Back in School

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NOTES

CHAPTER 1  “WE’RE NOT LIVING IN THE OLD SCHOOL ANYMORE”


2. Some fathers—particularly those who are married, reside with the family, and are biologically related to their children—benefit in regard to real wages, an effect referred to in the literature as a “fatherhood premium” (Hodges and Budig 2010; Killewald 2012). Women instead are more likely than fathers to experience a “motherhood wage penalty,” thereby limiting their lifetime earnings (Budig and England 2001).

3. Bourdieu further defines habitus as “the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent’s practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be nonetheless ‘sensible’ and ‘reasonable’” (1977: 79).

4. Swidler fleshes out these ideas in Talk of Love: How Culture Matters (2001), in which she examines how people use culture to make sense of their romantic relationships, a meaning-making process that simultaneously explains and guides their actions in the context of those relationships. She not only explores how contexts, codes, and institutions influence the tools available to social actors but also examines variations in the quality of their tools and knowledge of how to use those tools.

5. Swidler (2001) explicitly acknowledges the similarity of Bourdieu’s (1977) “habitus” to “strategies of action,” but maintains that she sees “learning such cultured capacities as a much more active, open, and continuous process than Bourdieu seems to do” (247n11).

6. Garey’s (1999) analysis is grounded in symbolic interactionist theories of the self, which emerged from the work of sociologists, including George Herbert Mead (1934/1962), Herbert Blumer (1969), Erving Goffman (1959), and Arlie Hochschild (1979). Symbolic interactionist theories presume the self to be in a constant state of construction and negotiation. Although strongly influenced by norms and roles, individuals are creating at every moment a sense of self through their actions and beliefs that reify or challenge those societal frames.

7. Blair-Loy (2003) similarly explores how some of the mothers in her sample, “the mavericks,” challenge traditional schemas, engaging in strategies of action that serve to reshape those schemas of devotion to work and home incrementally over time as cultural norms and institutional resources evolve. These mavericks pursued both work and family life, refusing to forgo one or the other in pursuit of their devotion to work
or their devotion to home. In pursuing both work and family, these mavericks reveal the constraining power of gendered schemas of devotion to work and home and the emotional and moral conflicts they face. However, they also forge new understandings of gender as they challenge what it means to be a successful mother and employer.

8. Like Swidler, I turn to Ronald Jepperson’s (1991) definition of institutions: “An institution is then a social pattern that reveals a particular reproduction process. When departures from the pattern are counteracted in a regulated fashion, by repetitively activated, socially constructed, controls—that is by some set of rewards and sanctions—we refer to a pattern as institutionalized” (p. 145).

CHAPTER 2      THE AMERICAN DREAM?


2. Such an intent is clearly revealed in the preamble of the colonial era charter for what later became Brown University: “Institutions for liberal Education are highly beneficial to Society . . . preserving in the Community a Succession of Men duly qualified for discharging the Offices of Life with usefulness and reputation” (qtd. in Thelin 2004: 37).

3. Postsecondary schools serving women reflected a variety of interests and “institutional names, including ‘college,’ ‘academy,’ ‘female seminary,’ and ‘literary institute’” (Thelin 2004: 83).

4. Such changes were evidenced in the New York’s People’s College and the New York Agricultural College, the latter of which subsequently became Cornell University (Rudolph 1962).

5. Frederick Rudolph (1962) notes the strengthening connections between an emerging culture of consumerism, capitalism, science, and higher education. Over time, Rudolph contends, “what sold agricultural education to the American farmer . . . was evidence that scientific agriculture paid in larger crops, higher income, and a better chance to enjoy higher living standards—in other words, an opportunity to make frequent use of the Montgomery Ward or Sears Roebuck catalogue” (260–261).

6. Morrill’s initial legislative efforts were rebuffed by then—sitting president James Buchanan, but later, in the midst of the Civil War, Morrill found both a new president and a political moment that were favorable toward his educational proposals. The overall influence of the Morrill Acts, at least their immediate effect on changing the face of higher education, has been deemed questionable at best. At the time, Morrill and other politicians were just as likely concerned with determining how to judiciously parcel out and use government-owned land, particularly in the still very open West, as they were with advancing higher education. Further, the funds earned from state sales of federal lands were too often squandered and not used to establish public state schools but instead supported the agricultural arms of established and well-connected institutions such as Cornell, Yale, and Dartmouth (Thelin 2004: 77–78). Nevertheless, the Morrill Acts established a model of the university that has prevailed to this day and paved a pathway allowing for the creation of a public system of colleges and universities.

7. See Mettler (2014) and McMillan Cottom (2017) for comprehensive analyses of the relationship between for-profit higher educational institutions and rising social inequalities in the United States in recent years.

8. See for example Aronowitz (2000); Berg (1971); and Collins (1979).
9. The term human capital is attributed to Theodore Schultz (1961), and human capital theory has come to be identified with the work of Schultz’s student Gary Becker (1964) and Jacob Mincer (1974).

10. These changes to welfare programs were also facilitated by a discourse of “undeservingness” that permeated discussions of the poor and of the various public assistance programs developed to provide aid to low-income individuals and families. See for example Abramovitz (2000); Katz (1989); and Reese (2005) for comprehensive historical overviews of discourse that relies on themes of deservingness to frame opposition to social welfare programs targeting low-income populations in the United States.

11. See Michael Roth’s (2014) Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters for a review of these debates as presented by a number of U.S. intellectuals, including Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Jane Addams, William James, and John Dewey.

CHAPTER 3 “I’M JUST LOOKING FOR SOME KIND OF UNDERSTANDING”

1. See for example Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney (2006); Binder and Wood (2013); McDonough (1997); Nunn (2014); Pascarella and Terenzini (2004); Stephens et al. (2012); Stuber (2011); and Tinto (1993).

2. In analyzing these retention rates, one must also consider that the student bodies at many selective colleges and universities are very different from the student bodies at those public institutions that are less selective. Students at more selective institutions are more likely than their counterparts in less selective institutions to be academically and culturally prepared for the rigor required in college. They are more likely to be of traditional college-going age, to have parents who graduated from college, and to have fewer external familial commitments. They are also less likely to work outside the classroom and live off campus, which increases their opportunity to socially and academically integrate, factors that are significantly related to retention (Mullen 2010; Tinto 1993).

3. The concept “return on investment” is most often measured in starting salaries and potential earnings. It is used by web-based tools hosted by the U.S. Department of Education ("College Scoreboard") and The Chronicle of Higher Education ("College Reality Check"), both of which allow individuals to compare colleges across a variety of factors (Carlson 2013).

4. As Pierre Bourdieu initially conceptualized the term, to have knowledge of elite culture is to possess a particular form of social power, which he referred to as cultural capital. Bourdieu and Passeron introduced the concept of cultural capital as it related to the formal educational system in Reproduction in Education, Culture, and Society (1977). Bourdieu continued to develop this concept in his comprehensive analysis Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste (1984) and in the essay “The Forms of Capital” published in the Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education (1986). In the latter work, Bourdieu (1986) refined his definition of cultural capital to include three types: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Embodied cultural capital refers to competencies and skills, whereas objectified cultural capital refers to objects whose meaning is most fully understood using those embodied competencies or skills. A rosette on a young man’s lapel, for example, only has meaning for those who understand its social significance as a marker of one’s lineage or membership in a socially elite organization. Finally, institutionalized cultural capital refers to the
credentials one may possess and the value accorded to those credentials within the context of social exchanges.

5. Stuber theoretically frames her analysis of culture using Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984) concept of habitus, innovatively and convincingly demonstrating how organizations themselves possess a habitus that reflects dispositions and patterns of action that ultimately reproduce social inequalities.

6. Although the advertised tuition costs for the liberal arts college was $32,000 at the time of Stuber’s study, the average financial aid award was $20,000, which combined both merit and needs-based aid. Such large financial aid awards are quite typical at many selective liberal arts colleges, which maintain substantial endowments in order to draw potential students, especially those who might not qualify for needs-based aid. At the state flagship university, average in-state tuition was $11,000 and tuition for out-of-state residents was $16,000. The average financial aid award for the state students was $5,500 and included only needs-based aid.

7. In recent years, members of the House of Representatives have introduced a number of bills that would improve access to college for U.S. veterans. Representative Jeff Miller of Florida introduced HR 357, The GI Bill Tuition Fairness Act of 2013, during the 113th session of Congress, which would require states to charge veterans in-state tuition rates, allowing them to bypass states’ residency requirements. Because the GI Bill will only cover posted in-state tuition costs, many veterans living in states with strict residency requirements must pay the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition rates, which prohibits many veterans from attending college. HR 357 never made it past committee status in 2013 (House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs 2013).

8. For more information about how 1996 welfare reform affected regulations for biological and nonbiological parents, who are married or unmarried, see the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2009 report Cohabitation and Marriage Rules in State TANF Programs.

9. Because case managers assess clients individually, they are afforded limited levels of discretion when interpreting and implementing state and federal regulations. For an overview of case managers’ varying perspectives on regulations regarding postsecondary education in the wake of welfare reform in 1996, see Pearson (2007).


11. The 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act also expanded the Hope Tax Credit, implemented in 1998, which provides tax credits for select expenses related to a college education including tuition, books, and course materials.


13. Small (2010) innovatively analyzes how child care centers located in an urban setting provide forms of social capital to parents, particularly low-income parents, as a result of their organizational structure. Central to Small’s analysis is the idea that individuals are organizationally embedded actors whose opportunities are influenced to some degree by the organizations in which they function. Small uses the
term brokerage to describe a “general process by which an organization connects an individual to another individual, to another organization, or to the resources they contain” (p. 19). In this way, child care centers are an integral organization linking parents to various relevant resource providers.


CHAPTER 4 WHAT STUDENTS WANT AND WHY

1. See chapter 3, note 4 of this volume for a detailed explanation of cultural capital.

2. In “The Forms of Capital,” Bourdieu (1986) fleshed out yet another dimension of interactional power, social capital, which he defined as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 248). Such capital refers to the social networks in which one moves that, in conjunction with one’s economic and cultural capital, can facilitate social mobility or, as is more often the case, social stasis. Together these various forms of capital help us to understand the complex functioning of power in our social exchanges, which more often than not serves to reproduce social and cultural inequalities.

3. Vincent Tinto (1988, 1993) and Alexander W. Astin (1984, 1993) have long documented the influence of various individual and institutional variables—including students’ personal commitments and goals and their access to institutional resources—that collectively shape their academic and social integration on college campuses. Academic and social integration in turn are correlated with students’ satisfaction and likelihood of completing their degree.

CHAPTER 5 WEAVING EXISTING AND NEW IDENTITIES AT HOME

1. The following analyses presume that gender—unlike an individual’s biological sex, which is primarily determined in reference to biological differences—is socially constructed and achieved. West and Zimmerman’s (1987, 2009) theoretical formulation of “doing gender” draws on symbolic interactionist theories and presumes that gender and our social comprehension of gender are primarily located within the context of interaction. As such, gender as a dimension of one’s sense of self is constantly being constructed via action and interaction and is validated (or not) by others by way of their appraisal and evaluation.

2. Building upon and extending our understanding of these processes of meaning making, both Michele Lamont (1992) and Mary Blair-Loy (2003) have produced a particularly compelling body of research that examines the moral and emotional dimensions of cultural logics and schemas that influence meaning making and strategies of being. These researchers argue for a renewed attention to moral signals and the ways that cultural schemas serve as “institutionalized and partially internalized models for cognition, morality, and emotion” (Blair-Loy 2003: 175).

3. Barbara Risman (1998), in her book Gender Vertigo, contends that gender “is not manifested just in our personalities, our cultural rules, or other institutions,” but is a “structural property of society” and is “deeply embedded as a basis for stratification, differentiating opportunities and constraints” (p. 28). For one, diverse cultural and structural forces contribute to women being more likely than men to forgo employment opportunities in order to care for young or ailing family members (Jones 2012;
Moe and Shandy 2010; Williams and Boushey 2010). A lack of adequately affordable child care, nursing care, and family leave resources makes such decisions necessary in the first place. That women more often take on these roles than do men is in part a result of gendered norms that are rooted in both history and the cultural belief that women are more nurturing and family oriented than are men. However, even heterosexual parents who actively challenge gendered norms frequently find themselves deciding to have the mother rather than the father stay home due to historical gendered income differentials in the workplace. Risman argues that “even when individual women and men do not desire to live gendered lives or to support male dominance, they often find themselves compelled to do so by the logic of gendered choices” (p. 29). For an excellent overview of recent research that examines how the “logic of gendered choices” contributes to the construction and maintenance of gendered inequalities see Cecilia Ridgeway’s (2011) Framed by Gender: How Gender Persists in the Modern World. In chapter 5, Ridgeway specifically examines research that reviews how gender operates as an organizing principle in the home, shaping micro- and macro-level inequalities.


5. Mary Blair-Loy (2003) provides a comprehensive analysis of these morally infused cultural processes as they shape women’s lives in her insightful exploration of devotion to work and devotion to family schemas.

6. Arlie Hochschild (1979) conceptualizes “emotion work” as “the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling” (p. 561). Such work is a central component of many feminized occupations, which involve high levels of human interaction. She most famously examined flight attendants and bill collectors in her 1983 book The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling, in which she elaborates on this concept as it is connected to the labor economy.

7. Freeman (2017) similarly found in her qualitative study exploring the experiences of low-income single mothers enrolled in an antipoverty program that mothers frequently described their own educational experiences as tied to and connected to those of their children. Their parenting and student roles merged as they saw their children as necessary motivation for their educational pursuits and saw their own work in the program as necessary to improve their family’s social standing, including role-modeling the value of education in the context of day-to-day family life.

8. Garey (1999) refers to an individual’s assets as well as the economic, social, and political structures that shape an individual’s access to assets as “resource constellations.” These constellations are shaped by income, wealth and class background, education, occupational field, job security and seniority, marital relationship, family support, race/ethnic privilege, public support programs, neighborhood context, transportation, family size, and physical health (pp. 52–55).

9. Gerson (2010) likewise found that the vast majority of students whom she surveyed, nearly 80 percent of the women and nearly 70 percent of the men, desired an egalitarian relationship in which both partners would share paid work and family responsibilities (p. 106).

CHAPTER 6     FALSE PROMISES?

1. Classic educational studies that examine the varied ways that schooling organizations are complicit in the reproduction of social inequalities include Apple (1982), Bowles
and Gintis (1976), Cookson and Persell (1985), MacLeod (1987), Spring (1976), and Willis (1977). Two more recent studies that examine the ways that secondary school environments shape students’ transition to college include McDonough (1997) and Nunn (2014).

2. On the other hand, many elite nonprofit colleges and universities have historically focused nearly exclusively on providing exactly the kind of education that self-reflective learners desire. As reported in 2012, Rebecca Chopp, president of Swarthmore College, argues, “The case for the liberal arts, in my opinion, needs to be reframed to suggest not only how well we serve individual students but also how we act as a counterforce against a culture that is commodifying knowledge and projecting a view of community and anthropology that is reductionist and dangerous” (Kiley 2012). Of course, colleges and universities like Swarthmore rely on strong alumni networks to ensure students’ access to internships and postgraduation job opportunities—they continue to “sell” to students access to these social networks, while simultaneously promoting an educational vision that prioritizes personal empowerment over economic security.

3. These scholars’ ideas can be traced historically to Weber’s ([1958] 2003) theories of status and stratification (see Brown 2001 for a comprehensive analysis of these connections) and Gramsci’s [1928] 1971 analysis of schools and the production of cultural hegemony. In The Higher Learning, Veblen [1918] 1993 also issued a vitriolic critique of the university systems emerging and expanding at the beginning of the twentieth century. Veblen was particularly concerned about the infiltration of business language and values in the halls of academia, which he believed ought to be a refuge from industrial interests.


5. Not all colleges or programs will necessarily facilitate such movement. For example, very few students who are accepted into and then attend high-prestige universities or who enroll in highly competitive programs are likely to leave those institutions or programs without a degree, and so the openings available for students desiring to transfer in will be limited. The level of competition for access to those programs and institutions will determine the level of movement into and out of those programs and institutions.

6. In fact, many contemporary commentators covering the state of education in the twenty-first century emphasize the value of creative thinking that can result from an education that is varied in regard to subject matter and that challenges students to forge connections across disciplines. In 2014, Thomas Friedman, editorial writer for the New York Times, interviewed Lazlo Bock, chief hiring officer at Google, about the value of a liberal arts education in the high-tech world. Bock responded that such an education continues to be “phenomenally important,” and then clarified his point with an example: “Ten years ago behavioral economics was rarely referenced. But [then] you apply social science to economics and suddenly there’s this whole new field. I think a lot about how the most interesting things are happening at the intersection of two fields.”

7. According to Autor and Dorn (2013), job growth is highest in fields requiring “abstract tasks,” such as problem solving and creativity, that define traditionally high-paid positions in engineering, management, medicine, and science. Job growth is also high in fields that require “situational adaptability” and “in-person interaction,” which are skills required in a variety of low-paid service-sector jobs, such as food services, retail, or security. Many jobs that previously provided middle-class wages that were
defined by “routine tasks,” such as organizing or manipulating objects or information, have been replaced by technology—factory workers and bookkeepers are but two examples of the types of jobs that have decreased in number due to a combination of sourcing out their labor to other countries or replacing their labor with technology.

8. See for example Mettler (2014) and the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (2012). For a comprehensive overview of how for-profit institutions fill a gap in our educational landscape via the provision of “risky credentials” see McMillan Cottom (2017).


10. Welfare reform debates in the late 1990s very frequently focused on individuals and perceptions of deservingness (see, for example, Abramovitz 2000; Katz 1989; Reese 2005). In response to public perceptions that welfare participants lacked a desirable work ethic that would allow them to succeed economically, policies were put into place that required welfare participants to pursue jobs in order to continue receiving cash and child care assistance. Many critics and researchers highlighted the long-term career limitations of putting low-income parents, most of them women, in primarily low-wage jobs (Shaw et al. 2006). Nonetheless, these new welfare policies served the employment needs of many businesses and companies reliant on low-wage labor. The strands of public discourse surrounding welfare that emphasized the importance of participants’ working tended to overwhelm competing framings highlighting the exploitation of welfare participants by businesses and companies offering low wages (Reese 2005).

CHAPTER 7 "IT’S A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT"

1. See https://fightfor15.org/.

2. Similar dynamics emerge in Mullen’s (2010) examination of students attending Yale University. The privileged women Yale students interviewed by Mullen were more likely than their men counterparts to select their majors based on their intellectual interests and passions. Men on the other hand, were more likely to consider the status of the major in the context of the university or their anticipated jobs.