MUSICAL TASTE AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

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Background

During everyday interactions we seek to establish new social ties or confirm existing ones using manifest signs of life styles. The ways we behave in certain situations, language codes, common interests, and shared repertoires of cultural preferences serve as resources with which we create mutual respect while excluding those who lack these cultural prerequisites. Since music is one element within this repertoire, it contributes to social exclusion. Or, as the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu stated: Musical taste as well as other cultural preferences is used as cultural capital in order to control access to high status positions.

Aims and methods

Using data from a representative survey of the German population in 1998 (ALLBUS 1998), the paper will examine two main theses:

First, cultural capital is not only expected to be a commodity that children from high status families "inherit" from their parents, but also, one which upwardly mobile persons acquire during secondary socialization. Hence, the extension of secondary education has broadened the opportunity to acquire cultural capital.

Second, the transformation of the German postwar society has changed the form of cultural capital itself. The orientation on high culture has lost its significance. In a situation of devaluation of traditional cultural hierarchies, the crossing of cultural boundaries between high brow and low brow seems to be more and more a prerequisite for status attainment.

Results and Conclusions

While Bourdieu's central thesis that cultural capital is used in the production and reproduction of social inequalities can be confirmed, nonetheless, the following modifications will be proposed: First, as a result of the expansion of secondary education, the opportunity for acquisition of cultural capital has been extended. Therefore, Bourdieu's reproduction thesis is complemented by a mobility thesis. Second, social exclusion not mainly depends on symbolic exclusion but on the ability to step over symbolic boundaries.