Privileging Class: Toward a Critical Psychology of Social Class in the Context of Education

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This issue of the Journal of Social Issues explores psychological meanings of social class in the context of education. In this article we propose an outline for a critical psychology of social class and discuss why education is a useful context for examining relations between class and individual psychology. We consider how research and theory in the study of race and gender can and cannot inform a psychology of social class. We introduce three themes that organize the issue and the articles that illustrate them. The articles in this issue address all levels of education, include data from within and outside of the United States, and investigate perspectives of individuals from a range of social class groups.

“What I remember most about school was that if you were poor you got no respect and no encouragement. I mean if you didn’t have cute ringlets, an ironed new uniform, starched shirts, and a mother and father who gave money to the church, you weren’t a teacher’s pet and that meant you weren’t encouraged.”

—a working-class woman respondent interviewed in Luttrell, 1993

Class differences were boundaries no one wanted to face or talk about. It was easier to downplay them, to act as though we were all from privileged

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backgrounds, to work around them, to confront them privately in the solitude of one’s room, or to pretend that just being chosen to study at such an institution meant that those of us who did not come from such privilege were already in transition toward privilege . . . . It was a kind of treason not to believe that it was better to be identified with the world of material privilege than with the world of the working class, the poor.

—hooks, 1989

Every day, in schools and other educational institutions, individuals notice social class, and in doing so create, maintain, and—at times—challenge its psychological meanings. The context of education, therefore, is an ideal stage on which to watch the dynamics and contradictions of class play out in both individual and social psychology. In this article, and in this issue of the *Journal of Social Issues*, we aim to “privilege class,” to foreground the psychological implications of the class-saturated educational contexts in which individuals develop their own identities and come to understand their place in society. Doing so requires that we break the silence around class that hooks (1989) and others (e.g., Dews & Law, 1995; Tokarczyk & Fay, 1993) argue characterizes the social climate and academic discourse in higher education, and all too often pervades the work of psychologists as well (Lott, 2002).

In developing this issue of *JSI*, we wanted to expand the possibilities for psychologists to see ourselves as responsible for understanding the implications of class at both the individual and group levels. It was our intention to highlight the ways in which “class matters” (hooks, 2000) to all people at every position in a class-stratified society. We aimed to represent a variety of methodological strategies for studying social class, and to highlight the ways in which class must be understood in conjunction with other social identities such as gender and race. In soliciting articles, it became clear that those psychologists who examine psychological meanings of social class often do so in the context of education; it also became clear that schools are an important site of both pain and possibility for understanding individuals’ psychological experiences as members of particular social class groups. In the United States, for example, institutions of education—especially public schools—are the very embodiment of the belief that the United States is a classless society. In their discussion of the ethos of meritocracy in the United States, Fine and Burns (this issue) note that despite the fact that education is intended to be the great equalizer, more often it serves to reproduce the class structure across generations. Sites of education, therefore, are a rich laboratory in which to study the experience of class. In the following sections, we develop an argument for why it is important for psychologists to study class, examine the psychology of social class in the context of education, and describe the organization of this issue of *JSI*. 
Toward a Critical Psychology of Social Class

There is a small amount of literature on the relationship between psychology and social structure that emphasizes the importance of studying social class (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1984; Centers, 1949; House, 1977; Hyman, 1942; Kohn, 1989; Ryff, 1987). Researchers in this tradition have studied the relationship between social class (or status) and values (e.g., Inkeles, 1960; Kohn, 1969), childrearing practices (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1958; Tudge, Hogan, Snezhkova, Kulakova, & Etz, 2000), people’s perceptions of their own and others’ class position (e.g., Coleman & Rainwater, 1978; Jackman & Jackman, 1983), mental and physical health (e.g., Adler et al., 1994; Hollingshead & Redlich, 1958; Wohlfarth, 1997), and other domains (see Argyle, 1994, for a review). However, by and large, psychologists have tended to leave the study of social class to sociologists, usually regarding social class as a variable to be statistically controlled for, if they attend to class at all.

At a time when psychology as a discipline has increasingly defined itself as interested in the ways race, class, and gender critically shape our psychological experiences, it seems that class is the least explored of these three. In contrast to the blossoming of research on the psychology of race and gender that has taken place over the past 25 or so years (evidenced, for example, by the existence of specialized academic courses and journals devoted to the psychology of these social categories such as *Journal of Black Psychology* and *Psychology of Women Quarterly*), there has been relatively little interest in class among psychologists in the United States. For example, recent annual reviews of research about identities in psychology (Frable, 1997) and sociology (Howard, 2000) support the contention that class identities have received considerably less scholarly attention than both identities based on gender and identities based on race.

This paucity of research on class may reflect the broader political zeitgeist in the United States. Beginning in the late 1950s, mass social movements aimed to gain rights for those who are marginalized or oppressed due to gender (e.g., the women’s movement) and race (e.g., the movements for civil rights and Black power, the Chicano liberation movement, the American Indian Movement) and to redefine and re-value their social identities. The literatures in the psychology of gender and of race have grown considerably since that time. Some of this research suggests that these movements have been instrumental in raising the consciousness and developing the social identities of these groups (e.g. Cross, 1991; Downing & Roush, 1985; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). However, in the same historical period, there has been a decline in class-based organizing, and even movements on behalf of poor people have not focused on identity to the same degree that these other movements have (Cohen, 1985). Indeed, Adair (2002, p. 467) describes the ways in which “communal affiliation” among poor people that might allow for collective organizing is systematically discouraged in
places like social service agencies. In this political context, and in a social climate in which the majority of people in the United States believe that upward mobility is a birthright (Hochschild, 1995), it is perhaps not surprising that psychologists have given less attention to class than they have to race and gender.

We propose that what is needed is a critical psychology of social class; that is, a systematic research-based literature focused on the exploration of the psychological meaning of social class to diverse groups of people. In addition to understanding the implications of material inequality and differential access to resources, a critical psychology of social class would need to address the relationship between variables related to class—identity, attitudes, and the experience of discrimination—and the various areas of functioning that have long interested social, personality, and clinical psychologists (e.g. self-esteem, well-being, altruistic behavior, etc.). The study of social class must, also, move conceptually beyond a focus on class differences (see Cole & Stewart, 2001) or class as a descriptor or demographic control variable (Frable, 1997) to investigate class as a social identity. That is, a critical psychology of social class must pay special attention to an individual’s understanding of him or herself as occupying a classed location, and the values and attitudes associated with that location (to paraphrase Tajfel, 1972).

This issue of JSI is an effort to engage psychologists in a critical study of social class. The work that psychologists have already done to explore the meaning of race and gender can help us begin to sketch a roadmap for this project. Class is, however, different from these other categories and raises special issues that distinguish it from gender and race. In the next section, we explore each of these ideas in turn.

**Lessons from Studies of Gender and Race**

As with race and gender, individuals experience privilege or disadvantage based on their class membership. Certainly, this has tangible, material consequences for individuals and their families. As is also true of race and gender, individuals may be discriminated against on the basis of class (see, e.g., Adair, 2002; Lott, 2002; Moon & Rolison, 1998; Sennett & Cobb, 1972). Yet for the most part, to psychologists, the effects of classism—the injuries of class—remain hidden (Sennett & Cobb, 1972). Also like race and gender, class is a powerful social category that shapes individuals’ experience of themselves in the world: as Steedman (1986), an historian, observed, “Class and gender, and their articulations, are the bits and pieces from which psychological selfhood is made” (p. 7).

A psychology of social class must begin to understand what class means to those whom we study. It must go beyond categorization to investigate the consequences of identification and the ways in which people see themselves in relation to members of other social class groups. Press and Cole (1999) looked at women’s identification with social class groups, rather than to class membership itself, and
demonstrated the ways in which these identities were meaningfully related to their attitudes towards abortion. Similarly, just as there is a growing literature documenting the costs of sexist and racist discrimination on those who experience it (Klonoff & Landrine, 1997; Krieger & Sidney, 1996; Williams & Collins, 1995), Croizet and Claire (1998) demonstrated that current theorizing on the costs of discrimination is also relevant to social class. They found that stereotype threat, a theoretical construct developed to understand the academic underperformance of African Americans (Steele, 1997), also had a negative effect on working-class students’ performance on a standardized test. This suggests that membership in the working class can have a negative effect on students’ performance not only through material deprivation and substandard schooling (Hochschild, this issue), but also through psychological mechanisms by which students are aware—consciously or otherwise—that their performance may confirm negative stereotypes about poor people. This increased self-consciousness could cause them to “choke” under the pressure of an academic testing situation (Gladwell, 2000; Steele, 1997).

The study of race and gender, and in particular, the study of women of color, has yielded the important insight that social identities are always experienced in conjunction with each other; for example, one cannot experience a racial identity that is genderless (Collins, 2000). This insight has been variously termed “multiple jeopardy” (King, 1988) or “intersectionality” (Crenshaw, 1994). A critical psychology of class will address the ways that class intersects with race, gender, and other identities because failure to investigate intersectionality results in research that ignores intra-group differences (Crenshaw, 1994). For example, Pattillo-McCoy (1999) has demonstrated that Black middle-class neighborhoods are different from predominantly White neighborhoods that would be similarly categorized in terms of class based on demographic measures; her ethnographic fieldwork documented the ways that persistent residential racial segregation shaped the social and cultural landscape of a Black middle-class neighborhood. Similarly, Raffo’s collection (1997) documented distinctive class-based experiences of lesbians and gay men.

We can point to several features of class that suggest that the idea of intersectionality is key to developing a critical psychology of social class. First, many terms that laypeople use to describe ethnic groups are class coded (Bettie, 2000; Ortner, 1998), as in “WASP;” also, class-based descriptors may be racially coded, as in “inner-city resident.” How does the popular use of such signifiers conflate race and class in the minds both of those who use the terms, and of those who are labeled by them? Second, racial identity may significantly affect the experience and meaning of class identity. For example, Tatum (2000) illustrated that middle-class Black parents who moved to predominantly White suburbs for the educational opportunities offered also feared that the move would negatively affect their children’s development of a healthy racial identity. Finally, Fine (1997) has shown that racially-based inequality in public schools reproduces class structure, and that students are willing participants in this process. In her study, White and...
Black students tracked themselves into the separate college prep and vocational curricula in their high school based on their social perceptions about which track was appropriate for students like themselves. Thus, the psychological experience of social class cannot be meaningfully understood outside of the context of race and other social identities with which class interacts.

The study of class, however, differs from that of race and gender in important ways. One way in which studies of class tend to differ from those of race and gender concerns the ways in which these social identities are defined and measured. In general, there is considerably more variability in and discussion about how to define and assess social class than there is with respect to race or gender (which is not to say that there are not controversies or disagreements in those two domains [e.g. Kessler, 1990; Zuckerman, 1990]). Race and gender are (almost) always assessed in psychological research by self-report; class may be assessed by both “objective” measures or by subjective ones (see, e.g., Centers, 1949; Jackman & Jackman, 1973; Ostrove, Adler, Kuppermann, & Washington, 2000).

Class is often operationalized as socioeconomic status (SES), although the two concepts are not conceptually identical. SES attempts to characterize dimensions along which individuals are stratified and it is relatively easily measured through objective indicators such as income, occupation, or level of education (for a comprehensive review see Krieger, Williams, & Moss, 1997). Objective SES indicators capture specific economic and social resources, and also reflect the hierarchical ranking inherent in the current class structure in the United States. They tend not to be theoretically grounded in ways that discussions of class and, often, gender and race are. Like definitions of gender and race, references to “class” (as opposed to SES) imply a particular relationship between social groups characterized by discrimination (Moon & Rolison, 1998), power, and/or exploitation (Wright, 2000; see Smith, 1985, and Williams, 1990, for a discussion of the distinctions between SES and class).

The possibility for mobility is another way in which the study of class is strikingly different from race and gender: It is much more difficult to change one’s race or gender than it (apparently) is to change one’s social class. Stories of, for example, light-skinned Blacks passing as White and of “masculine” women passing as men (Sloop, 2000; Streeter, 1996) provide important—and complicated—testimonies to the fact that some members of subordinate groups desire the power, privilege, and opportunities associated with Whiteness and maleness. However, the desire and intention to change one’s gender, for example, is considered under some extreme circumstances to warrant a psychiatric diagnosis (e.g., “gender identity disorder”). In contrast, the desire (or “aspiration”) to change one’s social class—at least in the “upward direction”—is generally commendable (if not expected), and is even described as “the American dream” (e.g., Hochschild, 1995). As hooks (1989) notes, however, mobility via higher education is not without negative consequences, “No wonder our working-class parents from poor backgrounds feared our entry into
[the world of elite higher education], intuiting perhaps that we might learn to be ashamed of where we had come from, that we might never return home, or come back only to lord it over them” (p. 75; see also Dews & Law, 1995).

In the United States, strong ideologies surrounding mobility and meritocracy encourage people to make individual (rather than structural) attributions for the causes of social class position (Langston, 1992; Ortner, 1991). In contrast, race and gender are more commonly thought to have biological or social origins rather than characterological ones. For example, although we often hear wealth explained in terms of ambition and poverty in terms of laziness, and we hear the claim that members of certain ethnic or racial groups are poor because they are lazy, no one makes the claim that a person belongs to a certain ethnic group because he or she is lazy (just as one would never argue that ambitiousness makes people White). Thus, the ideology surrounding class locates the causes of class stratification solely in the behavior or the personality of individuals; yet the class system itself exerts pressure on individual psychology, influencing the ways people view themselves and others (e.g., Leahy, 1983; Sennett & Cobb, 1972).

Some psychologists have argued that the tendency of poor and working-class (and other oppressed) people to maintain a belief in a just and meritocratic world despite evidence to the contrary represents “false consciousness.” Augoustinos (1999) critiqued the premise that these beliefs indicate that people have faulty cognitions or are unable to engage in critical thought. Instead she viewed these beliefs as a testament to the power of the ideology that is itself created by structural inequalities. Also, her argument helps us ask questions about how the self-concepts of middle-class and upper-class people are themselves shaped by their positions in the class structure (e.g., Marx, 1844/1978; Sennett & Cobb, 1972).

**Psychological Meanings of Social Class in the Context of Education**

Universal access to public elementary and secondary school in the United States is a central pillar supporting the American dream, the belief that upward mobility is available to all who would aspire to it through some combination of hard work and individual traits, such as perseverance and intelligence (Hochschild, 1995). Schools both attempt to offer opportunity and, whether intentionally or not, often simultaneously reproduce existing class stratification (Anyon, 1997; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Domhoff, 1983). In the process, schools themselves may erect barriers that impede some individuals’ access to particular opportunities (see, e.g., Adair, 2001). Schools are often the sites in which some are deemed able to progress and worthy of success, while others are considered intellectually inferior and incapable of achievement in ways that tend to be systematically related to social class (Fine, 1991; Lott, 2001; Oakes, 1985). This, in addition to the social implications of class status among schoolchildren, is poignantly illustrated by Adair (2002), who explains
We [poor students] were read as unworthy, laughable and often dangerous. Our schoolmates laughed at our “ugly shoes,” our crooked and ill-serviced teeth and the way we “stank,” as teachers excoriated us for our inability to concentrate in school, our “refusal” to come to class prepared with proper school supplies, an our unethical behavior when we tried to take more than our allocated share of “free lunch.” Whenever backpacks of library books came up missing, we were publicly interrogated and sent home to “think about” our offenses, often accompanied by notes that reminded my mother that as a poor single parent she should be working twice as hard to make up for the discipline that allegedly walked out the door with my father. When we sat glued to our seats, afraid to stand in front of the class in ragged and ill fitting hand-me-downs, we were held up as examples of unprepared and uncooperative children. And when our grades reflected our otherness, they were used to justify even more elaborate punishment that exacerbated the effects of our growing anomie (p. 457).

In Adair’s account, this intense classism among both students and teachers results in a vicious cycle in which working-class or poor students, worn down by the mistreatment and misunderstanding, sometimes “live down” to these pervasive negative expectations. A critical psychology of social class reminds us that there are important individual differences in the ways that students recognize and make sense of the opportunity structure within schools (Fine, Burns, Payne, & Torre, 2002). For example, O’Connor (1999) has demonstrated that low-income African American high school students vary in the narratives they use to explain social opportunity and mobility, and that these narratives are differentially associated with achievement outcomes.

Higher education is also an important vehicle for social mobility and for class maintenance. Many people believe that the achievement of a college degree will guarantee the opportunity to move from the working class to the middle class (Coleman & Rainwater, 1978; DeMott, 1990; Higginbotham & Weber, 1992). At the same time, attendance at private secondary schools and elite liberal arts colleges is an important strategy for the maintenance of upper-class status (Domhoff, 1983). Students’ aspirations toward higher education, their daily experiences in college, and their retrospective evaluation of the significance of college attendance are all germane to the psychology of social class. This is true for both those whose class status changes as a result of college education, as well as those for whom class status is maintained through the college education they receive.

Education is also a rich context in which to study the psychology of social class because for some students, schools are a site where class differences may be noticed for the first time. Although not all schools are heterogeneous with respect to class, many are. It is in these settings of difference that some students develop an awareness of their own class status and come to struggle with its meaning in their own lives and personal identities, as was illustrated in the two quotations cited at the beginning of this article.

**Organization of This Issue**

We have organized this issue into three main sections that help sketch the contours of a psychology of social class in the context of education: (a) Understanding
Privileging Class

Class: Attitudes, Beliefs, and Attributions, (b) Transitions and Traditions: Class Mobility and Maintenance Through Education, and (c) Transforming Practice and Policy in Public Schools and in Psychology.

Understanding Class: Attitudes, Beliefs, and Attributions

The first section of this issue focuses on the kinds of attributions individuals make for class position. Why is it that some people are poor and others rich? What accounts for inequality in a given society? People’s explanations for this stratification suggest their sense of the “rules of the game” (Flanagan & Campbell, this issue) and thus have important implications for their perceptions of their own life opportunities. The articles in this section explore how people’s place in the class system influences their views of the nature of inequality. Moreover, some of the articles help us understand whether changing (or attempting to change) one’s position through education is accompanied by a corresponding change in one’s views.

In different ways and among very different populations, Bullock and Limbert (this issue), Flanagan and Campbell (this issue), and Mahalingam (this issue) asked their participants to describe reasons for wealth, poverty, and inequality. Each of the articles discusses these attributions with respect to the participants’ relationship to the educational system and speculates on the relationship between attribution and prospects for social change. Bullock and Limbert studied working-class women enrolled in a short-term vocational training program. The women viewed post-secondary education as difficult to access and believed that wealth was primarily a result of privilege rather than hard work; yet almost paradoxically, they expected that they themselves would be able to obtain college degrees, thus gaining middle-class status. The authors discuss the possibility that this combination of beliefs may undermine the likelihood of engaging in collective class-based political action.

Flanagan and Campbell examine the role that educational systems play in teaching young people how to be citizens of the social order across countries that vary with respect to their social and economic histories and policies. For example, they show that not only do young people in the United States and Australia express less support for social entitlements than do youth in countries such as the Czech Republic and Hungary, but also that class and gender make a difference within social order and influence young people’s view of their governments and their schools. Mahalingam explores the intersections of caste and class by assessing whether people believed poverty and wealth were essential or socially constructed. His sample of Brahmins (upper caste) and Dalits (formerly called “untouchable” caste) who were all middle-class college-educated people in India provides us with a picture of how wealth is explained in a context that is both similar to and different from the United States. Compared to Dalits, more Brahmins took an essentialized view, specifically with respect to the nature of being rich. Mahalingam suggests that as a result of recent political consciousness-raising movements (analogous to the
Ostrove and Cole

Black power movement in the United States), fewer Dalits endorse essentialism, and he makes insightful recommendations for curricular change to encourage structural understanding of inequality.

Transitions and Traditions: Class Mobility and Maintenance Through Education

Many have argued that the educational system in the United States serves to reproduce the current class structure predicated on inequality, rather than to encourage change (see Giroux, 1983 for a review and critique of social reproduction theory), making the American dream harder to realize than many think. It does this by tracking people according to apparent skill and ability, preparing people for systematically different occupations, and socializing particular ideologies and values (Giroux, 1983; Oakes, 1985). The function and use of education in reproducing class status is as true for working- and middle-class children (see, e.g., Fine, 1997; Gorman, 1998) as it is for children from the upper class (Domhoff, 1983). Some of the articles in this section focus particularly on individuals from upper-class families and their experiences at upper-class educational institutions that were historically set up for the upper class to maintain their social position.

Other articles in this section explore individuals’ lived experience of mobility, because many individuals use education as a vehicle for upward mobility, despite the ways in which the educational system facilitates class reproduction. Many of the authors approached this subject by exploring the ways in which people from working-class backgrounds negotiate educational institutions of the middle- and upper-classes. It is often movement from one class position to another that exposes the discriminatory nature of the class system, and the ways in which feelings of inferiority or superiority based on class may be internalized (Russell, 1996; see also Kadi, 1996, on the possibilities for and the potential importance of choosing not to claim a middle-class identity or lifestyle, even after completing post-secondary education).

The articles by Kuriloff and Reichert (this issue) and by Ostrove (this issue) compare the experiences of those for whom attendance at elite institutions represented class maintenance with those for whom it represented social mobility. Kuriloff and Reichert explore the dynamics of class and race in the negotiation of the social and academic terrain of an elite private boys’ day school. They argue that the long-standing traditions of the school aimed to instill in its students ideals of manhood centered on excellence, competition, responsibility, and hard work. In some ways, these ideals proved to be almost egalitarian, because all boys, regardless of background, were held to these standards, internalized these values, and were regarded by their teachers and peers as capable of meeting them. These ideals were most clearly lived up to in the domains of academics and sports by all boys. In contrast, the experience of the social domain was quite different for boys from
privileged backgrounds than for those who were the first in their families to attend such a school. Importantly, White working-class boys had difficulty articulating their discomfort with their marginalization, whereas boys of color expressed a structural critique grounded in their racial/ethnic experience and identity.

Ostrove (this issue) uses quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate differences among women from different class backgrounds who attended private women’s colleges in the 1960s. She finds that women from working-class backgrounds, reflecting on their experiences in college 30 years after graduation, were most likely to describe a sense of alienation and to see college as an opportunity for mobility. Women from upper-class backgrounds were most likely to mention family tradition and expectation in their representations of college. She discusses these issues with respect to the ways that class helps define who “belongs” and who does not, and also how class issues are complicated by geography at elite New England colleges.

Cole and Omari (this issue) use the concept of intersectionality to explore the ways that class identities are distinctive for African Americans. They note that although all Black Americans experience racial discrimination, class and status divisions have long existed within Black communities, and that these distinctions represent a fault line along which there is still tension. Historically, members of the Black middle class have attempted to encourage education and “respectable” conduct among the Black working class, as a means to “uplift” the race politically. Schools are one site where these conflicts may continue to play out. Cole and Omari describe the experiences of Black students as they pursue class advancement through education, and focus on elite secondary schools and working-class students in colleges and universities. They conclude by problematizing the often unspoken assumption that upward class mobility is an unambiguously positive experience, articulating the possibility that there are hidden costs of this mobility both in terms of psychological well being, and disidentification and political alienation from other African Americans.

The final article in this section, by Jones (this issue), focuses on case studies of women academics from working-class backgrounds. Her fine-grained narrative analysis explores the subjective experience of class and race as they inform individual identity. Notably, she discusses a Latina who grew to understand her working-class identity in an elementary classroom for gifted students in which her class was constructed through her racial difference from her classmates. Jones compares this woman’s experiences with those of a woman who grew up in a Black community and attended a school that was heterogeneous with respect to class; thus, she experienced class diversity within one racial group and developed a class identity that was less “raced.” Jones concludes her article with a discussion of how academics from working-class backgrounds use their class identities and those of their students to teach about structural inequality and foster class consciousness.
Transforming Practice and Policy in Public Schools and in Psychology

Finally, our concluding section includes two articles that critique the current state of policy and practice in public schools, and in the psychological study of social class; both make pointed recommendations for the future. Hochschild (this issue) considers the policy implications of the current state of public education in the United States and Fine and Burns (this issue) reflect on all of the articles in the issue to make important recommendations for policy both within and outside of the discipline of psychology.

Hochschild (this issue) gives evidence of the nested inequalities that accrue in the public school system due to residential class and race segregation. She provides an extensive review of policy and practice in public education (e.g., differential funding, tracking, teacher quality) that create this disparity and she makes a proposal for possible change. This article provides a comprehensive picture of the ways that schools often fail their low-income students and the implications for how students might view themselves as a result.

Fine and Burns (this issue) similarly address the ways in which public schooling may serve to replicate existing inequalities at the expense of poor and working class students. In contrast to Hochschild’s macro-level approach, however, Fine and Burns (this issue) reflect on the articles within this issue and suggest that the ways in which psychologists think about social class may provide support for these practices at the individual and institutional levels. Perhaps more importantly, they then reflect critically on this issue of JSI to identify its limitations. As members of the professional classes, psychologists’ work may fall prey to their own class biases: Notably, our methodologies may lead to certain blind spots, we may systematically miss—or even misrepresent—important narratives of how class operates for particular groups of people, and we may all too easily place the onus for social change on members of the working class rather than making that responsibility our own. Thus, Fine and Burns point to the strengths of this issue, while simultaneously reminding us of its omissions. Their recommendations point the way toward a psychology of social class that is genuinely critical, and potentially transformative, for psychology, and for education.

There are many ways in which the articles in this issue may be read together beyond those suggested by our overall organization of the issue. The articles in this issue by Jones, Cole and Omari, and Mahalingam all pay particular attention to the ways in which class and race (or class and caste) intersect. Those by Ostrove, Bullock and Limbert, and Jones examine class and gender with a particular focus on women’s lives. Kuriloff and Reichert’s article focuses on class and gender in the context of boys’ lives. The articles by Mahalingam and by Flanagan and Campbell provide data from people who live outside of the United States. The experiences
and attitudes of adolescents are examined in the articles by Flanagan and Campbell and by Kuriloff and Reichert. Finally, for readers who are particularly interested in case study methods, the articles by Jones, by Kuriloff and Reichert, and by Ostrove all utilize different kinds of qualitative analysis.

Overall, the articles in this issue provide a variety of conceptual and methodological strategies for critically examining the psychological meanings and implications of social class in the context of education. We hope that both individually and together they underscore the need for increasing attention among psychologists to the ways in which class position, class mobility, and class-based oppression shape psychological experience, in educational contexts and beyond.

References


Privileging Class


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