

## Tilburg University

### Note from the editors

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## NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

The contributions of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) to sociology can hardly be overestimated; his innovative work has inspired numerous theoretical and empirical sociologists. In particular his two books *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1977 [1968] in conjunction with Jean-Claude Passeron) and *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984 [1979]) made Bourdieu famous in fields as varied as the sociology of social stratification and mobility, the sociology of education, and the sociology of cultural taste and lifestyles. The source of Bourdieu's ability to attract quantitative students of social stratification as well as qualitative students of cultural differentiation is his persistent idea that socio-economic and cultural inequalities are thoroughly entwined and operate reciprocally.

In *Reproduction* and numerous related publications, Bourdieu emphasizes that socio-economic inequalities are maintained by cultural practises. One product of cultural capital is the reproduction of educational success over generations, thus ensuring the interests of social elites. Schools provide a cultural climate where the offspring of cultural privileged groups feel at home and have ample opportunity to fulfil their intellectual capacities. In *Distinction* the leading theoretical point would seem to be precisely the opposite: cultural differences depend on social positions in a two-dimensional system of stratification. Conflicts between cultural and economic status groups are expressed by differences in taste and preferences. The visibility of cultural practises reinforces social differences to the outside world.

Bourdieu's empirical work has been and still is frequently criticized for its lack of theoretical and empirical precision and up-to-date social methodology. Indeed, Bourdieu seems to use data to underline or illustrate his theoretical points, and not as material to produce precise answers to research questions. This being the case, many empirical sociologists are indebted to Bourdieu for his provocative and fruitful hypotheses, and this cross-fertilization can be seen as a division of labour between theoretically and empirically oriented sociologists.

This special issue of the Netherlands' Journal of Social Sciences includes four empirical articles evaluating hypotheses derived from Bourdieu's two main contributions to sociology. Preceding these research articles, Rudi

Laermans presents a sociological biography of Pierre Bourdieu, discussing his sociological and political contributions. Laermans emphasizes Bourdieu's talent for attracting researchers with multifarious interests. Struggle, conflict, and inequality are perceived as the basic ingredients of Bourdieu's view on society. People's social positions in society explain their actions and preferences in social life. More specifically, differences in economic, educational, cultural and linguistic capital are instruments in a power battle for social status in the higher regions of society.

Ineke Nagel and Harry Ganzeboom discuss the extent to which cultural practices in the family and at school affect cultural participation in adult life. Using information on schoolmates and their siblings in a multi-level design, the authors examine whether family background features or cultural training programs at secondary school are the main sources of variation in cultural participation. Socialisation in culturally privileged families is believed to enhance high culture activities later in life. Nagel and Ganzeboom refer to this as cultural reproduction. The research focuses on the effects of cultural practices at secondary school as well. More specifically, the authors address to what extent school effects are related to family effects.

Gerbert Kraaykamp studies the consequences of the accumulation of cultural and economic resources as regards taste differentiation. He constructs a multi-dimensional social space that largely follows Bourdieu's idea of differentiating between the amount and type of resources. At different class levels, a status group that combines cultural and economic resources is compared to status groups with only one type of resource. The research question is: To what extent do people with cultural and economic resources differ in taste from people with primarily either one? The study focuses on differentiation in cultural consumption, materialist preferences and eating and drinking habits to test whether this representation of the social space is reflected in taste differences. It is shown that in the Netherlands there is taste differentiation between status groups with cumulated resources and status groups with a specific type of resources at each class level.

Alice Sullivan offers a critical introduction to Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction. Sullivan identifies several weak points of the theory at a conceptual and an empirical level. While acknowledging the importance of Bourdieu's theory, especially how cultural capital stresses the non-economic advantages of the higher classes, Sullivan criticizes the concepts of habitus and cultural capital as rather vague. Sullivan's contribution includes a review of empirical research being conducted on the cultural reproduction theory. One important point she makes is that researchers from various countries have defined cultural capital in different ways so that a direct comparison of conclusions leads to methodological dilemmas.

In this same line of research, Nan Dirk de Graaf and Paul de Graaf analyse

new Dutch data to examine how parents' cultural capital affects their children's educational success in the Netherlands. They start from the observation that cultural capital is too broad a theoretical idea to have meaningful interpretations in empirical research. The authors distinguish theoretically between status and cognitive mechanisms of educational reproduction and empirically between parents' culture consumption (beaux arts) and reading behaviour as measures of these status and cognitive dimensions of cultural capital. In addition, they decompose the broad concept of parents' cultural capital by examining their reading of literature as well as more popular reading matter. A comparison between social classes addresses whether cultural capital has differential consequences, and a cohort comparison is used to see whether the consequences of cultural capital have been stable over time.