SOCIOLOGICAL INQUIRY

A Theory of Racialized Cultural Capital*

Ashleigh Cartwright, *University of Pennsylvania*

Bourdieu developed cultural capital theory to explain the upper class' exclusive cultivation of skills, knowledge, and dispositions (i.e., cultural capital) that yield institutional advantages. Fundamental to this conceptualization is the idea that cultural capital itself is classed—not racialized—and that what constitutes cultural capital is broadly the same for every individual irrespective of one's racial position. I draw from the sociology of race to develop a reconceptualization of cultural capital as fundamentally racialized. Using the illustrative case of "Pursuit"—a white-led organization created in the 1960s to select nonwhite children for integrating white schools—I then theorize about the racial dimensions of cultural capital. I find evidence that Pursuit selected for nonwhite students deemed nonthreatening to the dominant racial group. Thus, I maintain that qualities associated with appearing nonthreatening function as cultural capital for nonwhite students in this field. Accordingly, I theorize that (1) what constitutes cultural capital may vary by the racial position of the holder of cultural capital and (2) those who are dominant in the racial hierarchy contribute to determining what constitutes cultural capital for those they dominate according to their own interests. As it is taken for granted that cultural capital is fundamentally classed, it should be equally understood and applied that cultural capital is fundamentally racialized.

It is well established in the sociology of culture that institutional standards are classed; institutions' putatively neutral standards benefit and align with the interests of higher class people (Bourdieu [1984] 2010). Bourdieu developed the theory of cultural capital to explain this observation: the dominant class exclusively cultivates skills, knowledge, and dispositions (i.e., cultural capital), which are institutionally rewarded. Implicit in this conceptualization is the idea that, irrespective of one's racial position, every individual is held to the same institutional standards. In other words, it is taken for granted that what constitutes cultural capital is the same for individuals occupying different positions in the racial hierarchy.

There has been relatively limited engagement with race in the abundant body of literature on cultural capital (Richards 2020; Wallace 2017). In response to the under-theorization of race in this tradition, some sociologists of race and culture have developed studies of cultural capital that center the black middle class (Claytor 2020; Lacy 2007; Meghji 2020; Rollock, Gillborn, and Vincent 2015; Wallace 2017). This line of research argues that race and racism are crucial aspects of how middle-class black people use and benefit from

Sociological Inquiry, Vol. xx, No. x, 2022, 1–24

DOI: 10.1111/soin.12479

cultural capital. The authors reveal some shortcomings of colorblind research in the Bourdieusian tradition by highlighting middle-class black people's unique and fraught relationships with institutions due to their experiences and historical memories of institutional racism. However, ultimately, these scholars continue to treat cultural capital as a class theory: they conceive of cultural capital as a fundamentally class-based resource that is accessible and advantageous to the black middle class (and to the middle classes of all racial groups) based on the exclusion of lower class people.

In this theoretical endeavor, I explore the racial dimensions of the cultural capital framework. Specifically, I am interested in how the racial system shapes what constitutes cultural capital and, in turn, how cultural capital produces and reproduces the racial hierarchy. My effort to reconceptualize Bourdieu's cultural capital framework is separated into two parts. First, I draw from studies in the sociology of race that—without using the cultural capital framework—illustrate nonwhite people's cultivation and enactment of nonthreatening and palatable dispositions to yield institutional advantages. I then move to present an illustrative case of racialized selection, which I use to theorize about the racial dimensions of cultural capital. Studying institutional moments of racialized selection can clarify the racial aspects of cultural capital as it allows for an examination of which qualities in nonwhite people are valued by dominant white institutions. For this reason, I use "Pursuit,"[1] a white-led organization created to select nonwhite students to racially integrate historically white schools in the United States, to explore the racial dimensions of cultural capital.

In examining Pursuit's process of selecting nonwhite students to integrate white schools, I find evidence that the organization selected for nonwhite students perceived as nonthreatening and palatable to white organizational leaders and white residents of the towns that were yet to be integrated. Drawing from the reconceptualization of cultural capital I develop based on studies in the sociology of race, I theorize that Pursuit selected for students whose characteristics countered controlling images of nonwhite people and families as threatening and dysfunctional. Thus, in this illustrative case, dispositions and qualities associated with appearing nonthreatening to the dominant racial group function as cultural capital. Accordingly, I theorize that cultural capital is fundamentally racialized: (1) what constitutes cultural capital may vary by the racial position of the holder of cultural capital and (2) those who are dominant in the racial hierarchy contribute to determining what constitutes cultural capital for those they dominate according to their own interests. I reconsider race—not only class as many would argue—as an integral and constitutive part of the cultural capital concept.

In calling for a reconsideration of race as fundamental to cultural capital theory, I first review some of the core elements of Bourdieu's conceptual framework and highlight the limited consideration of race in the Bourdieusian tradition. I then show that, while some sociologists of race and culture have fruitfully addressed the limited attention to race in the study of cultural capital by centering the experiences of the black middle class, they ultimately consider race and racism as important contextual and moderating factors—not as incorporated, constitutive, and fundamental aspects of cultural capital. I then draw from the sociology of race to outline a reconceptualization of cultural capital as fundamentally racialized. I end by utilizing the illustrative case of Pursuit—particularly the organization's process of selecting nonwhite children for integrating white spaces—to theorize about the racial constitution of cultural capital.

Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Concept

Across many of his works, Bourdieu ([1984] 2010, 1986) maintains that the dominant class exclusively cultivates skills, knowledge, and dispositions (i.e., cultural capital) that yield institutional advantages. Institutions and organizations like schools and workplaces have standards for success, achievement, selection, and admission—which may appear to be neutral—that are in alignment with the cultivated tastes, practices, knowledge, and dispositions of the dominant class. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu ([1984] 2010) argues that the cultural tastes and practices of the dominant class are the standard for success in educational institutions; upper-class people's tastes for and knowledge of what he calls "legitimate art" are valued on the academic market, which explains their high academic achievement.

Cultural capital can exist in three different states: the embodied state, the objectified state, and the institutionalized state (Bourdieu 1986). Embodied cultural capital takes the form of dispositions that take time to cultivate and that are internalized to become an integral part of the individual. The transmission of these dispositions largely takes place domestically, usually by mothers, and oftentimes unconsciously. Due to the disguised nature of its transmission and its link to an individual's body, embodied cultural capital is easily misrecognized as legitimate competence or natural ability: "it defies the old, deep-rooted distinction the Greek jurists made between inherited properties (*ta patroa*) and acquired properties (*epikteta*)" (Bourdieu 1986:18). Embodied cultural capital can bring inherited and acquired properties together, taking the form of cultivated dispositions that accentuate socially valued, biological characteristics: "Strictly biological differences [such as height or beauty]. . .are underlined and symbolically accentuated by differences in bearing differences in gesture, posture and behavior" (Bourdieu [1984] 2010:190–91).[2]

Objectified cultural capital takes the form of cultural goods such as books, instruments, and paintings that are highly valued by dominant institutions, organizations, and individuals. Lastly, institutionalized cultural capital takes the form of educational qualifications such as degrees or other credentials that symbolically impose cultural value onto individuals (Bourdieu [1984] 2010, 1986).

Cultural capital is only effective in the field in which it is produced. Fields function as markets that value distinct dispositions, attributes, and competencies (Bourdieu [1984] 2010). The advantages yielded from the use of cultural capital depend on the logic of a specific field. Certain dispositions and competencies may yield profit in one field but not in another.

Limited Consideration of Race in Studies of Cultural Capital

Over the past 40 years, scholars have widely used and developed cultural capital theory (Davies and Rizk 2018). Sociologists have shown that higher class people's participation in elite leisure activities like visiting museums and playing squash (DiMaggio 1982; Rivera 2015), embodiment of dispositions like ease, which are cultivated in elite educational institutions (Khan 2011), and knowledge of how to interact successfully with institutional actors like teachers (Lareau [2003] 2011)—all forms of cultural capital—benefits them in academic and job markets. However, this literature has decentered race by advancing what Richards (2020) calls a "class-based master-narrative" (p. 1).

It should be noted that, despite their treatment of race as secondary to class, many of these sociologists acknowledge that race is an important factor for understanding individuals' uses of (and capacities to use) cultural capital. For example, in *Unequal Childhoods*, Lareau ([2003] 2011) shows that middle-class black people's distrust of institutions prompts them to use their cultural capital to monitor institutional actors. In *Privilege*, Khan (2011) illustrates that the cultivated disposition of ease, a sense of comfort and openness that is valued in some elite institutions, is predominantly (if not exclusively) accessible to white students. In *Pedigree*, Rivera (2015) demonstrates that the standards for selection into elite jobs are harsher for nonwhite students.

Despite their acknowledgment that race is an important factor for understanding individuals' capacities to benefit from the use of cultural capital, these sociologists do not center race in their analyses. Instead, they argue that cultural capital is fundamentally a class-based resource that covertly produces and reproduces class inequality. Implicit in this argument is the notion that what constitutes cultural capital is the same for every individual irrespective of one's racial position.

Some scholars have responded to the limited consideration of race in the Bourdieusian tradition by theorizing about nondominant cultural capital and community cultural wealth (Carter 2003; Espino 2014; Yosso 2005). These

concepts highlight the cultural resources and value systems of people in marginalized groups. However, they do not emphasize cultural resources valued by dominant institutions, which yield institutional rewards such as selection into dominant institutions, educational achievement, and profit. For example, Carter's (2003) "Black cultural capital" is a form of nondominant cultural capital that low-income, black youth activate to maintain status positions in their communities by cultivating their peers' acceptance of them as authentically black. Black cultural capital is not valued by dominant institutions and, moreover, can *impede* success in dominant institutions. As I am interested in theoretically exploring the racial construction of dominant cultural capital, I will primarily engage with scholars who focus on dominant institutions and organizations such as schools and workplaces.

Relative to the amount of scholarship produced about cultural capital, few studies have centered race. Scholars studying the black middle class have directly addressed this gap in research.

Cultural Capital and the Black Middle Class

By highlighting the experiences of the black middle class, a number of scholars have fruitfully developed cultural capital theory (Claytor 2020; Lacy 2007; Meghji 2020; Rollock et al. 2015; Wallace 2017). These sociologists show that cultural capital activation takes place within racialized contexts and, in doing so, reveal that racism deeply influences how middle-class black people experience and benefit from cultural capital activation.

However, while these scholars extend Bourdieu's framework to consider race, they do not argue that cultural capital is racially constituted. By this I mean, the authors primarily do not focus on how the racial system forms what constitutes cultural capital and instead largely takes for granted that the class system shapes which cultivated dispositions, knowledge, and skills function as capital in dominant institutions and organizations.

White and Black Middle-Class Cultural Capital Activation Are Comparable

Scholars of cultural capital and the black middle class primarily treat cultural capital as a class theory (Banks 2012; Lacy 2007; Meghji 2020; Rollock et al. 2015; Wallace 2017). They reveal that—like middle-class white people—middle-class black people cultivate and activate skills, tastes, knowledge, and dispositions that yield institutional advantages. What constitutes cultural capital in this literature is broadly the same for white and black middle-class people. It includes, for example, taste for art exclusively accessible to people with class advantage (Banks 2017) and cultivated skills such as interacting with teachers with ease (Wallace 2017).[3] For white and black people, cultural capital is

conceived of as a class-based resource that derives its advantage from the exclusion of lower class people.

In qualitative studies centering the black middle class, sociologists show that—though there are important qualities that distinguish the cultural consumption and practices of the black middle class[4]—the black middle class ultimately activates and benefits from cultural capital in ways comparable to how the white middle class uses cultural capital. Rollock et al. (2015) usefully summarize:

> Comparing. . .[Black middle-class parents'] experiences with those of White middle-class parents documented in previous research, it is clear that the basis for the engagement of Black middle-class parents with the school system, their orientation towards it, lies on radically different ground to that of White middle-class parents. There is, however, some commonality in terms of *strategy*. (p. 98)

The major distinction lies in middle-class black people's "basis for [institutional] engagement" and "orientation" toward institutions: that is, from a racially dominated position in a racially stratified society.

In quantitative studies on race and cultural capital, sociologists have found that white and black middle-class students have comparable amounts of cultural capital (Eitle and Eitle 2002; Kalmijn and Kraaykamp 1996; Merolla and Jackson 2014; Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell 1999). In these studies, what is considered cultural capital (e.g., museum attendance) is the same for black and white people. Moreover, black and white middle-class people comparably use their cultural capital to access advantages such as educational returns.

Cultural Capital Activation Takes Place in Racially Stratified Contexts

Though the line of research on cultural capital and the black middle class fundamentally treats cultural capital as a class theory, it has meaningfully contributed to research in the Bourdieusian tradition by conceptually centering race and racism. The authors emphasize that cultural capital activation takes place in racialized and racially stratified contexts: historical memories and experiences of racism shape how black people experience and benefit from cultural capital activation (Lacy 2007; Meghji 2020; Rollock et al. 2015; Wallace 2017).

Because many middle-class black people understand institutions and organizations to be racialized structures that systematically marginalize black people, they use their cultural capital to counter racial stereotypes, monitor institutional actors to ensure fair treatment, and minimize the racial discrimination directed toward themselves and their racial group (Dow 2019; Lacy 2007; Lareau and Horvat 1999; Rollock, Gillborn, and Vincent 2011; Rollock et al. 2015; Vincent, Rollock, and Ball 2012; Wallace 2017, 2019).

Middle-class black parents pass cultural capital down to their children, providing them with "a range of resources including accent, language, and

comportment to signal their class status," so that they gain advantages including protection from racism (Rollock et al. 2011:1089; Vincent et al. 2012; Vincent, Rollock, and Ball 2013). Moreover, they teach their children how to simultaneously develop and express their black identities while conforming to dominant institutional demands (Wallace 2017, 2018).

However, due to their racial marginalization and distrust of white-dominated institutions and organizations, middle-class black people struggle to activate cultural capital: cultural capital activation sometimes requires them to repress their feelings and to detract from their racial interests (Lareau and Horvat 1999; Wallace 2017). Thus, despite having access to cultural resources, middle-class black people often resist or are ambivalent about activating them as their values, tastes, and interests are oftentimes in conflict with those of dominant institutions (Banks 2012; Lareau and Horvat 1999; Wallace 2017, 2019).

Furthermore, though middle-class black people access significant privileges by using their cultural capital, they oftentimes have less of a return for cultural capital activation when compared to middle-class white people (Gillborn, Rollock, and Vincent 2012; Rollock et al. 2015; Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell 1999). Thus, race is a significant moderating factor.

Unlike most empirical studies that build on Bourdieu's framework of cultural capital, those centering the black middle class seriously consider race and racism and their significance for understanding how cultural capital functions in a racially stratified society. However, they ultimately show that—while race and racism are crucial contextual and moderating factors—cultural capital is fundamentally classed.

Reconceptualizing Cultural Capital as Racialized

Cultural capital theorists can draw from the sociology of race to theorize about the racialized dimensions of cultural capital. For example, there is a line of research in the sociology of race that—without using the cultural capital framework[5]—has demonstrated that nonwhite people respond to controlling images characterizing them as threatening and dysfunctional by cultivating nonthreatening dispositions and appearances (Claytor 2020; Dow 2016, 2019; Durr and Wingfield 2011; Horvat and Antonio 1999; Thornhill 2015, 2019; Wingfield 2007, 2010). Their enactment and appearance of palatability (to white people and entities) potentially yield institutional rewards including selection into college (Thornhill 2019) and interpersonal success in workplaces (Wingfield 2010). Accordingly, I theorize that these cultivated dispositions and projections of palatability function as cultural capital for nonwhite people in some fields.

Controlling Images

Controlling images are "powerful ideological justifications" for racial systems (Collins [1990] 2009:76). In an exercise of their power, dominant individuals and groups create and use controlling images to naturalize existing power relations. Some sociologists of race have utilized the controlling images framework to explain nonwhite people's experiences of and responses to racism in various institutional and organizational settings (Dow 2016, 2019; Durr and Wingfield 2011; Wingfield 2007, 2010). This line of research illustrates how nonwhite people maneuver, resist, and adapt in response to controlling images characterizing them as threatening and dysfunctional in order to yield and maintain institutional advantages. Specifically, some scholars have highlighted three areas—disposition, physicality, and family structure—in which nonwhite people have attempted to counter controlling images by cultivating and enacting appearances of deference and palatability.

Disposition

In response to controlling images characterizing black people as violent, dangerous, and oppositional, some black people cultivate mild, palatable, and nonthreatening dispositions in order to yield institutional advantages (Claytor 2020; Dow 2016, 2019; Durr and Wingfield 2011; Horvat and Antonio 1999; Wingfield 2007, 2010).

White people and entities[6] coerce nonwhite people to adjust themselves to make white people comfortable in institutional settings. For example, to appear palatable in workplaces and educational institutions, some black people learn to repress their emotions when they are upset or excited (Dow 2016, 2019; Wingfield 2007, 2010), change the way they speak (Claytor 2020; Horvat and Antonio 1999), and downplay their experiences of racism in order to appear deracialized to white people (Horvat and Antonio 1999; Wingfield 2007, 2010).

Black parents foster the cultivation of these dispositions in their children. For example, Dow (2016, 2019) describes that some black mothers enroll their sons in karate and yoga, so that they are trained to develop an embodiment of calmness and emotional restraint. Parents teach these lessons in "strategic sacrifices in self-expression" (Dow 2019:53) with the intent that "this ability would translate to their interactions with teachers, police officers, peers, and the public" (Dow 2019:48).

Thornhill's (2015) audit study illustrates the advantages that nonwhite people potentially yield from signaling palatability to white people. The study reveals that white college counselors are more responsive to black prospective applicants who they deem deracialized and racially apolitical. Thus, the author

concludes: "This raises the question of whether and the extent to which these black students should 'work their identity' to allay white admissions counselors' racial fears and concerns and thereby circumvent their racist proclivities, at least during the admissions process" (p. 469). In the language of Bourdieu's conceptual framework, Thornhill suggests that—because the appearance and attribution of racial palatability function as cultural capital for black students in the field of college admissions—the question arises of whether black students should cultivate and enact that image in order to increase their chances of selection into college.

Physicality

Relatedly, white individuals and entities have targeted black people with controlling images characterizing them as physically threatening (Dow 2016, 2019; Rollock et al. 2015; Wingfield 2007, 2010). Thus, some black people have cultivated ways of carrying and presenting their bodies to counter that image in order to be perceived as palatable in white-dominant institutional settings. For example, some black people are taught to smile and to refrain from using expressive hand gestures to appear nonthreatening to white people (Claytor 2020; Wingfield 2010). Others report adopting calm, "low key" interactional styles, so that they are not perceived as aggressive (Claytor 2020; Wingfield 2010).

Constructing a nonthreatening physical presence also involves dressing and styling one's hair in ways deemed palatable in predominantly white spaces. Black people report holding themselves to higher standards of dress than white people in institutional settings in order to signal competency and to make white people feel comfortable (Claytor 2020; Wingfield 2010). For one black professional in Claytor's (2020) study, that meant wearing glasses to appear less threatening (p. 92). Parents teach their children to dress "respectably," so that institutional actors do not perceive them as "thugs" or "criminals" (Dow 2016, 2019). Some black people straighten their hair or steer away from wearing natural styles in predominantly white institutional settings to make white people comfortable and, ultimately, to yield institutional advantages (Claytor 2020; Dow 2019).

Family Structure

Lastly, as white individuals and entities have assailed black families with controlling images characterizing them as dysfunctional—especially the "matriarch" image—some black mothers have developed and projected "a particularly visible form of 'good mothering' to combat racist stereotypes" (Rollock et al. 2015:109). In 1965, "The Moynihan Report" illustrated and widely circulated the image of "the matriarch." Moynihan's "tangle of pathology" thesis blames

black mothers for the purported dysfunction of the black family and the pathology and failure of the black community at large (Collins [1990] 2009; Moynihan 1965). Though notions of an ideal family structure are certainly classed, this pervasive and powerful stereotype has uniquely targeted black women to the point that "single motherhood [has been] viewed as a black cultural trait" (Barnes 2015; Roberts 1997:17).

Some black women respond to this image by cultivating and displaying a countering image of "good mothering": they ensure that they appear to be highly engaged and that their children are impeccably dressed and presented during institutional interactions. One black Caribbean middle-class mother in Rollock et al.'s (2015) study explains, "there is a real pressure there to make sure everything is just right. . .it's not just that it's got to be right and appropriate, it's got to be *seen* to be appropriate" (p. 109).

Observing Selection Practices for Integration to Explore the Racial Dimensions of Cultural Capital

Drawing from a line of research in the sociology of race, I have developed a reconceptualization of cultural capital as fundamentally racialized. The literature indicates that black people cultivate and project dispositions and appearances of deference and palatability in order to maintain and yield institutional advantages. Thus, I theorize that qualities associated with appearing nonthreatening to white people and entities can function as cultural capital for nonwhite people in particular fields. I use this reconceptualization as a framework for my examination of the illustrative case of "Pursuit."

To further explore the racial dimensions of cultural capital, I observe the selection practices of Pursuit, an organization created in the 1960s to facilitate the racial integration of historically white schools by selecting nonwhite children for integration. I am theoretically interested in (1) what observing the selection of nonwhite students for integrating white spaces can contribute to cultural capital theory and, inversely, (2) how cultural capital theory can help to explain the selection of some nonwhite students and the rejection of others.

Context About The Illustrative Case

Overview of Pursuit

In the 1960s, at the request of President John F. Kennedy, leaders of elite, northeastern educational institutions, and civil rights organizers came together to consider their role in integrating historically white, K-12 schools in the United States. In their inaugural meeting, they planned the creation of an organization called "Pursuit," which would select and train nonwhite students to integrate historically white independent and public schools. In their own words,

the mission of Pursuit was to "remedy the academic and cultural deprivation which stands between 'promising potential' and its educational fulfillment."

In the summer following the initial meeting, Pursuit's founders and staff—mostly white headmasters and professors from elite New England educational institutions—carefully recruited nonwhite "disadvantaged high school boys" who demonstrated "promising academic potential" in their local schools. U.S. government officials also participated in recruitment by recommending students for consideration by Pursuit.

Following recruitment, each prospective Pursuit participant compiled a comprehensive application file. Selected applicants were tentatively accepted to historically white schools contingent upon successful completion of a summer training program, which included coursework and activities created to prepare students culturally for integration. During mealtime, students were taught etiquette ("coats and ties" were to be worn to evening meals); during recreation period, they learned to swim and were encouraged to play "individual(istic)" sports that were "common to preparatory schools, uncommon to Pursuit backgrounds"; and during English class, students were trained in "proper" speech. After the summer pilot program, Pursuit began recruiting students from across the country. In addition to the summer intensive, the organization developed year-round workshops and host family programs, which matched Pursuit students with white families in the towns of the schools they integrated. In the 1970s, Pursuit began including girls in their integration efforts. Since its inception, the still-operating organization has sent about 25,000 students to integrate historically white schools.

Methods and Data

In this theoretical exploration, I closely consider one step of the selection process—the acceptance or rejection of Pursuit applicants—to observe the factors that influenced which students were deemed ideal candidates for integration. Specifically, I compare the application files of Pursuit applicants who were accepted and those who were rejected in 1969.

Many of Pursuit's accepted and rejected applications are located in the archives of the college where the first Pursuit summer training program took place. In these archives, there are application materials from many years of the program. I chose to examine materials from 1969 because the most archival materials were available from this year relative to other years. Thus, I was able to analyze the applications alongside an abundance of other materials including newspaper articles and administrative records. Due to Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) restrictions, I was given access to these files under the agreement that I would use pseudonyms and change identifying information about individuals to protect their identities.

I cumulatively analyzed and coded about 130 documents, which comprise 13 student files: seven accepted and six rejected. I created a coding scheme to capture key themes in the data with a particular focus on the different aspects of Pursuit's evaluative criteria. Qualitatively analyzing the applications in conjunction with other archival materials revealed patterns in how students were evaluated and selected. That said, this case study does not intend to make conclusive, causal claims about the factors, which determined selection for integration but rather to find qualitative patterns in the process of selection in order to build theory on the racial aspects of the cultural capital framework.

To participate in Pursuit, students and their families or guardians must undergo an extensive application process. In 1969, Pursuit applicants were nonwhite boys in ninth or tenth grade, and all were applying in the effort to leave their local schools to attend schools that, before their potential arrival, were all-white. Pursuit staff—primarily white professors, administrators, headmasters, and teachers from northeastern educational institutions—assessed the applications and selected students into the organization. Each of the application files was labeled based on how the organization racially classified applicants: every file had the label "Negro," "Mexican," "Puerto Rican," or "Indian."

The application files have five parts: "general information," the "parents report," the "school report," letters of recommendation, and student statements. The applications were completed in students' and parents' handwriting. In the general information section, each student provided personal information about himself including his name, age, grade, religious affiliation, height, and weight. In the parents report, the parents or guardians of applicants were instructed to provide detailed information about their educational backgrounds, occupations, and finances. Based on the handwriting in the applications, it appears that students often completed this part of the application on behalf of their parents or guardians. In the school report, administrators from applicants' current schools provided information about their grades, class ranking, academic standing, and IQ scores. This section of the application also includes an academic performance summary score, which aggregates the information from each section of the school report. Each student received one of four academic summary scores based on his academic record: "Outstanding," "Good," "Fair," or "Poor."

Most applicants had two letters of recommendation. At the top of the letters, there is space for recommenders to describe their relationships with students: recommenders were applicants' teachers, preachers, neighbors, and employers. Lastly, in the student statements, applicants were required to respond to the following prompts in their handwriting: "What has been the most important event in your life and why? Who has had the most influence on your life and why? How do you feel an education might benefit you? Please

write a thoughtful statement about yourself." Most applicants responded to these prompts in two or three pages.

The nature of the data presents several limitations and strengths. As aforementioned, qualitatively studying one application cycle meant analyzing a small sample. However, it allowed for a close and systematic examination of about 130 application documents, which were supported by other archival documents including newspaper articles and administrative records.

Another limitation of the data is that, while this study aims to reconceptualize cultural capital theory, the data cannot illustrate the process of capital cultivation but instead shows how institutional gatekeepers attribute cultural value to different applicants. That said, this limitation comes with several strengths. Though I cannot study individuals' processes of cultivating capital, I can observe institutional actors' "symbolic imposition" of value onto nonwhite children (Bourdieu [1984] 2010:17). Cultural attribution is a crucial aspect of the functioning of cultural capital, as it is precisely how holders of cultural capital reap advantages (that is, through being recognized as culturally valuable by dominant institutions and organizations). Thus, though I cannot study the process of cultivation that is highlighted in other illustrative studies of cultural capital (Khan 2011; Lareau [2003] 2011; Rollock et al. 2015; Wallace 2017), I can study the moment at which individuals yield institutional rewards after their cultural capital is recognized, which many studies of capital cultivation cannot systematically examine.

Drawing on patterns that emerged when comparing the application files of accepted and rejected students, I center the analysis on the content of students' letters of recommendation. I find that, although Pursuit claims to select students based on their academic performance in their previous schools, there is evidence that students are selected based on the portrayals of their dispositions, family structure, and physicality in their applications. Specifically, there is evidence indicating that Pursuit selected for students described in their applications as mild in disposition, physically small and attractive, and from functional (two-parent) households. I theorize that dispositions and attributes associated with appearing nonthreatening to the dominant racial group function as cultural capital in this illustrative case.

Findings

Selection Not Based on Academic Record

Pursuit claimed to select students based on their academic records. In a report written by the founder and director of Pursuit in 1964, he devoted a detailed section to a description of the evaluative criteria for acceptance. The founding director stated the importance of "grades, rank in class. . .the extent to

which the student seemed 'in control of' his local academic situation. Although less important, test scores like the Secondary School Admission Test, I.Q., and other standard devices of measurement." Furthermore, central to the organization's identity is the notion that Pursuit selects for "academically gifted" students.

However, an examination of the applications revealed that high academic performance was not the standard to which students were held that determined acceptance or rejection. Some high-performing applicants were rejected while some low-performing applicants were accepted. According to the academic performance summary measure, most of the applicants were described as "Good" students; however, there were "Fair" and "Poor" students who were accepted into Pursuit. Only one accepted student was described as "Outstanding." While there was no association between acceptance into Pursuit and level of academic performance within this small sample, the data reveal patterns when comparing the letters of recommendation of accepted and rejected students. Specifically, accepted and rejected students were portrayed differently in their applications: accepted students were described as having pleasing dispositions, functional (two-parent) families, and attractive and unthreatening physical appearances. Rejected students were not portrayed in this manner.

Disposition

Each of the students accepted into Pursuit was described as having a "pleasing" and mild disposition. Thomas Daniels was a tenth grader with "Poor" academic performance who was accepted into Pursuit. He lived with his parents and younger cousin in a large trailer that, despite their low income, was in "a nice section of town." His father worked as a linesman, and his mother was a homemaker. Thomas generally did not perform well in school but was known to be a skillful artist. A business owner in his community wrote one of his two letters of recommendation. In response to the question, "Why did you select this student?", the business owner discussed Thomas' disposition: "I've known Thomas Daniels as a friend and customer. He is a boy of character, friendly, courteous, and a person who minds his own business. This I would consider one of his finer qualities."

Gabriel Ramirez was a tenth grader and the only applicant with "Outstanding" academic performance who was accepted into Pursuit in the sample. Gabriel's parents were Spanish-speaking, and his recommenders emphasized that he oftentimes served as a translator for them. Gabriel completed the parents' report with detailed information about his parents' tax history, yearly income, and government assistance received. Gabriel markedly stands out from the other twelve applicants as he was the only student described as academically exceptional. One of his recommenders asserted emphatically:

> Gabriel needs this opportunity to develop his experiential background—to show, in situations other than the narrow confines of his school and neighborhood, that he has the ambition, intelligence, and motivation to succeed and the capacity for hard work. If Gabriel had been adopted into an upper middle class, white family when he was an infant, he would now be well on the way through a good prep school and making concrete plans for a college or university education.

Gabriel's school report reveals that he was in the top five percent of his class unlike most of the other applicants. Despite his exceptional academic performance, much of the content of his letters focus on his disposition. For example, his teacher wrote: "I think Gabriel will succeed in the Pursuit program because. . .he has the social competency, the modesty, and grace to work well with a new group of people in a new school situation, which might be totally different from anything he has ever known." One of his other recommenders, his employer from a local restaurant, wrote: "he is one of the most dedicated, respectful, and honorable employees I have ever had working for me."

Characterizations of Thomas as friendly, courteous, and "a person who minds his own business" and Gabriel as socially competent, modest, graceful, and respectful exemplify the portrayal of accepted students' dispositions as pleasing and mild. Other descriptors used throughout the applications include polite, quiet, and well-liked.

Family Structure

All of the accepted students were from two-parent households, and conversely, all of the applicants living with single mothers or grandmothers were rejected. In the applications of students who lived with single mothers or grandmothers, recommenders emphasized their beliefs that this resulted in a dysfunctional family situation and, furthermore, that it led to students' development of unfavorable dispositions and academic challenges. For example, Marion Handle was a ninth grader in "Good" academic standing who was rejected from Pursuit. His teacher of 5 years highlighted his family situation in his letter of recommendation:

> Marion has lived with his grandmother ever since I've known him (she is approx 67-70 yrs. old). Marion's mother lives in Detroit; he often refers to her. "My mother will do this or that." Marion knows very little about his father – tells me he sees him when he goes to Detroit. Marion never mentioned his father to me but once. He does say that he likes him. I am concerned about the lack of any choice or options in Marion's background or future. At present he seems to be drifting with a 'special group' - a bored group of young people. . .He has always found school to be difficult. This problem coupled with his up-bringing has caused him to act out in school at many times.

Like other recommenders of students raised solely by their mothers or grandmothers, Marion's teacher fixated on his family situation. She expanded

upon her perception of Marion's family by noting instances in which Marion has mentioned his mother and father and by expressing skepticism of what Marion has told her about his parents. She also provided details about his family including that his grandmother was "approx 67-70" and that his parents lived in Detroit. This is in sharp contrast to the lack of detail devoted to discussing Marion's good academic performance. The teacher's description of Marion's family frames her expression of concern for "the lack of any choice or options in Marion's background or future." She ends by maintaining that, in part, Marion's "up-bringing has caused him to act out in school at many times." Like other recommenders of applicants from single-parent households, the teacher fixated on Marion's family life, portrayed it as dysfunctional, and indicated that it has contributed to his unfavorable and rebellious behavior in school.

On the other hand, David Fox was a tenth grader from a two-parent household described as a "Good" student who was accepted into Pursuit. David lived with his mother and father in a housing project that they "would like to move away from. . .because they would like to live in a neighborhood with people whose aspirations are more closely aligned with their own." His recommenders explained that part of the reason why David's parents, teachers, and school counselor wanted him to apply to Pursuit is so that he could leave his present environment. His recommenders also mentioned David's family situation but did not fixate on it or suggest that it was dysfunctional. His teacher wrote:

> David C. Fox is one of eight children of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Fox. For the past twenty years, his family has lived in a housing project in Savannah. . .His father is a custodian at Allen Elementary School and his mother is a cook in the cafeteria.

Although many aspects of David's family life were presented similarly to Marion's, namely that they both lived in poverty and in poor housing environments, the portrayals of their family situations differed: Marion's recommender characterized his family as dysfunctional and as one of the causes of his lacking school performance while David's portrayed his family as a supportive structure that allowed him to achieve some level of academic success despite living in poverty.

The content of other archival materials provides some explanation for why Pursuit may have selected students from two-parent households. For example, in a speech given in 1964 by one of Pursuit's founding headmasters about the future of the organization, the headmaster stated:

> A child should grow up in a family led by its father, but what leadership or even presence can a Negro father often supply when the rate and type of Negro employment have no relationship to white?...If mother works all day and no one talks to the child or reads to him or

> answers his questions, how does he know that learning is important? How does he even acquire a vocabulary with which to express his thoughts? The [Pursuit] students we get in our schools are different or else we wouldn't see them. They are the survivors, not just the talented tenth that W.E.B. Du Bois spoke of, but the one-hundredth.

This headmaster, one of the selectors of Pursuit applicants, explained his view that children should grow up in households with a father and a mother: a father to lead the family and a mother to foster an appreciation for learning domestically. In doing so, he evoked the denigrating image of the "matriarch" and named the cultural deficiencies that black children purportedly acquire from a matriarchal household. He ended by clarifying that Pursuit selects for the rare black children who have not inherited this dysfunction: "the one-hundredth" who are from two-parent, functional households.

Physicality

All of the successful Pursuit applications highlight students' physicality—particularly that students were physically attractive, clean, and small in stature. On the other hand, there is no mention of physical appearance, save for height and weight, in any of the rejected applications. The recommender of the aforementioned student, Thomas Daniels, noted his physical attractiveness:

> Tom has a very pleasing personality and is handsome in appearance. It seems to be such a waste of talent just to let him get by with poor school work when he could be motivated to use his full potential. He is the same type of student that "Mike Harris" was – who is now with Pursuit, since Mike had improved so much I sincerely believe that Tom would do the same. Tom has a much better personality than Mike and would establish much more rapport with his peers.

One of David Fox's letters also emphasizes his physical appearance. His teacher wrote, "I remember David as a pupil who strived for excellence in all subject areas, but with special interest in arithmetic. He was always neat and clean. He was courteous, honest, dependable and had very good study habits."

Thomas' teacher indicated that his handsomeness was one of the reasons why she selected him to apply for Pursuit. She seemed to consider his physical attractiveness and disposition to be "talent[s]" for which Pursuit would select even despite his "poor school work." David's teacher also discussed his physical appearance and disposition together and highlighted his neatness and cleanliness.

One of the starkest differences between the seven accepted students and the six rejected students is the substantial differences in the heights and weights of the students. On average, accepted students were 5 feet and 4 inches tall and weighed 129 pounds. Rejected students were, on average, 6 feet tall and 161 pounds. A larger sample is necessary to make conclusive statements about this

pattern. That said, this tentative finding that Pursuit may have selected for nonwhite children with small statures is particularly interesting and troubling in light of evidence that white educational institutions in the 1960s valued the opposite quality in white students. In *The Chosen*, Karabel (2005) discusses Yale admissions' selection for white boys perceived to be manly:

> The admissions committee viewed evidence of manliness with particular enthusiasm . . .So preoccupied was Yale with the appearance of its students that. . .each year, Yale carefully measured the height of entering freshman, noting with pride the proportion of the class at six feet or more. (2005:327)

The institutional standard for white and nonwhite boys differed—while white boys were rewarded for being "manly" and tall, nonwhite boys who applied to Pursuit were potentially selected for being small in stature. In other words, what constituted cultural capital varied by the racial position of the holder of cultural capital.

Discussion

In this theoretical endeavor, I have brought together frameworks and studies from the sociologies of culture and race to reconceptualize cultural capital as fundamentally racialized. I drew on studies in the sociology of race that—without using the cultural capital framework—illustrate nonwhite people's cultivation of nonthreatening and palatable dispositions to yield institutional advantages (Claytor 2020; Dow 2016, 2019; Durr and Wingfield 2011; Horvat and Antonio 1999; Wingfield 2007, 2010). I put this line of research in conversation with cultural capital literature to theorize that, in some fields, dispositions and appearances associated with palatability may function as cultural capital for nonwhite people.

Using this reconceptualization as a lens, I then moved to examine how the Pursuit organization selected nonwhite students to integrate white schools in 1969 in order to theorize about the racial aspects of cultural capital. I found evidence that Pursuit selected for students described as being pleasing in disposition and appearance, physically small and attractive, and from functional (two-parent) family backgrounds. This provides some indication that Pursuit valued qualities of mildness, smallness, attractiveness, and cleanliness in nonwhite students.[7] Accordingly, I theorize that, in this illustrative case, qualities associated with appearing nonthreatening and palatable to white people function as cultural capital for nonwhite students.

Mild and Pleasing Disposition as Cultural Capital

Pursuit's selection for nonwhite students characterized as having mild and pleasing dispositions aligns with the findings of some sociologists of race

(Claytor 2020; Dow 2016, 2019; Durr and Wingfield 2011; Wingfield 2007, 2010). In response to controlling images portraying black people as threatening, dangerous, and angry, some black people learn to cultivate and enact mild dispositions to yield institutional rewards. This finding is counter to those of some cultural capital theorists who treat race as secondary to class (Khan 2011; Lareau [2003] 2011). For example, Lareau ([2003] 2011) illustrates that middle-class children develop a "sense of entitlement," which is not mild but instead commanding and assertive. Relatedly, Khan (2011) shows that the disposition of ease cultivated at St. Paul's (an elite boarding school) is also not mild but instead requires comfortable sociability and confidence. Interestingly, black students in Khan's study have trouble embodying ease due to their overly reverent and constrained demeanors. He argues that their dispositions may prevent them from reaping the benefits of ease. However, this reconceptualization of cultural capital as racialized may suggest that those reverent and constrained dispositions may be institutionally valued and rewarded in nonwhite students (as indicated, perhaps, by their admittance to St. Paul's).

Physical Smallness, Cleanliness, and Attractiveness as Cultural Capital

Pursuit's selection for physically small, clean, and attractive students also aligns with some previous literature in the sociology of race. In response to the controlling images that portray black people as physically threatening, some black people cultivate nonthreatening physical appearances to yield and maintain institutional advantages (Dow 2016, 2019; Rollock et al. 2015; Wingfield 2007, 2010).

It could be argued that physical smallness (height specifically) is not a form of cultural capital given that it is not cultivated over time. Thus, it could be considered "bodily capital" (Bourdieu [1984] 2010). That said, Bourdieu emphasizes that individuals with institutionally valued biological characteristics can cultivate dispositions and behaviors that emphasize those characteristics (Bourdieu [1984] 2010:190–91). Additionally, it is notable that, while being tall functions as cultural capital for white men and boys, physical smallness functions as cultural capital for nonwhite boys in this illustrative case (Karabel 2005).

The Two-Parent Household "Credential" as Cultural Capital

Lastly, Pursuit's selection of nonwhite children from two-parent households can also be contextualized by studies in the sociology of race. In response to the controlling images of the matriarch and the unwed mother, some black women cultivate and project "a particularly visible form of 'good mothering' to combat racist stereotypes" in institutional settings (Rollock et al. 2015:109).

In the aforementioned speech given in 1964 by one of the Pursuit's founding headmasters, he evoked the matriarch image to describe how the organization selected students. He asserted:

> If mother works all day and no one talks to the child or reads to him or answers his questions, how does he know that learning is important? How does he even acquire a vocabulary with which to express his thoughts? The [Pursuit] students we get in our schools are different or else we wouldn't see them. They are the survivors, not just the talented tenth that W.E.B. Du Bois spoke of, but the one-hundredth.

The headmaster described his beliefs that most black children are from single-parent households and, therefore, are culturally deficient. Pursuit selects for students who are from two-parent households given that it is assumed to signal a cultural accumulation that, in the headmaster's imagination, is particularly rare for black children to have. Thus, in this case, being from a two-parent household functions as a credential that symbolically imposes cultural value onto nonwhite children from the perspective of the organization (Bourdieu [1984] 2010:17, 1986). Moreover, selected students are considered highly culturally valuable ("the one-hundredth") based on the image that most black children are culturally deficient.

This reconceptualization of cultural capital as fundamentally racialized contributes to the abundant body of cultural capital literature that has treated race as secondary to class (DiMaggio 1982; Khan 2011; Lareau [2003] 2011; Rivera 2015) and to the smaller body of cultural capital literature that highlights the black middle class but continues to treat cultural capital as a class theory (Lacy 2007; Rollock et al. 2015; Wallace 2017). Specifically, it reveals how the racial hierarchy (and the controlling images used to justify it) shapes what constitutes cultural capital and, in turn, how cultural capital produces and reproduces the racial hierarchy. In Pursuit's selection process, white gatekeepers had the power to select students that they perceived as culturally valuable and, correspondingly, that they perceived as nonthreatening to existing power relations. In other words, what white gatekeepers valued in nonwhite children were appearances and credentials that, from their perspective, signaled that their presence would not threaten white people and white power.

As previous cultural capital literature has explored the process of class reproduction, this reconceptualization illustrates the process of racial reproduction. Though the process of class reproduction is also referred to as "social reproduction," I maintain that racial reproduction—the process through which the racial hierarchy is reproduced—is also an integral part of social reproduction.

Indeed, this reconceptualization reveals troubling patterns that have implications for organizations like Pursuit and for institutions and organizations

more broadly that have been increasingly committed to racially diversifying over the past 60 years.

Conclusion

Over the past 40 years, sociologists of culture have widely used cultural capital theory to explain the production and reproduction of the class hierarchy while treating race as secondary. This theoretical endeavor reveals some advantages of bridging the sociologies of race and culture.

The cultural capital framework has proven to be an effective and accessible theoretical tool used across fields (Davies and Rizk 2018). The theory is particularly useful for explaining how the class hierarchy is produced and reproduced. However, sociologists of race have made relatively little use of cultural capital theory, which is understandable given Bourdieu's relatively limited engagement with the concept of race. Those sociologists who have, following the Bourdieusian tradition, treat cultural capital as a class theory and, therefore, have not fully benefited from its potential to help explain the production and reproduction of racial inequality.

Many sociologists of culture using the cultural capital framework have treated class as a relational social position while treating race as an individual attribute. In doing so, some have used having a small sample of nonwhite people as a justification for their lack of analytical attention to race. The treatment of race as an individual characteristic obscures the entwined, historical relationship between race and class, denies the relational and hierarchical nature of the racial system, and disregards that institutions and organizations themselves are racialized and racializing structures (Bashi and McDaniels 1997; Ray 2019). Thus, cultural capital theorists should adopt an understanding of race as relational, structural, and hierarchical and institutions and organizations as racially constituted, which many sociologists of race have already established. In sum, as it is taken for granted that cultural capital is fundamentally classed, it should be equally understood and applied that cultural capital is fundamentally racialized.

ENDNOTES

*Please direct correspondence to Ashleigh Cartwright, University of Pennsylvania, 353 McNeil Building, 3718 Locust Walk, Philadelphia, PA 19104; e-mail: ashcart@sas.upenn.edu

I am tremendously thankful to Camille Charles, Melissa Wilde, Dorothy Roberts, Annette Lareau, Regina Baker, Raka Sen, Tom Wooten, Katharina Hecht, Peter Harvey, João Victor Nery Fiocchi Rodrigues, Nick Graetz, Sherelle Ferguson, Blair Sackett, Doron Shiffer-Sebba, Alexander Adames, Hannah Olson, and Ellen Bryer for their feedback and support as I developed the ideas in this paper. I am also grateful to the reviewers for their challenging and thoughtful comments.

[1]"Pursuit" and all other names in this paper are pseudonyms. Reference citations are suppressed to protect confidentiality.

[2]For example, in a field that culturally values tallness in men, being tall is a form of bodily capital. A tall man may cultivate an upright posture and a confident demeanor, kinds of embodied cultural capital, to accentuate his bodily capital. The inherited and acquired qualities together multiply his capital.

[3]It should be noted that some scholars (Banks 2012; Rollock et al. 2015; Wallace 2017) present the concept of "Black cultural capital" to refer to middle-class black people's consumption of black cultural products, participation in black cultural spaces, and particular strategies for navigating white institutions. So, in a sense, what constitutes "Black cultural capital" is qualitatively distinct in that it may, for example, include the consumption of fine art produced by black people. That being said, whether they consume black or white cultural products, middle-class black people can yield advantages from doing so given that those cultural products derive their value from the exclusion of lower class people. For this reason, I maintain that "Black cultural capital" as conceived by the abovementioned authors largely functions as a class theory.

[4]These important distinctions include an emphasis on consuming black cultural products, spending time in middle-class black spaces, and using cultural capital to resist racism.

[5]Some of these scholars utilize the cultural capital framework but not to refer to the cultivated dispositions of palatability and deference.

[6]I primarily describe "white people and entities" as the perpetrators of racial violence and oppression to highlight their position in the racial hierarchy and, furthermore, to avoid using the passive voice in the effort to remove blame from the racially victimized while holding accountable those who are dominant in the racial hierarchy. That said, it should be noted that, in a white supremacist society, the perpetrators of white supremacist logic need not be "white" (though they certainly oftentimes are).

[7]Though there is a possibility that Pursuit staff would value some of the same qualities in white students, white students did not go through any comparable vetting process.

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