Cultural Holes:

Beyond Relationality in Social Networks and Culture

Mark A. Pachucki¹ and Ronald L. Breiger²

¹Department of Sociology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138; email: pachucki@wjh.harvard.edu

²Department of Sociology, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona 85721; email: breiger@arizona.edu


Abstract

A burgeoning literature spanning sociologies of culture and social network methods has for the past several decades sought to explicate the relationships between culture and connectivity. A number of promising recent moves toward integration are worthy of review, comparison, critique, and synthesis. Network thinking provides powerful techniques for specifying cultural concepts ranging from narrative networks to classification systems, tastes and cultural repertoires. At the same time, we see theoretical advances by sociologists of culture as providing a corrective to network analysis as it is often portrayed, as a mere collection of methods. Cultural thinking complements and sets a new agenda for moving beyond predominant forms of structural analysis that ignore action, agency, and intersubjective meaning. The notion of “cultural holes” that we use to organize our review points both to the cultural contingency of network structure and to the increasingly permeable boundary between studies of culture and research on social networks.

Key Words: culture, social networks, interaction, meaning