

Comprehensive Examination in the Sociology of Culture

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September 2010

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Result: *Passed*

PART A

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Culture has been a central topic in a number of disciplines. What are the central features of a distinctively sociological approach to culture? Articulate and assess alternative answers to this question within the sociology of culture literature

PART B

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Different sub-areas of the sociology of culture approach the study of symbolic boundaries in sometimes different ways. Discuss the most important features of the study of boundaries in work on culture and inequality, and compare and contrast with the study of boundaries in one other sub-area such as consumption or cognition.

PART C

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Assess the value of two or three conceptualizations of cultural capital for the sociology of culture. What are the strengths and limits of each concept? In what ways does it need to be revised or supplemented?

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Part A

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Introduction: What does it mean to be sociological?

Cultural Sociology is a particularly diverse and idiosyncratic subfield¹ that can claim within its body of literature studies of the earnings and employment rates of artists (Menger 1999; Bielby and Bielby 1996; Markusen 2006), historical analyses of artistic styles and genres (Peterson 1997; Dowd 2003; DiMaggio 1982; Ferguson 1998), abstract theoretical work concerning agency and structure (Swidler 1986; Sewell 1999), and increasingly scholarship that reaches into psychology and even physiology (Cerulo 2010; Lizardo 2004; DiMaggio 1997). This body of literature is not the result of a single mission statement that anchors the subfield, but rather a complex historical process whereby North American sociologists began to engage and respond to the notions of culture held within other academic disciplines. Therefore, rather than starting from any single, normative definition of “sociological”, it seems more appropriate to address this question from an institutional perspective. That is, I will first explore the intellectual “roots” of Cultural Sociology and identify which aspects of these earlier perspectives Cultural Sociologists adopted for their own distinctly sociological research. Second, I will look at how different understandings of culture have crystallized within Cultural Sociology since it developed into its own subfield. Only at the end will I make a few qualified statements about what a sociological approach to culture *should* look like.

¹ There is even diversity in how sociologists who study culture label themselves. For the sake of simplicity, I have chosen to use the term “Cultural Sociology” rather than the alternatives (e.g. Sociology of Culture). I have also capitalized the term to emphasize that it is a specific historical, institutionalized field of academic study.

The Roots of Cultural Sociology

Having clarified what I mean by the term “sociological”, we can now move on to a far more frustrating and ambiguous term: culture. Taking my cue from cognitive sociology, I would argue that we come to know certain objects of thought by dividing them and distinguishing them from other objects of thought. The concept of culture itself is a classic example of this process. Attempting to define culture on its own is notoriously difficult, but we can make things easier on ourselves if we begin by identifying things that are *not* culture. In fact, I would argue that many of the major social scientific approaches to culture can be defined in a series of binary oppositions that oppose culture to some better defined *non-culture*. There are three binaries I want to examine specifically: culture vs. nature, culture vs. social structure, and cultural institutions vs. economic institutions. In separating these binaries, I do not mean to claim that they are contradictory or incompatible, but rather that they represent separate academic traditions that employ culture for different purposes and have developed somewhat independently of each other.

Culture vs. Nature

This first opposition relates most closely to what has often been called the “anthropological” perspective (Williams 1995; Hebdige 1979). To see cultural ways of living as distinct from nature means to see them as inherently arbitrary and historical rather than inevitable and pre-determined. Nature within this perspective generally means biological, but it can also mean rational or self-evident. In what has become a landmark text within Cultural Sociology, Clifford Geertz (1973) frames culture and nature as two possible, but distinct, options that enable a species to survive in its physical environment. What distinguishes humans from animals is not

only how much culture we are capable of learning, but also how much culture we are required to learn because human biology alone is incapable of sustaining us (p.46). “We are, in sum, incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture” (p. 49). In the absence of biological programming, culture provides us with “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [we] communicate, perpetuate, and develop [our] knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (p.89). More recent biological applications of the culture vs. nature approach have sought to identify how human cognition (often treated as either a universal or as an individualist process) varies between and depends on cultural groups and social context (Zerubavel 1997; Hutchins 1995).

Because anthropology has been so successful in eliminating biological explanations of social difference (Sewell 1999:41), one of the more important applications of the culture vs. nature approach has been to problematize those forms of social behaviour that appear to us as self-evident and rational. For example, we typically think of the equation $1+1=2$ to be non-cultural because its truth transcends all cultural contexts (although our ability to use mathematical reason has been studied as a cultural phenomenon (Lave 1988)). The idea that certain social activities should be seen as rational and non-cultural can be traced back at least to Max Weber (1968) who distinguished instrumental-rationality from value-rationality, and rationality in general from traditionalism – implying that cultural explanations that focus on values and traditional norms are less important when examining social behaviour that seems reasonable and self-evident. Geertz (1976) as well argues that social scientists are inclined to look for cultural explanations when confronted with behaviour that seems different and unexpected rather than self-evident. There are various areas of research that target seemingly

self-evident behaviour and beliefs as the result of historical cultural processes. These areas include the use of money and market-based rationality (Zelizer 1988; 1994), and scientific discovery (Fleck 1979).

The utility of the culture vs. nature approach for sociologists is clear. When we define some kind of phenomenon as cultural, as opposed to being natural and self-evident, we effectively make it sociological. That is, we render the phenomenon explainable only with reference to the social conditions that produce it. There are, however, some criticisms of the culture vs. nature approach that have been influential in the way it has been incorporated into Cultural Sociology. One of these criticisms is that defining culture as everything that is not natural is simply too broad to be analytically productive (Sewell 1999:41). Considering that sociologists rarely engage with biology, we are left with a definition of culture that applies to almost everything we study.

Another important point where the sociology of culture is beginning to diverge from the culture vs. nature perspective is in the very dichotomy itself. Rather than seeing nature and culture as two distinct and mutually exclusive sources of social behaviour, new developments in cognitive sociology have called our attention to how human physiology (particularly of the brain) acts as a structuring force within culture (Cerulo 2010). While Geertz did acknowledge that the biological evolution of humans and the development of culture were intertwined, recent approaches go even further by rejecting the notion that culture simply picks up where genetics and biological instinct left off. Cognitive sociologists/scientists recognize that cultural experiences and learning are embodied (Lizardo 2004; Ignatow 2007), and that the distinct structure of the brain and of cognitive processes impact the various forms that culture takes (Rosch 1978; D'Andrade 1995). What remains to be seen, however, is the extent to which

Cultural Sociologists will embrace the insights of cognitive science, or if biology will continue to be regarded as generally off-limits within studies of culture.

Culture vs. Social Structure

The second approach presents a more narrow scope for culture by defining it against social structure. This approach is, in part, the legacy of Parson's three-system framework in which the social world is divided analytically between cultural, social, and personality systems (Alexander 1990:4). Culture within this perspective can sometimes – though not always – be understood as the immaterial content that “fills up” the more material and patterned forms of social interaction. Interaction is seen as occurring directly between social actors within a network (Erickson 1996; Crossley 2008), for instance, or as interaction with and through material resources (Sewell 1992). Formal institutions are also seen as falling within the sphere of social structure rather than culture.

Though the Parsonian cultural system could have potentially been conceived of as the system of meanings that has become associated with Geertz, in the functionalist and post-functionalist sociology that followed Parsons, culture was generally defined as a series of values and normative standards that guide actors through social structure (Alexander 1990:5; Swidler 1986). These values could remain informal, or they could become the basis of institutions (Alexander 1990:5). It is important to note that this dichotomy between cultural norms, on the one hand, and social structure and institutions, on the other, allowed sociologists to sustain the Weberian distinction between instrumental and normative (value/tradition) forms of social action. While the former was determined by self-interest operating within institutional settings (e.g. the pursuit of wealth in the economy, power in politics, and truth in science), the latter

could only be explained with reference to specific historical values (e.g. the Protestant ethic).

In her article “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies”, Ann Swidler (1986) presented a critique of this value-based approach to culture that has since become highly influential within Cultural Sociology. The article can be seen as an attempt to collapse, or at least significantly shrink, the distinction between culture and social structure by recasting culture not abstract rules or values that exist prior to social action, but as practical strategies that exist only as they are enacted within social life. For Swidler, culture exists as a *toolkit* that provides strategies for solving institutionally-defined problems. The major flaw of the paper however, is that Swidler did not follow this new conception of culture to its logical conclusion. To say that culture provides strategies of action implies that it is no longer reasonable to distinguish between instrumental and normative forms of action. Since all action requires strategies, all action is therefore *cultural* – including institutionalized action. Nonetheless Swidler continued throughout the paper to maintain the same Parsonian distinction between social structure and culture, treating culture as a residual force that is only important for understanding patterned social behaviour that (1) remains constant during times of social structural change (p.277), or (2) exists outside formal institutions (p.281).

Since the publication of Swidler’s article, the distinction between culture and institutions has been virtually erased in many areas of Cultural Sociology. Under the influence of new institutionalism, the definition of institutions now looks remarkably similar to Geertz’ definition of culture. DiMaggio (1994), for instance, defines institutions as “cognitive formations (categories, typifications, scripts) entailing constitutive understandings upon which action is predicated” (p.37). In her later work, Swidler (2001) herself seems to have abandoned the distinction as well. Thus, the toolkit metaphor should not be seen as a fully-formed theory of

culture, but rather a prototypical concept that calls our attention toward the importance of practice and signals a general shift in dominant sociological understandings of culture (at least within North America).

The ability to sustain an analytical division between culture and social structure depends on how the two concepts are defined. Erickson (1996), for instance, maintains the distinction in a way that is logically consistent by representing culture as “working knowledge” of particular topics and representing structure as social networks. Within these networks, culture becomes the content of interaction. Where we run into problems when distinguishing between culture and social structure, however, is when we fall back into the old Weberian distinction that treats certain phenomena as social without being cultural. Parsons himself (with further development by Luhmann 1995) offered logical evidence for why we cannot conceive of social life without culture by identifying the problem of double-contingency: my social actions toward you are dependent on your social actions toward me, and *vice versa*. Thus, without some previously existing system of norms or meanings that limit the scope of our possible social actions, we would be unable to proceed.

Cultural Institutions vs. Economic Institutions

The third binary opposition represents the most restrictive definition of culture. It is also the definition that relates most closely to the etymological origins of the term culture as referring to those spheres of life that facilitate the *cultivation* of the mind (as opposed to the satisfaction of basic biological urges). While the last two approaches positioned culture as a general system of meanings that relate to all social life, this approach frames culture as a group of institutions (formal or informal) dedicated explicitly and primarily to the production of the “expressive-

symbol elements of culture” (Peterson and Anand 2004:311).

The impetus for the sociological study of cultural institutions seems to have emerged partially within Marxism and among what Peterson and Anand (2004) call “the extreme elitist alarm over mass culture” (p.324), which could include some of the work of the Frankfurt School (e.g. Adorno 1975) and more right-leaning thinkers like Macdonald (1953). Within these early perspectives there was a recognition that cultural institutions represent a theatre in which much broader social struggles play out. Thus, studying culture is more than an end in itself because it helps us to better understand society as a whole. For Marxists, cultural and intellectual institutions were seen as facilitating bourgeois ideological domination and hegemony, but could also serve as a space for potential resistance (Alexander 1990:6-8, 21-22; Hebdige 1979; Williams 1977). As for the “elitist” or anti-mass cultural theorists, cultural products reflected and facilitated a general condition of existential alienation believed to exist among those living in the age of mass-production (Frank 1997:9-16).

Efforts to better understand if and how cultural products reflected and/or produced broader social phenomena led scholars to look more carefully at the actual processes of cultural production and consumption. This transition is evident in the work of Raymond Williams. In his 1981 book *The Sociology of Culture*, Williams puts aside many of the concepts and theories developed in his earlier works of Marxist cultural criticism (e.g. Williams 1977) in order to outline a distinctly sociological approach to studying the production of culture. Meanwhile, American sociologists such as Paul DiMaggio (1982) and Howard Becker (1982) were developing their own sociological perspectives for understanding the creation of cultural products and the workings of cultural institutions. DiMaggio’s study in particular problematizes the uncritical acceptance of “high” culture by the elitists, and helps to better specify the

relationship between bourgeois interest and cultural institutions for the Marxists. Within contemporary Cultural Sociology cultural institutions continue to be of central concern, particularly within the sub-areas of Production (Peterson and Anand 2004), Consumption (Slater and Miller 2007; Zukin and Maguire 2004), and Reception (Griswold 1987; Radway 1991).

Debates Within the Subfield of Cultural Sociology

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984) argues that a complete understanding of culture cannot be attained “unless ‘culture’, in the restricted, normative sense of ordinary usage, is reinserted into ‘culture’ in the broad, anthropological sense and the elaborated taste for the most refined objects is brought back into relation with the elementary taste for the flavours of food” (p.99). In my view Cultural Sociology has, under the heavy influence of theorists like Bourdieu, brought these two conceptions of culture into a single (if fragmentary) area of study. However, as the subfield has become institutionalized, some internal divisions have begun to crystallize. While these divisions do have some roots in the aforementioned perspectives, they are new and distinct. Below, I consider three points of possible division within Cultural Sociology: (1) the power we attribute to culture, (2) culture as practices or as a system, and (3) methodological divisions.

What is the Power of Culture?

There is much division within Cultural Sociology over how much causal power to provide culture and whether or not it should be seen as an independent variable or only as a dependent variable (or even if it should be reduced to causality models at all). The Production of Culture perspective has typically relegated culture to a dependent variable and relied on non-cultural factors such as markets, laws and technology to explain the production of cultural

symbols (Peterson and Anand 2002; Griswold 1981). This approach is a drastic departure from earlier perspectives that assumed that cultural objects represented broader class ideologies, zeitgeists, or national cultures (Griswold 1981), which is perhaps why the Production perspective has attracted the criticism that it ignores the meaning and autonomy of cultural objects (Alexander and Smith 2001:143). It should be noted, however, that later studies in the Production perspective have taken the power of meaning more seriously. A good example is the importance that Peterson (1997) attributes to expectations of “authenticity” in the production of country music.

As an alternative to the Production perspective, Lieberman (2000) (and Simmel before him) point to fashion as representing internal cultural logics that operate relatively autonomously rather than responding passively to external events. For Simmel (1957), fashion is dialectical in nature because it embodies both distinction and acceptance. A specific fashion statement is most powerful when it becomes accepted as superior taste by the rest of the group. However, this is also the moment when the fashion statement becomes accessible and replicable, which destroys the basis of its power. The result is that fashion is in constant motion. Although certain external conditions must be met to create a social space for fashion, once they are established fashion moves according to its own logic. Lieberman goes even further than Simmel in mapping out exactly how this logic plays out in the form of the “ratchet effect” and other internal mechanisms. Occasionally, according to Lieberman, the internal dynamics of fashion can have causal influence on the external world. For instance, the logic of fashion may prevent the adoption of certain technological advances like more fuel efficiency in cars or warmer winter jackets.

Finally, there has been an increasing push to demonstrate that culture does have its own

autonomous casual power on the result of society, and to explain how this power works. Sewell (1999) has argued that under the hegemony of causal sociology, Cultural Sociology has needed to emphasize concepts of culture that are easily observable and “whose influence on behaviour can be rigorously compared to that of such standard sociological variables as class, ethnicity, gender, level of education, economic interest, and the like” (p.45). Swidler’s toolkit perspective can certainly be seen as an attempt to carve out some space for cultural causation. Alexander and Smith’s (2001) “strong program” has been an even more aggressive push to acknowledge the autonomous power of culture. Today, the limits of culture’s power and the mechanisms by which it works are perhaps the most important questions within the subfield.

Culture as Practice vs. System

The concepts of “practice” and “systems of meaning” are two models of cultural power that are often seen as competing alternatives. The division between these perspectives relates very closely to the debate over the “coherence vs. fragmentation” of culture (DiMaggio 1997:267). When we study culture as a series of practices, we tend to see it as fragmented, interchangeable, and imminent in its enactment. When we study systems, on the other hand, we construct them as stable and coherent. On this issue, Sewell (1992; 1999) and Swidler (2001; 1986) seem to have placed themselves (rhetorically, at least) in opposite corners. Sewell (1992), starting from the point of structure, has sought to explain how culture both constrains and enables our possible behaviour within particular situations. Swidler (2001; 1986) emphasizes the instrumentality of culture and its use in providing strategies for action in practical situations.

In my own view, I see the divisions between Sewell and Swidler as being more rhetorical than theoretical. While their theories are different, and call our attention to separate aspects of

culture, they do not seem to be contradictory. Swidler certainly conceives of practices as fitting into larger systems with varying levels of coherence of logic (Swidler 2001:189-190).

Furthermore, both Sewell and Swidler quote Bourdieu and Geertz at length in laying the foundation of their own perspectives. Rather than trying to trace out this debate any further, I think it is sufficient to say that my own views of practices and cultural systems should become more evident as I employ them in my answers to the subsequent exam questions.

Methodological Diversity

There is not enough space available to do justice to the issue of methodology, but it is worth mentioning a few trends. Although there seems to be little if any support for the belief that we can interpret some true, transcendental meaning from cultural objects, interpretive methods still play a central role within the Cultural Sociology. Scholars like Lamont (1992; 2000), Swidler (2001), Milkie (1999) have employed interviews in order to examine how social actors attach meanings to themselves and their environment. Macro-level methodologies such as content analysis have also been employed to interpret “cultural meanings” that exist at a group level (Thomas 1994).

These methods are not without their critics however. Martin (2002) has voiced concern over the difficulty of identifying the content or meanings of belief systems, and has instead advocated studying their formal properties. Vaisey (2009) has warned that excessive focus on interviews limits us to observing only the discursive elements of culture, while ignoring the comparatively larger realm of practical culture. As a solution, Vaisey recommends “forced-choice” surveys that cause participants to rely on automatic cognition. Mohr and Duquenne (1997) also present some methodological innovations that allow them to look more directly at

practical culture by tracing out the relationship between discursive labels and enacted strategies among poverty relief groups.

While the methodology recommended by Vaisey is a step in the right direction, I would argue that it doesn't go far enough. Forced-choice surveys suffer from the same weakness as laboratory studies: they remove the enactment of practical action from its everyday context. If we want to observe practical action more closely, we need to follow it out into "the wild" (Hutchins 1995). This is why ethnography, and other strategies for observing behaviour in its natural settings (e.g. Lareau 2002), need to be considered a vital part of the methodology of Cultural Sociology. Sociologists cannot adopt the theories of anthropologists (e.g. Geertz; Bourdieu) without also adopting their methods. Of course, ethnography also needs to be carried out in conjunction with an array of other methods, ranging from surveys to content analysis to fMRI scans.

Going Forward

In my view, Cultural Sociology has advanced to the point where it is no longer productive to fight over what culture is or is not. Values, discourses, cognitive schemas, repertoires, ideologies, norms, grammars, systems of meanings, and many other concepts have all been used quite fruitfully to understand social life, and all require their own uniquely designed methodological strategies. Rather than trying to elevate one of these concepts as the true and proper definition of culture, we should instead be focusing on the relationship that exists between all of them.

Part B

Different sub-areas of the sociology of culture approach the study of symbolic boundaries in sometimes different ways. Discuss the most important features of the study of boundaries in work on culture and inequality, and compare and contrast with the study of boundaries in one other sub-area such as consumption or cognition.

Introduction

My response to this question will be presented in three parts. First, I will draw on Lamont and Molnár (2002) and Bourdieu (1977; 1984) to outline a conceptual framework for discussing symbolic boundaries and inequality. Second, I will consider a few perspectives on inequality (putting aside a discussion of cultural capital for Part C). Third, I will compare the study of symbolic boundaries across sub-areas within Cultural Sociology focusing specifically on the notion of “authenticity” as a point of common reference.

Symbolic Boundaries and Inequality

Lamont and Molnár (2002) provide a good point of departure for a discussion of inequality by distinguishing and defining symbolic and social boundaries. Symbolic boundaries, they argue “are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space. They are tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality”. Social boundaries, by contrast, “are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities” (p.168). They further specify that “the former exist at the intersubjective level whereas the latter manifest themselves as groupings of individuals”.

Lamont and Molnár’s definition suggests a distinction between symbolic or

intersubjective, on the one hand, and the social structural, on the other. This is a common theoretical position in sociology (see Part A), but it is one that runs into problems. The most immediate problem is the issue of the unequal distribution of *nonmaterial* resources – which I interpret as the distribution of status or symbolic inclusion versus exclusion from a group (e.g. civil society (Alexander 1992)). But while nonmaterial resources are included in the definition of social boundaries, as intersubjective constructs, it is hard to see how they do not also fit under the definition of symbolic boundaries.

Here we can turn to Bourdieu for some clarity and a slight modification to Lamont and Molnár's definition. Bourdieu also distinguishes between objective and subjective boundaries or structures, arguing that there is a “dialectical relationship between the objective structures [of social space] and the cognitive and motivating structures which they produce and which tend to reproduce them” (Bourdieu 1977:83). He argues that we should see social space “as an objective space, a structure of objective relations which determines the possible form of interactions and of the representations the interactors can have of them” (Bourdieu 1984:244). Subjective structures, on the other hand are conceptualized as the *habitus* that “functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions*” (1977:83). The habitus is a cognitive structure that is structured itself through physical interactions with an objectively structured external world (Lizardo 2004), and which in turn leads to objective practices that tend to reproduce that external structure.

In some ways, adopting this Bourdieusian framework seems to bring us very close to the duality of structure outlined by Sewell (1992) as material *resources* and intersubjective *schemas*. Both frameworks present a duality between some shared subjective schemes for dividing up the world in our minds, on one hand, and all of the material stuff (nonhuman and human) that

surround us, on the other. However, Sewell is being too restrictive by calling this material stuff “resources” and defining it as “anything that can serve as a source of power in social interactions” (p.9). Nonmaterial, intersubjective stuff can be resources too (e.g. cultural capital, knowledge, status, etc). Furthermore, there are many other elements of the material world that help structure it but do not necessarily count as resources. Lamont and Molnár rightly point out that objective social boundaries involve “groupings of individuals”. In the objective material world, some people (and things) are found together more often: males and political office, racial minorities and impoverished neighbourhoods, gays and cities. These “groupings” make up part of the objective, material structure of the world, but they cannot be reduced to “resources”.

So to sum up, social boundaries refer to the objective structure of the *material* world where certain people and things tend to be grouped together, while others are divided. Symbolic boundaries, for the purposes of this analysis, is the intersubjective (i.e. shared), cognitive structures or maps that suggest the practices that we use when interacting with the objectively structured material world. With this framework in mind, I will now examine some of the ways in which sociologists understand the relationship between social and symbolic boundaries.

Marxism and Ideology

Though not heavily represented in the reading list, it behoves us to at least acknowledge the legacy of the man who famously wrote “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” (Marx 1978:172). Indeed, the view that dominant symbolic systems and boundaries reflect the interests of dominant classes and reproduce their domination extends far beyond those scholars formally identified with Marxism. For now, however, I will address the work of two self-identified Marxists: Antonio Gramsci and Paul Willis. Gramsci’s

groundbreaking theory of the relationship between symbolic systems and social (or class) boundaries centres on the concept of hegemony, which refers a situation in which the dominant class is able to maintain its dominance by presenting its own interests as legitimate, thereby winning the consent of the subordinate classes (Hebdige 1979:16). Hegemony works not because it is imposed directly on the subordinate classes as a single coherent ideology, but because it becomes filtered through intellectuals and quasi-intellectuals who derive more immediate, practical beliefs and courses of action that are nonetheless consistent with the overall bourgeois class interest (Alexander 1990:7).

Willis (1977) also adopts a Marxist approach to studying inequality, but does so within a significantly different context. While Gramsci completed much of his work as a prisoner of the Mussolini regime, Willis studied inequality within the school system of the post-war British welfare state. The school system may be designed to provide equality across class lines, Willis argues, but it actually works to reproduce class division. He attributes this fact to the interaction between the bourgeois orientation of the school system and the working class dispositions of the students. While these working class dispositions allow students to “penetrate” the bourgeois hegemony and reject its legitimacy in a way that is unavailable to middle class students, they inevitably fall back on a hyper-masculine, shop floor culture that leads them to accept and find value in their subordinate working class position².

While Gramsci and Willis provide important insights for understanding the relationship between class divisions and culture, their tendency to subsume most of social life within the

² Putting aside Willis’ use of Marxist theory, the ethnographic accounts presented in *Learning to Labour* actually conform quite closely to Bourdieu’s ideas about the presence of a class habitus and institutional fields that are structured according to a misrecognized bourgeois logic (Bourdieu 1984; 1993). While not all students rebelled to the same extent as “the lads”, we can see this rebellion as an extreme response to a much broader discrepancy between the bourgeois expectations of the classroom and the shop floor dispositions developed at home. The relationship between the anti-school culture of the lads and the shop floor culture of their parents provides evidence of homologies that Bourdieu argues creates consistency in class relations across multiple institutional fields.

dominance of a bourgeois hegemony verges on the territory that Swidler (2001) refers to as “the logic of deductive inference” (p.187). She describes this approach to culture as a model that posits a central, coherent system of values and ideas from which all (or most) social actions and particular beliefs are derived. By contrast, social actors not only find themselves within several intersecting social divisions, but are also surrounded by symbolic systems that are far more fragmented than the Marxist perspective implies (Swidler 1986; 2001; DiMaggio 1997:267).

Binary Oppositions

Another legacy of classical sociology can be traced back to Emile Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995 [1912]), which introduced the notion that symbolic inclusion and exclusion was central to social life (Lamont and Fournier 1992; Alexander 1990). A more contemporary variant of this perspective can be found in studies that examine how groups with strong social structural connections (e.g. through networks) regulate membership and self-identity by making symbolic distinctions between “us” and “them” (Lamont and Molnár 2002). Alexander (1992), as an example, has used binary opposition to develop a cultural understanding of civil society. He argues that democratic societies attach symbolic markers to those they view as worthy of inclusion within civil society, and those who pose a threat. These binary markers, which include oppositions between rationality and irrationality, sane and mad, equality and hierarchy, do not actually dictate who should be included. Instead, they constrain our constructions and justifications of who we include and exclude³.

The logic of binary opposition pervades work on symbolic boundaries including the work

³ A good example of this phenomenon can be seen in the debate over the so-called Ground Zero Mosque in Manhattan. Those who support the project appeal to notions of equality, inclusivity, and law (see Alexander 1992:295). By contrast, opponents construct Muslims as inherently – or at least having a tendency to be – irrational, hysterical, and secretive (see p.293).

of Bourdieu (1977; 1984; 1993), Willis (1977), and Lamont (1992; 2000). However if we stick too closely to a model of culture that reduces everything to a related series of oppositions, we fall into the same trap as the Marxists.

Repertoires (and Toolkits)

Michele Lamont has also studied the symbolic boundaries that groups construct between themselves and outsiders. However, the boundaries she presents are far more complex and fragmented than those represented through binary oppositions or bourgeois hegemony. Her studies of the upper-middle class (1992) and working class men (2000) demonstrate that social actors sit at the centre of various lines of social cleavage and are required to make sense of the objective differences that divide them not only from those at different socio-economic levels (from above and below), but also from people of different races, geographical locations, employment sectors, and national origins. Given these differences, actors draw on a variety of creative, sometimes contradictory, cultural *repertoires* in order to help them assign meaning to their own daily activities and position within society. Therefore, like Swidler (2001), Lamont is very much concerned with the *use* of culture and symbolic boundaries in the everyday, practical activities of social actors.

Nonetheless, Lamont is careful not to reduce symbolic boundaries to a purely instrumental function. Describing her approach as a “cultural-materialist causal framework”, she calls attention to

the structured context in which people live, which is shaped by the relative availability of cultural resources (narratives made available by national historical and religious traditions and various sectors of cultural production and

diffusion – intellectuals, the educational system, the church, the mass media) and by structural conditions (the market position of workers, their networks, and the level of criminality in the communities in which they live). (2000:7)

Her comparisons between French and American participants, in particular, demonstrate the importance of cultural context in the creation of symbolic boundaries. While narratives are used instrumentally to help people make sense of their lives, people are generally restricted to employing only those narratives with which they are familiar. Thus, the French and African-American working-classes are far more likely than their White American counterparts to interpret their situation through collectivist narratives (Lamont 2000).

Lamont's work, as well as that of Zelizer (1994), also demonstrates how seemingly unambiguous and culturally "flat" objects such as money can be imbued with far more meaning than is formally attributed to them. Rather than simply being a quantitative measure of economic wealth, money becomes an important reference point in understanding the boundaries between classes, and even spouses, and assigning meaning and value to the people on each side.

As mentioned in Part A, the methodology employed by Lamont has been criticized as only uncovering *post-hoc* justifications rather than the underlying motivations that guide people in their everyday lives (Vaisey 2009). As a result, the use of symbolic boundaries may appear more conscious and instrumental in interviews than is actually the case in real life. Indeed, Lamont's work does seem to leave us with little understanding of the role of that symbolic boundaries play as people negotiate their lives in real time. Certainly the reflections of an executive about manners and morals in an interview setting may differ from the way these symbols are interpreted during a job interview.

So while more work needs to be done to study the use of repertoires outside the interview

setting, we can at least conclude that as people confront situations in an objectively structured world, they are required (consciously or unconsciously) to make sense of their position by deriving meanings from symbolic cues. While people are granted some freedom of interpretation due to the fact that they “know more culture than they use” (Swidler 1986:277), aside from periodic moments of creativity, they are still limited by the fact that they cannot use more culture than they know (culture which they learned within the objectively structured world in the first place).

Comparing Different Perspectives: The Issue of Authenticity

As the question suggestions, symbolic boundaries are a common theme across many sub-areas within Cultural Sociology. Rather than comparing these perspectives in the abstract, I would instead like to focus specifically on how symbolic boundaries relate to the notion of “authenticity”. Authenticity is a good concept to use as a point of comparison because it is so vaguely defined yet so frequently mentioned in academic and everyday discussion. In common usage, authenticity generally refers to something that is valuable and true (or credible). But what makes authenticity sociologically interesting is that it refers to the creation symbolic boundaries that are hierarchically arranged, with the authentic being held up as symbolically more valuable than the inauthentic.

There are many perspectives from which this process has been studied. The use of authenticity in creating distinction between classes (inequality), the notion of authentic consumption as an expression of agency and creativity rather than manipulation (consumer culture), the production of authenticity within cultural institutions (production), and authenticity as a cognitive schema (cognition). Below, I will examine each of these perspectives.

Authenticity as Distinction

In their study of gourmet food writing, Johnston and Baumann (2007) claim that authenticity serves as a discursive device used by elite food writers to reconcile a sense of distinction (i.e. that they have superior tastes) with the democratic principle that everyone is inherently equal. Authenticity is shown to relate to six qualities of food: geographic specificity, being handmade or produced at a small scale, involving personal connection between producer and consumer, and relating to history or tradition. Through these frames, elite food writes are able to assign value to foods that are non-elite but still rare and difficult to access for the majority of consumers:

Authentic foods are seemingly “simple” foods that come from highly specific places off the middle-class tourist path... Many (if not most) of the authentic foods profiled in these magazines are extremely expensive and difficult (if not impossible) to acquire in the mainstream commercial supermarkets and restaurants where most Americans buy food and eat out. Instead, authentic food items are primarily accessible to cosmopolitan, upper-middle class individuals with ample grocery budgets who are capable of extensive global travel (pp.187-188).

Thus, authenticity becomes employed by those in the cultural elite and upper-middle class to draw symbolic boundaries between themselves and the larger middle class. Framing their own tastes as authentic and therefore superior, gourmet food writers justify their own dominant position within the field of cultural production.

Authenticity as Agency

The approach to authenticity employed by Johnston and Baumann can only be taken so far, however, without imposing a false sense of instrumentality to the experience of consuming “authentic” culture. Such an approach ignores the importance of what Bourdieu (1984) called “misrecognition”: the fact that people truly believe in their cultural tastes and rarely consume specifically for the purposes of reproducing class division, even if that is the objective consequence. In other words, “the art-lover knows no other guide than his love of art, and he moves, as if by instinct, toward what is, at each moment, the thing to be loved” (p.86).

It is at this point that the literature on consumer culture can help us to better understand how the symbolic boundaries between the authentic and inauthentic are experienced subjectively by the consumer of cultural products (such as food). Consumer culture scholars have long debated whether consumerism should be thought of as a means of authentic personal expression, or as a process of manipulation and interpolation that recreates the capitalist system and class inequalities (Slater and Miller 2007; Frank 1997; Hebdige 1979; Zukin and Maguire 2004:180-184; Peterson and Anand 2004:325-326). There does seem to be some broad belief, however, that people often seek those consumption activities that they feel allow them to express their authentic free will, creativity, or personal and/or group identity (Hannigan 2007; Florida 2002). This feeling, which might be called agentic or existential authenticity, can be contrasted with the feeling that one is playing into hands of marketing executives, or other powerful interests⁴. As Florida (2002) suggests, the desire for agentic authenticity may be a particularly strong among those involved in cultural or creative employment fields (e.g. gourmet food writers).

⁴ It should be noted that consumers can willingly attempt to express themselves in ways that they recognize to be inauthentic and unrealistic, even if they do so reluctantly. This is the phenomenon that Milkie (1999) observes among White teenage girls who attempt to live up to the images in beauty magazines, despite recognizing these images to be unrealistic and inherently valueless. It is an open empirical question as to whether this group is particularly vulnerable to feelings of conflict over their consumption choices, or if this is a broader trend.

Empirical studies of consumption and reception give us a better sense of what it means to consume authentically. Relating consumption to group identity, Shively (1992) documents how Anglo consumers see the consumption of Cowboy movies as a way of experiencing a link to their past. Zukin and Maguire (2004) reference several cases of non-Western communities who must negotiate between their own group culture/identity and the encroaching consumer culture of global capitalism. Relating consumption to agency, Parr (1999) argues that while Canadian women in the 1950's were excluded from the formal design and production of domestic goods, they were still able to exercise some personal control by using the goods in creative ways. We can even reframe the aforementioned gourmet food writers as seeking out consumer opportunities that require resourcefulness and creativity, rather than just accepting whatever products are provided on the grocery store shelf.

Thus, authenticity in consumption can be seen as relating to a symbolic boundary between those activities that are recognized as an expression of one's own agency and personal/group identity, and those that represent the influence of external, coercive forces such as capitalism or industry elites.

Authenticity as Product

When we look at authenticity from the side of production, we do not see the expression of personal agency, but rather a "fabrication" that is negotiated between the various members of the production process and the consuming public as a whole. Research by Peterson (1997) and DiMaggio (1982) demonstrates how symbolic boundaries (in this case, the boundaries that separate authentic art from inauthentic art) have historical origins. Those in advantageous positions (either within a general class structure, or within a particular industry) are potentially

able to build institutional structures that promote and reward certain symbolic goods while excluding others.

The role of authenticity is not only important in understanding the formation of cultural institutions, however. Notions of authenticity (or at least credibility) continue to be important throughout the inner workings of the cultural institutions. Institutional studies have shown that in order for new proposals to be selected for production or new products to be selected for purchase, they often require recognition from credible sources (Zuckerman 1999) or to become associated with credible members of the field of production (Bielby and Bielby. 1994).

Authenticity as Cognitive Schema

These institutional studies lead us toward the issue of human cognition and its relation to judgments of authenticity. The recognition of what is authentic (i.e. valuable and credible) is not only a way of distinguishing oneself or maintaining power; it is also an important cognitive tool that allows us to navigate the social world. Television executives, for instance, rely on constructed notions of credibility, because they require some rationalization on which to base programming decisions (Bielby and Bielby 1994). In more general terms, social actors navigate through their daily lives by relying upon cognitive “prototypes” (Rosch 1978; DiMaggio 1997:276) that allow them to classify and partition the world. Though more work needs to be done to integrate this psychological concept into broader sociological theories, it is reasonable to suspect that prototypes may play a role in judgments of authenticity. It is worth examining whether, for instance, we have cognitive prototypes of authentic country songs, impressionist paintings, or even fine art.

Because it is generally accepted that most human cognition operates at an automatic

rather than deliberative level (D'Andrade 1995; Vaisey 2009; DiMaggio 1997), it is fair to assume that most authenticity judgments are made in a tacit, practical manner without requiring any fully-formed definition of authenticity, or even a fully-formed awareness that we are making authenticity judgments. Yet, we develop these tacit notions of authenticity within environments that have been socially constructed and that are grossly unequal. Herein lays the power of symbolic boundaries: they allow the most extreme forms of inequality to seem natural, uninteresting, and even desirable.

Part C

Assess the value of two or three conceptualizations of cultural capital for the sociology of culture. What are the strengths and limits of each concept? In what ways does it need to be revised or supplemented?

Introduction: What is Cultural Capital?

Cultural capital is a notoriously vague concept. In fact, even Bourdieu himself was inconsistent in the way he employed the term throughout his work (Lamont and Lareau 1988:155). Therefore, rather than presenting a series of distinct conceptualizations of cultural capital, I will instead start with a broad definition provided by Lamont and Lareau, and then examine two conceptual questions: (1) what is cultural capital made of, and (2) how does it cause social exclusion? Finally, because our understanding of cultural capital depends on what institutional model we use, I will end by examining the concept of “fields”.

Though originally part of Pierre Bourdieu’s larger theoretical perspective on practice and class structure, cultural capital has taken on a life of its own. Many of the studies within Cultural Sociology that focus on cultural capital do so without reference to fields, habitus, or many of the other theoretical concepts of Bourdieu. For this reason, it is perhaps best to start my analysis not with Bourdieu, but with Lamont and Lareau (1988), who present a review of cultural capital’s Bourdieusian origins and its eventual rise to popularity among American sociologists. Insisting that *exclusion* is the central feature of cultural capital, Lamont and Lareau (1988) define the concept as “institutionalized, i.e., widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviours, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion, the former referring to exclusion from jobs and resources, and the latter, to exclusion from high status groups” (p.156). One of the benefits of this definition for the purposes of my analysis is that it is quite broad and leaves a lot of room for possible interpretation. In order to

explore these possible interpretations, I'll start by looking at what cultural capital is made of.

What is Cultural Capital Made Of?

According to Lamont and Lareau, cultural capital is made out of “high status cultural signals”. But how do these signals work in social life? How do we learn them and use them? There are a variety of ways to conceptualize high status culture signals. For my purposes, I'm interested specifically in whether cultural capital is made out of explicit information, or if it made out of tacit dispositions. We might call this a question of “cognitive depth”. Alternatively, to use the terminology of Vaisey (2009), we could say that cultural capital can exist at a *discursive* level or at a *practical* level. At a discursive level, cultural capital refers to formal knowledge, credentials, and tastes – things that we know we have and that we know make us different or similar to the people around us. At a practical level, cultural capital refers more to our manners and dispositions. We are not consciously aware of the cultural capital we possess. Instead, our cultural capital gets unconsciously signalled in the course of our interactions with others. This is an important distinction, because the way cultural capital works in social life depends on its cognitive depth.

One of the corollaries of a *discursive* concept of cultural capital is that it becomes something that can be strategically and quantitatively accumulated and enacted. The literature on omnivorousness (Peterson and Kern 1996; Warde and Gayo-Cal 2009; Johnston and Baumann 2007), as well as Erickson (1996), tends to portray cultural capital as something that is accumulated quantitatively. According to these perspectives, people in privileged positions have more opportunities to accumulate knowledge, credentials, and cultural experiences than the underprivileged. Having accumulated more cultural resources, they are in a better position to

employ these resources any time a bit of knowledge or a formal credential allows them to take advantage of a situation.

However, not all studies treat cultural capital as something that is simply accumulated and used strategically. If we relate cultural capital to the deeper *practical* disposition of an individual, then it makes less sense to talk about strategic, quantitative accumulation and enactment. Even if a person can slowly modify their disposition over time, they still only have one disposition available to them. Relevant here is the difference observed by Lamont between the blunt, honest disposition that is valued and exhibited by the working class, which contrasts with the more genteel disposition of the middle class (Lamont 2000:36). The difference in these dispositions not only makes it difficult for the working class to transition into middle class situations where manners are important, but also renders the middle class as outsiders (and potentially phonies or snobs) within working class situations.

Bourdieu's own understanding of cultural capital seems to conform most closely to the practical conceptualization. His use of the metaphor "capital" seems to be more aimed at describing cultural expertise as relational and hierarchical (like being richer or poorer) than treating it as something that can be indefinitely accumulated and instrumentally invested (like actual money). He distinguishes, for instance, between the tacit, practical tastes "which bourgeois families hand down to their offspring as if it were an heirloom" (Bourdieu 1984:68) and which can be misrecognized as a natural gift, from the formal knowledge of culture that is explicitly learned and therefore easier to obtain.

In my view, rather than trying to define cultural capital as either discursive or practical, we should acknowledge that different types of high status cultural signals occupy different levels or our consciousness, they are useful as "capital" in different contexts, and we should be very

clear about what level we are talking about in any given analysis. Acknowledging these two levels of cultural capital presents us with some new questions to examine. First, we can ask which level of cognition is being employed to accomplish certain cultural rituals or activities. Consider the appreciation of paintings, for instance. On this issue, there seems to be some disagreement. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu seems to suggest that class variation in the interpretation of paintings does not come from differences in formal knowledge, but rather from the generative disposition of the habitus which calls attention to certain elements of a painting and not others (Bourdieu 1984:44-47). However, Halle's (1992) study of paintings suggests that while the cultural elite may be more likely than other classes to prefer abstract art, their method of appreciation seems to be similar to everyone else: they choose paintings that remind them of landscapes and that serve a decorative function in the room. This suggests that that the appreciation of abstract art, while perhaps not fully discursive, is not as deeply embedded in the practical disposition of the habitus as Bourdieu suggests. Thus, further empirical analysis is probably needed to sort out this disagreement.

Once we know which level of cognition is more important to perform certain cultural rituals, we can then ask which level of cognition is more important in taking advantage in particular social situations. In other words, which level of cognition is more effective as "capital"? In order to derive social advantage from talking sports, for instance, is it good enough to simply know the teams and the players? Or, in order to be considered a *real* sports fan, does one also need to adopt the aggressive disposition of a sportscaster? My guess is that the answer to these questions depends on the institutional context. While knowledge alone may be good enough to score points within the informal networks of the workplace, for example, it may not be sufficient to get a job as a sportscaster. Either way, these are empirical questions that merit

further research.

How Does Cultural Capital Exclude?

We cannot completely decide what cultural capital is made of until we know how it is incorporated into mechanisms of social exclusion. Lamont and Lareau (1988:158) identify four mechanisms of exclusion in Bourdieu's use of cultural capital: self-elimination, overselection, relegation, and direct selection. Given limitations of space, however, I would like to focus specifically on the issue of self-elimination. Self-elimination can refer to two things: (1) that "individuals adjust their aspirations to their perceived chances of success" (p.158), and (2), members of the lower class may choose to avoid situations where they feel subject to unfamiliar upper class cultural expectations. Support for both of these forms of self-elimination seems to be mixed and dependent on context. The educational aspirations of students do seem to vary with class (Davies 1995; Willis 1977). However, Lamont's study of the working class presents a slightly more complex situation. Her participants seem to value ambition, particularly in terms of achieving financial success, but not necessarily in terms of educational success. This suggests that a lack of cultural capital may not always dampen aspirations, but it may make certain realistic strategies for accomplishing those aspirations seem unappealing.

Research findings are also mixed with regards self-exclusion due to avoiding uncomfortable social situations. Within the "informal networks" of the workplace, Erickson (1996) found that actors often have multiple types of cultural capital available to them that allow them to interact across class lines and connect with those the upper levels of the organization. However, as mentioned earlier, those who have accumulated more cultural capital will have more flexibility in navigating these networks. In more structured environments, such as the

classroom, where cultural capital requirements are more rigidly defined, those without the needed cultural capital may find few alternatives other than dropping out (Willis 1977). Thus, once again, context seems to be extremely important in discussing the role of cultural capital in exclusion.

One final point about the role of cultural capital in exclusion should be mentioned. Sociologists have significantly challenged the level of rigidity that Bourdieu seems to attribute to cultural capital and its role in class reproduction and exclusion. First, several sociologists have questioned the extent to which the acquisition of cultural capital is dependent on early childhood experiences and the class position of parents. While some research has shown that interactions between parents and children differ significantly across class lines and impact the social dispositions of children (Lareau 2002), other research shows that the influence of parents' class diminishes over the life course (Aschaffenburg and Maas 1997). As Erickson (1996) argues,

As people move through their life trajectories, they move through different social settings in which different kinds of culture are salient, so there is no one life stage that dominates in learning all cultural genres. As they move they continue to learn; the early influence of family of origin is just one influence among many and not so powerful overall as later effects of education and adult social networks. (Erickson 1996:224-225)

The other criticism is that Bourdieu seems to privilege class over other forms of social cleavage. As has already been emphasized in Part B, we stand in the middle of countless overlapping social divisions. At any given moment some of these divisions will prove incredibly influential on our ability to achieve our goals, and other divisions will be quite irrelevant. Thus, it is misleading to only talk about a bourgeois culture

and a working class culture, since there are also gender cultures, ethnic cultures, and many other subcultures (Hall 1992; Erickson 1996).

Fields and Other Institutional Models

As I have already mentioned several times, understanding cultural capital depends on the particular context we're talking about. Therefore, in responding directly to the exam question, I would strongly insist that theories of cultural capital do need to be "supplemented" by parallel theories of institutions. In order for the concept of cultural capital to have any relevance, we need to be able to explain the context in which such capital would be used as a resource in power struggles and exclusion. One of the major blind spots the research on taste and omnivorousness is that discussions of how best to conceptualize, measure, and rank cultural capital often occur with little reference to the institutional settings in which the capital is used (e.g. Warde and Gayo-Cal 2009). If we wish to conceive of tastes as "capital", then we need to have some understanding of how they serve as resources within institutional settings.

Another important benefit of specifying the institutional context in analyses of cultural capital is that it prevents us from having to rely on some sort of vaguely-defined "global" high culture that governs all of society. As Lamont (1992) has shown, the upper-middle class is riddled with its own internal divisions that prevent it from being able to recognize a single, coherent set of high status cultural signals. However, if we limit our analysis to particular institutions where a stronger "cultural consensus" exists (Lamont and Lareau 1988:156), then the concept of cultural capital becomes more analytically useful. Extending the importance of cultural capital beyond particular institutional settings then becomes a matter of finding certain homological relationships between institutions.

Bourdieu (1993) supplies his own perspective on institutions in the form of field theory. Without getting too far into the theory, a few characteristics of the Bourdieusian field can be identified: (1) All fields have hierarchies of power. At any given time, some actors will have more power than others. (2) Power within fields is symbolic and based on a “working consensus” of legitimacy⁵ (Martin 2003:23). (3) This symbolic power is derived from particular resources (or capital). One of the most important sources of capital is economic wealth. However, subfields each have their own non-economic forms of capital (e.g. cultural capital in the field of cultural production and educational capital in the field of education)⁶. (4) Fields are ordered according to an internal logic that is also based on working consensus. This logic determines how power is distributed and the relative value of the various forms of capital (economic, cultural, etc). Since this logic is itself formed through the collective acknowledgement of the members of a field, it is subject to contestation and is unequally influenced by people with more power.

Oakes, Townley and Cooper (1998) provide a good example of a shift in the institutional logic of a field. They document changes in the heritage division of the Alberta civil service due to new business planning models imposed by the State. As a result, those activities relating to economic capital (e.g. proper financial management, attracting higher attendance figures) gained importance relative to the subfield’s own “heritage” capital (which concerns the collecting, studying, and exhibiting artefacts). Members of the field whose specialties were more closely tied to heritage work felt pressure to either change their strategies, or lose power to those with

⁵ Although we tend to think of economic power as more than just symbolic, economic capital is still dependent on a collective recognition of the legitimacy of money, property rights, etc. The economy is itself an institutional field with its own symbolic capital.

⁶ Lamont and Lareau (1988) rightly point out that the power of cultural capital depends on a strong “cultural consensus” (p.156). This view is consistent with Bourdieusian field theory. Where this consensus is weak, cultural capital will provide little benefit in power struggles. As a result the field of cultural production will become less economically autonomous and economic capital will become more decisive in power struggles within the field.

more familiarity with business management.

It should be noted that Cultural Sociologists have adopted Bourdieusian field theory far less frequently than they have cultural capital. There are, however, several studies that look at the historical developments of cultural fields. These studies point to important institutional developments that are needed to create the proper conditions for a field to exist. They include the creation of centralized cultural authorities that are not directly dependent on the market (DiMaggio 1982), as well as the production of aesthetic or intellectual discourses and cultural experts who provide a logic that justifies the evaluation and hierarchical placement of the actors and cultural products within the field (Ferguson 1998; Baumann 2007). In situations where these institutional features are strongly developed, cultural capital gains more salience in power struggles.

The use of fields to describe the role of cultural capital within institutions has been extremely fruitful. However, there are some significant drawbacks to this perspective. Most importantly all positions within the field are required to be hierarchical. This requirement is particularly problematic for cultural capital and the field of cultural production because it requires us to think of all cultural practices as being directly relational (Lamont and Lareau 1988:158; Hall 1992:259). In reality, there are multiple routes to the top. In fact there are multiple tops – many places where people can hold power. Furthermore, we may want to think of cultural production in terms other than power. We could, for instance, think of cultural production in terms of group membership and solidarity where the groups in question have no obvious power differences (e.g. different minority ethnic groups). In contrast to fields, networks offer far more flexibility. As Erickson (1996) has pointed out, informal networks keep companies (and institutional fields) integrated, and allow individuals to further their careers

(p.223). The network model allows us to acknowledge that there are multiple paths that individual actors can take, each with their own capital requirements.

My point is not that there are any fundamental problems with the concept of a field in itself, but rather that fields are only relevant in certain circumstances and for certain analytic purposes. Just as we need to be careful in specifying the form of cultural capital we are analyzing, we also need to specify a complementary theory of institutions.

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