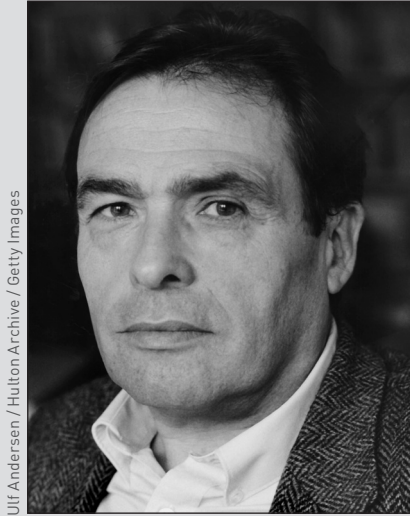


PIERRE BOURDIEU

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH



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Born in a small rural town in southeast France in 1930, Bourdieu grew up in a lower-middle-class household (his father was a civil servant) (Jenkins, 2005a; Monnier, 2007). In the early 1950s, he attended, and received a degree from, a prestigious teaching college in Paris, *Ecole Normale Supérieure*. However, he refused to write a thesis, in part because he objected to the mediocre quality of his education and to the authoritarian structure of the school. He was put off by, and was active in the opposition against, the strong communist, especially Stalinist, orientation of the school.

Bourdieu taught briefly in a provincial school but was drafted in 1956 and spent two years in Algeria with the French Army. He wrote a book about his experiences and remained in Algeria for two years after his army tenure was over. He returned to France in 1960 and worked for a year

as an assistant at the University of Paris. He attended the lectures of the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss at *College de France* and worked as an assistant to the sociologist Raymond Aron. Bourdieu moved to the University of Lille for three years and then returned to the powerful position of director of studies at *L'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* in 1964.

In the succeeding years, Bourdieu became a major figure in Parisian, French, and, ultimately, world intellectual circles. His work has had an impact on a number of different fields, including education, anthropology, and sociology. He gathered a group of disciples around him in the 1960s, and, since then, his followers have collaborated with him and made intellectual contributions of their own. In 1968, the *Centre de Sociologie Européenne* was founded, and Bourdieu was its director until his death. Associated with the center was a unique publishing venture, *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, that has been an important outlet for the work of Bourdieu and his supporters.

When Raymond Aron retired in 1981, the prestigious chair in sociology at *College de France* became open, and most of the leading French sociologists (for example, Raymond Boudon and Alain Touraine) were in competition for it. However, the chair was awarded to Bourdieu (Jenkins, 1992). In the time that followed, Bourdieu was, if anything, even more prolific than before, and his reputation continued to grow (for more on Bourdieu, see Swartz, 1997:15–51).

An interesting aspect of Bourdieu's work is the way in which his ideas were shaped in ongoing, sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit, dialogue with others. For example, many of his early ideas were formed in a dialogue with two of the leading scholars of the day during his years of training—Jean-Paul Sartre and Claude Lévi-Strauss. From the existentialism of Sartre, Bourdieu got a strong sense of actors as creators of their social worlds. However, Bourdieu felt that Sartre had gone too far and accorded the actors too much power and in the process ignored the structural constraints on them. Pulled in the direction of structure, Bourdieu naturally turned to the work of the preeminent structuralist, Lévi-Strauss. At first, Bourdieu was strongly drawn to this orientation; in fact, he described himself for