

Batteries, Big Red, and Busses:

Using Critical Theory to Read for Social Class in *Eleanor & Park*

Like the concept of adolescence itself (Lesko, 1996), young adult literature (YAL) as a category has a controversial past in gaining legitimacy as a field of reading and study (Cart, 2011; Nilsen & Donelson, 2009). Issues persist in contemporary times, as some question the content of YAL for being too “dark” (Gurdon, 2011), others critique its audiences for being “juvenile” (Graham, 2014), and the age-old debates about censorship of material deemed too provocative for today’s adolescents rage on (Boyd & Bailey, 2009). Many, however, have noted the value in YAL not just in terms of literary merit, but in its treatment of complicated social themes relevant to today’s readers (Gallo, 2001; Goering & Connors, 2014; Glasgow, 2001).

Despite these advantages, in the historic debate over the literary canon, literature for young adults often does not make the cut. In more recent lists of suggested texts for implementing the Common Core State Standards, few works for young adults are included and some scholars, such as Connors (2013), fear that this will lead teachers to miss the potential literary merit of YAL and, ultimately, exclude it from their text choices. Although popular authors have defended their titles based on their widespread reception and lasting impact on youth (Alexie, 2011; Anderson, 2010), Goering and Connors (2014) share “we do not believe that young adult literature has managed to win general acceptance as a form of reading material worthy of serious study in secondary school settings” (p. 16).

The battle over young adult literature therefore continues, particularly in discursive spaces where curricular decisions are made and loaded with ideological implications. It is our hope that the critical analysis we offer here will add to claims for the rich depth of YAL and its value in pre-service teacher education classrooms. Although we believe in the importance of

YAL for many reasons, we wish to highlight here how it can be an avenue for the discussion of critical theory. We specifically focus on Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital, tied intimately to social class, for our analysis. We feel that not only does the chosen text, *Eleanor & Park* (Rowell, 2013), lend itself fully to this theoretical scrutiny, but also that class disparities are often overlooked or conflated with race in social justice education. While we do not wish to deny the importance of race or the existence of intersectionality (Krenshaw, 1989), we want to distinctly mark social inequity related to the possession and consumption of material and collective goods as well as the embodiment of those valued ways of being with our students.

Our emphasis on social class and capital follows NCATE/NCTE's recent re-inclusion of social justice in English educator preparation standards (Alsup & Miller, 2014). Scholars are now attempting to craft various points of entry to achieve the goals set forward in the standards with their students. The need for a social justice approach stems from the perpetuation of societal inequity largely upheld by the institution of schools. Systems of tracking reproduce existing power structures wherein dominant norms, values, and knowledge continue to be that which is valued and those who are 'other' continue to be subjugated (Giroux & Penna, 1979; Oakes, 1985). Teachers, however, have opportunities to disrupt this reproduction through their dispositions and pedagogies. Particular to English educators, the texts we use with our students as well as the ways we encourage students to read and deconstruct those texts provide ample space for agency within the structure of schooling. We aim, through our engagement of our pre-service teachers with social justice education, to foster active participants in democratic schools and society.

In what follows, we posit the avenue of YAL as an untapped resource for cultivating students' knowledge of social theories and their recognition of societal inequities. Combining

specific perspectives of social justice education and young adult literature can be a rich and engaging experience for students, as these contemporary texts afford for multiple layers of analysis. Here we respond to Goering and Connors' (2014) "critical mandate," or "call to action on behalf of YAL to ensure an even brighter future in florescent-lit secondary English classrooms" which includes the need "to create opportunities for pre-service teachers to assess the literary merit of YAL by creating opportunities for them to approach it from the standpoint of critical theory" (p. 19). They and others encourage us to continue to broaden the field of YAL to include tangible models of use with pre-service teachers and to produce concrete evidence from implementing such work (Hayn & Kaplan, 2012). Here we hope to add to this conversation by outlining one specific critical theory, Bourdieu's (1986) notions of cultural capital and his explanation of how inequities are reproduced and maintained, and illuminating how we applied it to a young adult text.

Laying the Groundwork: YAL and Theory Examinations of Social Class in Young Adult Literature

The theme of social class is present in many YAL novels, though the topic has not received extensive exploration from scholars. Often, the inclusion of social class and socioeconomic status (SES) in children's literature is for moral reasons, to illustrate how societal norms work (Dixon, 1977 as discussed in Allen, 2011). Pearlman (1995) further asserted, "a character's SES dramatically affects the way he/she is perceived by the adolescent reader" (p. 223). However, this does not mean that all YAL novelists want readers to accept social norms as givens, or that there is not room within YAL novels to question and problematize these social norms. We contend that scholars and educators can use YAL to examine not only how class norms are created, but also how we are complicit in their maintenance. Literature allows us to examine things we may be afraid to think deeply about in

our own lives, which is one reason we think it has a place in preparing teachers for secondary education.

Pearlman (1995) posited that adolescent readers will learn through literature that “judging others solely on the basis of SES is not only wrong, it is unrealistic,” and that this is possible because “adolescents’ attitudes toward their place in society are still open, and they can be influenced regarding the role of SES in shaping- or *not* shaping their lives” (p. 230). Pearlman (1995) used several classic YAL texts to illustrate this claim including *The Pigman* (Zindel, 1968), *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1967), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960), and *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1951), tracing how SES is a moral device in all of them. Tribunella (2006) also investigated *The Outsiders*, and stated that even though it involves rebellious characters from different social classes, it still works to reaffirm traditional norms of “rugged individualism and a faith in American education” (p. 87). These complex analyses show that a novel that questions one social norm does not necessarily question others, and may in fact aid in their creation.

Allen (2011) incorporated theorists such as Beauvoir, Foucault, and Bourdieu in her essay on Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy to discuss femininity’s ties to social class in the series. In Pullman’s fictional world, women of the upper classes maintain strict rules of femininity while the lower classes, represented by the Gyptians, are carefree. As Allen (2011) noted, the character of Mrs. Coulter teaches Lyra, the protagonist, how to be a lady, proving Beauvoir’s point that women are made, not born. While Allen (2011) only uses Bourdieu’s theories of cultural and social capital in passing as that is not her focus, we have decided to use his theories as our primary line of inquiry in our analysis of *Eleanor & Park* (Rowell, 2013).

Eleanor & Park: The Novel

Rainbow Rowell's novel, *Eleanor & Park*, has earned great acclaim since its publication in 2013. At first, the novel appears to be a traditional teenage love story. The main characters are two youth struggling to locate themselves amidst family and social turmoil. Eleanor lives with her mother, stepfather, and four siblings in an impoverished home. Richie, her stepfather, is physically and emotionally abusive to her mother, Sabrina. As the plot unfolds, readers fear Richie's relentless temper as Eleanor comforts her brothers and sisters during late night fights, grapples with understanding her mother, and battles harsh bullying from peers at school. Once she meets Park, her predicament is both bettered by the fulfillment he offers and worsened by the fact that her circumstances preclude her from being able to sustain their relationship. Serving as Eleanor's foil, Park enjoys a safe and warm home punctuated by mild conflicts with his father related to his search for identity. Narrated in alternating points of view, readers are allowed insight into both Eleanor's and Park's perspectives, making readers feel as if they are a part of both characters' psyche. As Green wrote (2013), "the obstacle in 'Eleanor & Park' is simply the world" (para. 6). However, the running thread of their relationship becomes not about a love that transcends obstacles, but rather a love that endures. Rowell's vivid account of the timidity and awkwardness that often accompanies young love, or really the initial stages of love at any age, is breathtaking.

Social Class and Capital: The Theory

The starkest contrast between the lives of the two characters in *Eleanor & Park* is undoubtedly related to their financial circumstances, and the most outstanding social theme constructed thus becomes economic inequity. Because of our positions as English teacher educators who seek to incorporate social justice into our classrooms, we turned to one of the most well-known theorists, Pierre Bourdieu (1986), and his theory of cultural capital, as a means of teaching our students about social inequity, power, and social reproduction within

an educational context.

Bourdieu developed his theory of cultural capital as an explanation of the ways he discerned the existing social structure. He wanted “to elucidate the relationship between culture and power—especially how cultural processes sustain relations of power” (Levinson, 2011, p.120). He specifically related his investigation to education and worked against traditional notions of meritocracy or innate intelligence as the source of academic success (Lareau, 2011). To him, the idea that either hard work or biological quality leads to achievement was unwarranted, an assertion he based on the variation in value that dominant society ascribes to individuals’ skills and dispositions. Although these resources and a person’s way of being may appear as natural and objective, Bourdieu held that in reality one can discern patterns within those across social classes, albeit the patterns are arbitrarily assigned import. He used this to show which entities and qualities are esteemed in society and how those with the respected modes become and remain the dominant collective. He related the concept of *habitus* to the possession of different forms of capital. *Habitus* refers to:

Systems of durable, transposable dispositions. . . principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1974, p. 442)

In other words, the *habitus* is a person’s “background experiences” and affects the “forms of resources (*capital*) individuals inherit and draw upon as they confront various institutional arrangements (*fields*) in the social world” (Lareau, 2011, p. 361).

Bourdieu supposed that the resources one possesses come in the form of *cultural capital*, meaning “a kind of symbolic credit that one acquires through learning to enact and embody the desired signs of social standing within a social field” (Levinson, 2011, p. 121). In

short, he identified three forms in which *cultural capital* could exist: first, in the *embodied state*, which refers to “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (p. 246). This form is acquired predominately through socialization into the family and accompanying processes of transmission of values and social norms. Embodiment of cultural capital manifests in the way individuals conduct themselves. The second, the *objectified state*, is the “cultural goods” such as “writings, paintings, monuments, instruments, etc.” (1986, p. 250) that are tangible entities related to cultural capital. However, they are inextricably linked to embodied capital because one must also possess the appropriate means of consuming those goods. It does not advantage an individual, for instance, if she inherits a painting but does not possess the means for appreciating, discussing, or analyzing that work of art. Finally, the third form is the *institutionalized state*, which is a “certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture” (p. 252). These are the ways that the value of capital appears as natural; it is extricated from the individual and bestowed a certain value that presumably any person can achieve. Academic qualifications, such as a degree, are perhaps the best example of this form.

With pre-service teachers, we feel it is crucial to highlight Bourdieu’s theory of capital as a counter-narrative to predominant deficit perspectives of education (Lareau, 2011). If our students can understand his arguments about capital, they will hopefully begin to discern the ways that schools privilege certain forms of wealth, tangible *and* immaterial, over others. Briefly put, if they can view interactions in schools based on arguments about *capital*, this will help overcome arguments about what is simply *lacking*. We do recognize, however, the precarious nature of this work, since often Bourdieu is misread or misapplied as a dearth of capital, rather than seeing all students as possessing capital dependent on field (Yosso, 2005). Thus, all human beings do in fact have cultural capital, yet it depends on the context, or field,

in which it is activated that one discerns its ascribed value. In dominant social milieus, such as the school, there are certain forms of cultural capital that are deemed more worthy than others. This distinction is crucial to make. Thus, clearly applying the theory to an entity such as young adult literature aids in examining concrete examples of each form so that they can then be further applied to an educational context.

Reading Cultural Capital in *Eleanor & Park*

The Embodied State

High school social group distinctions are marked in part through the bodies of adolescents. As Bourdieu (1986) stated, cultural capital is embodied and takes time to acquire. A student may be able to change their hair or clothes to match the popular kids who have the most capital, but that does not necessarily gain the student access to elite social status. A Scottish study on 13-15 year olds found that subjective social status (SSS) at school had a greater effect on adolescent health than did their objective or subjective socio-economic status (SES) (Sweeting & Hunt, 2014), indicating that a perceived lack of social status has physical and mental effects on the body. Other scientific studies on SES and adolescent health abound, focusing on factors such as drug use (Hamilton, Maas, Boak, & Mann, 2014), school achievement (Destin, Richman, Varner, & Mandara, 2012), and weight (Ha, Choi, Seo, & Kim, 2013). The findings suggest at large that SSS has material impacts on adolescents, proving that Bourdieu's (1986) idea of symbolic embodied capital is strong for this group.

Eleanor's peers read her SES and SSS on her body the minute she steps on the school bus for the first time. Park describes her as:

Big and awkward. With crazy hair, bright red on top of curly. And she was dressed like...like she *wanted* people to look at her. Or maybe like she didn't get what a mess she was [...] Like something that wouldn't survive in the wild. (Rowell, p. 8)

Eleanor's body and the way she adorns it cause her to stand out, making her a target in the wilds of high school. Her clothes mark her as having lower SES, though at first Park does not recognize this and thinks her clothes communicate her as weird, and later, special. Girls at her school torture her by covering her gym locker with maxi pads with "RAGHEAD" (Rowell, p. 55) written on them to direct negative attention to her hair. Later in the novel, they steal her clothes, forcing her to walk through the school in her tight, revealing jumpsuit. These gendered attacks pinpointing her body are adolescent psychological warfare and increase Eleanor's struggles with her own body image. Yet their plan to deface her does not work entirely, as Park sees her body as beautiful, and when she walks by him in her gym uniform he describes her as "a stack of freckled heart shapes, a perfectly made Dairy Queen ice cream cone. Like Betty Boop drawn with a heavy hand" (Rowell, p. 245). While her popular classmates read her embodied capital as lacking, Park sees it as perfection.

The valued embodied capital at school is also raced as white. The characters with whom Eleanor becomes friends, DeNice and Beebi, are African-American. Their bodies are also not perceived as esteemed in the school hierarchy, and they stand by Eleanor when she is bullied. While Bourdieu (1986) does not claim that cultural capital is reserved for white people, others have interpreted it this way (as noted by Yosso, 2005). DeNice's and Beebi's body sizes also set them apart. Beebi is big, and her "gym suit was even a different color from everybody else's, like they'd had to special-order it for her" (Rowell, p. 55). DeNice has "little-girl bangs and braids" and "wore her gym suit baggy like a romper" (Rowell, pp. 61-62). Yet these girls seem more confident than Eleanor, telling her not to worry about the gym-class bullies. Though we do not hear their thoughts, from what we see through Eleanor they do not seem bothered by their devalued embodied status at school. These characters possess what Yosso (2005) called, in her description of the forms of cultural capital inhabited by People of

Color, navigational capital. That is, they have the ability to navigate an institution not built with their success in mind. DeNice and Beebi's embodiment of capital stress our point that Bourdieu's (1986) theory can lead us to see how various forms of cultural capital exist—whether they are valued by the dominant society or not—rather than leave readers to view the two characters as lacking.

Raced, gendered, and classed embodied capitals are also apparent through Park's mother, Mindy. Eleanor is amazed at the nicely kept, middle-class home in which Park resides, as she did not think such houses existed in their lower-class neighborhood, called the Flats. Mindy is Korean, petite, wears a delicate gold cross around her neck, and is a cosmetologist with pink nails and drawers of makeup. Though her birth name is Min-Dae, she goes by Mindy. Rowell, through Park, does not problematize this but the audience is left to assume that this name change allowed Mindy to fit in with her white neighbors and family, and to intentionally avoid the impoverished life she led in Korea that she rarely discusses with her children. When Eleanor meets Mindy for the first time, she wants to shake her hand, but Mindy makes a "*sorry, my nails are wet*, gesture that Eleanor didn't seem to recognize" (Rowell, p. 123). This gesture is one of both class and gender that Eleanor is not allowed to experience in her restrictive home life where signs of both relative wealth and femininity are dangerous to express. Such signs could provoke an attack from her abusive stepfather. As Mindy is not aware of the danger, she gives Eleanor a makeover, making her look more like a mainstream teenager. Though Mindy cannot inherit whiteness, and thus that form of valued embodied capital, she performs it in her demeanor. Even though she at first calls Eleanor a "weird white girl" (Rowell, p. 142) and dislikes her, this is the only time she mentions race. In this case, Mindy was really talking about Eleanor's class and gender performance more than whiteness.

Park's embodied capital is also inextricably tied to his gender and race. Though he

muses that he did not inherit his father's musculature as his brother did, he is strong and trains in martial arts with his male family members. When he fights Steve for making fun of Eleanor, his classmates compare him to Chuck Norris, the epitome of hyper-masculinity. His social status is higher than Eleanor's, so by fighting for her he elevates her status on the school bus. Yet despite this show of masculine energy, Park is not comfortable in his own body and experiments with his clothes and look, as many teenagers do. When Mindy gives Eleanor a makeover, she uses Park to demonstrate how to apply eyeliner. Park likes it and starts wearing it, thinking his technique "was messier than his [mom's], but he thought that might look better. More masculine...The eyeliner did makes his eyes pop. They also made him look even less white" (Rowell, p.217). The makeup infuriates his macho father, but for Park it is an outward sign of his embodied punk-rock aesthetic. Though this was not a form of capital valued by his peers, this new look was important to Park and his sense of self.

Although neither Eleanor nor Park possesses embodied capital as defined by their high school community, they are attracted to each other. It is in fact their physical, embodied differences that create their strong corporeal magnetism. As previously discussed, whiteness is valued and seen as the norm in their neighborhood. Because of this, Park has conflicted feelings about his race. He does not know any Asian people outside his family, and his mom does not talk about her Korean heritage, yet he knows "it's the number one thing people use to identify me. It's my main thing" (Rowell, p. 273). Park also knows that raced people are found attractive in accordance with their gender, as he says to Eleanor "nobody thinks Asian guys are hot...Asian girls are different. White guys think they're exotic" (Rowell, p. 272). Without role models with whom to discuss race, Park is left with a deficit perspective. Yet, similarly in the way that Park loves Eleanor because of her size, Eleanor's attraction to Park is partly because of his race. She often describes how she loves his skin, and when Park is lamenting the lack of

attraction women have to Asian men, Eleanor reassures him by saying “I don’t know if I’m thinking you’re cute *because* you’re Korean, but I don’t think it’s in spite of it” (p. 273). Park’s race is a part of him, and Eleanor loves him because of all that he embodies. For Eleanor and Park, the physical traits that make them stand out in negative ways to their peers make them special to each other. They see embodied capital in each other’s “weird” subjective social status.

The Objectified State

Just as Bourdieu’s concept of embodied capital can be read in *Eleanor & Park*, so can his notion of capital in the objectified state. It is perhaps through the objectified state that readers perceive the greatest social class differences between the two characters, as Eleanor lives in significant poverty while Park enjoys the comforts of middle-class existence. In a traditional Bourdieuan reading, objectified capital comes in the form of cultural goods that are imbued with social meaning. To give a contemporary example: the ownership of the latest version of the iPhone© communicates a certain status in our culture; having the device is a form of objectified capital. Knowing how to use that piece of technology, however, is the embodied capital that always accompanies the objectified state. One must be aware of how to navigate home screens, applications, and other elements of functionality. One must have the appropriate wherewithal to consume the good.

In *Eleanor & Park*, cases of Park’s possession of valuable objectified capital in the traditional sense abound. It is Eleanor’s recognition of these as esteemed that illustrates the concept in action. Park’s family’s possession of a home, cars, and consumable goods all denote the sort of objectified capital to which Bourdieu refers. Upon one of her visits to Park’s home, Rowell writes of Eleanor’s reaction:

It was all the little things about Park’s house that really freaked her out. Like all the

glass grapes hanging from everything. And the curtains that matched the little doily napkins under the lamps. . . she kept thinking about how nice it must be to live in a house like this one. With your own room. And your own parents. And six different kinds of cookies in the cupboard. (p. 164)

Here we see the value placed on material belongings through Eleanor's perspective. The matching linens and decorative elements of his house are contrasted with her own stark, crowded home. The fact that Park has access to such superfluities as after-school snacks is impressive to Eleanor who is often forced to eat dinner in the afternoon before her stepfather arrives home.

Eleanor's emphasis on these objectified forms of capital pervades the novel. At her dad's house she "fixated on all the small luxuries strewn and tucked around the house. Packs of cigarettes, newspapers, magazines. . . Now she wished she *had* brought an overnight bag. She could have snuck home cans of Chef Boyardee and Campbell's chicken noodle soup" (p. 97).

We learn that Eleanor does not own a toothbrush, but rather rubs her teeth with salt in an attempt to clean them. She does not have a home phone and uses safety pins to patch scraps of fabric over the holes in her clothes. Her most prized possessions, including colored pencils and clean paper, reside in a small box. At one point, she imagines telling Park "*sometimes when we're out of dish soap, I wash my hair with flea and tick shampoo*" (p. 89). In many ways, then, she does not possess valued objectified capital. Instead, she uses her navigational and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005) to work around and with what others in her community see as a deficit. She finds creative ways (the salt, the safety-pinned fabric scraps) to work with her family's meager provisions.

What is interesting, however, about Rowell's demonstration of capital in the objectified

state, is that for Eleanor, the possessions that to her constitute what is valued are actually quite minimal. They are not what would typically be constructed as entities with great monetary worth, and thus the presentation and analysis of them is striking. Bourdieu's description of this form of capital involves things with social worth, yet because of the circumstances of the characters in the novel, a critical reading for objectified capital here transforms to include smaller objects that are given worth. One repeated example of this throughout the story is the merit of batteries as an artifact of objectified capital. The relationship between the two teens burgeons when Park learns that Eleanor has a "wish list" of songs and artists she hungers to hear, so he goes home and, in true 1980s fashion, makes Eleanor a mixed-tape of the music he wants her to enjoy. When he attempts to give her the tape and his Walkman, the following conversation ensues:

"I don't want to use up the batteries." "I don't care about the batteries." [. . .]

"Really," she said. "You don't care."

"They're just batteries," he said.

She emptied the batteries and the tape from Park's Walkman, handed it back to him, then got off the bus without looking back.

God, she was weird. (p. 56)

Batteries, in the book, become a significant form of objectified capital, although they likely are not considered such by dominant society in daily life. Park goes to the extreme of gathering the batteries in his house from video games and remote controls to provide Eleanor with the capacity of time to listen to her tapes. He even calls his grandma to ask for AA batteries for his upcoming birthday, and in the end, when Eleanor has found a haven at her uncle's home, we learn that she has a "boom box. And a six-pack of blank cassette tapes" (p.314), which both

imply the use of batteries. As trivial as they may seem to today's audience, Rowell constructs these as a recurring form of objectified capital in the novel.

Within these aspects of objectified capital, Bourdieu explains that one must also possess the embodied capital appropriate to consume the good. As mentioned previously, having a piece of fine art, for example, does the owner little good if one does not hold the skills necessary to analyze and appreciate that art. Rowell's text demonstrates this with Eleanor's deconstruction and reverence for Park's comic books. First, the comics are constructed as inherently treasurable, thus they are categorized in our argument as objectified capital. This is established through Rowell's description of Eleanor's return of the books to Park: "she always acted as if she were handing him something fragile. Something precious. You wouldn't even know that she touched the comics except for the smell [vanilla]" (p. 42). Then, they become worthy through the knowledge she accumulates to consume them, through her embodied capital needed to utilize the objectified. Not only does she engage in numerous conversations with Park about the various protagonists in the comic books, but she also reiterates, "Sometimes it seemed like she would never be able to give Park anything like what he'd given her. It was like he dumped all this treasure on her every morning without even thinking about it, without any sense of what it was worth" (p. 99). Similar to the material goods catalogued above, such as a toothbrush, the comics come to have value and meaning in Eleanor's life through her abilities to fully experience them the way an expert should be able to.

Examining the objects that take on significance in the novel provide us another opportunity to further expand upon Bourdieu's (1986) theory, particularly in terms of adolescents. Young adults mediate their notions of worth with what is communicated in society, specifically via the avenues of media, and thus generally still hold traditional notions of what is valuable. Often they admire and strive toward the objects associated with financial

wealth and the American Dream. And yet, what transpires between Eleanor and Park also allows us to see how social values are placed on artifacts in the adolescent milieu that may differ from what a typical adult would define as a marker of success. Exploring these as objectified capital provides us an additional lens for understanding and exploring adolescence in contemporary times. Rowell (2013)'s potent portrayal of how passionately these 'things' become important to the two young adults helps readers discern how social constructions manifest at the adolescent level.

The Institutionalized State

In Bourdieu's (1986) discussion of the institutionalized state of cultural capital, he describes the capital that comes from academic qualifications. As the protagonists in *Eleanor & Park* are still in high school, they have not had the opportunity to gain such qualifications. However, Eleanor is successful in school and is enrolled in several honors classes. This affords her some protection, as she claims that students are nicer in honors classes as they are more worried about their grades and how the teachers perceive them, so they are less likely to cause trouble. For Eleanor, this meant less bullying. So while her status as an honors student does not seem to help her social standing in that it does not gain her respect from her peers, it does offer protection during parts of her day. Her grades do gain her praise from her counselor, Mrs. Dunne, but Dunne is portrayed as an enthusiastic yet ineffective figure in Eleanor's life. Though Eleanor likes her counselor, she does not ask her for help with her home life, so her good grades do not help her rise from her lower class or social status. Eleanor proves that Bourdieu's (1986) theory of the institutionalized state of capital through academic signifiers is not wholly foolproof; sometimes, other social markers outweigh them.

Beyond academics, we expand Bourdieu's (1986) notion of the institutionalized state of capital to the institutions of family and heterosexual romantic pairings. Park's family is the

epitome of middle-class privilege. As previously discussed, his family has a nice home that his mom keeps clean and tidy. They also have the advantage of local family heritage, which is important for social standing in the Flats. As Park knows, “that was why people left him alone, even though he was weird and Asian. Because his family had owned their land back when the neighborhood was still cornfields” (p. 223). Park constantly notes that his parents kiss openly, showcasing the strength of their heterosexual pairing. While Rowell hints at the exoticism Mindy’s race signifies, Park never truly interrogates this aspect of his parents’ relationship. Perhaps if he did so, the strength of his family would be threatened. As it stands, the family life Park inhabits gives him a form of institutionalized capital.

Eleanor’s family shows that domestic violence breaks the institution of family strength, and thus takes away from respected cultural capital. Her stepfather Richie abuses her mother Sabrina, and Rowell painfully describes Eleanor’s home life as tense and dangerous. Eleanor hides in her room when Richie is home, afraid to attract his attention. The repeated image of the single bathroom without a door is haunting: Eleanor must cross Richie’s path each time she needs to use the restroom, trying desperately not to draw his concern. Her mother watches the door for her when she bathes, which she tries only to do when Richie is gone. Eleanor fears for her mother, but does not believe she can protect her or her siblings. As she says to Park when he asks why her mother does not leave Richie, “I don’t think she can ... I don’t think there’s enough of her left” (Rowell, p. 196). Earlier in the narrative, Sabrina told Eleanor:

“We’re a family, Eleanor. All of us. Richie, too. And I’m sorry that that makes you unhappy. I’m sorry that things aren’t perfect here all the time for you...I have to think of everyone,” her mom said. “Do you understand? I have to think of myself. In a few years, you’ll be on your own, but Richie is my husband.” (p. 187)

At times, both Sabrina and Richie try to play the part of a happy family, but it never lasts. This is most poignant at Christmas. On Christmas Eve, Eleanor's siblings squabble over the box in which a present from their uncle Geoff is delivered. Richie is disgusted and starts throwing presents he purchased for them, saying "I should make you wait until Christmas morning...but I'm sick of watching this" (p. 185). Sabrina demonstrates her commitment to her marriage, despite the constant violence, when on Christmas day Richie explodes because she made a traditional Danish rice pudding instead of pumpkin pie. When he throws the bowl of pudding against the wall and walks out, Sabrina simply picks it up and continues serving it to her children. Eleanor notes that "if the Ghost of Christmas Past showed up, he'd be disgusted with their whole situation" (Rowell, p. 199), but despite this they are able to have a semi-enjoyable holiday as they all silently commit to upholding the charade of family togetherness. However, they know it will not stand up to scrutiny, and none of the kids ever bring friends to their house. While Park's family is not perfect, their happy home is a stark contrast to Eleanor's tense one.

The convention of coupledness is also a form of institutionalized capital, especially for Eleanor, though she is never comfortable with this distinction. When Park officially calls Eleanor his girlfriend when he fights with Steve for bullying her, Eleanor does not know what to feel about Park:

Was she supposed to be happy that Park had called her his girlfriend? It's not like he'd given her any choice in the matter—and it's not like he'd said it happily. He said it with his head down, with his face dripping blood. Should she be worried about him? ...Was Eleanor supposed to be mad at him still? Was she supposed to be indignant? Was she supposed to shout at him when she saw him in English class, *Was that for me? Or for you?* (p. 132)

Eleanor is a critical thinker, and knows that the fight was as much about Park's feelings of fitting in as it was about defending her honor.

Yet despite these mixed feelings, Eleanor does benefit from their relationship. She feels safe and loved with Park. Park's parents, who worry Richie is unsafe, welcome her in their home. She benefits from their family institution when she could not benefit from her own, a by-product of her also being a part of a heterosexual romantic couple. Though her peers continue to tease her after she and Park start dating, their mutual love and affection make her feel stronger. Park loves her as a whole person, including her rougher edges. Park thinks "[Eleanor] never looked nice. She looked like art, and art wasn't supposed to look nice; it was supposed to make you feel something" (Rowell, p. 165). Park likes that Eleanor does not humor him, that she speaks her mind, and "made him feel like something was happening" (p. 165).

With the class imbalance between them, there is a danger of their relationship becoming a rescue narrative, but Rowell makes it clear this is not the case. Rowell achieves this in part by having her characters challenge institutionalized gender roles. Though Park fits a typical masculine role by practicing taekwondo and fighting Steve, the reader sees his vulnerability as he freely expresses his emotions to himself and Eleanor. He says I love you first. He does not want her to change her dress or her body—there is no archetypical scene where the girl has a makeover to go to the big dance and the boy sees she was beautiful all along. When Eleanor gets a makeover and it makes her uncomfortable, he assures her she still looks like herself just with "the volume turned up" (p. 216). Instead, it is Park who is transformed by the makeover as he chooses to continue wearing the eyeliner his mother put on him only as a demonstration.

If anyone is being rescued, it is Eleanor rescuing Park. They even joke about this when Eleanor says, "I'm totally the Han Solo," and answers Park's protests about being Princess Leia

with “Don’t get so hung up on gender roles.” Park concedes by replying, “You can be Han Solo...and I’ll be Boba Fett. I’ll cross the sky for you” (pp. 250-251). In the *Star Wars* universe (Kurtz & Lucas, 1977), Han Solo is a lone, male rebel fighting on the side of good, and Boba Fett is a male bounty hunter working for the ‘dark side.’ Putting their relationship in this metaphor, rather than making one of them Princess Leia, the strong female of the *Star Wars* series who is at one point rescued by Han Solo, allows them both to be active players in their story with strong personal agency. Even though Park drives Eleanor to Minnesota at the novel’s end to escape her stepfather, he does not read like a knight on a white horse. He is openly distraught at the thought of losing her. Eleanor is also in charge of this climatic situation. She has a plan to rescue herself, and he is going along with it, showing that even in her hardest moments she still maintains some semblance of control. Furthermore, it is Park who pines for Eleanor, spending a year missing her and drowning himself in music. While she spends a year healing and rebuilding her life on her own, he puts his on pause. So when Eleanor finally writes him back, “something heavy and winged took off from his chest” (Rowell, p. 325). It is rare in YA novels for a male in a heterosexual pairing to show the depth of emotion Park does. The institution of coupledness therefore benefits both of the protagonists while simultaneously stretching and challenging the capital typically associated with gender.

Discussion

Social class continues to be an issue of import in our contemporary era. Disparities between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ remain, and social reproduction occurs in ways that we, as a society, rarely discern. We live in a world where status continues to be marked not only by possession, but also by the ways people negotiate themselves in public spaces. While these ways seem axiomatic, Bourdieu’s (1986) theory provides a lens for understanding how they are in fact not, but rather how the dominant ways of navigating society and relationships

instead have roots in our socialization. Instead of natural, they are in many ways, albeit unknowingly, learned.

Having immediate access to school officials or the knowledge to question authority, in dominantly accepted ways, for example, is not open to everyone but only to those who come from social spaces where this is a part of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1974) that is taken on and embodied. Myths of meritocracy pervade both the general public's discourse as well as teachers' thinking, but, as Bourdieu emphasizes, hard work as the justification for a person's success ignores patterns in those who are successful and excludes important elements of birth and privilege. When a person is born into an upper-middle-class home, for example, they learn to enact a mode of being valued in society. They enter school with speech patterns accepted by most teachers (Hicks, 1995), and their parents are comfortable approaching those same teachers who often look like them. Conflicts often ensue when mismatches occur, or, and more detrimental, when teachers misread differences in cultural capital as deficits. We need ways to bring these issues to the forefront in educational spaces. A critical reading of a YA novel allows us to do so.

Reading the forms of capital in *Eleanor & Park* presents us a practical, present-day reading of Bourdieu's (1986) theory. In terms of the adolescents in the book and in public school scenarios, it affords us a lens for viewing how embodied cultural capital in its dominant form is read on the body and is, in many ways, white and middle-class. We come to understand, as in the case with Park's mom Mindy, how embodied cultural capital can be communicated through gesture, or how, through Eleanor's tragic incident in her gym uniform, it can be read negatively. We also see how embodied capital is gendered; when individuals conform to the normalized standards for masculine and feminine roles they are accepted by dominant society, yet when they stray from those, such as Eleanor wearing men's clothes or

Park experimenting with eye liner, they are shunned in the social sphere.

Although specific manifestations, these milieu invite us to see how Bourdieu's notions work at the micro-level. In the objectified forms, we come to understand how artifacts maintain social worth, not just in a traditional sense as status markers such as fancy cars or middle-class comforts, but in a constructed manner as well, as in smaller articles such as batteries. Finally, we can examine esteemed capital in the institutionalized form through conventional customs such as grades. However, we can also expand this form to inspect institutions of family lineage and familial commitment as well as heterosexual relationships. Both are aspects privileged in our society by established standards and governances. Seeing these manifestations provides a platform for discussion of the ways capital manifests in our present environments in various ways, sometimes explicitly but more often latently.

When much YAL remains under fire for its content, a critical reading such as the one posited here affirms the value in such novels for not only their ability to bring to the forefront complex social issues such as class, but also their potential for helping explicate an academic theory and to serve as a model for applying such a theory. A literary text that lends itself to such analysis must contain a richness in scope, characters, and theme that disputes critics' claims of triviality. Although many YA novels have been lauded for their presentation of significant issues (Schieble, 2012) or their capacity to open new cultural worlds for students (Wolk, 2009), few have connected theory in the way we do to young adult literature, a pedagogical activity we feel holds great potential for our students (exceptions being Appleman, 2009; Soter, Faust, & Rogers, 2008).

Implications

The first author of this paper has engaged English undergraduate pre-service teachers with the texts described here. Generally, her pre-service teachers were not well-versed in

Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital prior to the reading and discussion in class. They tended to struggle with the theoretical density of Bourdieu's primary document when required to read it. We believe, as do many others (e.g. Cochran-Smith, 2008), that pre-service teachers must be keenly aware of the theoretical frameworks that guide their approaches to the world. Although research has documented the great deal of value in field experiences due to the practical elements they provide (i.e. Coffey, 2010), there is also a necessity to involve our teacher candidates with theories of education so that they become aware of the lenses through which they view their future charges and their families. In our efforts to work against deficit thinking, we believe that working with cultural capital in a YAL study is warranted and productive.

As mentioned above, pre-service students find the language and structure of Bourdieu's writing difficult to untangle. After reading and discussing *Eleanor & Park*, we suggest asking students to read "The Forms of Capital" (Bourdieu, 1986) and to first have them simply grasp Bourdieu's major arguments and definitions of each form. Then, we advocate asking them to apply the theory to this YA novel, combing through for each form of cultural capital and noting places in the text where it arises. These simple parallels form the basis for further discussion and analysis. Once students have located examples of embodied, objectified, and institutionalized capital, we would ask them to consider how each comes to hold value in its existing context in the novel. How, for instance, does Eleanor come to recognize that curtains are a symbol of wealth? From where do her notions of value arise? How do institutions govern characters' actions in the novel? Who determines the ideals of those institutions, and how are they upheld?

As we discuss the forms and their implications with our students, we often note what surprises or intrigues them about social class and capital as they read. Most often, the issue of

Eleanor's extreme poverty arises, notably by her lack of batteries to use the Walkman that Park attempts to bestow upon her. Not having access to batteries is often outside of the scope of the mostly white pre-service teaching population with whom we work, who are also often female and middle class. Regardless of what they think they know about poverty, simple amenities such as batteries or toothbrushes are often disregarded from the portrait they paint, where their first concerns are basic needs of food and shelter. While these are undoubtedly crucial, they admit that they do not often consider smaller luxuries such as paper or name brand food. They note that it must be very difficult to be a student living in these conditions, riding the bus and attending school alongside peers who have much more. While we do not think a text can facilitate full-scale empathy, we do find this reading beneficial as an exercise to have our students consider areas that had never crossed their minds. We suggest using this as a starting point to delve deeper into issues about which teacher candidates' have a limited initial framework for comprehending and to use what they do know to build upon. Students who live in poverty will undoubtedly appear in our teacher candidates' classrooms, and as social justice educators it is our duty to both have our students reflect and realize elements of their own socialization (Hinchey, 2004; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2010), and then to use those to consider who they will teach. Since the two will likely be disparate, we hope that our bringing both to light in the pre-service classroom will prove beneficial to our students.

Addressing poverty and cultural capital then allows us a space to talk to our students' future imagined selves. We ask our candidates, what would alert you to Eleanor's situation? How can you respond to students such as Eleanor? How might you understand her mother's situation differently, rather than to assume that she is an uninvolved parent? What are the psychological, social, and emotional consequences of Eleanor's poverty? What *does* Eleanor have that she could bring to the classroom? How could you tap into her strengths?

All of these lead to rich conversations on teaching and economic disparities and again help us move from deficit to additive thinking. We share Lareau and Horvat's (1999) research on parents and cultural capital in which they illuminate the discrepancies between what teachers, often white and middle class, expect from parents and what African-American parents expect from the school. Their work notes how teachers often misinterpret parents' actions. With our students, we also analyze social constructs of value as well as basic needs that must be met, and we explore the spaces in between, where what is valued in society is still important, even if it is not a basic need. We want our students to understand that while artifacts with tangible financial backing do exist, there are other forms of exchange that also contain vital social consequences. By this, we mean that judgments of value exist in a person's way of being, including their linguistic habits and clothing, for example, and while these are not monetary items, they are employed in interactions in ways that communicate and hold worth.

Having our students read YAL through the lens of what is often considered a difficult theory is then, we feel, wholly productive. Since Bourdieu's work continues to be employed in educational spaces, and since his writing explicates many elements of the ways schools work, we feel it is necessary to both engage our students with his theory and to have them apply it to current contexts. What better way to do that than through a lively, realistic novel that not only captivates the hearts of readers, but also presents complex social issues for analysis? We see this as a form of social justice education because we are challenging our students to recognize inequities and power structures in society and to critique those existing systems of oppression.

Furthermore, we involve them in reflection on their own socialization in terms of social class and on their notions of who is included in what social classes and how that relates to race and gender. We feel bringing those notions to the forefront is a crucial step in social justice education. Our example in reading *Eleanor & Park* for social class and the forms of cultural

capital is merely one step in advancing the conversation on the potential of YAL, and we imagine more related work can be accomplished if we truly use such texts to engage our pre-service teachers in meaningful conversation and mindful, critical planning for their future professions.

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