

The Role of Cultural Capital and Parental Involvement in Educational Achievement and Implications

For Public Policy

By

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October 2011

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Using the theory of social and cultural reproduction originally posited by Pierre Bourdieu, I test the idea that social status and individual culture affect academic achievement. The data used for this analysis was from the first panel of the Education Longitudinal Study (ELS), a survey sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and based on a nationally representative sample of 16,719 tenth-grade respondents in 2002. As one would expect, the measure of student's ability was the only variable that remained significant throughout for both classes and racial groups throughout all statistical models. The difference in the importance of upper class students and lower class is dependent on race. These findings are bolstered by other studies that show parental involvement has been shown to mediate the effects of race and socioeconomic resources in achievement gaps it could also be used as a possible strategy for reducing the achievement gap even in the presence of cultural capital.

The Role of Cultural Capital and Parental Involvement in Educational Achievement and
Implications for Public Policy

A Thesis

Presented To the Faculty of the Department of Sociology

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts

by

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October 2011

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Horace Mann, wrote in his 1869 work *The Life and Complete Works of Horace Mann*, “Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery.”(Cremin 1982) Since then many scholars and theorists have attempted to further develop this idea from a mere maxim to a theory adequate for explaining the upward mobility for the lower social classes through education. Unfortunately, many scholars have found that to be quite the opposite, claiming that problems within the strata of social and economic equality exist through the institution of education itself. (Lareau, 2001). This social fact has also gradually become a more salient issue to social injustice scholars when explaining how our social lives are constructed.(Bourdieu 1973) Education has been shown to be strongly correlated with income, health and our level of happiness. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1973; Lareau 2001; Lee & Bowen 2006)

Therefore, one can deduce from the body of work already compiled by contemporary academics that one’s educational credentials are paramount not only to an individuals’ social and economic success, but those advantages (or disadvantages) are then passed on to their children, in effect replicating the cycle. Ronnelle Paulsen, in her in 1991 study of education, social class, and participation in collective action, found that education generates class effects in political socialization in three ways: “(1) it reinforces the individual class socialization initiated in the home. (2) It is structured to treat class groups differently in the tracking process, and (3) it varies in the way communities address curricular emphases in their schools, feelings that one can accomplish what one sets out to do, is both nurtured and discouraged by the educational process, depending on the class position of the students.”(Paulsen 1991) It is because of the latent function of sorting our nation’s

a student based on a variety of criteria other than merit negatively affects our ability to accrue the human capital necessary to compete in a global economy.

Importance of the Study

Theories of cultural capital and family educational resources explain how and why background matters for achievement, yet it is unclear whether the process is equally applicable to both the upper and lower social classes. This study examines the extent to which upper and lower social class Caucasian and African-American students differ in cultural capital and habitus and its effect on educational achievement. Second, I looked for any mediating effects parental involvement may have in the presence of cultural capital over educational achievement. Theorizing on cultural capital and parental involvement offers insight into why family background is so influential to educational achievement. Bourdieu (1977) first used the concept to analyze how culture and education interact, thereby contributing to social reproduction of inequality. This makes the causal argument very straight forward. Cultural capital (the societal valued knowledge of “highbrow” culture is more likely to be manifested in families of high SES and translates into a greater likelihood of educational success. Conceived of as a mediating factor between social origins and educational outcomes, cultural capital is a useful conceptual extension of how social inequality is reproduced.

Background

Many social researchers have reported significant gaps in achievement that have been associated with race, gender and socioeconomic status (Grenfell & James, 1998; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). There exists however, a common thread among those aforementioned socio-demographics associated with achievement gaps in educational achievement originally postulated by French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. In his 1973 work *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction*, co-authored by Jean-Claude Passeron, Bourdieu gave social scientists the conceptual framework for studying class reproduction through educational institutions. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1973) Critiquing Karl Marx's idea of class struggle, Bourdieu posited that without collective consciousness among the lower social class that there could be no class struggle that would eventually lead to social and economic equality, but that there would need to be a break in the "cycle" of cultural and social "re"-production that takes place in society. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1973)

According to Bourdieu, the term *cultural capital* refers to non-fiscal assets that involve educational, social, and intellectual knowledge provided to children who grow up in intellectually sophisticated families. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1973; Lareau 2001; Lee & Bowen 2006) For him the culture of the dominant class is both diffused and rewarded through the educational system of that society and students who conform to and appropriate that culture the most will prosper academically and ultimately socioeconomically. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1973; Lareau 2001) "To acquire cultural capital, a student must have the ability to receive and internalize it" (Dumais 2002:44-45). "Although schools require that students have this ability, they do not provide it for them; rather, the acquisition of cultural capital and consequent access to academic rewards depend on the cultural capital passed down by the family, which, in turn, is largely dependent on social class." (Dumais 2002: 44-45) Therefore, varying levels of educational achievement (which ultimately results in increases in SES) are then

reinforced by an educational system that prefers students with a high level of cultural capital. (Dumais 2002)

In this theory schools are not viewed as neutral institutions, but as ones in which the preferences, attitudes, and behaviors of the "dominant class" are most highly valued. (Roscigno 1999) Despite general theorizing on the subject, surprisingly little research has been done to determine how cultural and ethnic groups differ in regards to cultural capital. "One exception was DiMaggio and Ostrowers (1990) which reported a black-white difference in "Euro-American high culture" and suggested that this variation by group is largely a function of disparities in parents' educational backgrounds."(Roscigno 1999)

Habitus and Cultural Capital

Although Bourdieu speaks of many sources of inequality in access to resources in his discussions of class divisions, the most important (and relevant) of note for this discussion in particular is the relationship between one's individual culture and the culture of the society at large or the individual institutions within that society. He uses the terms *habitus* and *field*, respectively, to describe this relationship. "Habitus" is "a system of dispositions that results from various forms of social training and past experiences." (Brubaker, 2004; Lareau, 2001; Reed-Danahay, 2005 cited in Lee & Bowen 2006:196-198). This can also be described as a way of thinking that is created through an individual's socialization process that occurs at home, the institutions and social classes they are a part of, as well as their experiences on those social planes. A persons "field" is a "structured system of social relations at a micro and macro level" (Grenfell & James, 1998; Lareau & Horvat, 1999 cited in Lee & Bowen 2006:196-198). "When an individual's habitus is consistent with the field in which he or she is operating, that is, when the field is familiar to and understood by the individual, he or she enjoys a social advantage." (Grenfell & James, 1998; Lareau & Horvat, 1999 cited in Lee & Bowen 2006:196-

198). "Lamont and Lareau defined cultural capital as "widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods, and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion." (Roscigno 1999)

Interestingly, as with many forms of "hard" capital (i.e. Financial), "soft" capital (i.e. social, cultural, human) becomes increasingly easier to obtain once an individual already possesses it. Some individuals can directly inherit their cultural capital through *habitus* formulated within their families. (Lareau 1987: Reed-Danahay 2005) This type of habitus is very strong when it comes to producing successful individuals in the *field* of education and ultimately the workforce, leaving lower class individuals and families with no chance to achieve social mobility. (Dumais 2002) Recognizing the role of habitus and its relationship with cultural capital has long been ignored by scholars in the sociology of education. When a student makes a decision to invest in their education it depends largely on the students' place within the strata of the class system and the expectations (habitus) of whether or not individuals from their particular social class tend to be successful academically. (Swartz 1997)

Parental Involvement

Within the same discussion on class reproduction also mentioned is the importance of *social capital* accumulation, which many scholars in the sociology of education have operationalized as parental involvement. (Swatz 1997: Lee & Bowen 2006) Parental Involvement (just like cultural capital) has also been shown to be significant when explaining variances within the achievement gap. (Lee & Bowen 2006) Because parental involvement has been shown to mediate the effects of race and socio-economic resources in achievement gaps it could also be used as a possible strategy for reducing the achievement gap even in the presence of cultural capital.

Therefore, I intend to join cultural capital, habitus and parental involvement as a measure of social capital into a model that will help to determine which is most important in predicting educational

success. Following the literature, I wish to determine if an individual's SES leads to different benefits from cultural capital and habitus in terms of educational achievement

CHAPTER 2: The Argument against Cultural Capital

It was well established that inequalities in a child's educational attainment, according to their social class, and also ethnic, origins, could not be explained simply in terms of individual variation in cognitive ability, as measured, say, by IQ. Leaving aside all questions of how IQ scores were to be interpreted, clear group differences in attainment were still apparent even when IQ was controlled. In particular IQ and its derivative (achievement tests) have always shown that SES is a crucial variable in explaining test score variance. Broadfoot (1996), a sociologist, argues that assessment in developed societies with mass education systems, whether for selection or certification, has a single underlying rationale: to control mass education and the nature of its goals and rewards. It operates to distribute, in a justifiable way, social roles that are not all equally desirable. Individuals are allowed to compete on an equal basis to demonstrate their competence. The provision of an apparently fair competition allows those who are not successful to accept their own failure (thus controlling resentment among the least privileged) and acquiesce in the legitimacy of the prevailing social order. Broadfoot cites IQ testing as a means of social control "unsurpassed in teaching the doomed majority that their failure was the result of their own inbuilt inadequacy" (Broadfoot 1996) "The argument in this case is that intelligence testing obscures the perpetuation of social inequalities because it legitimates them: Tests designed by "White", male, majority psychologists will tend to reflect the values, culture, and experience of the authors. It is not that the White middle classes are more intelligent or better able to acquire intelligence; rather, intelligence is defined by them and measured according to their characteristics." (Broadfoot 1996) The cultural capital argument is that children from lower social groups are not less intelligent or less academically capable, but children from middle-class homes are better able to do well at school because of the correspondence of cultural factors between home and school. As a result, IQ

examinations have a legitimating role in that they allow the ruling classes to legitimate the power and prestige they already have. (Broadfoot 1996)

“A ruling in 1979 in *Larry R v. Riles*, Federal District Judge Robert F. Peckham found that IQ tests are racially and culturally biased against blacks, and declared them unconstitutional for the use challenged by the plaintiffs.”(McKinsey 2007) While his decision applied to only one test use in one state (California), its implications are universal: if IQ tests are biased against a particular group, they are not only invalid for one use but for all uses on that group. Nor is bias a one-dimensional phenomenon. If the tests are biased *against* one or more groups, they are necessarily biased *in favor* of one or more groups and therefore invalid. There now seems to be a fairly clear understanding that IQ tests are biased in favor of individuals from the dominant culture who designed the tests. In the United Kingdom and the United States, this meant those from a White, male, middle-class background (Gipps & Murphy, 1994).

There are several names in the field of Intelligence and IQ that one must mention when discussing this issue, I will begin with the man who spear-headed this debate some four decades ago, Dr. Arthur Jensen. Jensen, a professor of educational psychology at the University of California at Berkeley, “became a target of abuse by publishing an article in the *Harvard Educational Review*. Its claim: based on IQ tests, whites may be naturally smarter than blacks. Jensen's original argument was based on a very disparaging set of facts: during two generations of IQ testing, blacks have consistently scored 15 points (or one standard deviation) lower than whites, and no one has yet designed a reputable test on which blacks do as well as whites. He estimated that a quarter of the IQ gap was due to environmental and cultural differences, the rest to genetics. Liberal academics and blacks immediately denounced Jensen as a racist. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, Jensen would write several books defending himself and his works even with physical threats and acts of violence being made against

him from both blacks and whites. Cross-cultural testing can show widely different patterns in answering IQ questions, but no such differences show up between black and white children in the U.S., according to Jensen.” (Behavior 1979) He says: "There is no way to discriminate or distinguish between the average ten-year-old black and the average 8½-year-old white. The tests look the same, but the black child has a lower mental age. It looks more like a developmental lag than a cultural difference." (TIME 1979) Those who belittle the tests because whites do them better than blacks, Jensen says, are evading the issue that all attempts to make the tests fairer have failed to raise blacks' scores. His conclusion: "None of these attempts to create highly culture-reduced tests has succeeded in eliminating, or even appreciably reducing the mean differences between certain subpopulations races and social classes in the United States." (Furze 1997)

Over the years since Arthur Jensen's famous discovery, many intellectuals ranging throughout the spectrum of social science have studied this issue both attempting to prove and disprove his findings. The most famous of which, Dr. Linda S. Gottfredson, has spent the last 40 years of her life studying this issue and has contributed the most to its increasing expanding body of knowledge. Although she graduated with a PhD in sociology Linda Gottfredson has worked most of her career as a professor of educational psychology at the University of Delaware and just recently as co-director of the Delaware-Johns Hopkins Project for the Study of Intelligence and Society. She also currently sits on the boards of the International Society for the Study of Individual Differences (ISSID), the International Society for Intelligence Research (ISIR), and the editorial boards of the scientific journals *Intelligence*, *Learning and Individual Differences*, and *Society*.(Gottfredson 1994) Gottfredson's work has been influential in shaping U.S. public and private policies regarding affirmative action, hiring quotas, and "race-norming" on aptitude tests.” (Gottfredson 1994) The *general intelligence factor*, discovered by famous psychometrician Charles Spearman (from whom we get the correlation

coefficient, r) is essentially the average score between all forms of intelligence quotient testing from the three age groupings that intelligence test are administered. These series of papers were only to spark her interests further in the field of intelligence on SES (socio-economic status). She claimed "We now have out there what I call the egalitarian fiction that all groups are equal in intelligence...differences in intelligence have real world effects, whether we think they're there or not, whether we want to wish them away or not. And we don't do anybody any good, certainly not the low-IQ people, by denying that those problems exist..." (Gottfredson 1994) Gottfredson's research and views have led to considerable controversy, especially her testimony on public affirmative action policy and her defense of *The Bell Curve*, especially *Mainstream Science on Intelligence*, an editorial written by her, signed by 51 colleagues, and published in the *Wall Street Journal*.(Gottfredson 1994)

This brings me back to my discussion on state of the American education system. The problem with many of the studies of IQ perpetrating the idea of races or social classes being better than one another, then require educators constantly placing students into categorized based on these examinations into categories befitting of their class and cultural or racial stereotypes ultimately leave the United States at a disadvantage for producing a society of highly educated individuals to compete in a global market. This means that we are and have been relying almost entirely on children from the upper social class to maintain and expand our body of intellectuals, policy makers, mathematicians and scientists. Educators construct the environment around students based on their perceived ideas about whether or not the students' level of ability will allow them to achieve academically and eventually in the labor force. This problem is becoming more and more apparent as we now have more than ever a high proportion of individuals over-educated for the jobs that they are performing.

What is it that the aforementioned researchers that have contributed to this field have left out? Statistically speaking the evidence claiming that individuals from different races many of those whom

comprise a disproportionate amount of the lower class do score consistently lower than those individuals of the upper class. This evidence is overwhelming and undisputable at this point scholars and researchers are still not sure why. Socio-economic status (SES) has been one of the most important factors that many individuals who have been crying “foul” have used to explain and interpret the results of Linda S. Gottfredson and Arthur Jensen. The studies on SES and educational stratification has begun to explain some of the variances between IQ scores amongst the races, but also the variances of IQ scores within races. Leading many people to believe now that the differences in IQ and educational achievement do not stem from the different races in America, but from social classes.

Effects on Human Capital

“Education plays a critical role in creating human capital, which can contribute to production and economic growth just as physical capital, land, and labor do. Both micro and macro-economists have investigated the role education plays in economic growth at the individual and economy wide levels.”(Judson 1998) Human capital refers to the stock of competences, knowledge and personality attributes embodied in the ability to perform labor so as to produce economic value. (Judson 1998)And according to human capital theory, investment in human capital can raise future returns in the labor market even though it may entail opportunity costs forgone in short-term earnings (Becker 1964, 1993). In essence, educated, skilled, and healthy individuals tend to enjoy higher occupational status and earnings, thus increasing their chances of upward mobility. It is the attributes gained by a worker through education and experience. (Judson 1998) “The economy produces people. The production of commodities may be considered of quite minor importance except for necessary input into people production. Our critique of the capitalist economy is simple enough: the people production process in, both in the workplace and in schools is dominated by the imperatives of profit and domination rather than human need. “(Bowles 1976) the undemocratic structure of economic life in the United States may

be traced directly to the moving force in the capitalist system: the quest for profits by exacting a high level of output from a generally reluctant work force. (Bowles 1976) Combined with a system of stratification based on race, sex, education, and social class that is very admirable at reducing the creative power and solidarity of its workers is also found in our educational system. Education can be seen as an allocating institution under societal rules which allow the schools to directly success and failure in society quite apart from any socializing effects the system would offer to the young. (Bowles 1976) For instance, allocation theory suggests effects of expanded educational institutions for both those who attend and do not attend schools. It also can explain why completing a given level of schooling often matters much more than determining educational outcome than features of the particular school attended. “The return to investment in education, like that to physical capital, depends on the project selected; in education, two important margins for investment decisions are the level of education and the individuals to be educated. The return to human capital in the form of schooling is a function both of the type of education and the individual's ability to benefit from the education” (Judson 1998) As individuals proceed through school, their abilities to benefit from it become clearer. Thus, one of the benefits of basic education is to reveal suitability for further education; without basic education, an individual's potential remains unknown. This has important implications for investment; if too much money is invested in higher education without sufficient investment in lower levels of education, there will not be many students who are both ready and demonstrably able to benefit from that higher education.(Judson 1998) Thus, the effectiveness of investment in higher education depends on how much investment in primary education is present, and the allocation investment across levels of education can play a role in determining its effectiveness. Labor researchers also find that educational attainment has a strong and unambiguous effect on earnings, although the precise magnitude of that effect varies widely across samples, time periods, and location. (Griliches, 1977, 1979) Indirectly.

Knight and Sabot (1990) find that ability contributes indirectly to income by contributing to skill acquisition and educational attainment, which in turn are linked to higher wages; Behrman, Rosenzweig, and Taubman (1994), Card (1994), and Miller, Mulvey, and Martin (1995) find more direct evidence of a link between ability and earnings by comparing samples of mono-zygotic (identical) and dizygotic (fraternal) twins. The evidence for diminishing rates of return to increasing levels of education come from rate-of-return studies that generally show lower rates of return to higher levels of education (Winkler, 1990; Psacharopoulos, 1996, 1994). The highest rates of return nearly always accrue to primary education. “The rate-of-return approach ignores the externalities that can come from education at different levels. For example, educating more students at the primary level not only provides a large pool of literate citizens, parents, and workers but also broadens the pool of talent from which secondary students are drawn, possibly raising the level of talent in the secondary-school population. Similarly, recipients of higher education may provide benefits to their communities as role models or contributors to knowledge that far exceed the increments to their wages” (Judson 1998)

School Funding

Unfortunately, the problem extends further than theoretical conjectures about social structures. We also know that economic injustice at the state level also helps to replicate this cycle in the public school system. Public schools are funded with a combination of state, federal and local funds. Although federal and state funds are available local property taxes constitute a disproportioned amount of support for public schools. In the 2004-05 school year, 83 cents out of every dollar spent on education is estimated to come from the state and local levels (45.6 percent from state funds and 37.1 percent from local governments)(U.S. Dept. of Education). The federal government's share is 8.3 percent. The remaining 8.9 percent is from private sources, primarily for private schools. (U.S. Dept. of Education) This division of support remains consistent with our nation's historic reliance on local control of

schools (U.S. Dept. of Education). Simply put, students who have parents with high enough incomes (usually due to their educational credentials) are able to purchase homes with higher values, thus higher taxes and more funding for the local schools that only their children may attend. State funding does little to mend this, as the state usually feels it more efficient to allocate funds to areas with the highest population and not necessarily the highest need. These inequity in funding leaves many working class students and minorities without educational resources such as books and computers, less funding also means that the most qualified teachers will chose jobs at schools with higher pay and it also means possible layoffs for faculty.

The goals of this paper are to join cultural capital and habitus in a model of educational Success and to determine what role if any that cultural capital and habitus play significant roles in educational success. Finally, and more specifically, to determine whether one's gender, in addition to one's socioeconomic status (SES), leads to different benefits from cultural capital and habitus in terms of educational outcome.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Data

The data used for this analysis was from the first panel of the Education Longitudinal Study (ELS), a survey sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and based on a nationally representative sample of 16,719 tenth-grade respondents in 2002, although only those that answered the survey in both their sophomore and senior years were counted, because GPA (my dependent variable) was recorded for a student's entire high school tenure (N=12,134). The data was collected by the not-for-profit university affiliated Research Triangle Institute in Raleigh, NC. "The ELS was designed to monitor the transition of a national sample of students as they progress from tenth grade through high school and on to post-secondary education and/or the world of work."(NELS 2006) This is the fourth time such data has been collected and its uses for studying the educational system in the U.S. are vast. (NELS 2006) Because it is a longitudinal study individuals are surveyed repeatedly over time allowing social researchers to mark changes and measure various outcomes while providing possible explanations and in the best cases, viable solutions to various issues in education. Secondly, since the study is multilevel, random sample surveys were issued not only students, but their parents, teachers and administrators as well. This makes for a very comprehensive set of data. A sample weight was also used throughout the analyses to compensate for unequal probabilities of selection into the sample and for no response. (NELS 2006)

Hypothesis

According to the literature there I have developed three hypotheses to investigate the relationship between cultural capital and educational achievement in the data set. First, students from the lower socioeconomic class will benefit from cultural capital and habitus more than their upper class counterparts. Second, I believe parental involvement will be significant in the final regression model

indicating that increasing parental involvement may be of importance for policy makers attempting to close the achievement gap even in the presence of cultural capital. Finally, lower class students (both Caucasian and African American) will benefit more from cultural capital than their upper class counterparts.

Variables

In operationalizing educational achievement I used the measure of student's high school GPA (9th through 12th grade), obtained directly from the transcripts of the students within the sample. I used GPA as my measure for educational success, believing that students with higher GPAs were more likely to not only graduate high school, but apply and be accepted to better institutions of higher education, this is also the dependent variable in the study. While the cultural variables in ELS were clearly not collected with the intention of measuring cultural capital, however, the ELS data set does not include such a wide set of variables for cultural capital. Using the measure for cultural capital from Susan Dumais' 2002 study on the same issue I use the limited definition of cultural capital as participation in the arts. This variable is operationalized by using responses from the parents questionnaire question "How often do you attend plays, films and concerts with your 10th grader?" (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently). (Dumais 2002) Socioeconomic status (SES) was used from the ELS data composite measure of parents/guardian's income, highest degree obtained and occupational prestige using the General Social Survey's system for coding. The measure for ability was also a composite measure within the data set combining the standardized test scores from each student's math and reading end-of-grade exams in 10th grade. Because these tests are measures of aptitude, I thought they would be the best measure for natural ability since data on IQ was not collected. Habitus was operationalized as student's expectations of themselves, just as Bourdieu had

intended. Again using a measure from Dumais 2002 study I constructed the dummy variable “Does student expect a white collar job by age 30?”(1=yes) from the variable “Occupation at 30”. (Dumais 2002) Responses were coded as “1” representing if the student said that he or she expected to have one of the following occupations at age 30: professional, managerial, or business; business owner; or science or engineering. Parental involvement/social capital, in my model was a composite of 6 individual variables in the ELS data set all designed to measure various aspects of parental involvement. The variables “How often parent checks HW”, “How often parent discusses grades”, “How often parent discusses college”, “How often parent discuss SAT prep”, “Does parent act as a volunteer at school” and "Parental Habitus (does parents expect a white collar job for their child by age 30)" were all dummy coded and summed together to create the parental involvement/social capital variable. I also used parental expectations in the parental involvement variable, believing that if parents expected their child to have a white collar job by 30 that would be a driving factor in how much the parent was willing to invest (time, financial resources, i.e.) in their child’s education.

Multicollinearity

Before explaining the results of the analysis it should be stated that because of a high amount of collinearity in more than one the variables placed in the model that multicollinearity is an issue that can and will affect the overall result if not addressed. Multicollinearity occurs when variables are so highly correlated with each other that it is difficult to come up with reliable estimates of their individual regression coefficients. When two variables are highly correlated, they are basically measuring the same phenomenon or construct. In other words, when two variables are highly correlated, they both convey essentially the same information. Variables in the model where inputted based on forward selection. Forward selection, which involves starting with no variables in the model and trying out the variables one by one only and including them if they are ”statistically significant”. The independent

variable and control variables were entered into my model based on the size of the focus (largest to smallest). In other words, if I expected based on the literature, that the sex of an individual and the ability of said individual would be the largest contributing factors to their academic success (GPA) those variables would go into the model first. This process would repeat until all significant variables from the correlation model (through forward selection) were entered.

Finally, Data was analyzed by looking at descriptive statistics, a correlation matrix and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression. A sample weight was also used throughout the OLS regression analyses to compensate for unequal probabilities of selection into the sample and for no response. Racial differences in the importance of cultural capital was a secondary focus in my study so chose to look only at cases that identified their race as Caucasian or African American within the data. Also, because I was interested in class differences I took the variable socioeconomic status (SES) and split it into quartiles, comparing students from the bottom quartile to those in the upper quartile, this was done in an effort to define an upper and lower class.

GPA's were drawn from students' transcripts and were reported by the students' schools. They ranged from 0 to 4, with a mean of 2.22 and standard deviation of 2.68. The mathematics-reading composite score, derived from tests developed by the Educational Testing Service was used as a standardized measure of ability. It ranged from 30.1 to 71.8 with a mean of 49.55 and a standard deviation of 12.62. The variable Habitus was coded as a dummy variable and was defined as whether or not the student expected to have a white collar job by age 30 ($M=.7862$, $SD=.4100$) Parental Involvement was a composite measure of 7 dummy coded variables, it ranged from 0 to 7 with a mean of 4.192 and a standard deviation of 3.599.

Table 1 Means and Standard Deviations for Variables Used in the Analysis

Variable	Mean	SD
GPA	2.22	2.682
Ability	49.5532	12.62346
SES	-.2689	1.51816
Sex (1=male, 0=female)	.4979	.50001
Habitus (1=white collar, 0=non white collar)	.7862	.41002
Parental Involvement: (range 0-7)	4.1927	3.599
Check HW (1=yes, 0=no)	.8533	2.84541
School Courses (1=yes, 0=no)	.8131	.35381
Grades (1=yes, 0=no)	.9294	.38986
SAT (1=yes, 0=no)	.5883	.25623
College (1=yes, 0=no)	.8891	.31407
Parental Habitus (1=yes, 0=no)	.9365	.24381
Act as a Volunteer (1=yes, 0=no)	-1.07	2.622

In Table 2 we see that all of the independent variables in the model have a significant correlation with the dependent variable (GPA). As one would expect the measure of a student’s ability was the most strongly correlated with higher levels of educational achievement (.266, $p < .01$) as compared with other measures. Interestingly, parent’s SES (socio-economic status) was the most strongly correlated with ability (.616, $p < .01$) than any of the other variables. Parental involvement had a strong correlation with cultural capital (.702, $p < .01$), in fact the strongest correlation between any two variables in the matrix. Tables 3 & 4 show the results of OLS regression run parallel for class and Caucasian and African American students respectively.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix of Variables used in the Study

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 GPA	1.000					
2 Ability	.266**	1.000				
3 Parent SES	.136**	.616**	1.000			
4 Culture	.138**	.272**	.382**	1.000		
5 Habitus	.093**	.191**	.140**	.015	1.000	
6 Parental Involvement	.170**	.213**	.217**	.702**	.064**	1.000

In Model 1 (Table 3) we can see that both Sex and Ability are significant predictors of GPA ($p < .001$) for both upper and lower class students. We would expect both of these to be true as multiple studies have shown female students to do far better on average than their male counterparts and in even the worse educational systems one would expect an individual's level of ability to strongly influence their success. In Model 2 I present the variable cultural capital and find that it is significant for only the lower quartile group ($p < .001$). This could be because upper class students already possess the cultural capital necessary to excel in school. Habitus introduced in Model 3 was also significant and decreased the effect of cultural capital. In the final model (4) I introduce involvement and with males I find that it eliminates the significant effects of both cultural capital and habitus, running parallel models for upper and lower class students. Leaving only sex, ability, cultural capital and parental involvement statistically significant in the final model for lower class students. The lower quartiles group with unit changes in Involvement saw a .077 increase in GPA.

Table 3 OLS Estimates of Cultural Capital on Educational Achievement (Caucasian students)

Class	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	U	L	U	L	U	L	U	L
Intercept	-.407*** (.217)	-1.378*** (.190)	-.005 (.410)	-1.365*** (.217)	-.283 (.520)	-1.228*** (.305)	-.547 (.585)	-1.702*** (.350)
Sex	.118*** (.057)	.233*** (.040)	.104 (.058)	.210*** (.057)	.013 (.063)	.173* (.062)	.035 (.070)	.288*** (.080)
Ability	.075*** (.005)	.087*** (.003)	.070*** (.006)	.082*** (.005)	.068*** (.008)	.079*** (.005)	.065** (.008)	.077*** (.006)
Cultural Capital			-.034 (.230)	.392*** (.012)	.420 (.295)	.393** (.142)	.540 (.154)	.378* (.021)
Habitus					.199 (.170)	.215* (.099)	.143 (.108)	.200 (.125)
Involvement							.063* (.034)	.077** (.024)
R-squared	.086	.108	.113	.089	.113	.089	.119	.084

* p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Note: Only metric coefficients and their standard errors (in parentheses) is used for each variable in the model.

In the first model of Table 4 for we notice that again that the sex of the student as well as my measure of student's ability (math and reading standardized test scores) were significant ($p < .001$) for lower class students. However, for upper class African-American student's sex was not significant in the first model. In the second model the cultural capital variable was not significant for either class and ability was the only variable that remained significant for both classes. Model 3 we have the introduction of habitus (whether or not student expected to have a white collar job by age 30). Habitus was also insignificant in the model for both classes. Finally, in model 4 I again introduce parental involvement which was significant ($p < .001$), but only for lower class African-American students.

Table 4 OLS Estimates of Cultural Capital on Educational Achievement (African American)

Class	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	U	L	U	L	U	L	U	L
Intercept	-.867* (.321)	-1.119*** (.109)	-.870 (.410)	-1.447*** (.275)	-.903 (.320)	-1.177*** (.215)	-.547** (.265)	-1.814** (.450)
Sex	.189 (.069)	.666*** (.034)	.037 (.058)	.580*** (.057)	.505 (.063)	.043* (.062)	.035 (.070)	.859*** (.080)
Ability	.058*** (.003)	.063*** (.002)	.065*** (.004)	.074*** (.002)	.067** (.008)	.081*** (.003)	.065** (.008)	.067*** (.002)
Cultural Capital			-.088 (.320)	.130 (.013)	-.059 (.195)	-.274 (.178)	.540 (.163)	.378 (.011)
Habitus					.217 (.150)	.369 (.09)	.143 (.108)	.200 (.055)
Involvement							.063** (.0373)	.077** (.017)
R-squared	.086	.108	.113	.089	.113	.089	.119	.084

* p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Note: Only metric coefficients and their standard errors (in parentheses) is used for each variable in the model

CHAPTER 4: Discussion

As one would expect the measure of student's ability was the only variable that remained significant throughout for both classes throughout all models. With testing for access to individual resources or a pooled regression analysis to test for effects that may be a result of students with parents of a certain level SES going to the same school, it can be determined specifically what higher SES means for students in this study. What can be said by looking at the parallel models is that SES does a slight moderating effect on the relationship between parental involvement and GPA. However, the significance of parental involvement does little to unravel that mystery, showing that for every unit change in parental involvement GPA for poorer students, increases by only .077 ($p < .001$). According to the data inherent ability is the most dominant factor in influencing a student's grades (for both groups), followed by parental involvement and sex. Cultural capital in this case plays a lesser role and at most times, plays little to no role in educational success. But for the students on the lower rung of the socioeconomic ladder, attaining a high level of cultural capital did show improvement in their achievement without habitus or parental involvement in the model. In other words, the disposition of poorer students in the data set may be tied to parental SES meaning that a student with lower SES might be more likely to make a decision to invest in her education that depends largely on the students' place within the strata of the class system and the expectations (habitus) of whether or not individuals from their particular social class tend to be successful academically. (Swartz 1997) However, parental involvement did significantly influence GPA for both upper and lower class students, indicating that parental involvement could be a possible strategy for closing the achievement gap, at least for males where the introduction of parental involvement into the model negated the significant influences of both habitus and cultural capital on grades.

With African-American students however, did not benefit from cultural capital or habitus in either the upper or lower classes, in the model. Keeping in mind that cultural capital is expected to be an asset in the schooling process because children who are exposed to cultural capital may be better equipped to master academic material, may develop a greater taste for learning abstract and intellectual concepts and may be favored directly by teachers over children who have less cultural capital, this begins to raise a few questions. (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp 1996) First, is there may be a qualitative difference between in the cultural capital that both groups of students receive? We would expect for students in the lower socioeconomic level of the models (both Caucasian-American and African-American) that cultural capital would be significant in terms of predicting academic achievement. Because this was only true for one group (Caucasian-American) and not for the other (African-Americans) one would assume that either the African-American students in our sample were unable to utilize cultural capital or that the cultural capital they were able to obtain was not as valuable in an educational setting as the cultural capital as that of their counterparts. Most studies on cultural capital have defined it as "Euro-American high culture" and most of these studies, including this one have only analyzed the effects of cultural capital quantitatively and not qualitatively as well. What I am suggesting is that there may be qualitative difference between the cultural capital between African-American and Caucasian Americans. Second, just because an individual or group is able to obtain cultural capital doesn't not also ensure that they will be able to utilize it. According to Bourdieu for students to acquire cultural capital, a student must have the ability to receive and internalize it. Although schools require that students have this ability, they do not provide it for them; rather, the acquisition of cultural capital and consequent access to academic rewards depend on the cultural capital passed down by the family, which in turn, is largely dependent on social class. This is a relevant issue because of the extensive literature on the fact that there is a huge gap in the SES of Caucasian and

African-Americans. According to ELS data the gap in parent SES is tremendous. The number of African-American parents that fall into the highest quartile among all parents in the sample is only 15%, while the number of Caucasian-American is more than twice as high as African-Americans 33.8% This might also help to explain why is habitus students' expectations of themselves were also significant in the model for lower class Caucasian-American students and not for their counterparts.

In one of the first systematic empirical studies on cultural capital DiMaggio (1982) showed that a student's involvement in art, music, and literature is positively correlated with his or her grades in high school even after the influence of prior ability and father's education is taken into account. Socialization into "highbrow" cultural activities is more common in Caucasian-American families than it is in African-American families even after parental SES has been taken into account. (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp 1996) "DiMaggio (1982) further claimed that over time there has been no convergence between blacks and whites with respect to participation in highbrow cultural activities. This finding was interpreted as "cultural resistance". That is, that in the face of increased socioeconomic opportunities that African-Americans have remained attached to traditional Black art forms to maintain their cultural identity. Therefore, despite the long term convergence of Caucasian and African-Americans in several other respects such as income, education and intermarriage DiMaggio argued that African-Americans have maintained their distance from traditional "White" culture and that his model of resistant is in contrast to the cultural behavior of whites." (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp 1996)

Table 5 Percentages of Parents SES

	Upper Class	Lower Class
Caucasian-American Parents	33.8%	66.2%
African-American Parents	15.0%	85.0

According to a study done by Jung-Sook Lee and Natasha Bowen of the University of North Carolina in 2006, parent's from different social backgrounds exhibit different methods for parental involvement and that parents from non-dominant groups would reap fewer benefits from their involvement efforts in terms of their children's educational achievement. (Lee & Bowen 2006) According to their data "involvement at school occurred most frequently for those parents whose culture and lifestyle were most likely to be congruent with the school's culture: parents who were European American, whose children did not take part in the school lunch program, and whose educational attainment was higher and more similar to that of school staff." (Lee and Bowen 2006:198-199). This could also explain why the effect of cultural capital and habitus disappeared in both models once parental involvement is incorporated.

"The variations found in habitus may relate to parent involvement derived from differences in financial resources, educational knowledge, experiences with and confidence in the educational system itself", further back the idea that there might be something moderating the effect of parental involvement/social capital on educational outcomes" (Grenfell & James, 1998 cited in Lee & Bowen 2006:198-199). Based mainly on their individual habitus, parent's from lower SES groups may exhibit less involvement within the school environment. These parents(those with lower education levels) may be less involved at school for various reasons. Maybe they feel less confident about communicating with school staff because of a lack of knowledge of the school or educational system, or it could also be a result of their own individual negative educational experiences.(Lee & Bowen 2006) Regardless of the reason, lower levels of involvement negatively affect their children academically.

Policy Implications

Education is seen as the foremost tool in assessing inequality issues in the United States. However, the socially privileged receive better grades in school, perform better on standardized tests and earn higher degrees. Because inequality is present in the educational through an achievement gap based on poverty and race/ethnicity. With education being seen as the predominate path to economic success, it is hard to overestimate the significance of the connection between social privilege and academic success. Because parental involvement is important for all students in my models I strongly believe that need to be made to reduce barriers African-American, low-income and less educated parents to engagement in child education at school.

Particularly in the United States, several researchers agree that most contributions to academic subject matter (i.e., history and social and natural sciences) are made by members of the majority race or culture (Rogoff, 2003) and much of the text throughout this subject matter is used to reinforce the superiority of this group (Loewen, 2007). Loewen (2007), for example, offers that most elementary and secondary U.S. history textbooks offer a “romanticized” view of the Europeans' experience in the United States whereas most of the experiences of Native Americans and/or Africans in these same lands are either misrepresented or underrepresented. He and others have also noted that many of these texts have continued to marginalize the achievements and significant traditions of many ethnic minority populations living in the United States (Howard, 1999; Loewen, 2007). Other works have shown that additional academic domains such as the natural sciences and English also promote a U.S./European ideological focus (Solano-Flores & Nelson-Barber, 2001). In addition to cultural bias found throughout public school curricula and standardized testing, cultural bias is believed to be salient throughout the instructional practices promoted and executed by school teachers and administrators (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2005; Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2001). Here, cultural bias beliefs sanction as appropriate certain forms

of classroom behavior, including the manner in which a student is to perform and learn during class time. An example of cultural bias in classroom practices is reflected in the belief that learning must occur in a controlled environment, where students are seated independently and working quietly on a singular task and are only to interact and correspond to the instructor (Gay, 2000). For many, these activities reflect a mainstream cultural perspective (Gay, 2000; Howard, 1999; Nieto, 2001).

Due to cultural bias in teaching, where there is an apparent adherence to mainstream forms of thinking, learning, and behaving (Howard, 1999; Loewen, 2007), ethnically and culturally diverse students often have to discontinue learning behaviors and activities that reflect aspects of their home or indigenous culture. “In fact, they are often told to replace these indigenous cultural value-laden behaviors with classroom practices and behaviors reflective of mainstream cultural values. Not doing so often leads to misperceptions of students' learning abilities and in some cases, recommendations for in-school remediation and/or psychological services” (Baker, 2005).

Creating a healthy classroom environment is a democratic process by nature. It requires collaboration between students, parents, teachers and administrators based on open dialogue. Students views of the importance of schooling, their academic self- concept, the presence or absence of feeling academic futility in their school environments, and the extent to which students feel alienated and/ or oppositional toward school curricula and officials affect their academic achievement and social-emotional adjustment. Education administrators must be willing to listen to and understand the needs of the under-served, and most of all understand that their parental involvement is paramount to *all* their student's success and that they would be best served to have as much parental involvement as possible are often unaware of reasons working- class and poor families may have attitudes and utilize child rearing and communication strategies that negatively affect their children's achievement. Multicultural education is designed to teach students about the characteristics of various ethnic groups,

their histories, their current experiences, and the ways they are similar and different to other ethnic groups. The hope is that such knowledge will change students' attitudes and behavior in ways that facilitate their functioning more competently in intercultural interactions. Strengthening our classrooms and increasing parental involvement by promoting a multicultural education is a good way to strengthen our communities, reduce poverty, crime, etc. Often people forget that when you are in school the most important things we learn are rarely learned in the classroom. It is here stereotypes and prejudices are developed, social classes are constructed, social behavior is learned and character is built. The school curriculum and climate not only affects us economically as a society, but socially and morally as well. In some communities grass-roots organizations have begun to establish programs that increase collaboration between parents and administrators which I explain next, is crucial to closing the all-important achievement gap and which I believe would be a critical component of my plan to solve this social issue. Since the civil rights movement educators have been trying to integrate school curriculum with ethnic content move away from mainstream, Euro-centric curriculum. "Ideological resistance is a major factor that has slowed the development of a multicultural curriculum in the United States, although other factors have also been significant in delaying its growth and development. Political resistance to a multicultural curriculum is closely related to ideological resistance. Many people who resist a multicultural curriculum believe that knowledge is power and that a multicultural perspective challenges the existing power structure. They believe that dominant mainstream-centric curriculum supports , reinforces and justifies the existing social, economic, and political structures. Multicultural perspectives and points of view, in the opinion of many observers legitimize and promote social change and social reconstruction.

In accordance with current educational policy (No Child Left Behind or NCLB) public school educators are required to meet what the legislation calls Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This refers to

the amount of progress that must be shown by a school, and for designated subgroups within a school, according to the act. Individual states must develop standards in the core content areas of reading, math and science to determine what AYP is. There are many consequences for schools that do not show adequate progress. Schools that do not do well may not be given technical assistance. If schools do not meet the objectives for performance as a result of this assistance, then they face far more serious consequences. Therefore, teachers have to spend more time “teaching to the test” as opposed to making sure that students acquire mastery of the material.

Educators are not only in the business of teaching what is known, but they also reinforce and, in fact, teach what they value and what is valued in society. Teachers must not only infuse their curricula with minority voices and oppression theory, but they must also employ instructional strategies that facilitate social justice education. “To do this, they must (1) balance the emotional and cognitive components of the learning process, paying attention to safety, respect, and valuing behaviors; (2) acknowledge and support their students individual experiences while illuminating the realities of institutional discrimination; (3) create opportunities for meaningful social relationships and group cohesion to form in their classrooms; (4) utilize reflection exercises and other student- centered learning strategies, including problem posing and self-reflection; and (5) value personal growth, awareness, and change for themselves and as outcomes of the learning process while taking into account student interest and readiness.”(McKinsey 2007) Cooperative and interacting teaching and school structure are the foundation of a strong school. Failure to advocate for equality within the classroom and within the school not only negatively affects those oppressed by “isms” and results in less attention, and thus achievement, within the schools, but it also can be seen as, at a minimum, trivializing such oppressive forces or, worse yet, supporting them. (McKinsey 2007)

Lower socioeconomic groups may exhibit less involvement within the school environment. These parents (those with lower education levels) may be less involved at school for various reasons. Maybe they feel less confident about communicating with school staff because of a lack of knowledge of the school or educational system, or it could also be a result of their own individual negative educational experiences. (Lee & Bowen 2006) Regardless of the reason, lower levels of involvement negatively affect their children academically.

Equity and access in local schools in the U.S. cannot exist without diversity on its local school boards. Although this is a salient issue, few grass-roots organizations focusing on local education have attributed their success or failure of their school systems on school board diversity. A need is perceived to be greater than the cost of the innovation, change is more likely to be embraced. For the benefit of our students we must (as academics) express this need to the “powers that be”, while providing feasible, cost effective solutions to reduce resistance change to school policy. Policies that make an effort to diversify not only the student population, but also that of the faculty and administrative ranks with the “underprivileged” group, whether that means class, race, gender, etc. (because this will vary from institution to institution, major, level of education completed, etc.) benefits not only students but society as a whole. These students will be “forced” to experience differences among their fellow Americans breaking the cycles of ethnocentrism and prejudice.

An example of the importance of a diverse school board came to Eastern North Carolinians after the Wake county school board voted to end their racial integration policy. In 1971, as a result of the Swann vs. Mecklenburg county case, Mecklenburg County became the first school district ordered by the state Supreme Court to desegregate its schools (News and Observer 2009). However, in 1999, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit ruled the Charlotte-Mecklenburg district had achieved a healthy level of racial integration, and stated that race-based busing was no longer a necessity (News

and Observer 2009). This policy was theoretically passed to balance the socioeconomic level of students in schools. The result was that some students traveled from the suburbs to the inner cities, others traveled from the inner cities to suburbs. The new plan will often leave black students in underachieving schools and white students in higher quality schools.

Because of the lack of candidates that represented their constituents and nihilism within the oppressed communities that did not allow large enough numbers to affect voting, it resulted in an overwhelming majority of the Wake county school board that did not represent the interests of the low-income or minority peoples in the community. Even in Pitt County, the district's 1970 desegregation court orders were never closed and lay dormant for decades until a complaint filed in response to a racially based 2005 student reassignment plan re-animated the issue. A settlement in 2009 found that the district had not yet fulfilled the orders and set the 2012 deadline to reach unitary status. A unitary school system is one in which the school district has eliminated the old racially segregated dual school system. Seven factors are measured to determine if a school district has achieved unitary status. These factors are: teachers, staff, transportation, extra-curricular activities facilities and student and faculty assignment. From my personal opinion the delay in such an order came mostly from a school board that did not reflect its constituents which has a high amount of low-income minorities, but one that represented the oppressors both ideologically and demographically.

Although the vast majority of the work needed to bring about equity in the U.S. school system will need to be done at the local level as almost all decisions are made locally due to a lack of centralization in the public school system, even the best grass-roots organizations promoting this social initiative cannot overcome the problem of equitable funding without some major changes at the state level. While the state does not have responsibility for equal school funding, it does have a fundamental constitutional responsibility to provide all students with "a sound basic education." "The United States

Constitution requires that access to a sound basic education be provided equally in every school district. The inability or indifference of local governments to provide funds does not excuse the General Assembly from a duty specifically imposed on it by the Constitution. The conclusion is that if poor school districts cannot provide their students with “a sound basic education” then the government has a constitutional responsibility to help those poorer school districts”.(News and Observer)

With the strength that the social movement within the community would generate at the local level it must also be established politically at the state level where possibility of equal funding could take place. As long as unequal funding persists at the state level it is impossible to ever have an equal school system. Rural areas who already have the lowest performing schools will continue to suffer due to lack of resources. The state is the only entity with the power to mitigate the effects of unequal school funding due to property taxes. State law makers will not feel the pressure to change their current policy of allocating funds based on the population in a given location but to area’s where the per pupil expenditures are significantly lower than the rest of the state if this is not something the local communities as a whole (parents, teachers, administrators and school board members) are not advocating for. Even then there is no guarantee that the policy will be changed, but the clamoring of entire communities and school boards is much harder to ignore come election time than the voices of a few individuals.

Conclusion

Through rhetorical support for 'universal' education, equal opportunity, or raising standards, political and business elites appear to be interested in expanding access to education. But the rhetoric of expansion and access often obscures the reality of limiting educational opportunities through a differentiated curriculum, standardized testing, and unequal financing. As a result of policies that limit educational opportunities through more subtle means than overt segregation and discrimination, students who found themselves in disadvantageous positions at the beginning of the twentieth century remain there at the end of the century. For poor minority students who live in rural areas of North Carolina (especially eastern North Carolina) educational attainment is all but impossible. One can understand why so many working class and poor minorities have so little respect in the educational system and refuse to invest any time or effort in it. Proposed reforms must be examined in a historical sociological context. Establishing such a context enables us to critically evaluate proposed reforms and to improve them. Critical evaluation of these policies makes us more aware of the role of public policy in mediating inequality, and equips us to reduce those inequities. I did however prove that parents' involvement and educational aspirations for their children are predictive of their children's academic achievement. Habitus did not have the effect on GPA for females that I had expected from initial research on the topic. Parental Involvement and ability were significant for both racial groups across models, indicating that for both groups of students, parental involvement coupled with the natural ability of their children can maximize educational achievement. As I mentioned before, because parental involvement has been shown to mediate the effects of race and socio-economic resources in achievement gaps it could also be used as a possible strategy for reducing the achievement gap even in the presence of cultural capital. Hopefully this study begins to build upon the idea of combining

cultural capital and parental involvement into a model that can provide feasible and worthwhile implementation for shrinking gaps in achievement.

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