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## Social reproduction theory revisited

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### ABSTRACT

Social reproduction theory names at least two distinct traditions, one of which has a long history in educational research. Social reproduction theory in *education* emerged out of a concern with education's relationship to capitalist inequalities. By contrast, social reproduction *feminism* developed out of feminist interventions regarding the role of women's unpaid care-work in the reproduction of capitalism. In this paper, we suggest that the renewed energy surrounding social reproduction feminism provides an opportunity to revisit social reproduction theorizing in education. We review the fields' histories and ready the ground for an integrated framework. At the heart of this integration is a feminist analysis of reproductive labor in its contradictory relationship to capitalism. Expanding the analysis from the reproduction of capitalist *relations* to the reproduction of *life* under capitalism, this approach avoids the pitfalls of determinism and attends to students' participation and teachers' work in the contested labor of social reproduction.

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In 2018, *Monthly Review* editor John Bellamy Foster (2018) described 'a rapidly growing body of work' on social reproduction theory, reflecting a 'meteoric rise of interest' in the paradigm. Foster traces social reproduction feminism from its beginnings in 1960s writings on women's liberation, to the 1970s Wages for Housework movement, to the cornucopia of writings on social reproduction today.

This may come as news to educational researchers. In the field of education social reproduction theory has had a decidedly different trajectory. Associated with Bourdieu's (1964/1979) notion of cultural capital, as well as Bowles and Gintis's (2011) correspondence theory, social reproduction theory (Clark and Carter 2012; Collins 2009) refers to a different framework for thinking about schooling and the reproduction of inequality (Heck and Rochelle Mahoe 2006; Cheng, Martin, and Werum 2007). Important though it may be, and while scholars of education continue to study the social reproduction of inequality, no one in education is claiming a 'rapidly growing body of work' in social reproduction theory today.

In this paper, we suggest that the renewed energy surrounding social reproduction feminism provides an opportunity to revisit social reproduction theorizing in education. In what follows, we review the intellectual legacy of these related, but distinct fields, mapping the contexts of their emergence, their points of intervention, and the similarities and

differences in their theoretical precepts. We show that while there may be a historical divergence between social reproduction feminism (SRF) and social reproduction theory in education (SRE), the streams share basic premises and goals as frameworks.<sup>1</sup> Outlining the diverging histories and foci of these frameworks reveals that they have much to offer one another. While recent scholarship has zoomed in to debate fine-grained details in social reproduction theorizing, we zoom out to think across traditions. Specifically, we argue that feminist scholars' close attention to the contradictions of reproductive labor can inspire new insights for understanding schooling's role in the reproduction of life under capitalism. While we do some historical work to situate these intellectual traditions, we do not have the space to provide a comprehensive historiography of these fields. Rather, our goal is to lay the groundwork for a theoretical synthesis that generates new insights moving forward.

We first tell brief histories of each stream of social reproduction theory. In doing so, we focus on explicit contributions to social reproduction theory, rather than broadly on any contribution relevant to the reproduction of inequality. Further, given that social reproduction theory has a vast literature, we have had to be selective. We offer these histories as an overview of texts relevant to the similarities and divergences between the two streams, which we examine in the second substantive section. Finally, we propose a way of thinking across these streams. We suggest that an integrated social reproduction framework can: 1) highlight the importance of educational research to the renewed excitement around social reproduction theorizing, and 2) bring key socialist feminist insights to studies of schooling, particularly regarding the social reproductive labor of teaching and learning. Shifting from a focus on the reproduction of capitalist *relations* to the more expansive reproduction of *life* under capitalism, this approach avoids the pitfalls of determinism and attends to students' active participation in the contested labor of social reproduction.

## Social reproduction in education

The idea that schools do not compensate for social problems, but rather perpetuate or exacerbate them, goes back a long time (e.g., Katz 1968; Woodson 1919; Woody 1929). Yet the concept of reproduction as we largely know of it today in educational research has roots in distinct threads associated with activists and scholars from different paradigms and regions. One of the first mentions of the concept comes from Durkheim (2005), whose first appointment was as a scholar of education (Durkheim, Halbwachs, and Dubet 1938). His second major sociological work, *Suicide*, written in 1897, took issue with the notion that schooling can change society. Making such a claim, he wrote

[I]s to ascribe to education a power it lacks. It is only the image and reflection of society. It imitates and reproduces [*reproduit*] the latter in abbreviated form; it does not create it. Education is healthy when peoples themselves are in a healthy state; but it becomes corrupt with them, being unable to modify itself... Education, therefore, can be reformed only if society itself is reformed. To do that, the evil from which it suffers must be attacked at its sources. (Durkheim 2005, 340)

Durkheim uses the term 'reproduction' here to make the basic pitch for social reproduction theory's central claim about education: schools, for the most part, maintain society rather than make it better. There was not a systematic approach to the claim until much later, however.

One thread of SRE was inaugurated by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Passeron (1964/1979) in *The Inheritors*, cut from the fabric of Durkheim's thinking about education. In it, Bourdieu interprets massive changes in the French republic in the 1950s, specifically analyzing inequalities in higher education through a sociological lens. In the book's final chapter, the authors focus on the distribution of cultural benefits through higher education, claiming '[a]mong other functions, the educational system is required to produce individuals who are selected and arranged in a hierarchy' (1964/1979, 68) such that 'the political project of giving everyone equal educational opportunity cannot overcome the real inequalities' (76). While they do not use the term reproduction in this early work, they write that 'the legitimacy authority of the school system can multiply social inequalities' (1964/1979, 72) and would go on to influence later work on education and reproduction (e.g., Calarco 2018; Carter 2003; Reay 1998).

Durkheim inspired others as well: Talcott Parsons, Ballantine, and Spade (1959) took up the functionalist strand of Durkheim's thinking about school, marking the beginning of a consensus-oriented framework for sociology of education. Also drawing from the Durkheimian tradition, but influenced by Marx and Weber, Basil Bernstein (1975) developed a framework for thinking about the reproduction of class status in education through language, or what he called codes.

While neither Bernstein nor Bourdieu takes their direct lead from Marx, the idea of social reproduction was present in Marx's writings on capitalism in the 19th century (1956). It would not be until the middle of the next century that scholars would do close readings of the concept in Marx's oeuvre and then apply it to schooling. This explicitly Marxist thread was initiated by French philosopher Étienne Balibar in his contribution to *Reading Capital* (Althusser 2016). This book, the result of a seminar taught by French philosopher Louis Althusser, featured interpretive essays on specific concepts from Marx's political-economic writings. Balibar develops a reading of social reproduction in Marx as meaning the 'pregnancy of the structure'<sup>2</sup> (Althusser 2016, 424) or 'the general permanence of the conditions of production' (Althusser 2016, 426). Althusser published a groundbreaking excerpt of a longer work entitled 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses' (1971) that centered schooling in the process of social reproduction. Here, he goes so far as to claim '[t]he ultimate condition of production is therefore the reproduction of the conditions of production' (1971, 129). Analyzing a social formation 'from the point of view of reproduction,' Althusser builds on Gramsci's previous distinction between civil society and the state to claim that the latter reproduces the relations of production through ideological state apparatuses. He then states that

the Ideological State Apparatus which has been installed in the *dominant* position in mature capitalist social formations as a result of a violent political and ideological class struggle against the old dominant Ideological State Apparatus [the Church], is the *educational ideological apparatus* (Althusser 1971, 152).

During the same decade Bourdieu and Passeron continued the work Bourdieu had begun on the study of higher education, making broader claims about social reproduction of cultural relations through symbolic violence and the distribution of cultural capital (1990, vii). Althusser's student Roger Establet collaborated with sociologist Christian Baudelot (1972) to write *The Capitalist School in France*, published three years before Bowles and Gintis's *Schooling in Capitalist America*. Establet and Baudelot applied Althusser's idea of

the scholastic apparatus to the contemporary schooling system in France, looking at historical data on enrollments in primary and early education.

These French scholars were largely responding to student-led rebellions sparked by the international antiwar movement. When such rebellions broke out in cities from Paris to Mexico City to Dakar to campuses throughout the United States in 1968, the McCarthy-era Red Scare's freeze on Marxist thinking melted considerably across the Atlantic. American researchers began using Marxist discourse more explicitly when thinking about education. American Historian Michael B. Katz's (1968) Gramscian view of the history of schooling was pathbreaking, and others followed in more disciplines. The sociologist Samuel Bowles (1972) published 'Unequal Education and the Reproduction of the Social Division of Labor' while working with political economist Martin Carnoy. The economist Herbert Gintis, meanwhile, had worked closely with Jencks (1974) on *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America*. This study was the first large-scale report on schooling and inequality in the US since *The Coleman Report* (Coleman et al. 1966) and found that rates of schooling did not correlate with decreases in rates of poverty in communities of color. In 1976 Bowles and Gintis, both members of the Union for Radical Political Economists, would go on to publish *Schooling in Capitalist America* (2011), a landmark study of how schools in the United States reproduce the social inequalities of a capitalist society. Their famous correspondence thesis, which they have defended recently (Bowles and Gintis 2011), laid the groundwork for a second thread of social reproduction theory. This second thread, geographically unique to the United States, is sometimes called neo-marxism (Anyon 2011; Apple 2015).

Bernstein continued to research and write a multivolume work on education, language and society. As Chair of the Department of Sociology of Education at the University of London in England, he brought together scholars interested in leftist and critical social science research about school. Gathering for regular lectures and conferences, students at the nearby Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies interacted with readers of Althusser and Bourdieu to talk about how school maintains inequalities along race, class, and gender lines. Michael Apple, having been active in anticapitalist and antiracist movements while teaching in poor and urban schools in the United States, began studying the relationship between school and social structure. His dissertation focused on the nexus of education and social critique, later published as *Ideology and Curriculum* (1979). These essays caught Bernstein's eye, and Apple was invited to speak at the Institute for Education, where he became a regular fixture in discussions between structuralist Marxists influenced by Althusser and Marxist-feminists like Madeleine Arnot and Rosemary Deem. The latter were part of an adjacent tradition of British feminist sociology of education on schooling and reproduction found in the work of Miriam David (2002), Rosalind Edwards and Pam Alldred (2000), Mary Hughes (1991), and Diane Reay (1991). These discussions included scholars from the Birmingham School, like Paul Willis, who were influenced by British historian E.P. Thompson and cultural theorist Stuart Hall. Henry Giroux then became involved in the same circle. He had read Paulo Freire's work and, through Stanley Aronowitz, was conversant in the threads of social reproduction theory in education. From there Apple, Giroux, and other scholars like Jean Anyon generated correctives to social reproduction theory by articulating the ways culture complicated ruling class attempts to maintain its permanence. Others, like Martin Carnoy and Henry Levin (1985), developed their own contributions to this next stage of the paradigm.

But this tradition of social reproduction theorizing in education was not long for the world. Researchers at the time saw a break with SRE when they read Paul Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labour*.<sup>3</sup> In 1981, Willis distanced himself from social reproduction theory by characterizing his approach as cultural production. Bundling together the threads of SRE, he argued that these theories of social reproduction, 'refer to the *relationship* between the classes (i.e., *not* the classes themselves) which is necessary for the continuance of the capitalist mode of production' (1981, 49). Focusing on this relationship implies a 'simple transmission...of the detailed nature of the classes themselves,' an 'elision' that 'takes no account of the continent of history, struggle, and contestation,' and 'the field of creative collective self-making in the subordinate class' (1981, 49). Willis framed his concept of cultural production in opposition to this apparently abstract and deterministic approach: his was 'creative and active' and rooted in 'the cultural milieu, in material practices and productions, in lives in their historical context in the everyday span of existence and practical consciousness' (1981, 49). Though it had a long history in English youth studies, Willis referred to his paradigm as 'resistance theory,' which he then argued should supplant SRE (McGrew 2011). This new characterization of SRE distinguished between reproduction and resistance, and would survive in intellectual history. Giroux (1983) made a similar move that same year, coining the term 'critical pedagogy' as a resistance paradigm for thinking about education in its social context. By 1995, if we take Morrow and Torres's (1999) extensive survey *Social Theory in Education: A Critique of Theories of Social and Cultural Reproduction* as a bellwether, SRE became an important historical step in educational thinking that continues in Bourdeausian sociology of education (Carter 2003; Calarco 2018) but from which many have moved on.<sup>4</sup>

## Social reproduction feminism

Social reproduction feminism (SRF) is rooted in the history of socialist feminist activism. The SRF framework emerged amid New Left movements of the 1960s and 1970s, as both an intervention and a set of demands. Intellectually, SRF intervened into Marxist theorizing that ignored and naturalized the reproductive processes that are essential to the daily and generational maintenance of the capitalist workforce, yet erased in accounts of capitalism centered on the workplace. Politically, this scholarship and the movements surrounding it shone a light on the undervalued and often unpaid work of sustaining life under capitalism – work that is disproportionately performed by women and people of color. While early SRF theorizing focused primarily on women's domestic labor, the framework later expanded to tackle wide-ranging issues such as neoliberalism, globalization, and migration.

In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx writes, 'Capitalist production produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value, but it also *produces and reproduces the capitalist relation*; on the one side the capitalist, on the other the wage laborer' (1977, 578, italics added). This statement alludes to the interplay of production and reproduction in the ongoingness of capitalism, but leaves the latter unexplained. In the words of Bhattacharya: 'If workers' labor produces all the wealth in society, who then produces the worker?' (2017, 1). Who made sure this worker was cared for, clothed, and fed? Who nurtured them as a child, soothed their wounds, and socialized them into capitalist society? Who staffed their schools as teachers, nurses, janitors, and cafeteria workers? These practices, among many others, make up the labor of social reproduction. One of the central insights of SRF is that social



reproductive labor is both essential to capitalist accumulation and undermined by it; capitalist efforts to maximize profits erode efforts to sustain individuals, families, and communities, both on a day-to-day basis and over generations (Fraser 2017).

Early SRF theorizing focused on the unpaid labor women performed within the home. In 1969, Canadian feminist Margaret Benston published one of the first pieces to theorize women's domestic labor as essential to the reproduction of capitalism. Critiquing the lack of attention to household labor in Marxist political economy, Benston argued that women's oppression was in fact rooted in the capitalist system. 'There is a material basis for women's status; we are not merely discriminated against, we are exploited,' she wrote. 'At present, our unpaid labour in the home is necessary if the entire system is to function' (1969, 11).

In the years that followed, women's unpaid work was the focus of considerable attention by socialist feminist scholars and activists, producing a wave of writing known as the domestic labor debates. In 1972, the International Feminist Collective launched the Wages for Housework campaign, which became a touchstone for feminist analysis of social reproduction. It was in that year that Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James released the famous pamphlet, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, followed three years later by Silvia Federici's (1975) *Wages Against Housework*. These interventions highlighted the role of the housewife as critical to the maintenance of capitalism, and thus critical to anti-capitalist resistance (Malos 1980). Wages for Housework aimed to rectify the injustice of women's unpaid domestic labor, their social isolation in the home, and the cultural ideals of femininity used to justify their subordination. This movement was not about valorizing 'women's work,' but about contesting this notion by challenging the capitalist organization of gendered labor. In *Wages Against Housework*, Federici (1975, 5) states:

We struggle to break capital's plan for women, which is an essential moment of that planned division of labour and social power within the working class, through which capital has been able to maintain its power. Wages for housework, then, is a revolutionary demand not because by itself it destroys capital, but because it attacks capital and forces it to restructure social relations in terms more favourable to us and consequently more favourable to the unity of the class.

Wages for Housework was only one current of socialist feminist theorizing and activism within the broader domestic labor debates. Wally Secombe (1974) challenged Dalla Costa and James's framing of the home as a 'social factory,' and argued that the privatized conditions of domestic labor undermined its revolutionary potential. In *The Anti-social Family*, Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh (1982) developed a socialist feminist analysis centering on the ideological workings of the nuclear family. Despite internal disagreements and divergences in focus, early social reproduction feminists shared the basic insight that unpaid care-work was essential to the reproduction of both the laborer and the capitalist social structure (Beechey 1979), and thus integral to Marxist scholarship and activism.

This early theorizing clearly centered women's domestic labor and oppression, but some feminist scholarship did acknowledge schooling as a site for the reproduction of capitalist relations. Dalla Costa and James' pamphlet included a section on 'The class struggle in education,' which identified 'the school as a centre of ideological discipline and of the shaping of the labour force and its masters' (1972, 29). Similarly, in 'The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism,' Secombe alludes to the role of education in ideological reproduction, but concludes that 'it is the family, and above all the mother that produces willing

participants for the social order' (15). These brief discussions of the ideological function of schooling did not engage with research in education at the time, nor were they cited in the education scholarship that followed.

While the domestic labor debates emphasized the figure of the 'housewife,' many women had been doing paid labor outside the home long before this, particularly women of color. SRF theorizing was challenged and expanded through the contributions and critiques of Black feminists, who drew attention to the unpaid reproductive labor African American women performed during slavery, and the continued pattern of women of color doing social reproductive labor both inside and outside the home – often as domestic workers in white households. Angela Davis's (1981) *Women, Race and Class* made clear that Black women's experiences of gender oppression and economic exploitation could not be understood apart from their experiences of racism. She wrote:

The unorthodox feminine qualities of assertiveness and self-reliance—for which Black women have been frequently praised but more often rebuked—are reflections of their labor and their struggles outside the home. But like their white sisters called 'housewives,' they have cooked and cleaned and have nurtured and reared untold numbers of children. But unlike the white housewives, who learned to lean on their husbands for economic security, Black wives and mothers, usually workers as well, have rarely been offered the time and energy to become experts at domesticity. Like their white working-class sisters, who also carry the double burden of working for a living and servicing husbands and children, Black women have needed relief from this oppressive predicament for a long, long time. (Davis 1981, 231–232)

While not explicitly a work of social reproduction theory, Davis demonstrates how the capitalist relations structuring women's oppression are inseparable from the workings of white supremacy (and includes an entire chapter on Black women's liberation and education). This attention to the systemic interrelation of gender, racial and sexual oppression with economic exploitation was a central insight of the Combahee River Collective (2017), and one that is echoed in work by other Black feminists like Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and Dorothy Roberts (1997).

After the vibrant debates surrounding domestic labor and a materialist analysis of women's oppression, in the 1980s, social reproduction feminist theorizing encountered a series of hurdles. One was the question of how to theorize the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism (Beechey 1979). Some advocated for what came to be known as 'dual systems theory,' theorizing patriarchy as an autonomous system, separate from capitalism (see Hartmann 1979), while others defined the politics of reproduction as a politics of child-bearing (e.g., O'Brien 1983). By contrast, Lise Vogel's (1983) *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* advocated a unified theory of gender oppression as integral to capitalist social relations – a position more commonly advocated by contemporary social reproduction feminists (e.g., Arruzza 2016; Ferguson et al. 2016; McNally 2017). The second significant challenge of this period came from the rise of postmodernism feminisms, shifting focus toward a poststructuralist analysis of discourse and away from a materialist analysis of social reproductive labor. To be sure, SRF theorizing continued during the 1980s and 1990s (e.g., Armstrong and Armstrong 1983; Beechey 1987; Collins and Gimenez 1990; Ferguson 1999; Laslett and Brenner 1989; Luxton 1980; Smith 1989), and some Marxist feminist scholars turned their attention to education (Arnot 1983; David 1980; Deem 1978; Wolpe 1985), but social reproduction feminism lost the considerable momentum of the 1970s scholarship and activism.



With the turn of the millennium, new issues came to the fore, as feminist scholars tackled processes of neoliberalism and globalization (Bezanson and Luxton 2006). In a comparative ethnography of children's lives in Harlem and rural Sudan, geographer Cindi Katz critiqued the rise of 'vagabond capitalism,' in which 'social reproduction gets unhinged from production' (2001, 710), as global capital moves freely in search of cheap labor with no incentive to invest in a local workforce. In 2004, Katz joined feminist geographers Katharyne Mitchell and Sallie Marston to publish a special issue of *Antipode* that was later released as the edited collection *Life's Work: Geographies of Social Reproduction*.

In their introduction, Mitchell, Marston and Katz frame their analysis of 'life's work' as attending to everyday practices of social reproduction, with particular interest in 'the relationship between the production of value 'at work' and the social reproduction of labor-power along with the conditions that enable its deployment' (1). Bridging Marxist and poststructuralist perspectives, these scholars challenge the notion of a rigid binary of production and reproduction, highlighting the blurred boundaries of work and nonwork under neoliberalism, and the existence of waged reproductive labor, such as teaching and childcare. In keeping with the longstanding SRF attention to questions of oppression, Mitchell, Marston and Katz work to illuminate the burden of reproductive labor on marginalized groups, such as women, people of color, and children.

Particularly noteworthy for our purposes here, *Life's Work* begins with a section on 'Education and the Making of the Modern (Trans)national Subject.' Chapters in this section explore schooling as a site of subject formation in relation to the nation, ethnicity, and indigeneity. The book thus represents one of few points of convergence between SRF and education scholarship. Notably, however, the chapters in this collection do not foreground the more traditional SRE emphasis on the reproduction of capitalist relations through schooling.

As SRF has expanded beyond the domestic sphere, it has become a generative framework for theorizing global migration and transnational relations of care (Francisco-Menchavez 2018; Kofman and Raghuram 2015; Parreñas 2015; Pratt 2012; Truong 1996). Canadian scholars Sue Ferguson and David McNally (2015) argue that SRF is crucial to understanding global capitalism, attending to the reproductive labor of migrant workers as a 'disposable' workforce who perform reproductive labor for low wages within the Global North, while *also* performing reproductive labor in their home countries by sending remittances to their families. Thus, racism and imperialism are not merely connected to patriarchal oppression and class exploitation but are central to the formation of gendered capitalist relations.

In multiple works, American political theorist Nancy Fraser (2017) situates the neoliberal 'crisis in social reproduction' in relation to a longer history of the contradictions of social reproduction under capitalism. 'On the one hand, social reproduction is a condition of possibility for sustained capital accumulation,' she writes. 'On the other hand, capitalism's orientation to unlimited accumulation tends to destabilize the very processes of social reproduction on which it relies' (2017, 22). Fraser traces this contradiction across different phases of capitalism, from nineteenth century liberal capitalism and the gendered ideology of 'separate spheres,' to state-managed capitalism of the post-War period, in which government support for social reproduction sought to revive capitalist accumulation (through public goods that were unevenly distributed and relied upon racialized exclusions). Under financialized capitalism, states have disinvested so that social reproductive labor is once again privatized, but commodified by those who can afford it, outsourcing care-work to

low-wage workers, often women of color and migrant workers who perform what Glenn (1992) calls the 'dirty work' of social reproduction (Duffy 2007).

In contrast to the relative decline in popularity of social reproduction theorizing in education, SRF is currently experiencing something of a resurgence. Moving well beyond its roots in understanding women's domestic labor, SRF has blossomed into a popular framework for theorizing wide-ranging issues of environmental justice (Di Chiro 2008; Katz 2011), economic precarity (Meehan and Strauss 2017), sexuality (Sears 2017), queer politics (Andrucki et al. 2017; Hennessy 2006; Lewis 2015) and trans liberation (Gleeson 2017). A 2017 book by Laura Briggs (2017) investigates *How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics*. One of the book's central arguments is that US government actors have manipulated racial hostilities to facilitate the privatization of social reproduction, as seen in the racist imagery of Black mothers used to justify welfare reform. Thus, even as SRF provides a powerful framework for theorizing the reproduction of a capitalist social formation, the political urgency of this critique has been driven by concerns with the oppressive relations that sustain capitalism – those of gender, but also race, imperialism and sexuality. While education is mentioned in the SRF literature, it is usually simply named as one of many sites of social reproduction, listed alongside childcare, health care, and food provision. Much less common is an SRF analysis of schooling, with almost no engagement with what is called 'social reproduction theory' in education.

### ***Reproducing relations or reproducing life?***

Having reviewed the histories of these related but distinct streams of social reproduction theory, we now compare their theoretical precepts. We begin with a few points of similarity, and then chart two central differences: first, between theorizing the reproduction of relations and the reproduction of life, and second, between a focus on reproductive outcomes and reproductive labor.

Although the two streams of social reproduction theory are distant from one another, they draw from similar rivers. Both streams focus on the ongoingness of societies: how social formations maintain continuity over time. Each stream is at least partly Marxist, in that it is informed by Marx's writings and addresses the problematic features of capitalism. Intellectuals and activists in these streams make their critiques by revealing facets of society, whether it be the notion that education is not the 'Great Equalizer' or that capitalism's continuity relies on activities outside the paid workplace.

The streams also share commonalities in their apparent limitations. Both have been criticized for insufficiently theorizing intersecting relations of oppression. Early SRE focused almost exclusively on class, with significantly less attention to the gendered and racialized dimensions of educational inequality (Apple 2015; Bettie 2014; McRobbie 1978), while much early SRF theorizing foregrounded a feminist analysis of capitalism that failed to sufficiently theorize imperialism and white supremacy (Barrett and McIntosh 1982; Ferguson 1999; Glenn 1992). This is not to say that scholars in either stream were dismissive of race, but that early social reproduction theorizing tended to incorporate race as an additive dimension of oppression rather than developing an integrative analysis of how racism operates in the reproduction of capitalism. A second similarity in the streams' limitations relates to the rendering of children. The shift to resistance theory in education was driven largely by a critique of SRE's alleged denial of youth agency; similarly, SRF has been critiqued

for positioning children as passive objects of care, ‘those beings who need to be fed, clothed, cared for, educated and socialized for their *futurity* as waged workers’ (Rosen and Newberry 2018, 120). Tracing the history of these shared criticisms is crucial to building an integrated social reproduction framework.

Despite their apparent similarities, the frameworks differ in their foci. Within education, theories of social reproduction have tended to focus on the reproduction of capitalist *relations*. For example, in Althusser’s understanding of education as an ideological state apparatus, schools reproduce the exploitative relations of the capitalist workplace, and it is through these relations that students are interpellated as future workers. While a different intervention, the reproduction of capitalist relations is also the premise of Bowles and Gintis’s (1976, 131) correspondence theory. In an oft-quoted passage, they write:

The structure of social relations in education not only inures the student to the discipline of the workplace, but develops the types of personal demeanor, modes of self-presentation, self-image, and social class identifications which are the crucial ingredients of job adequacy. Specifically, the social relationships of education—the relationships between administrators and teachers, teachers and students, students and students, and students and their work—replicate the hierarchical divisions of labor.

Both this correspondence theory and Althusser’s theory were later critiqued as overly deterministic and mechanistic – a critique we return to below.

By contrast, social reproduction feminism has tended to focus on the reproduction of *life* under capitalism (Bhattacharya 2019), and the labor this requires. In the words of Ferguson et al, social reproduction ‘encompasses the activities associated with the maintenance and reproduction of people’s lives on a daily and intergenerational basis’ (2016, 27–8). This includes not only the ideological reproduction of capitalist subjects, but also the meeting of basic needs, like food, shelter, and love. Joanna Brenner (1998) refers to these practices as ‘survival strategies’: the everyday ways individuals, families, and communities sustain themselves. Such strategies encompass familial caregiving, but also collective arrangements to meet these needs outside the household—like schooling. So whereas SRE asks how schooling reproduces capitalist relations, SRF asks how the student arrives at school in the first place: the work of feeding, clothing, cleaning, socializing, transporting, etc., necessary for schooling and then work.

Brenner’s concept of survival strategies hints toward a related distinction: while SRE has emphasized the *outcomes* of reproduction (ie., how schooling maintains unequal capitalist relations), SRF has emphasized the *labor* of those doing the reproduction, work that is often undervalued and performed by marginalized members of society. Geographer Nicola Ansell highlights ‘a divergence of interest between feminist scholars who are principally interested in the daily work of reproduction, and in particular ways in which this is gendered, and those concerned with education who are more interested in processes of generational change and continuity’ (2008, 803). While SRF has historically centered the daily reproductive labor of familial care-work, SRE has tended to foreground the reproduction of a new generation of workers. In *Life’s Work*, Mitchell, Marston and Katz (2004) critique Althusser’s account of social reproduction for what they see as a lack of attention to the embodied labor of reproduction as a social practice—what Katz calls the ‘messy, fleshy’ material components of everyday life (2001, 711). Historically, this insight was crucial to make visible women’s unpaid domestic labor; more recently, this attention to the labor of social reproduction has

yielded insights regarding the role of migrant workers in sustaining global capitalism, whether through childcare, cleaning, farming or food services.

In what follows, we delve further into these differences to lay the groundwork for an integrated framework that centers a feminist analysis of reproductive labor within studies of education.

### ***Towards an integrated framework: Schooling and reproductive labor***

Both streams examine how capitalism is reproduced. SRF tells us that this reproduction requires work and makes visible the reproductive labor that is so often discounted – work that is integral to reproducing not only capitalist relations but life more broadly. How might this more expansive analysis of reproductive labor deepen understandings of social reproduction in education?

The two differences outlined above – between a focus on the *outcome* of reproducing *relations*, and the *labor* of reproducing *life* – have meaningful implications, particularly when it comes to theorizing anticapitalist struggles and possibilities for social change. SRE's critics have argued that a narrow conception of education as reproducing capitalist relations renders schooling a black box in which students enter and are later churned out as workers (Apple 1982). While we might take issue with this simplified rendering of the framework, SRF's more expansive emphasis on the reproduction of life makes clear that even as reproductive labor is integral to reproducing capitalism, it is never *only* that. As Ferguson writes, 'households are not merely units geared toward feeding the capitalist system with labor. And by extension, women are not mere breeding machines, spitting out future laborers for capitalists to exploit' (1999, 6). We want to suggest that the same can be said about schools and the people who labor within them. Reproductive labor is necessary to producing and maintaining a workforce, but the work of caregiving cannot be entirely reduced to the functioning of capitalism. Nor can the work of teaching and learning. Capitalism sets the terrain for these practices, but does not exert total control over the labor of life-making.

This distinction is noteworthy, as it was critiques of determinism that contributed to SRE's decline as a framework. Willis's concept of cultural production and later work in what came to be known as resistance theory emphasized that educational relations are contested, rendering schooling a site of struggle and contradiction. While the standard account of this distinction has been contested historiographically (McGrew 2011; Gottesman 2016; Backer 2017), a feminist analysis of reproductive labor contests this distinction theoretically, highlighting contradictions *within* processes of social reproduction. From an SRF perspective, a tension exists at the site of reproductive practices, as these practices are the agentic rituals that make up life as we know it. As Ferguson and colleagues write: 'at the heart of social-reproduction feminism is the conception of labour as broadly productive—creative not just of economic values, but of society (and thus of life) itself' (2016, 48). Far from mechanistic or programmatic choices, the way people care, teach, love, and learn are the result of specific, situated experiences. Simultaneously, social reproduction feminism understands that these practices reproduce capitalist social relations. Without these life-making practices, capitalist social formations have no way of continuing. Thus, one of the key insights in social reproduction feminism is that reproductive labor is also a site of struggle against capitalism. Precisely because reproduction is the 'key to the key' of capitalist economies (Ronen and Backer 2018), SRF has pointed to the historical power and current necessity of reproductive

struggle to interrupting the capitalist organization of life. This understanding of social reproduction as a site of struggle has much to offer studies of education.

The tension between reproduction and agency has been a productive one at the heart of social reproduction feminism, as it animates the interventions feminists make when thinking about care-work and capitalism. We suggest that the same should be true in education. A dichotomy of reproduction and resistance does little to advance understandings of education in a capitalist context. We point towards a continuation of the SRE tradition through the SRF paradigm — an integrated social reproduction framework where the old dichotomies of reproduction-resistance and structure-agency are seen as constitutive tensions. We believe a more integrated focus on the reproduction of life *and* relations can bring new insights to educational research, linking the daily labor of caregiving with the reproduction of social structure.

Importantly, we understand such labor to be performed not only by teachers, administrators, school nurses, and bus drivers, but also by students. An integrated social reproduction framework must take seriously calls by feminist scholars of childhood to challenge understandings of children as ‘little more than the *objects* of social reproduction’ (Rosen and Newberry 2018, 120). If, as Ferguson insists, children participate in their making as capitalist subjects, then studies of schooling provide a rich site for grappling with the ‘specificities of children’s labor,’ understood as ‘the practical human activity... children engage in to transform their own worlds and selves’ (Ferguson 2017, 114). As Malcom Harris (2017) shows in *Kids These Days*, young people in the USA are encouraged to do ever more work on themselves, with the goal of becoming the kind of person who can succeed in an increasingly stratified and uncertain world. Newberry and Rosen (2020) argue that children’s reproductive labor is obscured through a process of ‘scholarization,’ whereby work is classified as learning, even as the rhetoric of ‘human capital’ characterizes such learning in terms of its future value. Young people have made strategic use of this logic in organizing school strikes. Whether it’s schoolboys striking against harsh disciplinary measures in 1911 England (Marson 1974), high school students walking out in protest of gun violence (Yee and Blinder 2018), or Greta Thunberg and the Sunrise Movement refusing to attend school amidst a climate crisis, these strikes feature students refusing to do reproductive labor. Young children also participate in political actions alongside caregivers, as seen in English and Campbell (2020) account of the 2019 International Women’s Day event, ‘My Mum Is On Strike.’ An integrated framework orients us towards these strikes as part of the struggle over reproduction.

By embedding an analysis of schooling within a broader understanding of reproducing life, an integrated framework also draws attention to the interconnections across different institutions that organize reproductive labor, such as school and family. These interconnections are visible in *Class War: The Privatization of Childhood*, by writer and educator Megan Erickson (2015). Though the book is not a work of social reproduction theory, Erickson draws links between the reproductive labor of mothers and teachers. ‘Neoliberalism, a political philosophy that prioritizes ‘freeing’ markets from regulation and privatizing public services, has transformed the social role of the child and caregiver,’ she writes. ‘Instead of liberating mothers and teachers, it has further strapped them with the obligation to compensate for the state’s failure to provide basic public services and blaming them when—due to structural reasons—they can’t’ (2015, 179). As care-workers, Erickson argues, teachers are deemed responsible for children’s outcomes and futures. Yet, because schools reproduce

the relations of capitalist society, individual teachers have limited ability to effect real change in children's lives. Viewed through an integrated social reproduction framework, we might read Erickson to be saying that teachers' and students' reproductive *labor* —labor that is essential to the reproduction of life, including young people's learning, growth, and possible futures—is undermined by their institutionally structured participation in the reproduction of capitalist *relations*. This tension speaks to a core contradiction identified by SRF scholars: that the very work of surviving capitalism feeds the system itself.

An integrative social reproduction framework can also expand the analytic lens to consider the reproductive work teachers perform beyond the classroom. Drawing on research in the predominantly Black and Latinx city of Camden, New Jersey, Keith Benson (2017) documents how local activists call upon teachers to support community struggles. Many of these struggles center reproductive labor, such as nourishing students who are hungry, caring for those who have experienced trauma, and fighting for the clean water they need to thrive. While Benson's piece is framed as an appeal to urban educators to act as social justice advocates, it might also be read as an account of the political stakes of teachers' reproductive labor. In this reading, the labor of teaching is not only about reproducing capitalist relations in the classroom (as some interpretations of SRE might suggest), but also part of surviving and contesting capitalist injustices.

An integrated framework also opens up possibilities for forging solidarities, in keeping with the SRF insight that because reproductive labor is essential capitalism, it is also a terrain of anti-capitalist struggle. Consider the 2018 wave of teachers' strikes across the US. Visiting picket lines in Arizona, Bhattacharya (2018) spoke with one teacher who repeated the common refrain that 'our working conditions are our students' learning conditions.' Teachers were not the only ones advancing the strike's social reproductive agenda. In a *Jacobin* interview (Blanc 2018), Charleston teacher and activist Jay O'Neal draws attention to the political contributions of school personnel who joined teachers in the action: 'This time all school employees are on board,' he explained. 'Bus drivers are a real linchpin of the strike. So are the cooks. We live in a high-poverty state, and a lot of our students really depend on the free lunches provided at school. So with all the personnel on board, we're a lot stronger.' Thus, by *withholding* the reproductive labor of transportation and food provision, these service personnel strengthened the impact of the teachers' action. At the same time, teachers worked collectively to make sure students were fed during the strike, coordinating with churches and food banks to ensure children had access to the nourishment they needed.

To offer a final example from the city where we both live, in Philadelphia, students, teachers, and community members have organized to demand action to address the problem of 'toxic schools' – aging buildings filled with lead paint, asbestos, and other hazards. This environmental health crisis is also a crisis of social reproduction, in that it threatens the conditions for sustaining life. At the same time, toxic school conditions contribute to the reproduction of inequality, as they disproportionately affect Black and Brown students in Philadelphia's poorest communities. In response to this issue, teachers, students, and community allies have collectively organized to challenge inequitable funding policies that benefit corporations and developers at the expense of public schools. These struggles are waged through the terrain of social reproduction in response to the exploitative relations that threaten everyday practices of life-making. While charges of determinism have long plagued SRE, an integrated approach to social reproduction can



illuminate, rather than obscure, an analysis of social struggle in the reproduction of capitalism.

### ***Towards an integrated social reproduction framework***

Social reproduction in education is part of a larger project of understanding the social reproduction of capitalism. Though SRE has not been a feminist project, historically, we propose to bring socialist feminist insights to this realm of educational research. At the heart of this integration is a feminist analysis of reproductive labor in its contradictory relationship to capitalism, alongside a careful attention to the field of education and the social relations of schooling. SRF's attention to not only the reproduction of capitalist relations, but of *life* more broadly, allows for a more expansive analysis of reproductive labor in schools – one that attends to students' active participation in these practices and avoids the determinism of earlier versions. By bringing such feminist insights to SRE, education scholarship can contribute to the contemporary resurgence of social reproduction theory, foregrounding the important place of schooling in these conversations.

An integrated social reproduction framework must also learn from past critiques. The framework we envision understands racialization to be integral to the reproduction of capitalism, rather than simply adding race into an analysis of gender and class (Arruzza 2016). This framework also views children and youth as active in the contested relations of social reproduction (Ferguson 2017; Cairns 2018; Rosen and Newberry 2018), not simply as objects of care or passive cogs in the wheels of social structure. As an avenue for further research, we propose to look at the labor of both teaching and learning through this integrated social reproduction framework.

While SRE has illuminated the reproduction of capitalist relations in educational institutions, it has lacked the feminist analysis of reproductive labor that is at the heart of SRF. We suggest that this dominant focus on the *outcome* of reproduction (in the form of future workers), and near-elision of the everyday *labor* of reproduction, contributed to the decline of reproductive frameworks in education, as scholars sought more explicit attention to the daily practices and struggles through which social formations are (re)made. The renewed excitement surrounding social reproduction theory offers an opportunity to revive and sharpen the insights of this somewhat forgotten framework. This essay presents a first step toward building an integrated social reproduction framework, making intellectual resources of each stream available to the other and thereby generating new avenues for thinking about schooling's relationship to capitalism.

### **Notes**

1. Because both of these traditions use the term Social Reproduction Theory, in this paper we use the terms "Social Reproduction Feminism" (SRF) and "Social Reproduction in Education" (SRE) to distinguish between them.
2. The socialist feminist Michele Barrett took Balibar to task here for using biological reproduction, particularly gestation, as an unexplored metaphor for the social reproduction of relations (cf. Barrett (1980). *Women's Oppression Today: The Marxist/Feminist Encounter*, Verso, 23).
3. Though we know from McGrew (2011) that this story is much more complicated than it appears.

4. We should note that there are new readings of Althusser (Backer 2017; Lewis 2017) and what Morrow recently called a “recent revival of Pierre Bourdieu’s non-Marxist reflexive sociology and theory of cultural and educational reproduction” (2014, 706).

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