prominently featured in the newspaper. There were 20 articles on boycott-related issues in 1987 and 1988 but only a handful from 1989 to 1991. In these articles, officials of civil rights organizations provided biting indictments of the district officials. An article in the summer of 1990, for example, stated that Mr. Gowan, an officer in the NAACP, complained at a district meeting that in the Lawrence schools, black children "sense negative attitudes toward their presence" and often feel like "they are unwelcome participants in the educational process." He also stated that the school district officials "are insensitive to the needs of blacks" and that black parents had no "receptive audience" in the schools. Mr. Gowan then said that the board needed to reestablish lines of communication with the black community and to seek advice from organizations, such as the NAACP, as two other school districts in the region had done. "Why are we having such a problem at Lawrence?" he asked. "A lot of it has to do with attitude."

This brief discussion indicates that until the mid-1960s, racial discrimination was a legalized part of Lawrence institutions and that institutional officials resisted efforts to bring about social change. As young children, the black parents witnessed and experienced this discrimination and the officials' responses to it. Although discrimination was no longer legal at the time of the study, organized protests on racial issues continued, albeit in a radically different form. This climate of racial discrimination severely undermined some parents' trust in dominant institutions, including their children's school.

The Value of Capital: A Stricter Test

In *Distinction,* Bourdieu (1984) gave examples of numerous differences in the tastes of the upper middle class and working class in France, ranging from types of foods to home furnishings and music, art, and other forms of leisure pursuits. In the classic formulation,

Bourdieu suggested that these class-based differences in dispositions are of unequal value in the broader school setting.

In the area of social and cultural capital, some empirical studies (DiMaggio 1982; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Farkas 1996; Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan, and Shaun 1990; Kalmijn and Kraaykamp 1996) have found an effect, but others (DeGraf 1986; Robinson and Garnier 1985) have not. In almost all these studies, however, the presumed value of the capital is based on the patterns of the dominant ideology in the broader culture. For example, attendance at art museums is given a higher status than attendance at baseball games. One problem with this approach is that it is not clear that these cultural patterns are, in fact, highly valued in a specific institutional context. Nor is it clear why these resources should be considered forms of capital, capable of providing advantages in the social world.

In this article, we introduce a stricter test of the definition of capital. Instead of determining whether children's homes have cultural resources or display cultural signals, we suggest that researchers should be able to clarify how these resources are valued in the specific context under investigation—in this instance, the school experience (see Farkas 1996 for a similar view). Not all cultural displays are equally valued.

According to this line of thought, parents' cultural and social resources become forms of capital when they facilitate parents' compliance with dominant standards in school interactions. In particular, cultural capital includes 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. Social capital includes social networks with other parents in the school community who provide informal information about the teachers.[5]

Lareau and others have suggested that social class provides cultural capital when it increases parents' compliance with these standards (Lareau 1987, 1989; Lareau and Shumar 1996; McDonough 1997). In this article, we suggest that being black, rather than white, also plays a role. Given the historical legacy of racial discrimination, black parents are more likely to begin the process suspicious and critical of the risk of unfair treatment for their children. Although the terminology is somewhat awkward, we see being white as a cultural resource that white parents unwittingly draw on in their school negotiations in this context. Technically speaking, in this field, being white becomes a type of cultural capital.

In contrast, blacks do not have this cultural resource available to them. This is not to say that blackness is, in itself, a disadvantage per se, as it is in the culture of poverty's conception of disadvantage. Rather, we argue that in this field of interaction, the rules of the game are built on race-specific interactions. Many black parents, given the historical legacy of racial discrimination in schools, cannot presume or trust that their children will be treated fairly in school. Yet, they encounter rules of the game in which educators define desirable family-school relationships as based on trust, partnership, cooperation, and deference. These rules are more difficult for black than white parents to comply with. Furthermore, although race has an independent role, class also makes a difference. Thus, middle-class black parents have access to important forms of cultural capital, just as middle-class white parents do.

RESULTS

The educators thought that they enthusiastically welcomed parental involvement and believed that their requests for parental involvement were neutral, technically efficient, and designed to promote higher levels of achievement. In reality, from a range of potential socioemotional styles, they selected a narrow band of acceptable behaviors. They wanted parents not only to be positive and supportive but to trust their judgments and assessments—a pattern noted by other researchers (Epstein 1986, 1987, 1991; Van Galen 1987). One third-grade teacher stressed the importance of parents being "supportive" when asked about the qualities of an ideal parent:

> There are so many parents that automatically say that you are wrong and my child is right.

The parents that I enjoyed working with the most were the ones who would listen to how the child is and what they needed to work on and didn't criticize you.

The teachers repeatedly praised parents who had praised them. They liked parents who were deferential, expressed empathy with the difficulty of teachers' work, and had detailed information about their children's school experiences. In addition, the teachers often stressed the importance of parents "understanding" their children's educational situations, by which they meant that the parents should accept the teacher's definitions of their children's educational and social performance.

Compliance with School Standards

The expected standard that parents should be positive and supportive was difficult for some black families to meet. One reason for the difficulty was the parents' understanding of the broader context of race relations and the ways in which it pervaded the school. In these cases, black parents' attempts to criticize educators directly were rebuffed. For example, the Mason family had a difficult and unhappy relationship with the school, partly because Mr. and Mrs. Mason criticized and expressed their anger directly to the educators. This display of parental concern and involvement through anger and criticism was deemed unacceptable and "destructive" by the educators.

Mr. Mason, a pastor of a small church, and his wife, a beautician and associate pastor, were troubled by patterns of racial injustice. Mrs. Mason thought that a "wave of prejudice" was sweeping the country and the community:

> Every now and then there is a wave of prejudice. A spirit of intimidation is placed on the children. . . . It's almost like the law in America is now. You find a black man that might commit a crime, and he gets life for it and a white man might get off in a year and a half or he might get off with probation. So that's the state of law in America.

Mrs. Mason complained that these broader patterns could be seen at Quigley, particularly in the ways the school lavished attention on some holidays and then systematically ignored the celebration of black heroes:

> I've been over to the school all year, and there are certain holidays, I mean like Halloween. . . [when] witches and skeletons and what have you are hitting you all in the face as you walk down the hall. . . . There is a play on Washington's and Lincoln's birthday. But then Martin Luther King is the only black person that is really kind of recognized in America. And they don't really, most times they're saying that they might [recognize him], . . . but I still don't feel like they're giving as much effort as they should.

The lavish attention to Halloween and little notice of Martin Luther King's birthday were noted in the field observations. Overall, however, the school officials were resistant to Mrs. Mason's arguments that there were patterns of racial injustice in the school. The principal rejected her claims of bias and found her accusations upsetting. As the principal stated:

> I just found her to be very upsetting. . . . I think she is doing so much damage. She will not listen. You try to tell her about the volunteers and what is being done and the positive things and . . . that white children are getting detentions, too. . . .
> She's the kind of person who makes me wake up in the middle of the night and I'm thinking, "What can I do, how can I reach this parent, what can be done to change her?"

The teachers also thought that the Masons' claims were undermining their authority by making it more difficult for them to educate their children. As another teacher, who provided supplemental reading instruction to all third-grade children, commented about Mrs. Mason's daughter Faith:

> When I would try to correct [Faith], she would smart back at me. If she got in trouble because of her behavior, she would say it was because I am prejudiced, not because she was running in the hallway or throwing something in the playground.

Mrs. Erickson found the Masons to be among the "most upsetting" parents in her teaching career. She was particularly disturbed by them raising their voices in conversation and "just out and out yelling." Because the Masons seemed always to be angry, Mrs.

Erickson tried to avoid interacting with them. As she stated:

> They came in angry in January basically over her health grade. And then because there weren't enough black history pictures in the library. And angry that she had been tested and found to have a language delay, and they refused to sign for the testing. . . . I just thought I should leave well enough alone.[6]

For the most part, the Masons' efforts resulted in moments of exclusion. Faith stayed in her reading group (below grade level), rather than being moved up, and hence was not exposed to the higher-level reading curriculum. Still, there were some changes. At the end of the year, Mrs. Erickson "boosted" Faith's English grade a few points because "I just didn't want to have a scene." Thus, rather than appreciate Mr. and Mrs. Mason's interest and concern for the school, the educators defined it as singularly unhelpful.[7] In this educational setting, open conflict and anger were not considered legitimate.

As we discuss shortly, there were variations in how the black parents activated their concern for race with the school. In addition, both the black and the white parents differed in their levels of concern. A few white parents presented a negative vision of racial interaction at the school; for example, one mother thought that the white children were being treated unfairly, and she "resented" it. Overall, however, the white parents' enthusiasm for busing for racial integration and levels of empathy and concern about the potential racial bias at school differed. But none of the white parents exhibited, in the interviews or observations, the wholesale suspicion, distrust, and hostility toward schools that we found among some of the black parents.

Thus, the white parents were privileged in the sense that they began to construct their relationships with the school with more comfort and trust than did the black parents. This lack of suspicion took on substantially more value (capital) in an institutional framework in which the educators stressed positive, affirmative, supportive family-school encounters. Had the school adopted the norms, for example, of a trial court or of a debating team, then the racial differences might not have

been of value. In this setting, in which the educators were extremely hostile to expressions of criticism toward them, the membership of whites in a dominant race, without the risk of historical patterns of discrimination, was an advantage in complying with the school's standards.

Race Intertwining with Social Class

Other black parents also approached the school with a suspicion that the legacy of racial discrimination was continuing. There were, however, important social-class differences in how the black parents managed their concerns. The middle-class parents were much more likely than the poor parents to maneuver and "customize" (Lareau 1989) their children's school experiences. At times, they diffused the risk of racial discrimination without the teachers ever knowing of their concern. These patterns point to the importance of differentiating between the *possession* and *activation* of capital. In addition, they point to variations (often by temperament) in the parents' skill and shrewdness in the activation process that have not always been noted in the empirical literature.

Some black parents were extremely skillful in fostering interactions with educators. For example, Mr. and Mrs. Irving, a middle-class couple, were apprehensive that black children were discriminated against in the school and actively monitored their daughter's schooling. But the teacher never knew the source of their concern because they shielded it from her.

Mr. and Mrs. Irving thought that some of the black children were being treated differently from the white children in the school. As members of an black middle-class church, they were friends with other middle-class blacks, including several teachers, who shared their criticisms with the Irvings of how some white teachers treated black students. As Mr. Irving, a former teacher who now works in management for a manufacturing plant, stated:

> I've heard that some young black boys are maybe singled out more often for discipline than young white males. I've heard that before from the teachers who have seen it firsthand. . . . They'll maybe put one of the

black boys on detention a lot faster than one of the white boys who maybe do the same things. I haven't seen it, but I've heard people talk about it that work there that ought to know.

When asked if he thought black children were being discriminated against, Mr. Irving said:

> It's probably happening. I'm just considering the ratio between black teachers and white teachers, I would say it's happening. . . . I think as long as you have black and whites, there is going to be some kind of discrimination—some kind of problems; I don't think it's as bad as it used to be. . . . You don't come out and see it now; it's more covert.

Indeed, his wife appeared to see her husband's bimonthly visits to the school as an activation of resources to prevent problems from developing:

> I guess all in all, looking at my child, I think she's been treated fairly. If she hadn't been, well, we kind of visit the school.

Mr. and Mrs. Irving kept a close eye on their daughter Neema's schooling. Mrs. Irving monitored Neema's homework closely and insisted that Neema read regularly. Mr. Irving would stop by to bring their daughter Neema her lunch, to volunteer, or just to check on how things were going. As one teacher said:

> Her Dad was . . . at the school a lot. Some days he was just bringing her lunch or something, but he would ask me many questions. Probably every time he was in there, [he] would ask, "How was she doing?" "Had she worked on this or that?" . . . [Both parents] seemed to want to do anything they could to help Neema. She was a very smart student.

Not only did Mr. Irving supervise his daughter's progress, but he would occasionally make requests. When Neema was in the first grade, for example, he asked that she be tested for the academically talented program; Neema was tested and admitted to the program. In this case, Mr. Irving activated knowledge (from his days as a teacher) to improve his daughter's educational experience.

The teachers did not seem to know about the Irvings' apprehensions of racial discrimination. In both the interviews and the day-to-day chatter about parents after school, the teachers had only positive things to say about Mr. and Mrs. Irving and thought they were among the most supportive and helpful parents in the school. Thus, unlike the Masons, the Irvings were able to activate their cultural and social resources to intervene in their daughter's school career in a way the school defined as helpful and supportive. The Irvings' efforts to customize Neema's school career were partially motivated by their concern about the broader context of racial treatment in the schools. The Irvings were particularly masterful in gaining advantages for their daughter (for example, enrollment in the academically gifted program) and managing her schooling so they could be reassured that she was not subjected to unfair treatment without revealing their concern to the educators. The interventions provide a portrait of a series of moments of social inclusion in which parent-teacher contacts facilitated Neema's inclusion in high-status educational programs and her continuing success in school.

In contrast, some poor black parents who were concerned about racial discrimination handled the matter differently. Some saw a separation between home and school (Lareau 1989) and did not seek to intervene in the school process. For example, Ms. Caldron had been an alcoholic and cocaine drug addict for most of her children's lives but had been sober for two months. She lived in a government-financed housing project with her children; on her welfare subsidy, she could not afford to have a telephone. Ms. Caldron was concerned that the school was treating the black children, especially those who lived in the housing project, unfairly:

> I don't know, it seems like every black kid out there is getting in trouble one way or the other, and it's mostly black project kids. She [the principal] is just hard on them. It seemed like every time I turn around, Doug [her son] is on detention for something or other. . . . Pauley [another school in the district] was mixed. Now . . . they are in a predominantly white area where, you know, black kids aren't supposed to be. And I don't think that's right.

Ms. Caldron objected to children attending a school in the white part of town and thought it contributed to the racial discrimination at

the school. When asked if she thought that the black children were being treated differently from the white children, she replied:

> I just feel that they do. They are being treated differently. For one thing they just got out there. They hadn't been there when the rest of that school was all white. . . . So the kids that are still there get more seniority than these kids who are just coming in there. But it shouldn't be like that.

Ms. Caldron had little contact with the school during the academic year. Although Ms. Caldron requested spelling lists a few times, Mrs. Erickson complained that she did not return forms that required her signature or respond to notes that were sent home. Although Ms. Caldron had negative and hostile feelings toward the school, she did not discuss these concerns with other parents because she did not know any of the mothers of the other children in her children's classrooms. The only person she shared her concerns with was her friend Hope, whose child also attended the school:

> Me and this lady Hope we talked about it [sometimes], but just us two. . . . She feels the same way I do, and I feel the same way that she do. I feel that Mrs. Hertman [the principal] is semiprejudiced. I don't know about the rest of the teachers. I think Mrs. Erickson, she's semiprejudiced, too. Really, the only one I really liked was Mrs. Harrison (a school volunteer), and she's not even a teacher.

Unlike the Irvings, Ms. Caldron was not knowledgeable about her child's schooling (for instance, she did not know the name of his teacher or what reading group he was in), did not monitor and oversee the school experience through volunteer work, and did not attempt to intervene and change the character of the school experience.

In Bourdieu's terms, Ms. Caldron's habitus meant that she approached the educational field with fewer resources to influence her children's schooling successfully. It is also possible that because she was plagued with problems of substance abuse, she "played" her resources (Bourdieu, 1976) less successfully than did other parents with comparable resources. In any case, she felt (and appeared to be) excluded from the educational process.

Her son, who had repeated a grade and was at the bottom of the class in educational performance, did not have promising educational prospects. The most important point, however, is that social class appears to mediate how parents with similar types of concern about racial discrimination seek to manage their children's school careers. The results point to the influence of social class on how families manage their concerns about racial injustice at school.

White working-class parents also experienced distance from or conflict with the school. However, they focused exclusively on their own children's experience independent of the political or racial climate at the school. These parents did not talk about "the school" having a particular attitude or stance; rather, they talked about teachers treating their children in a specific manner.

Chad Carson's parents are a case in point. His mother, a manager at a local motel, and his father, a car salesman, never married and do not live together. Ms. Carson had a number of conflicts with Chad's teacher, Mrs. Nelson, which centered on the communication between them. As she put it:

> I got a detention notice in the mail from the principal. This is the first I had heard of anything—two weeks before a report card comes out. So I went in, and she said, "Chad daydreams. He never gets his things done and has a hard time paying attention." Anyway, I talked to Mrs. Nelson, and for the most part we didn't get anything resolved except I just said to her, "I can't do anything unless I know." . . . This is the first time that I had heard of anything that was the matter with Chad. He's bringing home A papers. I didn't understand. And I said, "I can't help if you don't let me know."

This pattern of difficult communication between the teacher and parent appeared in regard to other issues as well. Ms. Carson detailed the problems she had with the school in keeping Chad supplied with paper for school.

> Chad would call me here at work and say, "I ran out of paper." And I would say, "Chad, could you borrow some from someone, and we'll be sure to get you some for tomorrow." [Chad replied]: "No, Mrs. Nelson won't let me

do that. She made me call you." I said, "Chad, I can't leave work to bring you paper." The next day I sent four notebooks with Chad. . . . Well, it happened again. So, the way I handled it the second time was I took two of those big 500-sheet things into the principal's office and said, "Here, if any child comes in here to call their parent for paper, please give them this." I said, "You know, I can't just leave work. . . . If I don't know that Chad is out of paper, I can't do anything about it."

Even though the lack of communication between Mrs. Nelson and Ms. Carson involved a visit to the principal's office to drop off more paper, Ms. Carson remained focused on her and Chad's relationship with the teacher, not with the school in general.

Another white working-class couple, Mr. and Mrs. Jennings, attributed the problems that their daughter Lauren was having in third-grade mathematics to problems that began in the first grade. Mrs. Jennings described when and how Lauren's problems began:

> I thought things were goin' fine—and her first-grade teacher was not payin' attention at all. When they got far behind, she wasn't lettin' us know. And all of a sudden, Lauren was comin' home with 10 or 12 pages of math homework in a workbook that she hadn't been doin', that I didn't know she hadn't been doing. 'Cause I thought everything was OK. I mean, I knew she fooled around, but I know a lot of 'em do that. So, it wasn't gettin' remedied.

Despite her daughter's persistent problem in mathematics that was traceable to the first grade, Mrs. Jennings did not hold the school as a whole responsible.

These two families' experiences represent the most difficult conflicts that white working-class parents reported having with teachers or the schools. They clearly did not have the diffuse and pervasive race-based distrust of the school that some of the black parents identified. For them, conflict with the school was limited to and centered on their individual relationships with the teachers.

Variations in Parents' Perceptions

Black Parents Not all the black parents and guardians had difficult and unhappy relationships with the educators at Quigley school.

Some were very positive. One black grandmother, whose daughter died suddenly during the spring, was grateful to Mrs. Erickson. Saying she was "just super," the grandmother could not say enough good things about her. At the end of the year, she gave Mrs. Erickson a necklace as a thank-you gift.

Moreover, not all parents shared the view that black children at the school were subjected to unequal and less favorable treatment compared to the white children. A number of black parents stated that they did not know if there were problems at the school. For example, the grandmother of a child (the drug-addicted mother was unable to provide care) had not heard anything:

> Q: Do you know any parents who feel that children are being treated differently at the school because of their race?
>
> A: To tell you the truth, I never really discussed it with any parent, you know, the way they feel their children are being treated. Cause I don't go around and talk to people a lot. We might talk about church or something like that, but as far as racial things, I never really talk about it. . . . I haven't heard anything said.

Other black parents stated that children at Quigley school were not being treated unfairly on the basis of race. Some of these parents, from a range of social-class positions, were openly hostile to the black parents who complained about racial injustice. For example, one poor mother energetically defended the principal, Mrs. Hertman, from accusations of racism that she had heard in the public housing project in which she lived:

> The people who call Mrs. Hertman prejudiced are just rebellious. I don't brainwash my kids with that white-folks stuff. It's not that she's prejudiced. It's that a lot of black kids are hard to handle because their parents are on drugs or don't care.

A working-class father who worked as a laborer on the railroad was cautious as well:

> Tracking [of black students] is a problem, but I've got different feelings: . . . A lot of parents don't take the time and make their kids do their part. If parents participated more, I don't think you [would] have a problem.

In a different vein, a middle-class father acknowledged that other parents were concerned that blacks were not sufficiently active in the schools but he, too, placed responsibility on the parents. He thought that the parents needed to take an active role in monitoring schooling: "My biggest thing is that a lot of black people just need to get more involved."

White Parents The white parents' assessments of the existence of racial problems in the schools also varied. Some white parents agreed there were problems. As one white mother said:

> I think the teachers need to go, a lot of them, for a good semester, not a Friday workshop,... and become sensitized to some of the problems these kids have.

This mother also noted that she would never discuss these issues with some parents because "I know that they are prejudiced."

Other white parents said that they did not know what to think about race relations in the schools. For example, one father had read of black parents' concerns in the newspaper, but he was not sure if they were happening in the school. Another mother also expressed confusion:

> I don't know. I can't tell. I mean, I know that there's a disciplinary problem with some of them. And, ah [long pause] Holly has complained about there were certain girls that were picking on 'em. . . . I don't know if the teachers are intimidated by these kids. They probably are, . . . but I think they've pretty much have a handle on it over here, somehow. . . . I mean, it doesn't bother me because they're trying for the right reasons to do the integration.

DISCUSSION

The conceptual model of social reproduction has been rightfully criticized for being overly deterministic. Although ethnographic research has stressed the meaning of daily life, the theoretical models have an "automatic pilot" quality to them. The skills that Bourdieu clearly pointed to in parents "playing their hands" are not brought to bear. The models also sub-

stantially underemphasize the crucial role of institutions in accepting or rebuffing the activation of capital by family members.

A more fruitful approach, we believe, is to adopt the conceptual framework of moments of inclusion and moments of exclusion. (One could also use the terms *moments of reproduction* and *moments of contestation*.) We define moments of inclusion as the coming together of various forces to provide an advantage to the child in his or her life trajectory. In the realm of school, these moments may include placement in an academically gifted program or the highest academic track (Oakes 1985), enrollment in a suburban school (Wells and Crain 1997), encouragement and preparation for applying to college (McDonough 1997), attendance at an elite college, and use of networks for job placement. In contrast, moments of exclusion may include placement in a low reading group, retention, placement in remedial courses, and the failure to complete college-preparation requirements.

In this definition, we focus on the "objective" completion of or gaining access to a particular school task, not on the subjective experience attached to this task. Obviously, however, subjective experiences are integral to the entire process leading up to and through these critical moments in a life trajectory.

These moments are important. The social reproduction model has implied that the passing of privilege of family to child is relatively automatic. It is not. Although social class is heavily tied to educational outcomes, a student's performance is a core feature in determining educational access in the United States. Thus, even wealthy parents cannot guarantee admission to an elite university, such as Harvard, if their son or daughter has a combined SAT score of 780 and a grade point average of 2.2. By stressing the objective standards for entrance, this approach highlights more clearly the numerous strategies that parents, especially middle-class parents, take to gain advantages for their children in the educational system. For a strategy to be successful, however, it must be legitimated and accepted by the school officials. When it is, it can be termed a moment of inclusion.

To return to the parents, when Mr. and Mrs. Irving requested that their daughter Neema be tested for the academically gifted program, she was tested and admitted. This was a moment of inclusion, since the program was prestigious and exposed children to a higher level of academic work than in the regular classroom. Generally, teachers recommend that children be tested for the gifted program. In this instance, the Irvings were able to gain an advantage that, in all probability, would not have occurred otherwise.

In contrast, Mr. and Mrs. Mason's involvement was, for the most part, less successful. Mrs. Mason repeatedly asked her daughter Faith's third-grade teacher, Mrs. Erickson, to move Faith up to a reading group at grade level, but Mrs. Erickson, who thought that Faith's vocabulary was inadequate for a higher group, refused. Mrs. Mason also complained that Faith wasn't being called on enough during class. In addition, she was unhappy that the school library did not have enough books that celebrated black heroes and expressed concern about the uneven distribution of detentions by race.

The situation of these girls, is, of course, not strictly comparable, since there were important differences between the girls, especially in reading level. Our point, however, is not the girls' absolute level of performance in the class, but the ability of their parents to intervene in a fashion that the educators defined as appropriate and legitimate.

One can argue that, in Bourdieu's terms, Mr. and Mrs. Mason were drawing on their habitus and seeking to activate cultural capital for their daughter within the educational field. Most of their efforts were rebuffed. For example, the school (with elaborate special decorations, a special program, and a special school assembly) devoted far more time and energy to the celebration of Halloween than to Martin Luther King's birthday, and their daughter's reading group was not changed. These interactions, which further compounded the Masons' feelings of alienation and anger, should be characterized as moments of social exclusion. Although Mrs. Erickson "boosted" Faith's grade on her report card, an action that could theoretically be considered a moment of social inclusion, this action

was the exception, and the Masons did not know about it.

Moreover, these moments of social exclusion were heavily (but not entirely) connected to Mr. and Mrs. Mason's membership in a minority group with a history of legal discrimination. The Masons framed the issues with contestation and anger, but the school had a standard that emphasized positive, polite interactions. (The standard was not formally stated or made explicit.) In a setting (field of interaction) in which the educators defined a particular socioemotional style (calm voices, positive affirmations, and few criticisms) as legitimate, the anger and hostility that these black parents brought to bear were not recognized as legitimate.

Thus, we stress the value of particular cultural displays should not be presumed to be general, but should be linked to legitimated standards in specific social settings (fields). In the case of parental involvement in white-dominant schooling, being white is an advantage. Whiteness represents a largely hidden cultural resource that facilitates white parents' compliance with the standard of deferential and positive parental involvement in school. Even when white parents approach the school with suspicion and hostility, they are spared the concern over historically recognized patterns of racial discrimination of black children in schools.

CONCLUSION

What are the implications of this study for research in sociology of education? On a substantive level, the work points to the independent power of race in shaping key interactions in school settings. Although middle-class black families still benefit from their class position (and interact with schools in different ways than their less-privileged counterparts), they still face an institutional setting that implicitly (and invisibly) privileges white families. We assert that in this instance, the role of race is independent of the power of class. This study echoes, in some respects, other research that has suggested the primacy of race in shaping school experiences (Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Ogbu 1974, 1988). Similar to O'Connor's

(1997) and Fordham's (1996) findings, we point to the interplay of the individual and the institution in mediating the complex ways that race shapes school experiences.

At the theoretical level, we suggest the value of using Bourdieu's theory to explore social reproduction. Our study sought to highlight the fluid nature of social interaction and the reproduction of inequality in society in a way hinted at, but often underdeveloped, in the literature on social reproduction. Relying on the theoretical purchase offered by Bourdieu's method, our results suggest three modifications to notions of social reproduction. First, researchers should pay more attention to the field of interaction and the explicit and implicit rules for interaction embodied in a given field. Any form or type of capital derives value only in relation to the specific field of interaction. Particular types of social capital do not have inherent value exclusive of what is accorded in a specific field. Second, individuals must activate capital in social environments, and they vary in the level of skills they have to do so.

Accepting these two points leads to our third and concluding point. The process of social reproduction is not a smooth trajectory based on individual characteristics that are seamlessly transmitted across generations. An individual's class and racial position affect social reproduction, but they do not determine it. Each person (in this instance, a parent), through the skill with which he or she activates capital or plays his or her hand, influences how individual characteristics, such as race and class, will matter in interactions with social institutions and other persons in those institutions.[8] Thus, a closer focus on moments of the activation of capital situated in a field analysis that emphasizes how individual behaviors are recognized and legitimated or marginalized and rebuffed provides a more conceptually accurate picture of how social reproduction occurs.

The process of social reproduction is not a continual, deterministic one. Rather, it is shaped moment by moment in particular social fields. By not abandoning the concept of capital, but showing more forcefully the individual's use of strategies in their displays, as well as the nature of the field, researchers

stand to develop more nuanced and accurate models of the continuing nature of social inequality.

NOTES

1. We recognize the complex symbolic politics surrounding the naming of racial and ethnic groups and the growing tendency to use the term *African American,* rather than *black.* However, we chose to use the everyday language of the people in the study, who consistently used the term *black.* As a result, throughout the article, we use black to refer to African Americans and white to refer to European Americans.

2. In recent years, multiple interpretations of the definitions of capital have proliferated, particularly for notions of social capital and cultural capital (Portes 1998). We acknowledge the core focus on social relationality and social networks in most definitions of social capital. However, we stress the potential power of these social relationships to provide not intergenerational closure, but access to highly desirable social locations. For cultural capital, we stress the historical and contingent character of the definition of cultural resources. In contrast to Bourdieu, we draw more on the role of gatekeeping institutions in determining the value of various displays of cultural capital. Thus, although there were differences in the home furnishings, fashions, and personal appearances of the families and teachers in our study, our focus was on the cultural resources that facilitate or impede compliance with the school's standards. In the moments of inclusion and exclusion we discuss here, cultural resources include parents' vocabularies, socioemotional styles of discourse, and definitions of the roles that family members can take to be the most helpful in advancing their children's school performance.

3. These proportions differed considerably from the town's racial population, which was 73 percent white, 18 percent black, and 9 percent other. The racial composition of Quigley school was not, however, linked to a heavy private school enrollment. Although there were three private or parochial schools

within the city limits, they enrolled only 130 children from kindergarten to the 12th grade.

4. For several families, multiple visits were required to establish contact. One white family refused to participate, and another family moved several times and could not be contacted; both were replaced with other comparable families. In addition, in three families, the mothers, but not the fathers, agreed to be interviewed.

5. These should not be seen as an exhaustive list of forms of capital; children's exposure to, for example, classical music, 19th-century novels, and art museums also may provide advantages in other ways.

6. Mrs. Erickson thought that Mr. and Mrs. Mason would not defer to her assessment of Faith's educational needs and lacked a good understanding of these needs. She also thought that the Masons "put a lot of pressure" on Faith and that Faith was "insecure."

7. We do not want to paint an overly deterministic picture of the relationship between the Masons and Mrs. Erickson. Although they had clear periods of conflict, they also had times when relations were more cordial, as, for example, on Back-to-School Night. There were even rare signs of genuine warmth, as on the last day of school when Faith and Mrs. Mason separately gave Mrs. Erickson hugs in the classroom as they were getting ready to depart. Mrs. Mason told Mrs. Erickson that she "wanted things to be better between us." She also said she would be tutoring some of the children over the summer in the program organized by her church. In addition, she said that she planned to be back next year to volunteer in the school, a suggestion that Mrs. Erickson warmly responded to by saying that they needed volunteers.

8. Clearly, parents' actions reflect their assessment of their child's needs and temperament. In addition, the child's response to the parents' strategies further mediates the entire process. In this study, we were observing children in the third grade. When children are in high school or college, however, they generally take much more of an independent role in this process. Peer groups also come to play a more central role in children's lives as they grow older.

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