

Social inequality in health: the role of cultural capital



Thomas Abel
Montreal, October 2006

- I. Introduction
- II. Bourdieu's 3 types of capital
- III. Cultural capital
 - three states of cultural capital
 - interdependence and transformation
- IV. Conclusions: two hypotheses for Health Promotion theory and practice

1

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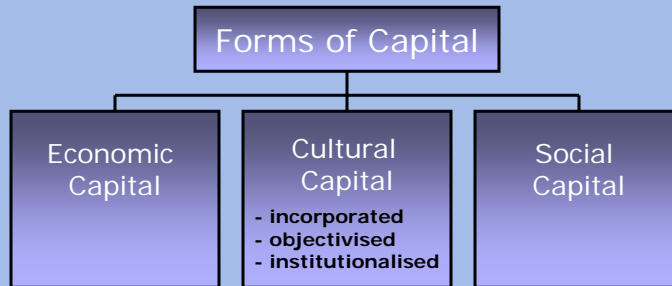
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Prof. Thomas Abel, PhD - Department of Social & Preventive Medicine - University of Berne

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Social inequality in health: the role of cultural capital

Fig. 1: Forms of Capital



Introduction



Types of capital



Cultural capital



Conclusions

Social inequality in health: the role of cultural capital

Fig. 2: Types of Capital

Types of capital	Basic distinction	Mayor currency	Indicators
Economic	Monetary success Vs. failure	Money	Economic status
Social	Member versus nonmember	Social contacts & connections	Membership
Cultural	Recognition vs. indifference	Prestige Knowledge	Reputation Education

Adapted from: Anheier, 1995

Introduction



Types of capital



Cultural capital



Conclusions

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Social inequality in health: the role of cultural capital

Fig. 3: States & indicators of cultural capital

States of Cultural Capital	Indicators of Cultural Capital	Indicators applied to Health
Incorporated cultural capital	Social and technical knowledge and skills; perceptions, values; behaviours...	knowledge of body functions, risk factors and prevention; body perceptions, health values and norms; health and illness behaviours...
Objectivised cultural capital	Books, technical tools, pieces of art...	health books and guides, health related internet access, health behaviour equipment, the "healthy-styled body"...
Institutionalised cultural capital	Educational degrees, status ascriptions, professional titles...	Degrees in the health professions...

Introduction



Types of capital



Cultural capital



Conclusions

Social inequality in health: the role of cultural capital



Fig. 4: Incorporated cultural capital

Incorporated cultural capital:

- perceptions, skills, knowledge
- acquired through social learning
- needs personal investment, time, "affection"
- bound to the individual
- essential for the use of other forms and states of capital

Introduction



Types of capital



Cultural capital



Conclusions

Prof. Thomas Abel, PhD - Department of Social & Preventive Medicine - University of Berne

Social inequality in health: the role of cultural capital



Cultural resources relevant to health

- **Knowledge** e.g. about body functions, bio-psycho-social determinants of health
- **Perceptions** e.g. on health risks, body awareness
- **Values** e.g. health as a priority, social responsibility
- **Social norms** e.g. group expectations about certain behaviours (eating, alcohol consumption etc)
- **Attitudes** e.g. self-efficacy, food preferences
- **Health Behaviour repertoires** i.e. options available, appreciated (at least accepted) in a given social context (family, peers)

Introduction



Types of capital



Cultural capital





Conclusions



Discussion

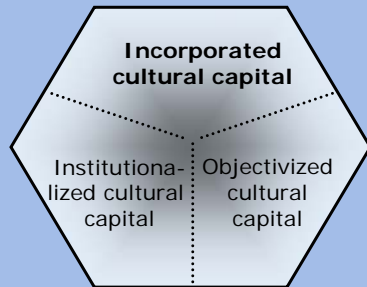
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<h2>Social inequality in health: the role of cultural capital</h2>	
<p>Fig. 5: Objectivized cultural capital</p> <p>Objectivized cultural capital:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - material representations of knowledge and meaning - transferable - utility dependent on incorporated cultural capital 	<p>Introduction</p> <p>✦</p> <p>Types of capital</p> <p>✦</p> <p>Cultural capital</p> <p>✦</p> <p>Conclusions</p>
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<h2>Social inequality in health: the role of cultural capital</h2>	
<p>Fig. 6: Institutionalized cultural capital</p> <p>Institutionalized cultural capital:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - educational degrees, professional titles - provides formal legitimization and social recognition - yields credibility 	<p>Introduction</p> <p>✦</p> <p>Types of capital</p> <p>✦</p> <p>Cultural capital</p> <p>✦</p> <p>Conclusions</p>
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Social inequality in health: the role of cultural capital

**Fig. 7: States of cultural capital:
Interdependence**



Introduction



Types of capital



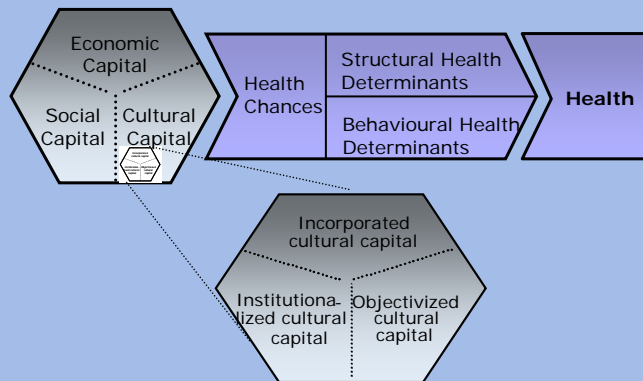
Cultural capital



Conclusions

Social inequality in health: the role of cultural capital

**Fig. 8: Capital interaction in the social
distribution of health**



Introduction



Types of capital



Cultural capital



Conclusions

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Cultural capital and health promotion: Two new hypotheses

- 1. It is the interaction between the different forms of capital that explains much of the dynamics of social inequality in health
- 2. In the field of Health Promotion cultural capital plays a critical role in understanding and eventually reducing social inequalities

Introduction



Types of capital



Cultural capital



Conclusions

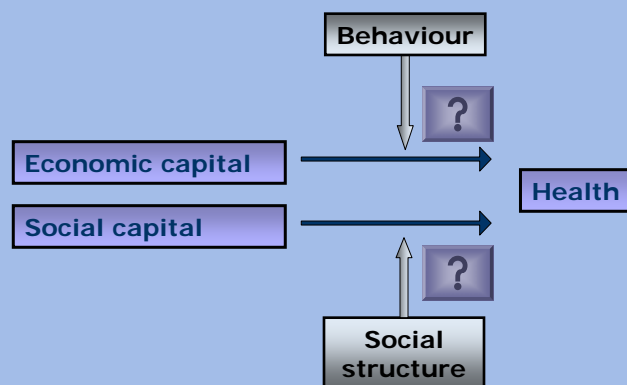
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Thank you very much
for your attention

Social inequality in health: the role of cultural capital

Unresolved issues



Introduction



Types of capital



Cultural capital



Conclusions



Discussion

Social inequality in health: the role of cultural capital



Health literacy

WHO's definition of health literacy:

"Health literacy represents the cognitive and social skills which determine the motivation and ability of individuals to gain access to, understand and use information in ways which promote and maintain good health"



Nutbeam (2000) distinguishes three levels of health literacy:

functional health literacy: basic understanding of factual health information.
interactive health literacy: advanced cognitive and literacy skills; social skills to improve a individual's personal capacity for interactive communication
critical health literacy: analysis and application of health information for the sake of greater control over life events and situations.



Abel (2004) concludes:

"In health promotion practice, health literacy means to understand the conditions that determine health and to know how to change them!"

Introduction



Types of capital



Cultural capital



Conclusions



Discussion

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„We think of the fact that learning is something you do in school, but what happens in a family enables you to learn in school. Not because your parents are teaching you arithmetic [...] it's because you learn from them how to relate to very complicated things“

Bronfenbrenner, 1996

Introduction



Types of capital



Cultural capital



Conclusions



Discussion

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