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ABSTRACT
This article argues that to better investigate the enduring relationship between social class background and inequalities in post-compulsory education necessitates a more comprehensive approach to thinking with Bourdieu, but also a need to move beyond his seminal, much used concepts. Through meta-analysis, we review how Bourdieusian theory has been used in widening participation research in mainly Anglophone contexts, and consider how including concepts from his wider ‘toolbox’ can aid this pursuit. We consider new theories and concepts that have emerged largely after Bourdieu and their appropriateness for research in Australian higher education. We explore how a ‘practice-based’ theory of widening participation might be developed, drawing on the work of Schatzki and Kemmis which permits researchers to usefully consider the internal goods of a practice and the role of institutions and the non-human. We also suggest that incorporating intersectionality, as both a social theory of knowledge and an approach to analysis, facilitates exploration of routine practices and struggles and reveals the complexities, provisionality and becomingness of social positioning, subjectivities and change. Such theoretical extensions to Bourdieu’s legacy enable more nuanced understandings of how complex and intersecting social inequalities in higher education are realised or challenged in countries beyond the global north.

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Introduction
A pressing issue for scholarly communities is the investigation of why the recent expansion of the higher education system and initiatives to widen participation has not overcome the enduring influence of social class and family influence on participation and outcomes. The widening participation agendas in many Commonwealth countries have had limited impact in increasing the participation of disadvantaged groups (France 2016). Reay’s assessment of the UK system seems to parallel well with the current situation in Australia: ‘regardless of what individual working-class males and females are able to
negotiate and achieve for themselves within education, the collective patterns of working-class trajectories remain sharply different from those of the middle-classes’ (Reay 2006, 294).

Part the problem of system transformation stems from the weakness of the explanations provided by widening participation research (Kettley 2007). In reviewing research focused on educational access over the past 100 years, Kettley (2007) argues that since widening participation developed as a specific field in the 1980s, recent research has reflected the three distinct and separate strands of earlier twentieth century approaches. He contends that the separateness of these contributions weaken the potential to provide strong evidence for transforming policy. The three strands he identifies include: a focus on the analysis of rights to education and contestation of policies and constructions of inclusion and exclusion; a focus on social causation, often through measuring participation and quantitative analysis of the barriers to learning; and a focus on social formation through analysing the constructions and meaning of student experiences (Kettley 2007). Although Kettley (2007) acknowledges that contemporary approaches have been extended by new official, managerial and monitoring studies of widening participation and that ‘new access’ studies include more ethnographic, feminist and post-modern research and studies of access discourses (Burke 2002), he maintains that holistic research is needed that conjoins exploration of social formation and social causation.

But what might research that conjoins social formation and social causation involve and would such research affect widening participation policy? The limited effects of research on policy to date are perhaps not surprising given that there is a considerable body of scholarship that acknowledges that policy making is a political not a rational process (Ozga 2000; Weiss and Buculavas 1980). It is not our purpose, though, to explore further the complex process in which research and policy ideas travel within and between national boundaries and become inflected across spaces and time through the practices and contestations of elites and local communities, including research and policy communities (Ozga, Seddon, and Popkewitz 2006). Although we have noted that Ozga, Seddon, and Popkewitz (2006), argue that one feature of these travelling policy ideas has been a declining interest in equality of opportunity and outcomes and a focus on promoting diversity and differentiation.

While recognising the contested nature of the research-policy nexus, the purpose of this article is to explore the use of Bourdieu’s research tools, which have dominated much research to date. At the same time, the article intends to question such research and consider where it might be strengthened by engaging more fully with Bourdieu and even thinking with theories that have gained popularity after Bourdieu, rather than using concepts in a Bourdieu-lite way (Gale and Lingard 2015, 1).

Arguably, over the last decade there has been considerable educational research on widening participation, which draws on Bourdieu’s legacy. Through recognising habitus as ‘A structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices’ (Bourdieu 1984, 170), Bourdieu drew attention to the interconnections that break the dichotomies of agency and structure. As scholars have operationalised Bourdieu’s conceptual toolkit to investigate the influence of social and economic capitals, class practices and identity work, the macro and micro, or individual action and social formation have been brought together (see for example, Crozier and Reay 2008; Bathmaker et al. 2016; Bathmaker, Ingram, and Waller 2013; Fuller, Heath, and Johnston 2011; Quinn 2010).
Whilst much of this Bourdieusian scholarship in widening participation research appears to address Kettley’s (2007) concern that social transformation requires bringing together a focus on social formation and a focus on social causation, this article argues that not all research has used his research tools in this way. Therefore, this article argues for a more holistic approach to think with and beyond Bourdieu’s concepts (see Adkins, Brosnan, and Threadgold 2016) to investigate how research is conducted on the enduring relationship between social class background and inequalities in post-compulsory education. As a meta-analysis of the use of theories concerning social class in widening participation is at the forefront of this paper, the article begins with a discussion of theorising as a practice in order to explore the relationship between theory and explanation and to consider what types of ‘work’ theories can provide for a field of knowledge and practice. To structure our meta-analysis concerning the relationship between theory and practice, we review how Bourdieusian theory has been used in widening participation research predominantly in Anglophone contexts. Bourdieu’s (2003) notion of practical reason will be revisited because we consider that this approach encourages a holistic use of Bourdieu’s toolbox by focusing specifically on the practical interconnections of habitus, capital and field. Nevertheless, we are in agreement with Gale and Lingard (2015) who regard Bourdieu as a principled eclectic in the way that he argued for ‘scientific rigour’ but not ‘scientific rigidity’ (Bourdieu 1992, 227). For this reason, the article will also consider some other theoretical developments that have become prominent after Bourdieu. These ideas include: a grounded practice approach to theory, drawing on the work of Schatzki (2005) and Kemmis et al. (2014) that encourages researchers to consider the role of institutions; actor network theory (ANT) derived from the work of Latour (1986), which draws attention to the non-human and has been applied to the concept of student aspiration in higher education (Nichols and Stahl, forthcoming); and theories of intersectionality drawing on feminist and post-structuralist thinkers to consider other categorical formations and identities that intersect with class to provide a richer understanding of social inclusion and exclusion. The article concludes that these theoretical extensions to Bourdieu’s legacy enable a more nuanced understanding of how complex and intersecting social inequalities in higher education are realised.

**Theoretical investigations of practice**

Widening participation is a field of research in which utility is forefront as it is characterised by a belief that ‘current policies and practices have undermined the commitment to combat the social inequalities that are institutionalised and reproduced within the academic world’ (Burke 2002, 1). Yet a commitment to revealing the ‘things that work’ to make a difference should not be at the expense of research informed by critical theory (Farnsworth and Solomon 2013; Furlong and Oancea 2007). Theory helps us articulate our understandings of the world. Without theories we would struggle to share our experiences because theory is not distinct from daily practices. We contend therefore that within the field of widening participation the separation of theory and practice has been unproductive. As Biesta, Allen, and Edwards (2011, 226) have argued, the creation of binaries between ‘theory versus practice, the theoretical versus the empirical, or theoretical versus the useful […] have tended to give theory a bad name’.
In thinking with and beyond existing theories it is imperative that we think about the process of theorising and the types of theories that have informed the field of widening participation. Recent discussion of theorising processes by Swedberg (2016, 8) draws a distinction between the context of discovery involving observation and other processes typical of formal research theorisation and the theorising/sense-making processes that underpin our being in the world, where we develop a ‘personal kind of knowledge’ about how ‘things work’. Swedberg (2016, 8) calls this ‘personal knowledge’ a form of ‘practical knowledge’ because it enables us to make sense of our experiences and provide justifications to others and ourselves about how we understand our engagement in the world. Furthermore, in this stage of personal or practical theorising, existing theories will be drawn on, consciously and unconsciously (Swedberg 2016). In order to develop theory therefore, Swedberg (2016) encourages researchers to consider the tacit ways in which assumptions and ‘theories’ are framing their research, as well as the conscious theories or concepts being drawn on. Arguably, this thinking will be helpful in reviewing why recent critics of Bourdieu have highlighted a certain irony: Bourdieu’s theoretical framework and toolkit, which was developed to assist in our critique of the so-called tyranny of meta-narratives concerning theory, has become a meta-narrative unto itself. This intriguing provocation requires a critical approach, a meta-analysis, to explore the complex relationship between research, theory and practice. It also requires us (the authors) to reflect on the tacit and more conscious ways in which Bourdieu’s research tools, and other theoretical frames, have been drawn on in this field, given our location in Australia where there has been a call for a “southern theory” of HE and a ‘southern’ disposition about equity (Gale 2012, 240).

**Thinking with Bourdieu**

The importance of Bourdiesian theory is the expectation that theorists do not ‘mine’ data to capture, for example, evidence for habitus, capital and field (i.e. using these as a priori categories) but rather these concepts become theoretical tools – that is, research tools to better understand empirical data and think inductively and critically through research as a practice. Indeed, in a paraphrasing of Kant’s ideas, Bourdieu argues ‘theory without empirical research is empty, empirical research without theory is blind’ (Bourdieu 1988, 744–745). Therefore, while we call attention to Bourdieu’s legacy in research on widening participation and the value of his tools to help with thinking, the tools were never intended to constitute a regimented framework of analysis.

Instead, interconnections between the tools in the toolbox need to be explicated as King (2002, 425) contends:

> The connection of the habitus to the field, which allows for a degree of intersubjective struggle and change, provides a richer and more convincing account of social life, which is much closer to ‘practical theory.’

For Bourdieu these interconnections in thinking with practice and with theory, are essential to understanding social and cultural spaces. As such, Bourdieu argues that practice can only be understood through three ‘thinking tools’: habitus, capital and field (Bourdieu 1984), and that these three are intrinsically interlinked so that practice = [(habitus) (capital)] + field (Bourdieu 1984, 101). As such, practice is conceptualised not just as
‘what people do’, but as a complex interaction of the social space and its dominant values with the dispositions and capitals of those acting in the space. Practices, in a Bourdieusian sense, are assumed to be both cultural, reflecting a ‘way of life’, and social, or constructed not in individual minds but rather in and between people and institutions, in other words, in fields of practice. As Bourdieu has argued, the field of educational institutions contributes to the reproduction of advantages and disadvantages, as much through the work schools do in imparting cultural resources to individuals and signalling the symbolic value of their qualifications to others, as in their sifting role in ensuring that those who progress to higher education are perceived to have achieved this by passing examinations through merit alone. In arguing for research designed to study practices in fields of power, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, 154–155) have claimed that:

In the absence of analysis of what the resigned withdrawal of members of the working classes from the School owes to the functioning and functions of the education system as an agency of selection, elimination and concealment of elimination under selection, all that technocratic research is able to see in the statistics of educational opportunity which highlight the unequal representation of the different social classes in the different stages of education, is the manifestation of an isolated relationship between scholastic performance, taken at its face value, and the series of advantages and disadvantages deriving from social origin.

Clearly for Bourdieu, research design need to consider not the isolated experiences of individuals, but how people and institutions interact and function in the field in which they operate; but he is not a structural functionalist, indeed he is critical of such accounts as Grenfell (2008, 45) notes:

Bourdieu attempts to reconcile these two traditions by taking what has been learnt from the analysis of structures as symbolic systems in order to uncover the dynamic of principles, or logic of practice, which gives them their structuring power; in short, a theory of structure as both structured (… and thus open to objectification) and structuring (… and thus generative of thought and action).

Essential to Bourdieu’s practical theory is the use of habitus. Bourdieu describes habitus as a product of people’s own history (1993, 86), their conditions of existence, as being ‘necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning giving perceptions’ (Bourdieu 1984, 166). Such perceptions are held by Bourdieu as reason for disinclinations towards staying on in education any longer than necessary, allowing us to understand social class gaps in the take up of higher education because working-class students are ‘a fortiori more likely not to enter than to be eliminated from it by the explicit sanction of examination failure’ (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, 153). At the same time, habitus drives feelings of incongruence for those students from lower social classes who do attend higher education, who sit in contrast to their middle class peers who are akin to ‘a “fish in water”: it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 127).

Habitus is, though, a concept that has its own versatility in how it has been put to use in empirical work on learner identities in widening participation research to explore perceptions and points of view in making decisions about their futures. It is a complex concept that according to Reay (2004) takes many forms in Bourdieu’s own writing, as well as in the work of those that apply the term.1 Archer and Francis (2005, 2006) focus on these learners’ perspectives through identifying peoples’ ‘narratives’, both personal and
collective that are historically constituted in the habitus, while Archer, Halsall, and Hollingworth (2007a, 2007b) analysed ‘components’, ‘elements’ and ‘performances’ as indicators of habitus. Skeggs (2004) work addresses the generative capacity of the habitus by revealing peoples’ practices that seek to accrue value and also symbolic power, while Lareau (1987) and Lareau and Horvat (1999) examine the cultural capital and educational expectations that form part of the habitus. Reay’s (1998, 2004) works use the terminology of ‘dispositions’, which accounts for the permeability of habitus in the focus on individual subjectivities and social positioning, as well as identifying institutional habitus. Reay (2004, 439) opens up the complexity of habitus, but she also grounds habitus in empirical work urging that it ‘has to be apprehended interpretatively’ as an embodied compilation of individual and collective trajectories that draws attention to intersections with social positions and identities other than class. At the same time, by pointimg to the permeability of habitus, an indeterminacy or a sense of improvisation in people’s dispositions is revealed as different practices in fields, which indicate loci for change, as well as continuity in social formation (Reay 2004). Habitus may be conceived as improvisations in living, where the value of capital in different fields provides a way of understanding why a particular range of improvisations are usually imaginable or feasible and others are not. Operationalising habitus with capital and field counteracts the critics that identify Bourdieu as a methodological determinist and political pessimist (Adkins 2004; Kettley 2007).

In spite of Bourdieu’s theory locating habitus and the development and deployment of capitals within struggles for position within fields of practice, our contention is that much research on widening participation particularly in the Anglophone context has underplayed the structured and structuring aspects of Bourdieu’s theory. A possible reason stems from the interest in the use of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus which can be traced back to the development of the new ‘access’ studies (Kettley 2007) and the qualitative turn from the 1990s onwards to examine the social formation of inequality. This work focused on student identity formation and the student voice in order to understand how educational life chances and the acceptance or resistance of these life chances and positionings were constructed through people’s daily lives and the institutional contexts they encounter (Archer and Leathwood 2003; Blaxter, Dodd, and Tight 1996; Britton and Baxter 1994, 1999; Webb 2001, 2004). Unquestionably, this qualitative body of research has provided a strong sense of the ways that young people are positioned in relation to the field of higher education (Abrahams 2016; Davey 2009). Such research has often privileged the voice and agency of learners, though also noting the way this agency has been constrained, and the way decision-making processes are always more than individual acts. Consequently, it is argued that patterns of university access and participation are not the result of the cultural deficit of learners, they are the consequences of patterns (Archer and Leathwood 2003; Reay, David, and Ball 2005; Reay et al. 2001) that cannot be transformed simply by voluntaristic action, by ‘an intellectual act of cognition’ (Bourdieu 2003, 80). However, at times, the use of Bourdieu in this body of research has been ‘light’ (James 2015) particularly when the concept of voice draws more on liberal humanism and does not connect habitus to fields of power and to the recognition of structure in narrative accounts of agency (Warren and Webb 2007).

At other times, Bourdieu’s concepts have often been utilised in ways that resemble a ‘pick and mix’ approach (Atkinson 2010; Reay 2004), and in such analyses higher education as a social field takes something of a back seat, becoming a contextualising
landscape, or recognised as a structuring force, yet rarely properly and fully taken to task. Additionally, this picking and mixing of concepts can sometimes lead to the alignment of similar terms drawn from very different conceptual analysis and practices. The deployment of social capital in widening participation research is one example. For Bourdieu the concept is embedded in a field analysis of power and struggle over the control of resources in a zero-sum game to sustain or change dominant patterns of social reproduction. Whereas, the operationalisation of this term in policy and practice has drawn more from the work of Putnam and Coleman (Field 2008) with the underlying assumption that social capital is a resource that can be increased to improve the opportunities and outcomes of working-class students without any disadvantage to others.

Narrow conceptualisations of social capital have limitations for explaining why the expansion of the higher education system has taken place without concomitant transformation (Wyn 2009). Arguably, system transformation has not occurred, not because working-class students or those from disadvantaged backgrounds do not have ‘enough’ social capital to access appropriate networks, but rather because certain interest groups – as a class collective, or dominant group – have resisted efforts to change who can access the system or parts of the system. In other words, a Bourdieusian understanding of capital (whether it be social, cultural, symbolic or economic) is relational; it presumes that capital is a resource employed in the power play of a field, whereas policy discourse that draw on the work of Putnam and Coleman hides the struggle over power to determine the rules of the game (Hughes and Blaxter 2007). Whilst it is beyond the scope of this article to explore the struggles over capital in the field of higher education to change how disadvantaged groups are treated, there is some research evidence that the interests of dominant groups are being sustained. For example, pedagogic processes that have been shown to inhibit or constrain working-class students’ engagement (Crozier and Reay 2011; Roberts 2011) have been met with little substantive change or concern, with even advocates for overturning the deficit discourse noting that ‘[n]o university, to our knowledge, has yet formally acknowledged the extra time required to teach LSES students in workload models’ (Devlin et al. 2012, 34).

Without equal weight and detailed attention given to higher education as social field, it is likely that research will inadvertently collude with the minimal impact of the widening participation agenda. That is to say, research using these light or pick and mix approaches has not really challenged the practices underpinning the status quo: that higher education is a contested space, subject to power struggles to shape or reshape the field, and further influenced by struggles in the field of power. In the next section, we propose ways to think more comprehensively with Bourdieu.

**Thinking with Bourdieu’s concepts of illusio and misrecognition**

In the field of widening participation for those making post-school transitions, the notion of class has been central to critical engagements with the ways young people move within and between sectors of education and work. Debates have focussed on the nexus between risk, reflexivity and inequality (Roberts 2010; Threadgold 2011; Woodman 2009; Woodman and Threadgold 2014). Drawing on Bourdieu, reflexivity itself has been theorised as a form of cultural capital (Threadgold and Nilan 2009) and more recently there has been an effort to bring attention to other oft-overlooked aspects of the
Bourdieu’s Bourdieusian toolbox, such as *illusio*, struggle, strategy and social gravity (France and Threadgold 2015), and misrecognition (James 2015) to highlight the affective ways inequalities are made and remade. Therefore we now turn to these oft-overlooked concepts to think through their interconnections, interdependencies and intersectionalities.

Recognising that a more comprehensive approach to the full range of relational Bourdieusian concepts is essential, we draw attention to a need to think with Bourdieu’s concepts of misrecognition and *illusio*. In thinking about the struggles that young people face in post-school transitions, rather than rendering peoples’ actions as evidence of unenlightened and dispirited practices, these concepts add to the structure-agency conundrum by stressing how the interplay between individual dispositions and the possible positions in social space one may occupy are mutually constituted. *Illusio* and social gravity both rely on double meanings to explain why individuals invest their practice, invest themselves – in specific fields. Bourdieu describes *illusio* as a way of understanding the intertwined nature of individual interests and social institutions where *illusio* is both the socially constructed stakes and the rewards of a field. When young people invest in their lives by taking specific trajectories, they become cognisant of the ‘gravity’ of the situation, while at the same time they are pushed and pulled by forces beyond their control (Hage 2011). As they make decisions about their lives and invest in those choices, the gravity of their situation thickens. A sequence of choices creates a trajectory. Once a trajectory has momentum, it is much more difficult for the young person to get off that path just by making different choices. Rather than understanding this process solely through the analytic tool of habitus as an indicator of constraint through setting ‘horizons for action’ (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997), a more comprehensive approach that interconnects habitus to the concept of field and the multiscalar concepts of *illusio* and social gravity surpass emphasis on agency and structure. The employment of this enlarged toolkit has the potential to show how ‘choice’ creates trajectories, which gather momentum, leaving the young person oriented towards future investment, despite previous ambivalent or even harmful consequences (France and Threadgold 2015).

Misrecognition similarly can help reveal the implications for trajectories of choices that people make. The concept of misrecognition, rather like that of *illusio* and social capital also has double meanings according to which theoretical frames underpin the concept. For example, in relation to misrecognition, James (2015) has drawn attention to the related, but different processes at work in the conceptualisations of misrecognition in the work of Bourdieu, Honneth and Fraser (see Lovell 2007 for a further discussion of this). In widening participation research, depending on how the concept of misrecognition is understood, attention is given to different processes for change and to different effects on the individual who might be the target of policy. For Bourdieu (1977) misrecognition develops, not because people are foolish and easily misled, but rather because they develop accurate recognitions in line with the practices of the field. For Bourdieu, the concept of misrecognition is interconnected with his theory of practice, a theory that accounts for how everyday experiences become known and continually made and remade through practices in which our position or power in the field account for how our personal taken for granted knowledge about how things work develop. The concept of misrecognition connects closely with habitus and the unconscious way in which dispositions are taken for granted, unless disrupted by some conflict between fields with different practices. By regarding misrecognition as embedded in a theory of practice, Bourdieu highlights the
underpinning symbolic violence of the concept in which, ‘the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity’ recognises the embodied effects of misrecognition (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 167). Misrecognition occurs when power relationships based on who has access to different economic capital within fields morph into symbolic capital to legitimise a hierarchy of different worth, and hide the underlying interests of those that are deemed more worthy to sustain the symbolic order. This theoretical model suggests the need for research that uncovers the practices of the powerful in constructing systems and institutional orders that sustain their privileges.

Applying these concepts to the research problem of thinking about the struggles disadvantaged people face in participating in higher education, Bourdieu’s concept of misrecognition provides a way of analysing why removing ‘barriers’ to participation or focusing on educational attainment and standards at school will not necessarily overcome educational inequalities (Thomson 2014). For example, a focus on attainment as the main barrier to progression presumes that qualifications obtained in schools and colleges provide cultural capital that has equal exchange value in the school to university transition. Yet there is much evidence, especially in education systems, such as those in the UK and Australia with strong academic-vocational qualification divisions, that different school leaving qualifications or grade hierarchies provide different access pathways to different tertiary institutions and programmes (Crozier and Reay 2008; Bathmaker 2015). Misrecognition, as a concept, highlights the way that meritocratic notions of raising attainment do not necessarily level the playing field between social groups. Yet meritocratic discourses have become the taken for granted ‘fair’ approach to identifying who should access higher education (Williams 1997). These discourses form a doxa that can mask the symbolic capital that some groups and institutions (schools and universities) may employ to sustain their social position and close down access for others. Equally, understanding how social capital interconnects to field and recognition has been used to explore why well-qualified working-class students may opt not to participate in higher education (Heath, Fuller, and Johnston 2010; Stahl 2015).

In sum, the light approach and ‘pick and mix’ use of Bourdieu’s intellectual resources may have now come to constitute an over-use or meta-narrative in itself, limiting the possibilities for theorising why recent expansions in the higher education sector have not led to the expected gains for those learners who are traditionally under-represented in the field. Instead, a more comprehensive use of Bourdieu’s theory that includes consideration of the mutual relationality between concepts, such as Illusio, misrecognition and doxa, along with the more prominent habitus, capital and field triad helps provide an appreciation of why policy makers, practitioners and institutional leaders, who focus on raising aspiration as the leitmotif of widening participation, often do not recognise the difficult changes that need to be made to schools, universities and their programmes, as James (2015) recent review of research on middle class school choice shows.

Yet in thinking with Bourdieu, other conceptual frames have been identified that align with, yet are distinct from, Bourdieu’s work, in particular thinking related to practice and the role of institutions; interactions between humans and the non-human; as well as, feminist post-structural and intersectional readings of experiences. Put crudely, is the field now experiencing a kind of Bourdieusian ‘hangover’ which necessitates we employ new theoretical tools, which may offer fresh insights into this ‘wicked problem’? Due to word length limitations, this exploration will be constrained, but nonetheless, it is in
the spirit of this enterprise that we now turn to considering how new theoretical constructs that have gained purchase after Bourdieu might assist in developing our theorising and what such constructs may offer.

Thinking beyond Bourdieu

In thinking with Bourdieu, our argument so far has questioned the light touch and ‘pick and mix’ approach which also tends to focus on individuals as the unit of analysis through prioritising one or two of Bourdieu’s concepts, such as habitus or capital, rather than exploring the interconnections and interdependencies between concepts in a field of intersubjective practices. In this section we draw on two theoretical approaches that think beyond Bourdieu, ANT and intersectionality. We turn to these new approaches not because we wish to simply add more concepts to Bourdieu’s toolkit and contribute to the ‘pick and mix’ approach we have criticised, but rather because we are aware that these recent ideas have generated much interest after Bourdieu. We wish to explore what, if any, new issues have these ideas sought to address and consider how they might help us think beyond Bourdieu. Additionally, since Bourdieu’s approach was always guided by the disposition to apply concepts and to comprehend and theorise the empirical, which is always changing, it is appropriate to consider how we have sometimes employed other theorists and make explicit which assumptions have led to the adoption of these new ‘theories’ to frame our research (Swedberg 2016).

For example, other recent approaches to the study of practice have been considered to offer more promising directions through which we can locate higher education as an object of study (or the unit of analysis) in its entirety (Wilkinson 2010). As noted above, one criticism of Bourdieusian approaches has been the highly selective ways in which certain concepts have been employed, in ways that fail to hold the field to account, and which diminish the concreteness, messiness and ‘happeningness’ of practices (Schatzki 2006) within the higher education field. One of the reasons for these selective approaches may be because the analogies employed by Bourdieu in his later work to describe practices, including terms such as field, ‘discursively suggest… a structural boundary’, which ‘pictures practices as always and already structured’ (Rawolle, Wilkinson, and Hardy 2007; as cited in Wilkinson 2010, 42). Ironically, then, this approach can draw the researchers’ gaze away from the social practices that constitute higher education (Wilkinson 2010). Rawolle (2005) also highlights the need to retain the gaze on the wider social and political field and recognise social fields are temporal constructions, constructed through practices which are affected by practices other field (what are called cross field effects).

A second and interconnected, reason for the turn to institutional practices may be that Bourdieu’s usage of practice in empirical analysis tended to be deployed either in the sense of practice as contrasting to theory and thought; or practice as a ‘series of performances’ (Warde 2004; as cited in Wilkinson 2010, 46). This usage of practice overlooks two of its key features. Firstly, it ignores the internal goods of a practice, such as satisfaction or self-esteem, that is, the singular or collective actions that are directed towards non-competitive behaviours, as opposed to the external goods produced as a result of the self-interested strategising of agents (MacIntyre 1981; Warde 2004; Wilkinson 2010). In these cases, it could be argued that not enough of Bourdieu’s toolbox has been utilised in higher
education studies that usually just rely on the habitus-field-capital triad, as we have argued, the oft-overlooked notions of illusio and misrecognition, struggle, strategy and social gravity are well equipped to analyse those internal goods (see France and Threadgold 2015). Secondly, and crucial to this discussion, it overlooks a key notion of practice as a ‘coordinated entity … a temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings’ developed over time by groups of practitioners … engaged in that practice in specific sites’ (Schatzki 1996, 89). This latter definition of practice calls attention to the distinctive features of practices, that is, the shared understandings or ‘sayings’, know-how or ‘doings’ (Schatzki 2002); and relations of solidarity and power or ‘relatings’ that unfold and are exercised between practitioners in a practice (Kemmis et al. 2014). These sayings, doings and relatings are highly institutionalised in modern societies (Kemmis et al. 2014; Warde 2004). Apprehending practices in this latter way draws our attention to the importance of analytical work that concerns itself with ‘both practical activity and representation’ (Warde 2004, 17).

In calling the higher education sector to account, institutional theorists shift the focus of the sites of struggle for power in relation to who has access to university education away from fields of practice (the unit of analysis) as understood by Bourdieu, to institutions as organisations. This is because institutions are regarded as ‘macro-level structural and cultural spheres and domains in which actors, resources and authority systems are distributed in bounded ecological space’ (Abrutyn 2013, 2). When the institution is treated as the ‘field’, a site-specific analysis in which the ontological perspective of practices in the site become the focus (Schatzki 2006; Wilkinson and Kemmis 2015). This approach augments Bourdieusian analyses by directing the researchers’ gaze on practices as sayings, doings (Schatzki 2002) and relatings unfolding in specific sites in all their happeniness (Kemmis et al. 2014). The specificity of each site is an essential focus of an approach that explores the ontology of the site in all its intersubjective complexity or ‘human coexistence’ that can only be apprehended through its ties ‘to a context … (or site) … of which it is inherently a part’ (Schatzki 2005, 465, 467). Hence, in order to analyse an organisation such as a university and how or why particular forms of social capital become the ‘gold standard’ (Maton 2005), the site in all its particularity must be examined (Schatzki 2005, 467). In viewing organisations as ‘site[s] of social life … composed of a nexus of human practices and material arrangements’ (Schatzki 2005, 465), a site ontological approach then shifts the emphasis from universities as socially constituted and constructed fields and habitus, or as interactions between practitioners in a practice, to higher education practices as the objects of study. Consequently, practices as ‘sites of the social’ (Schatzki 2002) need to be analysed in their entirety and site specificity. Thus, what we do as researchers and how we do it become crucial questions.

**Thinking beyond Bourdieu: ANT**

Once practices in institutions become the objects of study, albeit there still needs to be consideration of the way that power relations in the wider social and political field are mediated through institutional practices (Rawolle 2005), new questions emerge in relation to widening participation research and new theoretical frames may extend thinking. For example, in neoliberal logic, aspiration is understood to be the characteristic of the individual; indeed it is arguably the prime quality of the ideal citizen in a neoliberal society
resulting in widening participation research being ‘assigned’ the policy problem of how to raise aspirations (Sellar and Storan 2013). One theoretical frame that generates new questions about practices in institutionally bounded spaces and prompts us to ask different kinds of questions about aspirations and the role of universities, is ANT.

Actor network perspectives offer a means of seeing and investigating individuals in terms of the ways in which agency (action) is a function of connectedness (networking). ANT conceptualises networks as ‘comprised of diverse materials’ (Murdoch 1998) including the human and the non-human. It has been proposed that ‘[l]earning … be understood as emerging from what happens in distributed networks and assemblages consisting of both human and non-human matter and organisms that are in interaction’ (Taguchi 2011, 38). In the higher education context, this means that the ability of an individual student to practice what is understood as learning, is a function of her extension through networks made up of multiple human members as well as the tools and devices through which they connect and act. As ANT theorist Law states ‘materials (human, textual and technological or artefactual) define one another and hold one another in place’ (Law 2003, 8). By the same token, instability in connections can threaten the integrity of assemblages through which individuals access and participate in higher education.

We can ask: How is the subject ‘aspiration’ brought into being as a network entity? And, how do universities activate aspirations in order to maintain and extend their networks? Clarke (2002), in an early application of ANT in the adult education domain, analysed how the UK government, through the implementation of the Skills for Life policy, enrolled adult learners and institutions into a network aimed at improving the country’s position in the global economy. Drawing on Callon (1986), she considers how the enrolment of actors into a network begins with the establishment of a problem-solution logic through which powerful actors establish deficiencies that can be addressed through enlistment into the network. So, in relation to the Skills for Life policy, the deficiency is a lack of functional literacy of a percentage of the population, compromising the country’s ability to create a skilled competitive workforce.

This is relevant to considering the constitution of aspiration in relation to lack or absence; that is, the concept of aspiration inherently orients the actor to what they do not yet have, or have not yet become. In a study of young Australian males’ post-school transitions, Nichols and Stahl (forthcoming) examined the aspirational rhetoric of texts found on university web-pages addressing potential future students such as the following:

For most students, the main reason for going to uni is to forge the pathway to a new career, or take the next professional step. But in the daily grind of uni lectures, tutorials and assignments it can be easy to forget about your long-term goals. It’s important not to let go of the bigger picture. UniSA offers an impressive range of career services to help you plan your career, get yourself ready for the workplace and find a job. (University of South Australia 2016)

The potential student is addressed as a subject who has not yet reached the aspirational goal of a career and as an actor who has mobilised themselves by ‘forg[ing] the pathway’ which will ultimately result in this goal being achieved. The university is presented as a connecting network, an extension of the student actor in the service of their career goals. The danger evoked in this representation is that the student subject will ‘let go of the bigger picture’, that is, become disconnected from the career producing actor
network. Once enlisted, students will be expected to extend themselves through the production of network artefacts such as a personal portfolio.

Actor networks are composed of both human and non-human entities, which connect at multiple scales from the intimate to the macro. In ANT, entities are often considered as assemblages, composed of disparate materials, which are held in place with more or less stability depending on contextual factors (Latour 1986). In relation to aspirations, this encourages us to look at how non-human actors may be mobilised into networks in the service of human actors becoming what they wish to become, in other words, achieving their aspirations. In Nichol and Stahls’ study (2017), the young men involved referred to a number of important non-human actors, the presence or absence of which impacted materially on their ability to network towards achieving their aspirations. Many could not afford to run a car and so to attend university, they needed to access the public transport network; however proximity of transport links to their homes, crime levels in some transit areas and late timing of some classes made it difficult to utilise this resource. Lack of money to run a car was associated with the decisions many had made to focus on their studies in their final year of school rather than to work in a part-time job, a decision which was motivated by their aspiration to acquire a high enough entrance rank to get into university. Thus, while they lacked the extension a vehicle would provide, they had secured their extension by connection to the higher education network. Such approaches provide a broader conceptual framework for theorising ‘aspiration’ in both its entirety and site specificity, revealing the problematic logic behind constructions of aspiration as the characteristic of the ideal citizen of neoliberal societies and the assumed relationship between widening participation and raising aspiration.

**Thinking beyond Bourdieu: intersectionality**

A further theoretical frame to consider is that derived from feminist, post-structuralist thinking in which the unit of analysis, intersectionality, has its historical roots in empirical studies where identity processes were considered fragmented, discursive, hydridised and global (Wetherall and Mohanty 2010). More broadly, intersectionality ‘refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference … social practices, institutional arrangements, cultural ideologies, and the outcomes of these interactions’ (Davis 1992, 68). Concerned with inequality, intersectionality explores the dynamics of power in relation to the interplay of race, class and gender. Intersectionality calls for a canvass of these identity categories, which constitute multiple axes of intragroup and intergroup difference and elicit multilayered narratives embedded within and across critical social and cultural contexts (Crenshaw 1991; Hill-Collins 2000; Phoenix 2006). Such conceptualisations engage the complexity of social inequalities in higher education, exposing the deep tensions and contradictions between sameness and difference at play within institutions when widening participation policies, practices and subjectivities are produced and enacted across intersecting, and often contradictory, identity formations.

Beginning in feminist theory, specifically Crenshaw’s (1991) and Hill-Collins (2000) scholarship investigating societal oppression and women of colour, intersectionality has sought to address how theorists take categories of difference, or power differentials, and illustrate how these categories and differentials interact or become entangled. Intersectionality explores social structures and how power is distributed in absolute and asymmetrical
terms, whereby human subjects, and their embodied categories and identities, are primarily constituted by systems of domination and marginalisation (Prins 2006). Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1983), and Skeggs (2002, 2004) situate identities, and the experience of these identities, within interrelated and overlapping identity categories where ‘gender is always lived in the modalities of ethnicity and class, nationality in the modalities of gender and race, and class in the modalities of gender and nationality’ (Prins 2006, 278). Arguably, these conceptualisations have commonalities with Bourdieu’s practical reason in that social positions are treated as inherently relational, and aim to make ‘visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it’ (Phoenix 2006, 187).

Theorising the multiple and often contradictory social and identity positions across and within institutions enables the micro and macro power relations between individual and institutional identities and practices to be more closely analysed in widening participation research, revealing the complexity and fluidity of power that includes but extends beyond class differences. For social theorists who engage in intersectional analysis, critical engagement of power differentials among social categories is required, which works to further interrogate the complexities of how these inequities not only function in the real world, but are also resisted/subverted by individuals. Such theoretical works attempt to show identity processes as complex and are therefore stronger than persistent, reductive and polemical arguments concerning, for example ‘boys struggle to read’ or ‘all boys disengage’. This is important in examining the tensions between imperatives of redistribution and recognition through analysing structures of inequality as always intersecting, embodied identity formations that operate at systemic, cultural, symbolic and affective levels (Burke 2012). This way of thinking beyond Bourdieu helps to address how an individual’s ‘difference’ is systematically organised through social relations in our political and economic structures, policies and practices’ (Mirza 2014/2015, 1).

Intersectionality sheds light on how social and cultural differences (e.g. social class, gender and ethnicity) and inequalities (e.g. of access to and participation in HE) ‘are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society’ (Collins 2000, 42). Intersectionality enables us to see that social identities, power and inequalities cannot be separated into homogenous categories. It avoids falling into over-simplifying the problem of equity through ‘inadequate additive models’ and sheds light on how difference is systematically organised and discursively produced through social relations in our political and economic structures, policies and practices (Mirza 2014/2015). Intersectionality brings a lens to analyse the practices by which social class, ethnicity and gender interact and overlap to produce highly differentiated experiences and outcomes for students in diverse types of HE. This approach can be transposed into a Bourdieusian framework, as feminist re-workings of Bourdieu (Adkins and Skeggs 2005) and scholars exploring ideas around ethnicity capital have shown (Shah, Dwyer, and Modood 2010; Webb 2015). Such an approach highlights that inequalities are not only reproduced through material differences but are also produced at the lived, material, embodied and emotional levels of subjective and affective experience and practice (Burke 2012).

Working within an intersectional theoretical frame, Fraser (2007), has also turned the focus of the lens of misrecognition in the opposite direction from that of Bourdieu, away from the interests of the powerful and towards concerns about the effect on status and
identity of non-recognition on those who are not so powerful. Her theoretical model provides a framework for tackling social injustice and the psychological harm that stems from the denial of voice to certain social groups who are denigrated and not recognised. In this model it is the lack of recognition of certain people or groups, which restricts the redistribution of resources and the participation of these people in the processes and benefits of a society. In this regard, Fraser’s (2007) concept takes a different turn from Bourdieu’s work by identifying the inner emotional effects of misrecognition and provides the basis for more complex feminist post-structural and intersectional readings of the experiences of those who might consider accessing higher education (Burke 2012). Nonetheless, Fraser’s (2007) work on misrecognition shares some similarities to Bourdieusian thinking in the way that fields of power operate to restrict access to resources.

Intersectionality, as both a social theory of knowledge and an approach to analysis of social inequalities, helps bring to light how formations of difference play out in relation to knowledge-formation. From an intersectional perspective, knowledge is always partial, dynamic and subject to the interplay of multiple social forces. Intersectionality is an inductive, bottom-up concept, derived from the everyday observation and analysis of routine practices and social positioning, rather than top-down from a single discipline or theorist (Phoenix 2010). Feminist scholars have interrogated the tendency to separate intersecting social identities with the processes and contexts through which knowledge is produced and legitimated; a separation that arguably colludes in the persistence of inequalities in access to and participation in higher education and lifelong learning (Burke and Jackson 2007).

Social theorists believe identity and knowledge is infused with history and shaped discursively (Hall 1996; McLeod 2000). Subsequently, the study of identity becomes a complex and deeply reflexive process. Social divisions and positions have different organising discourses or logics, whereas the conceptual tools of race, class and ethnicity, should not be treated similarly or equally (Skeggs 2002, 2004). Identities and positionalities are processes of becoming rather than being: ‘not “who we are” or “where we came from,” so much as what we might become, how we have been represented, and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves,’ therefore it is about ‘routes’ as opposed to ‘roots’ (Hall 1996, 4). Given these multiple frameworks, context (i.e. time and place) becomes essential for interpreting and theorising how participants narrate their positionalities and subjectivities. Each division presents ‘ideological and organizational principles within which the others operate … in different historical contexts and different social arenas, their roles will differ’ (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983, 68). Such theoretical insights challenge institutional categorisations connected with widening participation policy that homogenise rather than recognise difference within and across groups and the intricate ways that differences intersect in embodied and intersecting identity formations.

**Discussion and conclusion**

Our purpose in providing a conceptual meta-analysis and discussion of thinking with and beyond the use of Bourdieu’s conceptual toolkit in widening participation research has been to avoid ‘reinventing the wheel’ which is what happens when researchers engage in ‘a collective act of forgetfulness with respect to earlier contributions’ (Kettley 2007, 333). Over the last decade research on widening participation has become a major focus in many different
contexts where we have recognised that other theoretical approaches, such as organisational theories of practice, actor network theories and feminist, post-structuralist theories of intersectionality have gained influence alongside the use of Bourdieu. In recognising that these alternatives frames have developed sometimes even alongside the use of Bourdieu’s concepts, we are drawn back to thinking with Bourdieu to ask what are the contexts in which researchers have been drawn to apply these frames to widening participation research? Arguably as Gale (2012) contends, different locales call for different understandings of equity. He argues, that Australia should be regarded as in need of ‘southern theories’ because the reproduction of social inequality affects a range of different equity groups and less stark than in other Anglophone countries, such as the UK. Whilst not explicitly arguing for an intersectional analysis, such work has engaged with theoretical frames other than Bourdieu, suggesting that there is a need to continually ‘evoke and provoke’ Bourdieu’s work to provide meaningful analyses of the empirical (Gale and Lingard 2015, 13). Similarly, support for more research that takes an institutional focus to explore how different universities practices (perhaps including the non-human) build cultural capital has been put forward by Gale and Parker (2017), as they have used the Bourdieusian concepts of cultural capital and distinction to explain why some institutions are better able to retain students from low socio-economic backgrounds than others.

Whilst this article has not attempted to provide an account of the relationship between global policy travels and research framing as encouraged by Ozga, Seddon, and Popkewitz (2006), the article has tried to identify how, even since his death in 2002, Bourdieu’s thinking tools have continued to influence research on widening participation. In this regard, the article has identified the need to take a more comprehensive approach to thinking with Bourdieu (1990) informed by ‘the logic of practice’. The article has argued that light approaches or ‘pick and mix’ approaches to the use of Bourdieu’s toolkit underplay the interconnectedness of Bourdieu’s critique. Ironically also, these approaches can be misread because some concepts such as social capital appear to be used in conflicting ways.

We have argued that if, as Kettley (2007) suggests, widening participation research requires the conjoining of understandings of the social causation and social formation of educational inequalities, comprehensive uses of Bourdieusian’s concepts are needed to inductively analyse the interrelationships and interdependencies between practices in fields. Drawing on the interconnectedness between the concepts of habitus, field, capital, illusio and misrecognition focuses attention not on individuals as the unit of analysis, but rather on practices in the sites of power struggles over resources to reproduce or change who participates in higher education. Yet in thinking with and beyond Bourdieu, other objects of study and their interconnections have been identified in the field of higher education practice. Whilst it is an empirical task to put theory to work and to build or extend existing theories, the article has argued that context is important and theories need to work in practice. In the context of Australia, there have been a number of institutionally focused studies that shift the unit of analysis to the organisation, whilst not neglecting that institutional boundaries are permeable and ideas and practices will flow in both directions, in and out. This requires focusing on the sayings, doings and relatings (Kemmis et al. 2014) in organisations, thereby ensuring research on widening participation is directed at changing practices by engaging with the ontology of different institutional sites of struggle. Secondly, there is a small but growing literature focusing on actor networks, both the human and non-human, to provide new ways to consider
aspiration and its construction, one of the leitmotifs’ of widening participation policy and practice. Thirdly, considering intersectionality as both a social theory of knowledge and an approach to analysis that provides an inductive account of routine practices and struggles and reveals the complexities, provisionality and becomingness of social positioning, subjectivities and change might be a fruitful way to explore how inequalities have been reproduced (or not) in contexts where social class groupings are not considered the sole locale for struggles for power and resources.

Bringing together different conceptual traditions may be considered inappropriate since theories may have their own logic and frame of assumptions about research questions, design and the object of study or unit of analysis. It may seem as if we are simply advocating a bigger ‘pick and mix’. However, drawing again on Swedberg’s (2016) account of theorising processes, the article has provided an account of the development of our practical knowledge about how different theories have helped us make sense of how to research widening participation. Bourdieu too argued against ‘scientific rigidity’ (Bourdieu 1992, 227). Increasingly, researchers are combining different theoretical frames, especially when the contexts of research are very different from those in which Bourdieu developed his ideas. The utility of bringing together different theoretical concepts can only be fully justified through practice. This article has drawn attention to the underpinning connectedness in the workings of power in social practices, materials and discourses that have sustained educational inequalities. Taking these ideas forward in widening participation research is the next empirical task.

Notes

1. Others have been far more scathing. Sullivan (2002), for instance, describes habitus as ‘never clearly defined’, ‘feeble’, ‘vague’ and a concept that ‘utterly fails’.
2. In contrast to the Anglophone writing we discuss in this article, in the Swedish context the work of Börjesson et al. (2016) aims to draw on the full potential of Bourdieu’s sociology in their analysis of the social space of elite higher education and the distribution of cultural capital embodied by students of different classes, gender and age as their tastes are developed in this education field of power.
3. A similar rationale is given by von Holdt (2012) for bringing the work of Bourdieu, which he names as the sociology of the west, into play with the work of Fanon, which he names as the sociology of the colonial and post-colonial south, to understand the contentious politics of South Africa.

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