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# From the Margins to the Mainstream

## The Curious Convergence of Pierre Bourdieu and US Sociology

by Jane Zavisca *and* Jeffrey J. Sallaz

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### Introduction

The late French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is a prominent figure in the field of sociology in the United States today. Practically all of his major empirical monographs have been translated into English. His writings are regularly cited in articles appearing in the discipline's main journals. Several books about his life and work have been published by major American university presses. And, perhaps most tellingly, many of his major concepts have entered the general sociological lexicon in the United States. One need not be a specialist in culture or education to understand the significance of "cultural capital" for reproducing inequality across generations. No longer a philosophical or social psychological oddity, the idea of the "habitus" informs research across a variety of subfields. And few are the sociologists in the US today who are not familiar with Bourdieu's use of the "field" concept to describe various meso-social orders.

The extent to which the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu have been integrated into and become integral to the practice of sociology in the US today can be considered surprising for a number of reasons. His work is highly theoretical and integrates ideas from a variety of fields; while US sociology has long been characterized as an empirical and relatively insular discipline [Ross 1991; Gulbenkian Commission 1996]. Indeed, US sociology has proved relatively impermeable to several other Francophonic traditions (the early canonization of Émile Durkheim notwithstanding), for the most

part passing over the work of scholars such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Bruno Latour, and Alain Touraine. US sociologists' aversion to the French tradition should seemingly have been exacerbated by Bourdieu's notoriously opaque writing style [Wacquant 1993; Simeoni 2000; Swartz 1997; Lane 2000]. Nonetheless, as our quantitative study below will show, Bourdieu has moved from the margins to the mainstream of US sociology.

Bourdieu's own theory offers several clues for understanding this seemingly surprising case. First, and as we demonstrate below, the current interest in Bourdieu's theory is neither a recent fad nor a short-lived homage following his 2002 passing. Rather, it represents the culmination of a long and steady diffusion of his ideas into American sociology. As such, it can be analyzed as a particular sort of social process: the movement of a research program (i.e., a set of methods, concepts and tools for gathering and analyzing data) from one academic field to another.

Second, we would expect that Bourdieu's program has not been seamlessly "picked up" (in France) and "placed down" (in the US). Theories and methods are not like DNA. They are not automatically replicated from case to case; nor are mutations in the transcription process random. Instead they diffuse via what Bourdieu labeled a "field effect" (i.e., the idea that exogenous forces will affect a field only after first being "refracted" through the structuring principles of the field itself). We would therefore expect that the way in which Bourdieu's program has been received here has been a function of pre-existing assumptions, standards and practices in the field of US sociology. In fact, we will show that American scholars have not simply been passive receptors. They have adopted many of Bourdieu's central ideas, but they have also sought to extend and develop them by bringing them into dialogue with extant research traditions in the United States.

Third, the field of US sociology exhibits a central characteristic of all fields: formal stratification and ongoing conflict. Rather than a homogenous world of mechanical solidarity, it is crisscrossed with fissures and fault lines. As documented by Bourdieu in *Homo Academicus* [Bourdieu 1989] – his masterly study of the field of the faculties in France – academics no less than any other professionals compete among themselves to monopolize various powers. It follows that any given individual or institution within US sociology can be shown to possess definitive quantities of social capital (i.e., ties to other powerful groups within the field of power), scientific capital (status and recognition vis-à-vis one's colleagues), economic capital (access to various financial streams) and other relevant resources. Conflict too typically characterizes the relation between academic "generations," with incumbent versus upstart sociologists struggling over the proper principles of succession.

The data we present in this short paper do not permit a thorough mapping of the US academic field (indeed, no such study on par with the scale and scope of *Homo Academicus* has even been attempted). But they do paint a broad picture of the manner in which Bourdieu's concepts have entered the field in different ways and at different points in time. In addition, they allow us to speculate as to how Bourdieu came to be embraced by so many different actors within the field. In what follows we first provide a brief overview of two trajectories: that of the field of US sociology and that of Bourdieu himself. We here describe the main concepts constitutive of Bourdieu's research program as well as the manner in which these ideas have been appropriated in the United States. Second, we provide primary data that show precisely how Bourdieu's ideas have been "put to use" in research published in major American sociology journals since 1980, through a quantitative content analysis. Third, we offer detailed case studies of Bourdieu's diffusion into two specific subfields: the sociology of culture and political sociology (we chose these subfields mainly because of our own expertise). Finally, we conclude by discussing current trends and the future potential for a Bourdieuan sociology in the US.

### **Convergent Trajectories: US Sociology and Pierre Bourdieu**

The meshing of Pierre Bourdieu and US sociology would have been hard to predict a half century or so ago. A young Bourdieu was intensely studying the history of continental philosophy, only to be pulled into the violent politics surrounding the Algerian struggle for liberation from colonial rule. Sociology in the United States, in contrast, was deceptively placid. The decades following the end of the second world war had ushered in for the nation as a whole an "age of affluence," and sociology seemed content to document the seamless integration of the country's various parts. The years to come, however, would see the two – US sociology and Pierre Bourdieu – travel convergent trajectories. In this section we describe these two paths.

American sociology in the 1950s and 1960s was for the most part dominated by the structural functionalist paradigm developed and elaborated by Talcott Parsons at Harvard University. Had this paradigm remained dominant, it is hard to see how Bourdieu's work could have gained a foothold in the field. Parsons' theory emphasized integration and harmony, Bourdieu's conflict and struggle; Parsons looked only at the formal characteristics of the social structure as a whole, Bourdieu harshly criticized such structuralist thinking; Parsons eschewed empirical research in favor of theoretical abstractions, Bourdieu repeatedly demanded that sociologists "get their hands dirty" by collecting their own data.

But the dynamics of power within the field of US sociology changed dramatically during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Much as occurred in the French academy, there was an insurgency from below led by the younger generations. As famously described by Alvin Gouldner, growing hostility towards the ruling functionalist paradigm generated a “crisis of Western sociology.” Graduate students and assistant professors formed linkages with the anti-Vietnam movement, civil rights groups and trade unions. They in turn formed new disciplinary sections such as Marxist sociology, the sociology of race, and the sociology of sex/gender. The era witnessed as well a blossoming of new methodologies, such as the unabashedly micro-oriented ethnomethodology of Harold Garfinkel at UCLA and the Freudian-inspired feminist interviewing of Nancy Chodorow at UC Berkeley.

This was the environment in which Bourdieu’s work first started to appear in English. No longer dominated by a single hegemonic paradigm, the field of US sociology by the early 1980s was characterized by a multiplicity of subfields, each seeking to establish its legitimacy and to attract adherents. (Indeed, this diversity of perspectives continues to characterize the field today.) Bourdieu’s theory – regardless of its intrinsic merits – has been attractive to many of these new subfields. For instance, a new generation of ethnographers – many dissatisfied with the lack of attention to political forces characteristic of the symbolic interactionist tradition – have latched upon Bourdieu’s call to examine “the logic of practice.” Economic sociologists, meanwhile, have drawn upon his notion of field to criticize the individualistic and rationalist bent of mainstream economic theories. And as Marxism has fallen out of favor in recent years, critical sociologists have migrated to Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic violence in order to depict the workings of various forms of power.

In light of these changes in the field of US sociology, let us explore further Bourdieu’s own biographical and intellectual trajectory. The son of a rural postman, Bourdieu became the most prominent sociologist in France, and at the time of his death, a global public intellectual. This unusual trajectory, we argue, sensitized him to both the power of social structures to reproduce themselves, and the possibility for social change [Wacquant 2002]. Following graduate work in philosophy, Bourdieu was drafted into the French army during the Algerian War for Independence of the late 1950s. There he conducted his first major study, on the Kabyle people’s experience of colonization [Bourdieu 1962; Bourdieu 1979]. The most important work to emerge from this study is *Outline of a Theory of Practice* [Bourdieu 1977] – later revised and expanded in the book *The Logic of Practice* [Bourdieu 1990] – in which he develops his theory of social structure and social action. Moving from philosophy through anthropology to sociology, Bourdieu continued to develop his conceptual system through sustained empirical research on a wide range of topics.

Upon returning from Algeria, he turned his attention to the role of education in the reproduction of inequality in France [Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1988]. This interest in social inequality next led him to study cultural production and consumption [Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu 1993; Bourdieu 1996]. In later work, Bourdieu developed his theory of the state through studies of language [Bourdieu 1991], elite schools [Bourdieu 1998], and housing markets [Bourdieu 2005].

Bourdieu sought to bridge the deep philosophical divide between the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss and the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre. Structuralism establishes “objective regularities independent of individual consciousness and wills,” privileging scientists’ formal models of social relations over agents’ commonsense understandings of the world [Bourdieu 1990, 26]. Phenomenology, by contrast, equates agents’ representations of the world with reality itself, without analyzing the conditions of possibility of subjective experience [*ibidem*, 25]. Neither perspective takes into account the scientist’s own relationship to the social world and the attendant effects on the production of knowledge. The novelty of Bourdieu’s theory lies in the synthesis of the objectivist and subjectivist epistemologies underpinning these two traditions. Social structures inculcate in individuals mental structures, which in turn reproduce or (under certain conditions) change social structures [Bourdieu 1988, 27; Bourdieu 1989, 15; Bourdieu 1991, 135-136]. Furthermore, Bourdieu assembled a set of concepts to describe these processes: *capital*, *field*, *habitus*, and *symbolic power*.

We will describe how these key concepts are generally understood by US sociologists today. The various species of capital are thought of as resources that provide different forms of power. *Economic* capital consists of not just monetary income, but accumulated wealth and ownership of productive assets. To possess *cultural* capital is to demonstrate competence in some socially valued area of practice. Bourdieu speaks of three sub-species of cultural capital: an embodied disposition that expresses itself in tastes and practices (an *incorporated* form); formal certification by educational institutions of skills and knowledge (an *institutional* form); and possession of esteemed cultural goods (an *objectified* form). *Social* capital consists of durable networks of relationships through which individuals can mobilize power and resources [Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 119]. Any form of capital can serve as *symbolic* capital if people recognize its unequal distribution as legitimate [Bourdieu 1991, 118].

In American sociology, the forms of capital are usually operationalized and analyzed as individual-level variables. Bourdieu however was critical of variable-oriented analysis, in particular regression approaches that try to separate the effects of independent variables [Bourdieu 1984, 105-106]. For while people may vary in the overall

volume and composition of the capitals which they possess [Bourdieu 1985, 231], it is insufficient to study social space as an aggregate of individuals and their capital holdings. This is because the power that capital provides depends on the structure of the *field* within which it is activated.

American sociologists view a field as a meso-level concept denoting the local social world in which actors are embedded and towards which they orient their actions. In his review of field theory, University of Chicago sociologist John Levi Martin delineated three senses of the concept of field – a topological space of positions, a field of relational forces, and a battlefield of contestation. All three senses are present in Bourdieu’s writings, Martin argued [2003, 28-30], but the sense of contest is most significant, as exemplified by Bourdieu’s frequent use of a game metaphor. Like a game, a field has rules for how to play, stakes or forms of value (i.e. capital), and strategies for playing the game. In the process of playing, participants become invested in and absorbed by the game itself [Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 98-100].<sup>1</sup> Yet the most important game in any field is establishing the rules, to define “the legitimate principles of the field” [Bourdieu 1991, 242]. This Bourdieu considers *symbolic power*: the capacity of dominant groups to impose “the definition of the social world that is best suited to their interests” [*ibidem*, 167].

A major tenet of field theory, emphasized by Bourdieu and taken seriously by US sociologists, is that fields can be identified by what is at stake within them: “In empirical work, it is one and the same thing to determine what the field is, where its limits lie and to determine what species of capital are active in it” [Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 98-99; see Bourdieu 1989, 132-133]. The “fundamental species of capital” (economic, cultural, and social) tend to operate in all fields, while specialized forms exist which have value only within a particular field – for example scientific capital within the academic field [Bourdieu 1991, 124-125]. The concept of field has also provided us entrée into Bourdieu’s theory of history: pre-modern societies did not have fields per se, as all action occurred in a single social space, whereas modern societies are characterized by a proliferation of fields. The relations among differentiated fields are governed by the modern state, characterized by Bourdieu as the possessor of a meta-capital through which are established rules and hierarchies of value across fields. It is, in Bourdieu’s famous extension of Weber’s formulation, the “holder of the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence” [Bourdieu 1989, 22].

<sup>1</sup> For applications of the game metaphor in Bourdieu’s sociology, see the analysis of the field of power as a “gaming space” in *The State Nobility* [Bourdieu 1998, 264-278], and the explication of the relationship between habitus and field as a “feel for the game” in *The Logic of Practice* [Bourdieu 1990, 66-69].

To theorize the relationship between structure and agent, Bourdieu introduced the concept of *habitus*, a system of “durable, transposable dispositions” [Bourdieu 1991, 53]. Of all of Bourdieu’s ideas, this one has perhaps proved the hardest for scholars in US sociology to grasp. We offer what we think to be its three essential characteristics. First, as a disposition, habitus is less a set of conscious strategies and preferences, than an embodied sense of the world and one’s place within it – a tacit “feel for the game” [Bourdieu 1984, 114; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 128-129, 135]. Second, because it is internalized in individuals through early socialization in the family or primary group, habitus is durable (though never immutable). Third, habitus is transposable, in that people carry their dispositions with them as they enter new settings.

Bourdieu’s work has been frequently criticized in the US on two grounds: for being too static and for being too specific to French society [e.g. Alexander 1995; Gartman 1991; Griswold 1998]. According to the stasis critique, the interlocking concepts of field, capital and habitus depict an airtight system in which structures produce individuals who in turn reproduce structures. While Bourdieu did document a great deal of reproduction of inequality in his empirical work, he also argued that his theory can account for change. Mental structures and social structures rarely correspond perfectly, especially during periods of rapid change. Under such circumstances, like those observed by Bourdieu in revolutionary Algeria, a “displacement” of the habitus occurs: the everyday world is now problematic. This in turn may open “space for symbolic strategies aimed at exploiting the discrepancies between the nominal and the real” [Bourdieu 1984, 481. Even relatively stable fields can be destabilized by exposing the symbolic violence supporting existing power relations – for Bourdieu, this is a central task of sociological inquiry.

What of the criticism that Bourdieu is “too French”? Early critiques of Bourdieu argued that he attempted to universalize the particularities of French society, and that his empirical findings could not be generalized to America. However, scholars are increasingly adopting a relativist rather than substantivist view of his theory. Bourdieu himself did not expect that his empirical findings on France could be directly reproduced elsewhere; he merely identified underlying structures whose contents could differ cross-nationally.

Those who dismiss my analyses on account of their “Frenchness” (every time I visit the United States, there is somebody to tell me that “in the mass culture of America, taste does not differentiate between class positions”) fail to see that what is truly important in them is not so much the substantive results as the process through which they are obtained. “Theories” are research programs that call not for “theoretical debate” but for a practical utilization Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 77].



## Quantitative Evidence on Bourdieu's Influence

To see precisely how Bourdieu's research program has been "utilized practically" in American sociology since 1980, we indexed its influence upon empirical research published in major journals. We compiled a database of all articles published between 1980 and 2004 in the following sociology journals: the *American Journal of Sociology* (AJS), the *American Sociological Review* (ASR), *Social Forces* (SF), and *Social Problems* (SP). We chose these journals precisely because they are the four most influential in the field (as determined by the impact scores computed by the Social Science Citation Index). They thus constitute a barometer for measuring Bourdieu's influence among those possessing the greatest amount of scientific capital in the field.

From this database of 4040 articles we extracted all of those which cited Bourdieu at least once, generating a total of 235 articles (5.8% of all articles published in the period).<sup>2</sup> We subsequently analyzed and coded them so as to track the following: the general diffusion of Bourdieu's ideas and concepts into the field over this time period, the level of engagement with Bourdieu by scholars, as well as trends in the main concepts used and specific works cited.

Our first and most important substantive finding is that articles in the field of US sociology are increasingly citing Bourdieu. While only two percent of articles in the field did so in the 1980-1984 period, eleven percent did so during the 2000-2004 period – a five-fold increase over the past several decades. In addition, we find that US scholars are using Bourdieu in a variety of ways in these journal articles. About half of all the articles we collected cite Bourdieu *ceremoniously* – that is, they mention him but briefly (typically only once, rarely in the text itself, and often in a string of related citations) and without any significant elucidation of his theory or work. Some may interpret such citations as facile, as demonstrating only that the author is unwilling (or unable) to fully engage with Bourdieu. Our own reading of these articles, however, has led us to conclude that many of Bourdieu's core concepts have become so taken-for-granted within the sociological lexicon that they now serve as building blocks for larger arguments, and so no longer need to be elaborated upon in the context of a journal article. Ceremonial citations, in sum, signal awareness of the general significance of Bourdieu's research program, even if that program is not essential to the study's sociological contribution.

<sup>2</sup> Some of these articles were authored by scholars who might not identify as "American sociologists" (e.g., economists, or sociologists based outside the US). We nevertheless included them in the final sample insofar as articles published in these four journals are generally written for and read by scholars situated in the field of US sociology.

On the other hand are articles that initiate and sustain a serious dialogue with Bourdieu's theory; these we label *paradigmatic* citations. Such articles derive their central research questions and/or hypotheses from Bourdieu's theory. A good example would be the article "Forms of Capital and Social Structure in Cultural Fields: Examining Bourdieu's Social Topography" [Anheier *et al.* 1995]. As signaled by both the title and the first sentence of the abstract – "This article tests one key assumption of Bourdieu's theory of culture fields" – this article is centered entirely upon a prolonged dialogue with Bourdieu. Like ceremonial citations, the absolute number of paradigmatic citations has increased greatly over the past several decades.

Having documented Bourdieu's general incorporation into the US sociology canon, we next sought to discern the existence of possible "field effects". We wanted to see, that is, whether Bourdieu's ideas and concepts were simply replicated in the US, or if they were mutated in some way as US scholars creatively adopted them for their own purposes. We found it helpful here to use the distinction made by Imre Lakatos [1978] between degenerative and progressive research programs. Research within a degenerative program seeks merely to confirm existing knowledge. It eschews novel findings and is content to work within the program, so speak. In contrast, research within a progressive program aggressively applies existing concepts to new empirical areas. It will problematize and re-shape taken-for-granted knowledge.

A developed and autonomous field of scientific knowledge, we argue, would likely use Bourdieu's work progressively. In fact, of the 49 articles in our study which comprehensively engage Bourdieu, 25 (51%) explicitly attempt to extend Bourdieu's research program. A good example of this type of project is Bonnie Erickson's article "Class, Culture and Connections" [Erikson 1996]. In it she applies Bourdieu's two-dimensional schema of social spaces (accounting for the distribution of economic and cultural capitals) to the organization of a private security industry. Contra Bourdieu's well-known findings reported in *Distinction* on the importance of high-culture knowledge, Erickson discovers that the breadth of one's cultural knowledge along with one's networks are responsible for intra-firm patterns of hierarchy. These results, she claims, allow us to expand and modify Bourdieu's theory, by specifying the different sorts of capital which might structure a field [*ibidem*, 247].

Our final set of questions asked which of Bourdieu's concepts have been adopted by scholars in the field of US sociology. For each article in the database, we coded which, if any, of Bourdieu's four primary concepts (capital, field, habitus, symbolic power) was most central to the analysis. We find that *capital* is and has been the most popular concept in US sociology. It was cited by 45 percent of all articles in our analysis, and in each period it prevailed over the second most frequently cited concept by at least a three-to-one ratio. Capital's popularity among researchers, however,

seems to have been in decline over the past ten years, dropping from a high of 55 percent of cites in the 1990-1994 period to just 32 percent in the 2000-2004 period. The same holds for habitus, which was the second most frequently used concept from 1980 to 1994, but whose use has since declined. The field concept, in contrast, has slowly worked its way into American sociology. While it was cited only rarely in the first 15 years of our study, it now is cited in about 10 percent of articles.

Considering the importance of the capital concept to research published in US sociology journals, we investigated further which species of capital was the primary focus of these articles. Overall, 74 percent of these articles centered upon cultural capital and 18 percent on social capital. There appears however to be an ongoing dramatic shift in the relative popularity of these two capitals. In 1980-1984, 86 percent of articles that employed capital as the core concept concentrated on cultural capital (undoubtedly reflecting the popularity at this time of Bourdieu's work on education, buoyed later by the popularity of *Distinction*), while none focused on social capital. By 2000-2004, cultural capital's share had declined to 46 percent, while social capital's had risen to 42 percent. This trend can likely be accounted for by the increasing interest in social capital across several subfields: social network analysis, race and immigration, as well as political sociology.

### **Bourdieu in Cultural and Political Sociology**

Our quantitative analysis suggested that Bourdieu entered the field of US sociology in line with what can be termed a field effect – that is, his ideas have been creatively reinterpreted and used to generate new empirical research projects, all in line with the tenets of a progressive research program. Our argument can be evaluated in more detail via case studies of how Bourdieu has been deployed within specific subfields. In previous work, we demonstrate the potential of Bourdieu to constitute a research program by reviewing four influential books within the fields of political, economic, cultural, and urban sociology [Sallaz and Zavisca 2007]. Here, we examine engagements with Bourdieu in recent articles in American sociology journals by scholars working within the subfields of cultural and political sociology. We choose these subfields both because they have been the locus of a lot of attention to Bourdieu within American sociology, and also because they are the primary areas of our own interest and expertise. No doubt Bourdieu has the potential to inspire research programs within other subfields as well [e.g. see Benson 1999 and Couldry 2003 on media studies; Lareau and Weininger 2003 on the sociology of education; and Emirbayer and Johnson 2008 on organizations].

### *Studies of Omnivorous Taste in Cultural Sociology*

Distinction has been Bourdieu's most influential work in US sociology, according to our citation analysis. This engagement is evident in the literature on "cultural omnivorism," a taste for cultural goods that spans across boundaries of high and popular culture. Several new publications have appeared in major American journals in the last few years, part of a transatlantic dialogue that has been especially vigorous in the Dutch journal *Poetics*. A shift from highbrow toward omnivorous consumption of cultural goods among high status groups was first noticed by American researchers in the late 1980s and early 1990s [DiMaggio 1987; Peterson 1992; Peterson and Kern 1996]. Omnivorous tastes and practices have since been observed in various countries, from the Netherlands to Spain to Russia [Van Eijck 2001; Sintas and Alvarez 2002; Zavisca 2005].

Why has there been so much interest in this phenomenon within US sociology? Omnivorism contrasts with Bourdieu's finding in France of polarized tastes, with the upper classes preferring highbrow genres and disliking lowbrow genres, and the opposite pattern for lower classes [although omnivorism has since identified in France: see Coulangeon and Lemel 2007]. This apparent democratization of taste seems to signal a weakening of class boundaries, leading some to assert that Bourdieu overstated the relationship between culture and inequality. Most recent work, however, acknowledges that omnivorism does not in itself disconfirm Bourdieu's general theory of taste. Bourdieu posited the existence of a "pure aesthetic," which finds beauty or interest in everyday objects as well as fine arts, observed among those richest in cultural capital [Lizardo 2008]. His chief theoretical contribution was not the correspondence between high and low taste and class position per se (which he never claimed would generalize beyond France), but his understanding of how differentiated tastes demarcate class boundaries while at the same time making inequality appear natural.<sup>3</sup> Cultural capital inheres in any competence that is unequally distributed, and is not restricted to "high" culture such as fine arts, a common mistake among American adopters of the concept [Lareau and Weininger 2003]. To the extent that ease across a variety of cultural contexts brings social advantage, omnivorism constitutes cultural capital.

A recent article by Omar Lizardo, a sociologist at Notre Dame University, asserts that omnivorism is a form of cultural capital that can be converted into social capital [Lizardo 2007]. He finds an association in US survey data between consump-

<sup>3</sup> I use the term "class" here in Bourdieu's sense as a position in a social hierarchy defined by overall volume of capital, as well as its composition (in this case a combination of cultural and economic capital).

tion of popular cultural forms and weak network ties, as well between highbrow consumption and deep ties. According to network theory, weak and strong ties provide different advantages, with weak ties strengthening the extent and diversity of one's network. Omnivores will be advantaged in being able to sustain both types of ties – what Bourdieu would call “social capital.” This connection of cultural and social capital is particularly interesting given the shift identified in our quantitative analysis from an overwhelming focus on cultural capital to a surge of interest in social capital in US sociology. Lizardo deepens cultural sociology's engagement with Bourdieu through his focus on an important quality of any form of capital – its potential to be converted into other species of capital and thus deployed in other fields.

While Lizardo extends theories of cultural omnivorism by linking it to social capital, Garcia *et al.* challenge Bourdieu by questioning whether omnivorousness is strictly the purview of privileged groups [Garcia-Alvarez *et al.* 2007]. Omnivorism is reconceptualized as having broad tastes, which may or may not include highbrow genres. In other words, someone can be an omnivore without liking opera or ballet, as long as they enjoy a broad range of popular genres. The decoupling of breadth from level (i.e. high/low) leads to the new finding that omnivores exist across the social space. They propose that “heterology,” not homology, characterizes the correspondence between cultural consumption and social structure, which is influenced by time period, cohort, and other structural conditions beyond the distribution of cultural and economic capital [Katz-Gerro 2002].

This intriguing finding leaves open the question of how the meaning of omnivorism might vary across the social space. Qualitative research suggests that taste patterns that appear similar in surveys conceal divergent dispositions that correspond to stratification hierarchies. For example, Russian omnivores interpret consumption differently depending on their class trajectories since the Soviet period [Zavisca 2005]. Researchers in the UK also found a variety of types of omnivores, and these types are distinguished by educational and class background [Warde *et al.* 2007].

Qualitative research on the meaning of omnivorism is quite sparse. A recent discourse analysis of omnivorism among gourmet food writers in the US further confirms the relationship between omnivorism and class distinction [Johnston and Baumann 2007]. Good food is typically framed as authentic or exotic, a seemingly democratic embrace of simplicity and diversity (whose consumption requires access to expensive imports or travel). These tastes, however, implies a disinterestedness and distance from necessity that exemplifies the aesthetic disposition identified by Bourdieu. Furthermore, not anything goes: food which is “familiar, bland, and broadly accessible” is not consecrated. Gourmet food writers are in the business of drawing

boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate culture – a practice that is at the core of Bourdieu’s theory of distinction.

Johnston and Bauman come closest to a field analysis by examining the production of consecrated taste. No analysis of omnivorism yet undertaken a thoroughly relational investigation that employs Bourdieu’s entire conceptual apparatus of capital, habitus, field, and symbolic power. This may in part be due to the fact that consumption is less of a field and more of a social space – there are no clear boundaries and not one form of dominant capital. The methodology predominant in this literature may also play a role – it is difficult to get at habitus or field without reference to data beyond demographic variable and the crude measures of taste and practice accessible via survey research.

### *State Formation and Policy Analysis in Political Sociology*

Recent research in political sociology has sustained an engagement with Bourdieu’s relational apparatus, taking the concepts of field and symbolic power as the point of departure. For Bourdieu, the modern state must be situated within a larger political field – a social world in which actors struggle to claim political capital. This itself is in essence a form of symbolic capital imbuing its holder with the legitimate right to represent and govern the state’s subjects. Bourdieu’s own writings – especially *The State Nobility* and *Language and Symbolic Power* – were concerned with the structure and functioning of the political field in France. Scholars in the field of sociology in the United States have in turn expanded on his ideas and applied them to new empirical cases.

For instance, George Steinmetz, a sociologist at the University of Michigan, introduces the concept of “ethnographic capital” as the specific form of symbolic capital predominant within the “colonial field” [Steinmetz 2008]. Ethnographic capital is a claim to “know the natives” – it is to seize the right to represent the colonized and to guide policy for governing them. The grounds for claims to ethnographic capital vary with the forms of capital actors possess when they enter the colonial field: military capital for the nobility, cultural capital for the educated middle class, and economic capital for capitalist entrepreneurs. Which types of capital were successfully converted into ethnographic capital had serious consequences for policy – from genocidal campaigns to gentler attempts to civilize the “noble savage.” Steinmetz explains the divergent trajectories of native policy in several German colonies as the outcomes of struggles for ethnographic capital, tracing the fit of the habitus of key actors with historical conditions in each case. In addition to using Bourdieu to understand Ger-

man colonialism, Steinmetz uses the colonial case to extend Bourdieu. He critiques Bourdieu's definition of the state as "a central bank of symbolic credit that dominates all other fields," showing how other fields may also contribute to state formation.

In another study of state formation, Mara Loveman, a sociologist at the University of Wisconsin, argues that the state's very existence and administrative capacities are the outcomes of the "primitive accumulation of symbolic power" [Loveman 2005]. She maintains that most of the work on culture in politics concentrates on the routine exercise of symbolic power in stable polities. But the question remains, how did states accumulate this power in the first place? In other words, how did the modern state come to be? She explores this question via a study of a negative case – the failure of the Brazilian state in the Nineteenth century to establish a civil registration system. A popular rebellion emerged because the state did not have the legitimate authority to engage in a practice which inhabitants feared would undermine religious authority over births and deaths, and possibly even lead to enslavement. According to Loveman, the state's inability to quell the rebellion was not just a consequence of poor military capacity. Instead, low military capacity was a symptom of the state's lack of legitimate authority to develop the civil registry necessary to develop a modern army. In other words, symbolic power is necessary to acquire other forms of power.

Both of these studies employ a case study approach (comparative in Steinmetz's article, a single case for Loveman) in their Bourdieu-inspired research agendas. Although neither explicitly lays out their analysis in micro-, meso-, and macro- layers, the depth of the cases studies enables them to link the structure of fields to the practice of policymaking and its consequences on the ground. An interest in this "meso-layer" has been a focus of two other recent Bourdieusian studies of policy. Sallaz, in his study of gambling policy, argues that Bourdieu is missing a meso-concept of institutions needed to link broad field dynamics to specific moments of policy formation and enactment [Sallaz 2006]. He accomplishes this by linking Bourdieu's work to that of the American sociologist Erving Goffman. The end result is a new conception of fields as dramaturgical settings that enable and constrain the accumulation of symbolic capital necessary to prevail in policy debates.

Diane Vaughan takes a different approach, drawing on the concept of "organizational habitus" to connect a field's structures to the practical actions of its participants. In a case study of NASA, an "organization-as-field," she argues that the organizational habitus predisposed actors to "valorize hierarchy" and "recognize the unequal distribution of power as legitimate". In other words, symbolic power accrued to managers rather than engineers in the crucial moment of decision making to launch the Challenger shuttle despite safety concerns. Vaughn's article was written as a response to Emibayer and Johnson's [2008] critique of organizational sociology's

failure to engage Bourdieu's entire conceptual apparatus. As Vaughan points out, this relational approach is methodologically demanding, a fact reflected in our own finding that few works published in American sociology journals have done so. Vaughan poses the case study as a way to "empirically realize the theoretical potential of a relational analysis." A case study approach facilitates, for example, Emibayer and Johnson's call "to examine the perceptions of actors in a field, based on position in social space and capital, and how these perceptions resolve into strategic action." The case study can then be connected to other cases and to broader theoretical concerns via analogical reasoning.

## Conclusion

To document the influence of Bourdieu on the practice of research in American sociology over the past two and a half decades, we have studied citation trends in major sociology journals, as well as provided extended examples of how Bourdieu has been employed in the subfields of cultural and political sociology. Our analysis demonstrates that the recent surge of interest in Bourdieu's work is not merely a fad, nor is it a short-lived homage following his passing in 2002. Today over ten percent of all articles published in the four leading sociology journals cite Bourdieu. Our review of recent work in cultural and political sociology shows that Bourdieu's writings are not being cited in a strictly ceremonious manner. On the contrary, Bourdieu's core theoretical concepts are increasingly used to design empirical research and to advance debates in core sociological subfields.

Our goal in this article (as well as our previous 2007 article upon which the present article is partially based) has been to document the rising influence of Bourdieu in US sociology and to describe the research programs his work has inspired within some core subfields. Our data and methods do not suffice to explain the trajectory of this influence, a project we plan to undertake in the future. We conclude with some hypotheses and an outline for how a Bourdieusian analysis of Bourdieu's influence on US sociology might proceed.

Following Bourdieu, we conceive of US sociology as an academic field. We would model our field analysis on Bourdieu's general approach in *Homo Academicus*: to determine the structuring principles of the field, collect indicators of access to positions within that field "i.e. the determinants of the formation of *habitus* and of academic success," i.e. the forms of academic, scientific, social, economic, and cultural capital [Bourdieu 1988, 39]. We would not expect the relative weight of these forms of capital or their modes of accumulation and conversion to replicate



the French academic field analyzed by Bourdieu – to the contrary, our goal would be to identify the “field effects” that would alter a theory and its reception as it is transposed internationally from one academic field to another.

Mapping of the field and positions within it would require analyzing not just citation patterns, but also the institutional locations, biographical trajectories, and networks of citing authors. We would need to trace the evolving structure of the field and conflicts within it since the 1970s, as discussed in the introduction to this article. Bourdieu’s own study of French sociology and its place in the larger academic field, *Homo Academicus* [Bourdieu 1988], would suggest as a preliminary hypothesis that “early adopters” were scholars seeking to challenge the prevailing status hierarchy of the field. We would here expect to find earlier and more frequent cites in “peripheral” journals; likewise, with articles utilizing “peripheral” methods (participant observation, feminist methods, etc.). An alternative hypothesis would be that agents rich in academic capital (i.e. those with PhDs from high status departments or universities) were most predisposed to attempt the risky tactic of citing the then-outsider Bourdieu. This hypothesis is consistent with Frickel and Gross’ theory of scientific-intellectual movements [Frickel and Gross 2005], in which they propose that established scholars possessing significant scientific and social capital are best positioned to lead and legitimize new research programs via their organizational, financial, and publishing resources. Based on our research to date, this hypothesis appears plausible, given the positions of leading Bourdieu scholars at high-status institutions such as Princeton (DiMaggio), Berkeley (Wacquant), and University of Michigan (Steinmetz), and the proliferation of conferences and edited books and journal issues dedicated to Bourdieu sponsored by such institutions.

Frickel and Gross also hypothesize that the success of a scientific-intellectual movement depends on the extent to which its leaders successfully “frame movement ideas in ways that resonate with the concerns of those who inhabit an intellectual field or fields”. Our case studies of recent work in cultural and political sociology suggest two different, successful approaches to such framing that reflect the long-standing division in the field of US sociology between quantitative and qualitative research. Cultural sociology [with some notable exceptions: Lamont 1994 and Lareau 2003] has largely deployed and engaged Bourdieu via regression analysis of population surveys, a longstanding and highly legitimate tradition in American sociology. In political sociology, by contrast, Bourdieu has been brought into the field via case studies and small N comparisons that typify research in “historical comparative sociology,” a subfield with perhaps less quantitative representation but a significant presence in the discipline, especially in higher status institutions. The success of Bourdieu’s ideas in US sociology appears to hinge on this double-barreled diffusion process, a hypothesis

that could be confirmed via a field analysis that would include this qualitative/quantitative division as one of the structuring principles of the field in determining access to valued positions and resources.

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## From the Margins to the Mainstream

### The Curious Convergence of Pierre Bourdieu and US Sociology

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Abstract: Over the past several decades, the sociological project pioneered by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has entered the field of US sociology. In this paper we ask how and why this occurred. We describe two historical trajectories – that of the *institutional field* of US sociology, and that of Bourdieu as a *biographical individual* – as well as the ways in which the two have intersected. Such points of convergence have in fact been moments of mutual influence. For on the one hand, Bourdieu’s sociology took form through engagement with the American tradition of social science; while on the other, Bourdieu’s ideas have been selectively adopted (and often creatively reinterpreted) by researchers in the US. Drawing upon original primary data, we summarize precisely how Bourdieu has been “put to use” in research published in US journals and books since 1980. Also discussed are current trends and the future potential for a Bourdieuan sociology in America.

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*Keywords: Bourdieu, sociology, field, diffusion, knowledge, United States of America.*

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