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Cultural Capital

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The concept of cultural capital was first introduced by French sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron in 1970 in their study on school education and differences in children's outcomes. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990/1970) found that middle-class parents equip their children with cultural capital, which consists of a variety of language, social, and cultural skills. Schools require the possession of these skills to achieve educational success, and are not able, through teaching, to pass these competencies on to working-class children. As a result, school grades, even though they seem to be objective, in fact, reflect and contribute to economic inequality. Finally, working-class children can see that the educational success of their middle-class peers is legitimated by symbolic or economic inheritance rather than being the result of hard work.

Bourdieu further developed the concept of cultural capital as part of his theory of structure and agency in his later works. He shows that individuals can use many forms of capital, with which they are unequally equipped. The crucial forms are economic capital (money and tangible objects suitable to produce goods and services, infrastructure), social capital (social position and networks of more or less institutionalized relationships), cultural capital (lifestyle, acquired or consumed cultural objects, skills, customs, language, education, taste, social origin), and symbolic capital (prestige, honor, attention, fame, recognition; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The most important of these is symbolic capital, where symbols are used to legitimize ownership of other forms of capital and symbolic violence against the lower social classes. Forms of capital can be partly converted so they can be better used in different fields and social contexts. A field can be any structure of social relations that includes individuals or groups competing for positions within that field (for example, education, work, art, consumption, law, science, family). Capitals are collected and transmitted as an inheritance by members of different social classes to the next generation and can be used to produce or reproduce inequality and consumption patterns.

Bourdieu (1986) describes three subtypes of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Embodied capital consists of resources that are consciously acquired by the personal investment of time and effort and is passively inherited by family socialization. This capital expresses itself through habitus, that is, individual character and way of thinking. The

habitus is also determined by the internalization of norms and values inherited from one's family in accordance with patterns that have been established in a given social class. Objectified cultural capital includes physical objects owned by an individual. Cultural goods such as art and literature are instruments that may be converted into economic capital by buying and selling or to cultural capital by using and consuming them if their users have proper embodied skills. Institutionalized cultural capital consists of acquired and socially recognizable educational competencies, for example, academic credentials or qualifications. Institutional recognition is important in the labor market as it allows for the comparison of job applicants.

In *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu develops his social stratification theory on the basis of taste, which he regards as a part of cultural capital. He claims that aesthetic preferences are transmitted by generations, so young people are directed toward behaviors and positions that are appropriate to their social class, and taught an aversion toward other behaviors. Tastes in food, culture, and presentation reflect trends in individual consumption and how they fit into classes of a given society. Each class has its own consumer interests and positions that meet these needs through newspapers, artists, and hairdressers, for example. Taste differentiation implies claims to authority and authenticity. For example, cultural elites, the dominant class (owners of capital, high-level managers, professors, artists), show their learned characteristics and properties as natural and innate. Their tastes are presented through symbolic violence in order to dominate the other social classes. These processes are manifested, for example, in luxury or the freedom of practicing and admiring art for art's sake. For all those outside this class, they are at best incomprehensible and at the worst exclusive, for example, as reflected in abstract painting, music without rhythm or melody, or novels with no traditional form and structure. Below this "high" culture is the "average" individual's taste for musicals, light opera, and amateur photography. At the bottom of the hierarchy is popular taste, or taste of necessity, which reflects the impossibility of sharing or imitating the supposed selfless taste of the dominant classes. Popular taste is oriented toward pleasure, usability, and functionality; it gravitates toward pleasant images of attractive people, rock and country music, undemanding stories, photographs of pleasurable moments of everyday life. For example, a choice of olive oil over vegetable oil indicates an orientation to a more "knowing" position, a healthy consumer as opposed to one who seeks instant gratification. This is the difference between a luxury and a necessity (Paterson 2006). It also shows consumer awareness of brands and of their role in the construction of lifestyle and cultural identity.

Cultural capital can be confused with concepts of human and creative capitals, of pecuniary

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emulation, and of a variant definition of cultural capital employed in economics and urban studies. The idea of human capital was developed by James Coleman (1988) in his studies on educational institutions. Human capital is composed of knowledge, skills, and competencies that are an effect of the use of social capital. For example, parents can use their social contacts to choose a school for their children that will increase their chance of educational success. Human capital is different from cultural capital in that it represents the cultural characteristics of individuals and the possibility of the conscious acquisition of identity. Meanwhile cultural capital primarily describes the possession of class culture and identity from primary groups such as family, friends, and neighbors.

Richard Florida (2002) introduced the creative capital theory to highlight that it is not only people, education, and social contacts that are important to the development of geographic regions. He argues that economic growth occurs in places that are preferred by creative people, places that are innovative, diverse, and tolerant. The creative capital theory thus differs from human capital theory by identifying a type of human capital, creative people, as being key to economic growth; and by identifying factors that shape their location decisions. Creative capital is characterized by thin social capital that is not blocking the creative activity of individuals and is open to immigrants and diversity, whereas cultural capital can be understood as relating to thick social capital, exclusion, and limitation by traditions. Moreover, creative capital can be interpreted as an effect of art education on those who produce and distribute cultural goods, while cultural capital is the effect of cultural education that encourages aspirational lifestyles and the tendency to consume. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital should be distinguished from Thorstein Veblen's (2009/1899) idea of "pecuniary emulation," which describes the competition for prestigious and expensive signs of distinction. For Bourdieu, it is status groups, not individuals, that aim to monopolize cultural capital. He also highlighted that cultural capital must be legitimate and not only fashionable. Moreover, for Bourdieu, prestigious cultural goods not only lose their value with time and trickle down the class hierarchy but are reproduced with cultural hierarchies over long periods of time. Bourdieu's concept should also be distinguished from the cultural capital interpretations of economists and urbanists, who sometimes use it to describe collections of aesthetic or moral knowledge, cultural heritage, diversity, and sustainability, or as the economic benefits of arts spending in the cultural and creative industries (Throsby 2001).

The concept of cultural capital was further developed by other scholars. In her studies on fandom Sarah Thornton (1995) coined the term "subcultural capital" to describe a subtype of

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capital that is not common across an entire culture but is specific to a subculture or fan culture. Matt Hills (2002) describes media and sports “fan cultural capital” as dominated by male and middle-class groups. Roberta Sassatelli (2007) describes “consumer capital” as a relatively autonomous form of capital. This capital is based on practices of consumption that create a structure for the standardization of taste. Sassatelli argues that consumer capital can be the result of consumer experiences from the past that are related to the consumer’s class and formal education, including influences from the market (global brands and mass media) and nonmarket (social movements) institutions. Consumer capital also includes consumer practices as indicators of the tastes and opinions of different experts (for example, fashion journalists, architects, environmentalists) who try to influence consumer choices.

SEE ALSO: Bourdieu, Pierre; Class; Consumer Socialization; Education and Consumption

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