"RULES OF THE GAME" FOR HIGH SCHOOL SUCCESS: HOW THEY ARE DEVELOPED, TRANSMITTED, AND REINFORCED

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Abstract:
"Rules of the game" are the social expectations one must enact for success in a specific environment. From veteran public high school educators in Washington, D.C., this study found: 1) "Rules of the game" for high school success are most consistently communicated through interventions after students have not met academic, behavior, or attendance expectations; 2) One "rule of the game" is that students and parents must show up exemplifying that they value education; 3) There was no mention of institutionally developed and implemented methods of understanding the needs, desires or values of the students and families—the most marginalized.

Schools in the United States have historically been and continue to be sites of social reproduction (Dumais 2005, Laureau, 2002). Bourdieu's (1977) cultural reproduction theory posits that cultural capital consists of the tools used to obtain symbols of wealth that are "socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed" (p. 488). Bourdieu (1998) compares the social world to a compilation of fields with specific rules, where people use cultural capital to compete for status within different social fields (Richards, 2020). The value of this contextual cultural capital, however, is mediated by "the standards or institutional 'rules of the game'" of a particular field, which means that certain actions are privileged as they are given value within each respective field (Lareau et al., 2016, p. 281). These "rules of the game," which are prescribed sets of actions that activate social capital in specific fields, and their corresponding layers of contextualized subjectivity in urban high schools—are the focus of the exploratory pilot study at the heart of this piece.

Educational institutions, like high schools, act as fields with their own set of rules for success. To be successful in educational institutions, one must understand the "rules of the game:" activating cultural capital within those institutions and possessing agency to activate personal cultural capital. Relating this idea to research on educational mobility, Jæger and Møllegaard (2017) state, "familiarity with the dominant cultural codes in a society, is a key determinant of educational success because it is misperceived by teachers as academic brilliance and rewarded as such" (p. 130). Thus, an ability to activate cultural capital within the educational setting plays an important role in perceived and possibly actual academic success. Education researchers and scholars, like Delpit (1988) take up Bourdieu's framework to examine how these "rules of the game" are often miscommunicated cross-culturally, necessitating explicit teaching.

This qualitative, exploratory pilot study helps us understand the sociopolitical and reproductive nature and cycle of U.S. schooling. It examines how urban high schools, from the perspectives of veteran teachers, conceptualize and describe the components of academic success, and how these definitions are transmitted and reinforced to students and their primary caregivers. Specifically, the study explores these concepts as they relate to high school "rules of the game," in various urban high school settings. This study also explores the mediating role of several urban high school's institutional norms and practices, and how they influence the development and activation of student and caregiver cultural capital. Additionally, given that the impact of one's familiarity with and ability to activate cultural capital is moderated by the school field, examining the way "rules of the game" are conceptualized, shaped, communicated, reinforced, and evaluated within high school settings is imperative to understanding how students' and their caregivers' behaviors are valued, devalued, and differently valued by school norms and structures.

This exploratory study engaged veteran teachers in Washington, D.C., to understand their perspectives in response to these guiding research questions:

1. What are the "rules of the game" for student success in urban high schools in the United States?
2. How are the "rules of the game" transmitted to and reinforced for students and caregivers at their school?
3. How does social identity influence these perspectives and practices?
4. What are the implications of this phenomenon on students' educational experiences and life trajectories?

Background and Context

My interest in studying how cultural capital is mediated by urban high school norms emerged from the ten years I spent in urban,

metropolitan, traditional public high schools in Washington, D.C. Public Schools (DCPS). I draw on experiences as a teacher, special education coordinator, social worker, and school administrator, as well as being a mother and a child raised by a working-class Black woman. During my time in DCPS, I observed differences in the ways schools invest in planning for, interpreting, evaluating, engaging and responding to students as directly related their perceived social capital, socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, and also their primary caregivers perceived social capital. Research regarding student tracking supports this practitioner experience because it highlights the prejudice and racism that influences tracking decisions; it also highlights the results of incredible disparities in access and outcomes for students based on biases in adult decision-making processes (Domina, Hanselman, et al., 2016; Domina, McEachin, et al., 2016).

As a student, I witnessed firsthand adults changing behavior after their first interaction with my mother, or once they knew I was able to articulate my needs clearly and with confidence. My mother's parenting logic included a sense of entitlement and ability to advocate that did not align with the expectations these professionals associated with her working-class socioeconomic status. Rather, my mother's engagement and advocacy behaviors aligned with the middle-class behaviors of her great-grandparents, who played a large role in raising her. Resultantly, my experiences and habitus as a student also aligned with middle class behaviors of entitlement, self-advocacy, and seeking individualization (Lareau, 2002).

Habitus is defined as the "set of dispositions that allow someone to see opportunities as available or unavailable based on their life experiences" (Luedke, 2020a). In educational settings, a person's experiences with educational institutions over time impact how they perceive their own agency within these institutions (Luedke, 2020a; Potter & Roksa, 2013). As a high school student, my accumulative advantage positively shaped my habitus (Potter & Roska, 2013) through years of successful activation of cultural capital by my mother and positive extracurricular and academic experiences. Therefore, I felt confident about my ability to maximize opportunities for educational success. My habitus is more reflective of the collective funds of knowledge of my extended family (Moll et al., 1992) than my social class of origin—likely an important factor in my educational success.

Lareau (2002) extends Bourdieu's framework by examining White and Black parenting practices across poor, working, and middle-class households. She concludes that social class is the primary contributor to the transmission of social capital, through the various "culture[s] of logic of child rearing" that develops in differently across social classes (p. 748). Development of cultural capital in children follows the same general patterns regardless of the ethnicity of families, with middle class families employing a specific set of structured parenting logics, called concerted cultivation (Lareau, 2002). Concerted cultivation includes behaviors that exemplify confidence in interactions with authority figures, such as assertiveness during conversations, comfort negotiating and advocating for individualization, and willingness to engage in conflict amongst other things (Lareau, 2002).

Lareau's (2002) findings have proven invaluable to educational researchers, however, they also erase the intersectional influence of race and ethnicity in cultural reproduction. Growing up as an economically poor Black woman, my identity is inextricably tied to both my ethnicity and social class of origin. I am unable to separate them nor identify which socially constructed stratification has a stronger impact on my life trajectory. Do the racial differences of families and students explain the differences in education outcomes, or do the class differences? Lareau (2002) compartmentalizes these variables; this exploratory pilot study aims to explore the nuances of their intersectionality.

In 2019–20, DCPS served fifty-one thousand students, 74% of whom qualified for federal free and reduced lunch, 59% Black, 20% Hispanic, and 16% White (District of Columbia Public Schools, n.d.). In spring of 2019, 39.9% of students met or exceeded English Language Arts (ELA) grade level proficiency on the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) exam, 32.4% for math (District of Columbia Public Schools, 2019). A staggering 88% of White students were proficient in ELA compared to 26.8% of Black students; 82.1% of White students were proficient in math, compared to 18.1% of Black students (District of Columbia Public Schools, 2019). Additionally, the 2020 median household income for White households in DC is $141,863, while the median household income for Black households in DC is $46,061 (DC Health Matters, n.d.). These data highlight deep economic and standardized test performance disparities in Washington, D.C. between various ethnic groups, and lead to questions about what factors are contributing to these disparities. This study aims to focus on the norms and systems within local educational institutions that may contribute to the data and evidence of social reproduction it represents.

The question of whether race or social class is most strongly predictive of educational outcomes is less important than why the intersection of race and social class are so strongly predictive of educational outcomes. Schools mediate the translation of valued cultural capital into student outcomes; therefore, schools must play an active rather than passive role in this process (Richards, 2019). As a result, the norms and practices within the school have a dynamic relationship with students and their caregivers.

As an extension of the ways schools influence each student's development of capital in relation to their own habitus, this research works from the belief that the problem of practice does not lie with individual students and caregivers, in terms of whether they can activate cultural capital within schools and increase their ability. Rather, I suggest that as an institution, the school's mediating role as a "field" in the cultural reproduction framework is paramount. This positioning helps foreground the

ways that schools determine the nature and valuation of cultural and educational capital and who can successfully activate proscribed versions of capital (Lareau et al., 2016). The DCPS data (DC Health Matters, n.d.; District of Columbia Public Schools, 2019) highlight differences in educational outcomes that strongly track by race, ethnicity, and median income. This means that the social capital of students and their families has predictive value in understanding whether an individual student performs on grade level or not in both math and reading. From the perspectives of veteran teachers, this study explores how schools determine and evaluate capital and the "rules of the game" of academic achievement and how these rules of the game are transmitted and reinforced to students and caregivers.

Study Significance

The norms and practices of educational institutions require examination to determine where changes must occur from the institutional perspective. Today, many schools and educational institutions espouse the desire to be antiracist. If schools are to meet these expectations in measurable ways, they must be able to identify specific policies, curricula, and practices that perpetuate racism and classism (Luedke, 2020b; Nunn & Tepe-Belfrage, 2019; Wallace, 2019). One step towards doing this is to shift the language around how cultural capital is developed and reproduced to not only include the practices of the family, but also the practices of the school. Another step requires acknowledging that by reinforcing White middle-class values as normative and essential for academic achievement, schools institutionalize a color-blind framework that infuses Whiteness with positive social attributes while reinforcing deficit perspectives of racialized minorities (Manning, 2019).

Literature Review

The concept of fields within Bourdieu's (1997) cultural reproduction theory provides conceptualization of the school as a non-neutral entity in cultural reproduction. Lareau's (2002) description of the cultural capital of concerted cultivation, and her conceptualization of parenting logic that is acknowledged by schools and thus contributes to student academic success, is foundational in further considering the role of educational institutions in the development, acknowledgement, and activation of cultural capital.

"Rules of the game" is a concept coined by Bourdieu (1984) that provides the language used in this study to describe the specific set of norms and behaviors associated with a particular field. An outcome of "rules of the game," cumulative advantage centers the effect of experiences with schools over time on the self-efficacy, agency, perspectives, and actions of students and parents (Potter & Roska, 2013). One of the results of concerted cultivation and cumulative advantage is a sense of entitlement, which empowers students and caregivers to negotiate and activate cultural capital for subsequent advantages (Carolan & Wasserman, 2014). Finally, critical intersectional theories provide a guide for ensuring this study's theoretical framework and methodology prioritize the needs, desires, and intersectional experiences of the marginalized (Richards, 2019).

Further, the Coleman Report—mandated by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to describe inequity in education across the United States—found that schools did not interrupt inequities students entered the educational system with (Coleman, 1968). To this day, the Coleman Report influences educational researchers to focus almost exclusively on the family unit as the unit of responsibility and the family's role in increasing academic inequality over time (Potter & Raska, 2013). This had implications that are felt to this day in schools, families, and communities (Stevenson, 2014).

Bourdieu (1977) describes cultural capital as "instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed" (p. 488). The composition of cultural capital is subjective and contextual, meaning that it is different based on the social setting, or field, it is used within (Bourdieu, 1977; Chiang et al., 2020; Lareau et al., 2016). The field sets the tone for the value capital is given in a particular setting" (Luedke, 2020a). Therefore, we must critically examine the specific cultural capital centered within a field and enacted in local education settings, to shift the locus back onto the organizations that confer dominance on narrow definitions of social capital and the "rules of the game," based on White, Western binaried logics and preferences (Pak & Ravitch, 2021; Ravitch, 2020).

Concerted Cultivation

Lareau (2002) observed Black and White families from middle, working, and poor socioeconomic classes to describe how cultural capital is used and passed on. She found that middle class parents employed "concerted cultivation," or a way of being and parenting that cultivates agency and even entitlement with regards to bureaucratic systems like schools, resulting in an assertive posture and actions that involve customizing, negotiating, and getting desired outcomes from interactions with adults within said institutions (Lareau, 2002). The most controversial conclusion from Lareau's (2002) work posits that social class is *the* central factor shaping socialization processes, as it happens the same way for White and Black children. Her contributions set the stage for other researchers to test theories associated with her ethnographic findings (see, e.g., Bodovski & Farkas,

2008; Carolan & Wasserman, 2014; Cheadle & Amato, 2010; Chin & Phillips, 2004; Manning 2019; Roska & Potter, 2011).

Entitlement and Cumulative Advantage

Concerted cultivation and entitlement have a symbiotic relationship in that they positively reinforce one another. Concerted cultivation both relies on and builds a sense of entitlement due to the assertiveness and advocacy around individualization it requires of parents and children (Lareau, 2002). Concerted cultivation activities develop entitlement through the accumulation of positive experiences and results over time that build confidence and a cumulative advantage (Bécares & Priest, 2015; Carolan & Wasserman, 2014; Lessard et al., 2011; Nunn & Tepe-Belfrage, 2019; Potter & Rosksa, 2013). Parental perceptions of their own and their children's place in the social structure play an essential role in social reproduction, which means that parents engage in concerted cultivation based on ideas of what is possible and what feels natural (Bodovski & Farkas, 2008). This idea of parental attitudes and beliefs mediating their willingness to engage in concerted cultivation is important because interactions with schools, over time and in the present, impact how parents feel and what they believe about the school and their relationship to the school (Lareau et al., 2016; Luedke, 2020a).

Parenting practices and examples are an incredibly important mediator of cultural reproduction, but it does not completing explain the phenomenon (Roksa & Potter, 2011; Bécares & Priest, 2015; Bodovski & Farkas, 2008; Chin & Phillips, 2004; Vincent et al., 2012). Cumulative advantage works primarily to benefit White individuals who have an established middle-class background. Knowing the “rules of the game” for the field and setting helps to ensure a more informed selection of specific tools of cultural capital to employ and obtain better outcomes. If a student’s family has a history with this field, then either the cumulative advantage or the cumulative disadvantage will influence the way they choose to enact the entitlement they have confidence in, or a lack of assertiveness based on, what they have experienced or witnessed in the past (Potter & Roksa, 2013).

Critical Intersectional Analysis

Contrary to Lareau’s (2002) assertion that cultural reproduction happens the same for Black and White families and is only mediated by socioeconomic class, “Black parents seeking to operate in White-dominated fields can have their cultural capital de-valued, rejected, and treated as illegitimate when they come into contact with educational institutions” (Vincent et al., 2012, p. 350). This tells us that cultural capital is mediated by ethnicity in educational institutions, and that there are norms and practices within educational institutions that privilege White parents. Bécares and Priest (2015) aver that the benefits of affluence and advantage are not equal across race and ethnic and gender groups and assert that power within institutional settings operates to undermine access to and use of resources available to dominant advantaged classes.

Educational research focuses on identifying the ways families and their children fall behind and fail, while also attributing educational attainment to how well parents engage in concerted cultivation (Bodovski & Farkas 2008; Carolan & Wasserman, 2014; Cheadle & Amato, 2010; Laureau, 2002). Until recently, the field has almost completely missed alternative explanations. Change requires researchers to adopt a race-conscious model for interrogating cultural capital and reproduction to “center the issues of race and/or racial domination in ways that challenge the class-based master-narrative and its colorblind assumptions” (Richards, 2019, p. 5). Richards (2019) suggests modeling cultural capital research after feminist intersectional theorizing to consider the “multiple perspectives of multiply marginalized people” and to consider the cumulative impact of overlapping inequalities (p. 5).

Theoretical Framework Considerations

Given the institutionalized racism and classism underpinning the development of “rules of the game” for educational environments, research design in this area must include explicit opportunities to lift the voices, perspectives, and experiences of the marginalized (Richards, 2019). In advocating for disruption of the cultural reproduction cycle, Richards (2019) asserts that “it is important for cultural capital scholars to ask questions that center the needs and desires of the marginalized and engage in theorizing that envisions a more equitable society” (p. 6). This commitment is important because the researcher is not neutral and researcher positionality must be actively considered in determining impact of assumptions, biases, and tacit theories on study design and data analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

In addition to the formal theories and empirical research that inform this exploratory pilot, there are also tacit theories that I bring to the work. One tacit theory I hold is that there are implicit ways of doing things the “right way” in schools. Students achieve at different levels primarily because they are better at doing things the right way. I want to be mindful of how this tacit theory might influence me to focus on the actions of students and their caregivers, rather than the actions, norms, and systems of the school. Part of my apprehension about the potential impact of focusing solely on the actions of students and parents is because of the next tacit theory I carry—hyper-focus on student and caregiver actions as mediators of student academic success encourages

individualism, competition, and hoarding of resources. Additionally, I am conscious of the extra intersectionality from my personal experiences while "beating" the predictive indicators of my own personal education and economic "disadvantages." I present as a Black woman, raised by a single mother, on a working-class income, who is now stably in the middle class and has graduated from multiple, highly competitive universities. There are ways that my mother and I were able to navigate systems and activate cultural capital that color the way I see the world due to my own experiences of cumulative advantage.

Another tacit theory I bring to this work is that the parents who speak up for their children are also known to hold adults within the building accountable. They message that their children must get quality treatment, and that they are willing to be loud, assertive, and vocal to ensure this occurs, which results in their child getting a different and more quality educational experience. I experienced this as a child with my own mother. I witnessed this in my own schools as an educator. However, a hyper focus on the perspective of the individual student or family reinforces decades of research that absolves schools as institutions that have broad power to disrupt racism and classism.

Finally, schools and the adults within them represent a bureaucratic, classist, and racist system to the minoritized communities they serve. As a result, this impacts how parents and students view the school and their relationship to the school. It also shapes what parents think is possible and the amount of power parents and students believe they have. I understand that schools are not seen as neutral to positive entities in many communities, and that often those of us who represent schools in the lives of children and families must work hard to establish unique relationships with them that are distinct from the institution. If schools and the adults within them do not systematically alter their behaviors to acknowledge the layered experiences students and parents show up carrying, they will continue to perpetuate racism and classism. Schools also run the risk of retraumatizing or multiplying the impact of inequalities for minoritized communities across the multitude of institutions and fields in which they engage.

Methodology

This exploratory qualitative study invokes a transformative paradigm defined as "a family of research designs influenced by various philosophies and theories with a common theme of emancipating and transforming through group action" (Chilisa, 2020, p. 41). It will engage minoritized veteran teachers in Washington, D.C., to understand their perspectives and seek out their in-depth responses to these guiding research questions:

1. What are the "rules of the game" for student success in urban high schools in Washington, DC?
2. How are the "rules of the game" transmitted to and reinforced for various stakeholders at their schools?
3. How does social identity influence these perspectives and the ways they shape student socialization practices?
4. What are the implications of this phenomenon on students' educational experiences and life trajectories?

This study uses Richard's (2019) race-conscious model for cultural capital research, which is operationalized by applying its four guiding principles: "positionality matters," "amplifying perspectives of racially marginalized groups," "make white supremacy visible as a power structure," and "do not treat social institutions as neutral entities" (p. 8).

Merely knowing "rules of the game" is not sufficient to ensure one will obtain the benefits of said cultural capital, as ability to activate cultural capital and acknowledgement of cultural capital activation is mediated by intersectional constructs like socioeconomic class, race, and ethnicity (Bécares & Priest, 2015; Chin & Phillips, 2004; Richards, 2020; Roksa & Potter, 2011; Vincent et al., 2012; Wallace, 2019). This means that an investigation of institutional socialization practices is vitally important to determining how to most effectively disrupt pedagogical practices that perpetuate racism, classism, and identity-based disparities in educational outcomes for students (Delpit, 1988; Jæger & Karlson, 2018; Jæger & Møllegaard, 2017; Manning, 2019; Nunn & Tepe-Belfrage, 2019; Potter & Roksa, 2013; Wallace, 2019).

Site and Participant Selection

Participants were recruited via an email invitation to every teacher at their school as denoted on their school website staff directory. Teachers were asked to participate in the study if they identify with a minoritized ethnic group and have been teaching at their specific school in DCPS for at least five years. After emailing, in alphabetical order, the first 10 of 15 DCPS high schools, seven teachers responded to the invitation. My current school and the most recent previous school I worked at were not emailed because I did not want to fill the participant list with people who knew me before others had an opportunity to reply. Every teacher who responded was interviewed. I worked as a teacher with, and a Washington Teachers Union building representative for, three of the teachers who responded.

Minoritized teachers are foregrounded to adhere to Richard's (2019) race-conscious model for cultural capital research which calls for researchers to "amplify perspectives of racially marginalized groups" (p. 8), to decentralize and deinstitutionalize

Whiteness and attributions associated with Whiteness as the singular standard for comparison (Jæger & Møllegaard, 2017; Manning, 2019; Wallace, 2019). Minoritized teachers can provide nuanced perspectives of how the "rules of the game" are defined across professionals at their schools, how the rules of the game are identified and reinforced, how these rules are impacted by the social identity of stakeholders, and how this phenomenon influences student experiences and trajectories.

Limitations of this participant selection process are the social distancing restrictions of COVID-19 that do not allow researchers to recruit in person, which limits the available avenues for follow-up. Additionally, the size of the sample is unclear. I do not know how many minoritized veteran teachers there are in DCPS, who have been at their current high school for at least five years. Therefore, when none of my respondents met the full criteria, I adjusted to prioritize minoritized veteran teachers regardless of the time they were at their current school.

Data Collection

This study collects data through two central data collection methods, semi-structured interviews and archival data. Semi-structured interviews, "provide deep, rich, individualized, and contextualized data" and structured similarity through similar questions and "customized replication" via flexibility in follow-up questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 126). The research questions and study aim to investigate how teachers conceptualize "rules of the game," and qualitative interviews allow the researcher to "develop full, detailed, and contextualized descriptions of experiences and perspectives" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 127). The semi-structured interview approach also limits the inherent power of the researcher to shape the conversation allowing for a "unique and customized conversational path that is co-constructed with each participant" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 134).

The interview protocol investigates definitions of the "rules of the game" for student success at high schools in Washington, DC. I asked minoritized veteran teachers about their definitions of "rules of the game" and what shapes those rules. Teachers were also asked how they communicate and model the rules or have seen others communicate the rules to students and caregivers. Further, teachers can explore how their own social identity and the social identity of the students they serve impacts how they communicate and enact "rules of the game." They also reflect on how the construction, communication of, reinforcement, and evaluation of "rules of the game" influence students' educational experiences and trajectories.

To ensure adherence to Richards (2019) race-conscious approach to cultural capital, the interview protocol includes questions "that center the needs and desires of the marginalized" (p. 6). In addition to asking teachers questions about what is or has happened in their schools, study participants will determine what they see as necessary to close racialized gaps in outcomes for students at their schools. The interview questions ask teachers to reflect on and explore the types of cultural capital activated by their minoritized students and families that are typically not positively reinforced at school, and ways they and their schools could better reinforce the identified cultural capital. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

I requested archival data as written evidence of school communication to students and parents regarding "rules of the game" from each participant. One participant referenced a set of emails, agreed to furnish them, but did not produce them after three reminders. Another participant referred me to their school's website where they said everything was documented. However, the website would have been the only source of archival data in the study, which jeopardized confidentiality, so it was not utilized.

Validity

An integral part of the research development process are opportunities for structured reflexivity and dialogic engagement because these strategies recognize the researcher as a non-neutral component of the research and allow for meaningful reflection in different stages of the research process (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I met bi-weekly with a pair of dialogic engagement partners to review portions of my data and discuss the development of findings. In addition to those conversations, I developed a series of informal memos. After transcribing interviews, I created a data analysis memo outlining the main ideas from each interview question and a memo compiling the main ideas from each survey transcript, by interview protocol question. I also created a memo of the main ideas that support each of the questions this study aims to answer. In addition to these prescribed memos, I also wrote memos to document my evolution of thinking around coding, themes, and the theoretical framework to further assist in distilling findings. These memos guided my data analysis process, helped me identify missing elements of analyses and ultimately determine a robust process for analysis that included creating a matrix of my research questions nested within my theoretical framework.

Transferability

I reached out to all teachers at ten of the fifteen high schools in the district with a detailed outline of selection criteria. Once I

realized none of the teachers who responded met the outlined criteria, I recalibrated to prioritize minoritized veteran teachers, whether they had taught at their current school for five years. Though all the participants in the study were veteran teachers, none of them met these criteria. Participants represented both magnet application schools and neighborhood high schools.

Treating Social Institutions as Neutral Entities

In her development of the race-conscious model of cultural capital, Richards (2019) poses a validity concern. She provides a list of five diagnostic questions researchers can use to identify institutional racism in a social institution (p. 9):

a. Which group(s) feel most at home (on campus) and which ones feel like (unwanted) guests?;
b. Whose norms, values, and perspective does the institution consider to be normal or legitimate? Whose does it silence, marginalize or delegitimize?;
c. Who inhabits positions of power within the institutions?;
d. Whose experiences, norms, values, and perspectives influence the institution's laws, policies, and systems of evaluation?; and
e. Whose interests does the institution protect? (p. 9)

I explored some of these questions during the interview process and again in the data analysis process to ensure adherence to the race-conscious model for cultural capital research, thus challenging what Richards (2019) terms the "class-based master-narrative" (p. 2). Unchecked acceptance of White middle-class values as normative and preferable continue to shape this narrative while ignoring the intersectionality of race and class within theories of cultural capital and cultural reproduction.

Data Analysis

After each interview—recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai—the data was reviewed while simultaneously reading the transcript to correct any errors and pinpoint potential themes (Maxwell, 2013). Data collection memos documented potential themes, to reflect upon my decisions regarding individual follow-up questions, and to document resulting amendments to the basic interview protocol. I created a "theme matrix" that maps potential themes to each research question (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 500). Within 48 hours, memos from each interview were provided to the participant for their reflections.

The next stage of data analysis included coding data from the various interviews into the common themes identified in the memo processes. This included rearranging data "into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107). Substantive categories were identified using "participants' own words and concepts" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 108), to prioritize decolonization methods that enhance participant voice and knowledge (Chilisa, 2020).

Each piece of data identified for each participant within a particular category was placed into a "themes × data" matrix that includes themes and quotes speaking to each respective theme (Maxwell, 2012, p. 108). Once data from a particular interview was categorized, an additional full transcript analysis took place as well as a review of the initial interview memo, to reorient the segment of data within its original context, as a connecting strategy to "understand the data *in context* [... and] to identify the relationships among the different elements of text" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 112, emphasis in original).

After analyzing the data using the methods outlined above, the findings were only partially revealed. To further refine them, I went back to my theoretical framework and research questions. I mapped the research questions onto my theoretical framework in a formative data analysis memo to explore "How do the data map onto my conceptual framework or theoretical framework?" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 263). This analysis allowed me to compare findings that aligned to theoretical expectations, extended beyond those expectations, and were areas of concern.

In addition to data coding processes, a "race-conscious model" (Richards, 2020) of analysis was applied to the findings to analyze the intersections between race and class within cultural capital and cultural reproduction theories. This included "interrogating how racial ideology might inform whose capital is legitimized or delegitimized" (Richards, 2020, p. 6). In developing the formative analysis memo, two considerations from the race-conscious model (Richards, 2020) were present: the needs and desires of the marginalized, and what the institution can do to make a specific phenomenon more equitable. Applying the model highlighted that the voice of the marginalized was missing from the data. The "race-conscious model" analysis also helped me explore how the data mapping onto my literature buckets also reveal specific suggestions for making norms and practices more equitable.

Findings

This study's three major findings highlight the school's active institutional role in mediating cultural reproduction, while also underscoring how institutional practices and norms perpetuate racism, marginalization, and inequity.

Finding 1: "Rules of the Game" for High School Success are Most Consistently Communicated Through Interventions After Students Have Not Met Academic, Behavior, or Attendance Expectations

Schools as institutions are fields that have their own "rules of the game" for obtaining desired results in the school setting (Bourdieu, 1977; Chiang et al., 2020; Lareau et al., 2016; Luedke, 2020a). Each field has its own "rules of the game;" thus, a clear understanding of the "rules of the game" is imperative to success in that specific setting. All participants mentioned a response to intervention (RTI) or multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) intervention team, which seems to be the only consistent practice each school implements to uniformly and repeatedly alert both student and caregiver to the "rules of the game" at school. At each school, the interventions team is activated for groups of students who do not meet academic, behavior, or attendance expectations, and are thus deemed in need of intervention or support. Additionally, a point person or team is assigned to work with each student; aggressively contact the student and parent; and then create, implement, and monitor an intervention plan.

Every participant brought up the RTI/MTSS teams when asked about how the "rules of the game" are transmitted or reinforced at their school. The following excerpts portray the participants' inability to identify any other consistent ways students and parents were clearly informed of the "rules of the game" at their respective schools.

> Oh, my goodness. Not at all. The caregivers are given. They're given straight, no look passes. The caregivers are the no look passes. The caregivers. I go back to being the stakeholders. The caregivers are not being talked to straight and I understand why. It's because people don't want to look people in the eye and tell them what they're doing wrong. You know, I'm saying. Instead, it's pacify them. (Participant Interview, W1B, 1/15/2021)

W1B describes school practices around communicating expectations to parents. They observe that parents are not clearly communicated with. They posit this is because of a sense of discomfort between the school and parent community, where school representatives (teacher, administration, and staff) are not comfortable telling parents the school's "rules of the game" for student success, precisely because these rules seem to include not only actions a student must take, but also actions needed or expected from the parent.

When asked about how students are informed of the "rules of the game," another participant illuminates that high schools may also fail to directly inform them: "That is an excellent question. The question is the assumption that the students are informed" (Participant Interview, S4W, 1/27/2021). Of the six study participants, only one described a school-wide practice of introducing students to the "rules of the game" for student success. The one school that does make a concerted effort has a strategy that includes clear messaging on their website supported by regular school assemblies, individual class assemblies, and parent meetings that reiterate the "rules of the game." Even with a plan for basic communication of the "rules of the game," the participant from this school was critical of institutional practices of teachers, administrators, and staff:

> Sometimes it takes a lot for adults to reach certain families, you can't just give up, you know, the first time. In high school, I've noticed that a lot of adults like to talk to students. And it's almost like the student is serving as the middle person and the liaison to the families, assuming that the families may not want to know about the student because they're trying to give ownership, versus sharing the knowledge with the family and the student at the same time. So I've seen that sometimes be a barrier in mindset—of what to expect for adolescents to be developed to do. (Participant Interview, K6R, 2/4/2021)

> I think the students who are not succeeding, I think they, they, they have that, that lower morale for sure. And sometimes things kind of snowball, and it just gets too far gone. And then they, you know, become evasive. Like maybe they don't know, those students who are not as successful, they don't know oftentimes how to ask for help. Maybe they don't know who to ask for help, they just don't know where to start. So then that just compounds their issue. So then we see them less and less. (Participant Interview, G3C, 1/26/2021)

The first quote identifies a difference between the experiences of families and students who master the "rules of the game" of high school and those who do not. Specifically with regards to how easy the school perceives it is to connect with the family, school representatives (teachers, administrators, and staff) are more likely to communicate—exclusively or primarily—directly with the adolescents. The second quote provides an additional lens to consider by outlining behavior typical of a student who has not mastered the "rules of the game." This student may not exhibit contextually valuable engagement norms, which can

spiral into disconnection from the educational process due to the dynamic nature of the relationship between students' attitudes and behaviors, and the behaviors of adult educators. Is it possible that adolescents whose caregivers are not easily connected to the school are then ascribed more responsibilities by their school—to be the conduit of information and expectations between the school and their families. However, those same adolescents may be less adept at the basic communication and engagement "rules of the game" needed to navigate their own success and to be an advocate for their family. What, then, is the school's role in erasing parents from their role in cultural reproduction, if institutional norms and practices fail to include strategies for creating bridges to collaborative success for the students and families experiencing the conditions described?

Cultural reproduction theory posits that one of the main modes of conveying "rules of game" to children is through their parents (Bourdieu, 1977; Lareau, 2002), which means that even in the high school setting it is important for students *and* their caregivers to have a clear understanding of "rules of the game." Their attempts at enacting their capital to abide by the "rules of the game" must also be encouraged and accepted by the school, which means that high schools must consider their own role—the institutional practices implemented by teachers, administrators, and staff—in ensuring "rules of the game" are clearly communicated to and reinforced with caregivers. As Richards (2020) encourages cultural reproduction researchers to consider when applying critical intersectional analyses, schools must also consider what the institution can do to make the experiences of students and families who do not demonstrate perceived mastery of the "rules of the game" for the specific school field more equitable?

Finding 2: Students and Parents Must Show up Exemplifying That They Value Education

Each participant mentioned the idea of values alignment between the school, the student, and their family—either as a requirement for successful students, in the context of barriers to student success, or in a description of how students' school experiences differ based on their level of academic success. Whether students and parents show up exemplifying the value of education was the most common attribute described as a barrier to academic success for students.

> If the student and the parent value the need for content. You know what I'm saying? How they show or demonstrate, or even verbally say, you know what I'm saying, the need, and truly understand the value of what they're trying to learn. Because those who really understand the value, they tend to perform better. (Participant Interview, W1B, 1/15/2021).

> The barriers, I have to say, and I'm going to put the onus on what's going on at home. Because from my purview, there are no barriers. There's no reason why our students should not be thriving. But that's very surface. I can say that because I mean, there may be the social emotional issues that I'm neglecting to mention, and that's very real. I know you can't just expect, you know, your students, if they don't already have certain habits of success. They're not going to just cultivate them in a semester. But I still feel like there are supports in place for that. (Participant Interview G3C, 1/26/2021)

The school's teachers, administrators, and staff actively mediate which student and caregiver behaviors are acknowledged and assigned a positive value as representatives of the institution or field (Bourdieu, 1977). Therefore, individuals who represent the school decide whether the student and caregiver show appropriate value for their education. However, Finding 1 highlights that a clear definition of the "rules of the game" is not shared systematically until after students fail to meet some predetermined academic, behavior, or attendance requirement of the school. If a student and caregiver are expected to act in ways that exemplify value for the school in question, how are the required ways of acting determined and communicated to parents and students?

Students and caregivers are expected to enter high school aware of the "rules of the game" for success at that level of schooling. Lack of concerted efforts to ensure all school stakeholders are aware of "rules of the game" for student academic success is documented in five of the six interviews, which implies that high schools expect caregivers and students to walk in the building with "rules of the game" for their institution mastered. One of the participants highlights this concern with the following quote:

> "Based on my personal experience, sometimes families have a different definition of what success is, and what they, what they want for their students. So, and sometimes it's language, language barriers, computer literacy, ways of life, cultural, all those things like just making sure that we align what we're saying with what families are saying is very important." (K6R, Participant Interview, 2/4/2021)

Another says, "The only barrier I can think of is, you know, you can lead people to water, but you can't make them drink. So, on the receiving end are the caregivers. Are they receptive to learn" (Participant Interview, G3C, 2021). Students and families arrive

with sets of experiences that informed their values. The theory of cumulative advantage, in fact, posits that students and families enter high school impacted by the effects of all the experiences they have had with education institutions up until the present moment, which means that the previous experiences students and families have had with educational institutions will influence how they show up at a new school (Potter & Roska, 2013).

Depending on the previous experiences of the student and family in question, the actions of school personnel and ways the student and family show up may act as negative feedback or positive feedback loops. For example, if my child's last school did not welcome active parent involvement from my point of view, I am not going to try hard to engage with their current school. If our family transitions to a new school and it never mentions that I need to do anything more than I am doing, I do not receive any signals to change the accustomed behavior. Meanwhile, the new school thinks I do not value my child's education, so they do not give me ideas for meaningful participation. The cycle is self-fulfilling and includes assumptions from all stakeholders that go unclarified and reinforced.

Another participant describes a typical experience for them when calling home to inform parents that their students are not meeting expectations.

> "Those students who are struggling, I don't see evasion, I see frustration. Even when I'm connecting with the home, I don't see evasion. I see frustration there. I can feel tension. 'I tell you to do your work!' Um, so it's just pressure." (G3C, Participant Interview, 1/26/2021)

This participant highlights the difference in educational experiences between students who are successful academically and those who are not. In these situations, many student and family actions might be perceived as evasive or examples of not valuing education. However, this participant perceives something different.

Frustration and pressure are the descriptors they use for times when students and parents are notified that they are not being successful meeting the expectations of the school's "rules of the game." Parent reactions are not perceived as dismissive, unconcerned, or avoidant. Rather frustration denotes a lack of understanding about what can be done. The parent yells at the student, maybe to prove to the teacher and maybe out of their own frustration, too, "I tell you to do your work!" The hidden question there for the school personnel, however, might be, "What else am I supposed to do here?" The tension this participant observes may be caused by many things: embarrassment, the caregiver's lack of understanding of what tools are at their disposal and how they might partner differently with the school and their child, and an understanding of disparities in access to capital.

On the contrary, students who are academically successful may have tools of cultural capital that predict a different and better educational experience. Every participant mentioned home support as a "rule of the game" necessary for academic success. One participant, however, explained some of the explicitly positive consequences of strong parental engagement:

> "What makes the students successful? I've noticed that students who have very active parents, a lot of times you would assume that, you know high school students' parents don't want to be involved, blah, blah, blah. But very active parents ensure student success because I've found that they hold adults accountable. It's not even like holding students accountable. It's just letting adults know, ' I'm here and I'm watching'. Something as simple as that, where you're like, 'Alright, I know, I gotta do this, because not only is the student counting on me, but the parent is counting on me, too.' So that extra level of accountability is huge." (K6R, Participant Interview, 2/4/2021)

It is possible that parental support is not merely an important tool for ensuring positive cultural capital is passed on and appropriately activated by students, so they can succeed at meeting the "rules of the game"? Parent-initiated engagement may also ensure a set of behaviors from the school that amounts to a different, more positive, and more intentional educational experience for their students. Therefore, the parents who have mastered concerted cultivation have their behaviors positively reinforced by the responses they get from the school.

None of the participants in this study mentioned methods the school took to ensure either institutional values or family values were aligned or understood by each school stakeholder—teachers, administrators, staff, students, and caregivers. If students and caregivers don't arrive with the values, as exemplified by specific and unnamed attitudes and behaviors, they may not be able to attain success in the school setting. It is the school's responsibility to ensure that students and caregivers are fully informed of, and that students are equipped with, the tools to meet the "rules of the game." However, it seems they do not do this.

Finding 3. There was no Mention of Institutionally Developed and Implemented Methods of Understanding the Needs,

Desires or Values of the Students and Families—the Most Marginalized

This space is held and intentionally left blank to honor the space where the needs, desires, and values of the marginalized, and the schools' efforts to discern them, should be.

Discussion and Implications

This study finds that "rules of the game" for high school student success are not directly, clearly, and continually communicated to students and parents before school staff begin intervention efforts to address a concern. As a result, students must experience a relative academic, behavior, or attendance failure before they are targeted by a concerted effort from their school institution to ensure they know the "rules of the game" for academic success. Richard's (2020) race-conscious theory implores researchers to interrogate the role of institutions in preserving iniquities and favoring values that are normalized as White and middle class. This finding indicates that high schools are not explicit and preventative in their formulation and expression of "rules of the game" to their students and parents. As a result, schools actively perpetuate inequality by failing to ensure that all students have the same level of access to "rules of the game" for academic success. One way this perpetuation of systemic racism and classism occurs when norms and systems are permitted to develop, function, and run as they have always. This study documents seasoned high school educators' perspectives regarding how "rules of the game" at their school are defined and reinforced for both students and their caregivers.

Study participants highlighted how schools fail to act at the prevention and basic level of the response to intervention (RTI) or multi-tiered systems and supports (MTSS) systems, by not clearly explicating the "rules of the game" for academic success. This means that students and caregivers who do not share the same unspoken values as the adults in the school, or who display their values in ways that are not familiar to adults in the school, are automatically at a disadvantage for attaining whatever is defined as success in the setting. The lack of intentionality schools show when welcoming students and families into their setting begins a cycle that can be detrimental to students and families by reinforcing behaviors that are not aligned with the school's "rules of the game." Though the participants at all but one school in this study revealed that "rules of the game" for success at their school are unwritten and/or unexplained in their settings, research shows that these expectations are necessary to success, and they are defined by the institution (Bourdieu, 1977, Lareau et al., 2016). Families and students who prove to school personnel that they have mastered the "rules of the game" get advantages in the institution. These students get a heightened level of responsiveness from the institution by virtue of having parents who hold the adults within the school accountable, using behaviors and attitudes positively acknowledged by the school, or abiding by the "rules of the game" (Lareau et al., 2016; Potter & Roska, 2013).

The way schools perceive student and parent behavior and beliefs determine how school employees respond to students and families (Bécares & Priest, 2015; Cheadle & Amato, 2010; Jæger, & Møllegaard, 2017; Nunn and Tepe-Belfrage, 2019; Vincent, et al., 2012). Students, therefore, may have different educational experiences based on how their actions and the actions of their families are perceived by the school. Each participant in this study mentioned students and caregivers needing to exemplify that they value education. Therefore, one "rule of the game" is that students and their families must come in with the behaviors and attitudes schools interpret as valuing education mastered. If they do not, schools—the teachers, administrators, and staff within them—may place them on the path opposite of successes, because school adult behaviors may be different towards them, and the expectations schools have of them may also differ. This expectation of students and their families is problematic because research has shown that minoritized groups content with racism as a mediator for whether their cultural capital activated acknowledged (Bécares & Priest, 2015; Richards, 2020; Vincent, et al., 2012).

For high schools in Washington, DC, to move towards race-consciousness, they must take concerted actions to disrupt cultural reproduction and inequality by reallocating time and resources to tier 1, or prevention level, endeavors. School leaders can begin by documenting the currently unspoken "rules of the game" of student academic success, not only for students, but also for their caregivers and for schoolteachers, administrators, and staff. The voices of students and their families must be meaningfully sought to determine the best way to support them in mastering the "rules of the game." This is also an opportunity for schools to develop strategies for empowering students and parents in co-creation of new "rules of the game" for their shared field or school institution, and to collaboratively create behavioral anchors and real life scenarios to help all school stakeholders understand what the "rules of the game" look like in practice.

Since individualization is a result of concerted cultivation and one of the primary ways schools perpetuate inequality, schools must interrogate its systems and practices to determine potential for loopholes to be exploited or created. Following this interrogation, schools must infuse equitable processes into their culture that inform all students and caregivers about opportunities and give them chances to take advantage of them. However, an additional barrier to success in resetting norms and expectations, and whether parents are empowered to activate cultural capital, is the set of experiences students and caregivers enter the building with (Bodovski & Farkas, 2008; Manning, 2019; Nunn & Tepe-Belfrage, 2019; Potter & Roska, 2013). Researchers and practitioners both must endeavor to learn directly from students and caregivers about the formative

home-school experiences that impact practices associated with concerted cultivation, particularly agency engaging with school representatives and negotiating with them to ensure needs are met. This investigative process, centering the needs and desires of minoritized stakeholders in the building (and those with less power), also positions schools to implement Richards (2020) race-conscious model for exploring and disrupting cultural capital.

As a research practitioner, my dissertation explores effective and practical ways to co-create, communicate and reinforce "rules of the game" with each group of school stakeholders—school representatives, students, and their caregivers—in addition to examining how principals conceptualize these processes.

Conclusion

If schools are to cease being mechanisms for perpetuating cultural reproduction, they must begin to view themselves as active rather than passive or neutral participants in the cycle of cultural reproduction. This begins by investigating their longstanding norms and practices to unearth the often unwritten "rules of the game." Only once the "rules of the game" for academic success in their local school environment are unearthed can schools endeavor to ensure that all stakeholders have shared understandings of what it takes to be successful in their environment. School leaders, teachers, and staff, however, must understand that merely describing the "rules of the game" is not enough because there are other factors that influence which students and families are most likely to activate the appropriate cultural capital to meet the standards identified. These factors are steeped in racism and classism and accumulate for families over time. They reinforce behaviors that keep schools, students, and their caregivers out of sync and result in less successful academic performances from students.

In addition to practitioners committing to this level of interrogation and disruption, cultural capital researchers and educational sociologists must also commit to enhancing the field by interrogating how "rules of the game" are developed within schools, how they are transmitted to students and caregivers, and how they are reinforced. A body of literature and practical tools for practitioners must be developed to walk schools through the self-evaluation and action planning processes. Professional development must be developed to ensure all school stakeholders have a clear understanding of its role as an active mediator of cultural reproduction.

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