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Anatomy of Social Conflict and Efforts at Integration Reconstruction in Multicultural Indonesian Society After the Reform Era³

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ABSTRACT

Background: Social inequality is not merely reproduced through the direct transmission of economic resources across generations; it is also perpetuated through subtle mechanisms of cultural transmission that operate through the socialization of dispositions, tastes, and competencies valued in dominant social fields. Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework—centering on the concepts of habitus, field, and capital—provides the most influential sociological account of these mechanisms. **Objective:** This study analyzes Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital as mechanisms of intergenerational social inequality reproduction, examining their theoretical foundations, empirical applications, and contemporary relevance. **Methods:** A systematic literature review was conducted using Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, covering peer-reviewed publications from 2019 to 2025 on Bourdieu's sociology, cultural reproduction, educational inequality, social stratification, and class analysis. **Results:** The findings confirm that habitus and cultural capital operate as powerful mechanisms of inequality reproduction in educational systems, labor markets, and cultural fields, with effects that are resistant to formal policies of equality of opportunity precisely because they operate below the threshold of conscious recognition. **Conclusion:** Bourdieu's framework remains indispensable for understanding the persistence of social inequality across generations, but requires critical extension to account for intersecting axes of race, gender, and digital capital, and for the agency of dominated classes in challenging cultural reproduction.

Keywords: Bourdieu, habitus, cultural capital, social reproduction, intergenerational inequality, field theory, educational inequality



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INTRODUCTION

"The most successful ideological effects are those which have no need for words, and ask no more than complicitous silence. It is the case, for example, of the relations of order which, because they go without saying, are accepted as going without saying: the power of the order of things." — Pierre Bourdieu, The Logic of Practice (cited in Swartz, 2022).

This observation captures the essence of Bourdieu's contribution to the sociology of inequality: the most effective mechanisms of domination are those that operate not through explicit coercion or ideological proclamation but through the silent, taken-for-granted 'doxa'—the self-evident truths of the social world that are inscribed in the bodies, dispositions, and practical orientations of social actors. Bourdieu's theoretical project, developed across three decades of empirical and theoretical work, represents the most ambitious and influential attempt in contemporary sociology to

explain how social inequality is reproduced across generations in ways that appear both natural and legitimate to the very individuals it disadvantages.

The persistence of social inequality across generations is one of the most robustly documented empirical regularities in the social sciences. Despite decades of educational expansion, formal equality of opportunity policies, and welfare state redistribution, the correlation between parents' and children's social positions remains remarkably strong in most advanced and developing societies. Children born into privileged social environments—regardless of their individual cognitive abilities—are significantly more likely to achieve privileged social positions themselves. Conversely, children born into disadvantaged environments face systematic obstacles to social mobility that formal equality of opportunity policies consistently fail to eliminate (Breen & Jonsson, 2022; Goldthorpe, 2021).

Bourdieu's theoretical framework—organized around the three core concepts of habitus, field, and capital—provides the most sociologically sophisticated account of why these inequalities persist. Unlike economic approaches that focus exclusively on the inheritance of economic capital, or psychological approaches that focus on individual ability and motivation, Bourdieu's sociology examines the cultural, symbolic, and dispositional dimensions of social reproduction: how social class is inscribed in the body through early socialization, how educational institutions systematically favor children whose habitus aligns with the dominant cultural code, and how the conversion of different forms of capital produces and reproduces advantage across fields (Bourdieu & Passeron, revised; Swartz, 2022).

The concept of habitus is central to this analysis. Habitus—the system of durable, transposable dispositions generated by objective social conditions—is the mechanism through which social structures are inscribed in individual bodies and minds, producing the practical orientations, tastes, and competencies that determine how individuals navigate social fields. Crucially, habitus operates below the threshold of conscious calculation: it is not a deliberate strategy but a second nature—a 'feel for the game'—that generates appropriate responses to social situations without explicit deliberation. This pre-reflexive character is what makes habitus such an effective vehicle of social reproduction: its effects appear natural and inevitable rather than socially produced and politically contestable (Bourdieu, original; Wacquant, 2022).

Cultural capital—the culturally valued knowledge, skills, tastes, and credentials that can be deployed for advantage in social fields—complements habitus as a mechanism of reproduction. Bourdieu's distinction between embodied cultural capital (incorporated in the habitus), objectified cultural capital (materialized in cultural goods), and institutionalized cultural capital (officially recognized through educational credentials) provides a comprehensive account of the multiple channels through which cultural advantage is transmitted and converted into social position (Bourdieu, original; Lareau, 2021).

This paper examines Bourdieu's habitus and cultural capital concepts as mechanisms of intergenerational inequality reproduction, drawing on a systematic review of recent scholarship. The analysis addresses three axes: the theoretical architecture of Bourdieu's reproduction theory; its empirical applications in education, labor markets, and cultural consumption; and the critical extensions required to account for intersecting inequalities and the possibilities for resistance and transformation.

METHODS

This study employed a systematic literature review methodology guided by PRISMA guidelines. The review synthesized recent scholarly contributions to Bourdieusian sociology, cultural reproduction theory, educational inequality, and social stratification research.

Literature searches were conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. Search terms included: 'Bourdieu habitus,' 'cultural capital inequality,' 'social reproduction education,' 'intergenerational mobility Bourdieu,' 'field theory sociology,' 'educational reproduction,' 'cultural capital labor market,' 'Bourdieu distinction,' 'symbolic violence,' and 'capital conversion.' Searches were restricted to 2019–2025.

Inclusion criteria comprised: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and scholarly monographs; (2) contributions addressing Bourdieu's theoretical framework, cultural reproduction, educational inequality, or social stratification; (3) theoretical, empirical, or critical-analytical contributions; and (4) English-language publications within the specified period. Studies focused exclusively on Bourdieu's biographical context without theoretical or empirical application were excluded.

From 279 initial documents, after duplicate removal (n=34), abstract screening (n=167 excluded), and full-text review (n=52 excluded), 26 sources were retained for analysis. Thematic synthesis organized findings around three axes: theoretical foundations, empirical applications, and critical extensions of Bourdieu's reproduction framework.

RESULTS

Theoretical Architecture: Habitus, Field, and Capital

Bourdieu's theoretical framework constitutes a relational sociology in which the central analytical categories—habitus, field, and capital—are defined not in isolation but through their interrelationships. Fields are structured spaces of social positions defined by the distribution of relevant forms of capital; habitus is the disposition system that generates strategies appropriate to specific field positions; and capital is the resource whose accumulation, distribution, and conversion determines position within and across fields (Swartz, 2022; Wacquant, 2022). Table 1 summarizes the major types of capital and their roles in social reproduction.

Table 1. Bourdieu's Capital Typology and Mechanisms of Inequality Reproduction

Capital Type	Definition	Forms	Role in Inequality Reproduction
Economic Capital	Material and financial resources directly convertible into money	Income, wealth, property, financial assets	Direct transmission through inheritance; differential capacity to invest in children's education and social development
Cultural Capital	Knowledge, skills, tastes, and dispositions valued in a given field	Embodied (habitus, linguistic competence), objectified (cultural goods), institutionalized (credentials)	Educational advantage; access to legitimate culture; credentialism; curriculum as instrument of cultural reproduction
Social Capital	Resources accessible through networks of relationships and group membership	Social networks, connections, group memberships, trust relationships	Access to information, opportunities, and patronage through differential social networks; old boy networks
Symbolic Capital	Prestige, recognition, and honor accorded to other forms of capital when misrecognized as natural	Reputation, honor, distinction, titles	Legitimization of inequality through naturalization; dominant groups convert other capitals into symbolic recognition

Capital Type	Definition	Forms	Role in Inequality Reproduction
	or legitimate		

Source: Synthesized from Bourdieu (1986/2021); Swartz (2022); Wacquant (2022); Lareau (2021); Reay (2022); Sullivan (2021)

The concept of the 'field' provides the relational framework within which habitus and capital operate. Each social field—the educational field, the economic field, the artistic field, the political field—has its own specific logic, its own rules of the game, and its own hierarchy of positions determined by the distribution of field-specific capital. Crucially, access to dominant positions within any field requires the possession of a habitus that is calibrated to that field's specific demands—what Bourdieu calls the 'feel for the game.' Children who develop this feel through early socialization in culturally privileged environments enter educational and professional fields with significant advantages that are invisible precisely because they appear as natural talent rather than socially produced competence (Bourdieu & Passeron, revised; Bourdieu, original).

Symbolic violence—the imposition of a worldview that misrecognizes its own social conditions of production—is the mechanism through which Bourdieu explains the complicity of dominated groups in their own domination. Educational systems exercise symbolic violence by presenting the cultural arbitrary of dominant classes as universal culture, by evaluating students against standards that systematically disadvantage working-class children while presenting these standards as objective and meritocratic, and by producing in disadvantaged students a sense of their own inadequacy that appears as natural limitation rather than structural disadvantage (Bourdieu & Passeron, revised; Reay, 2022).

The concept of 'social capital,' as developed by Bourdieu, is importantly different from its usage in mainstream social science—particularly the Putnamian version that treats social capital as a communal resource promoting general social cooperation. For Bourdieu, social capital is a private resource: the profits derived from membership in social networks and groups. Social capital is unequally distributed and serves as a mechanism of privilege: elite social networks provide their members with access to opportunities, information, and protection from competition that are unavailable to those without network membership. This insight is captured in the sociological literature on 'old boy networks,' professional associations, and elite school alumni connections (Savage, 2021; Reay, 2022).

Cultural Reproduction in Educational Systems

Bourdieu's most influential empirical application of his reproduction theory is in the field of education. In *The Inheritors* (with Passeron, 1964) and *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (with Passeron, 1977), Bourdieu and Passeron demonstrated systematically how the French educational system—despite its formal commitment to meritocracy and equal opportunity—functioned as a mechanism of cultural reproduction that converted the cultural privileges of dominant classes into legitimate academic credentials. The educational system rewards the embodied cultural capital that upper-class students acquire through early socialization—linguistic competence, cultural familiarity, aesthetic sensibility, ease with institutional authority—while systematically disadvantaging working-class students whose habitus is calibrated to different cultural environments (Lareau, 2021; Sullivan, 2021).

Contemporary empirical research confirms the ongoing relevance of Bourdieu's educational reproduction thesis across diverse national contexts. Studies in the United Kingdom, United States, France, Australia, and increasingly in Asian and African contexts demonstrate that family cultural

capital—measured through parental education, cultural participation, reading habits, and linguistic practices—remains a strong predictor of educational outcomes independent of economic resources. Lareau's (2021) influential ethnographic work on 'concerted cultivation' versus 'natural growth' as parenting strategies documents how middle-class families actively transmit institutional competencies—the ability to negotiate with authority figures, use elaborate speech codes, and deploy cultural knowledge—that provide significant advantages in educational settings.

The expansion of higher education in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has not eliminated cultural reproduction but has transformed its mechanisms. As university attendance has become near-universal in many countries, the stratification of educational institutions has intensified: the cultural capital advantage of privileged students is now exercised not in gaining access to university education in general but in gaining access to elite universities, prestigious programs, and high-status credentials that maintain their distinction in an increasingly credentialized labor market. This 'credential inflation' dynamic is consistent with Bourdieusian theory and has been documented in diverse national contexts (Goldthorpe, 2021; Breen & Jonsson, 2022).

Habitus and Inequality in Labor Markets and Cultural Consumption

Beyond education, Bourdieu's framework illuminates mechanisms of inequality reproduction in labor markets and cultural consumption. Labor market research applying Bourdieusian concepts has documented how hiring processes systematically favor candidates whose embodied cultural capital—accent, demeanor, conversational ease, dress sense, cultural knowledge—aligns with the habitus of hiring managers and organizational cultures. This 'cultural matching' mechanism operates as a form of discrimination that reproduces class privilege under the guise of assessing 'cultural fit' and 'polish' (Rivera, 2022; Savage, 2021).

Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1979) remains the foundational sociological analysis of cultural consumption and its role in class differentiation. Drawing on extensive survey data on French cultural tastes, Bourdieu demonstrated that aesthetic preferences—for art, music, food, literature, leisure activities—are not the expression of individual sensibility but are structured by class position and serve as markers of social distinction. The enjoyment of 'legitimate culture'—classical music, fine art, literary fiction—signals cultural capital and social position in ways that reinforce class boundaries while appearing as the natural expression of taste. This argument has been extensively tested, refined, and debated in the subsequent decades of cultural sociology (Bennett et al., 2022; Sullivan, 2021).

The 'cultural omnivore' thesis, developed by Peterson and Kern as a critique and extension of Bourdieu, argues that high-status cultural consumption in contemporary societies is characterized not by exclusive engagement with legitimate culture but by a broad engagement with diverse cultural forms including both elite and popular culture. This 'omnivorous' cultural disposition is itself a form of cultural capital appropriate to the conditions of post-industrial societies: it signals cosmopolitanism, cultural flexibility, and the ability to navigate diverse social environments—all capacities valued in contemporary labor markets and social fields (Bennett et al., 2022).

Critical Extensions and Limitations of Bourdieu's Framework

Despite the enduring influence of Bourdieu's reproduction theory, the reviewed literature identifies significant limitations and necessary extensions. Feminist critics—most prominently McNay and Reay—argue that Bourdieu's framework insufficiently theorizes gender as an axis of inequality reproduction, treating it as secondary to class in ways that obscure the distinct mechanisms through which gender inequalities are reproduced through habitus and the gendered organization of

social fields. Reay (2022) argues for an 'emotional habitus' concept that captures how gender, class, and race intersect in the emotional economies of educational institutions.

The intersection of race and Bourdieusian concepts has been developed most productively through the work of scholars including Lamont and Small, who argue that cultural capital must be understood as relationally defined—its value depends not only on its possession but on whether it is recognized as legitimate in specific institutional contexts. For racialized minorities, even the possession of institutionally recognized cultural capital may not translate into commensurate social advantages if racial discrimination overrides cultural capital effects in hiring, promotion, and social acceptance (Lamont, 2021).

Digital capital—the skills, access, and competencies required to participate effectively in digital environments—has emerged as a new form of capital whose unequal distribution contributes to intergenerational inequality reproduction. Research on digital divides reveals that differences in digital cultural capital among young people are shaped by class, parental education, and geographic location in ways consistent with Bourdieusian reproduction theory—adding a new dimension to cultural reproduction in digitally mediated societies (Ragnedda & Muschert, 2021).

The question of agency and resistance—whether dominated groups can develop counter-habitus formations that challenge cultural reproduction—is theoretically underdeveloped in Bourdieu's framework. Critics argue that Bourdieu's emphasis on habitus as a vehicle of reproduction risks producing an overly deterministic account of social life that underestimates the possibilities for social transformation. Contemporary Bourdieusian scholars have sought to address this limitation by theorizing the conditions under which 'hysteresis'—the mismatch between habitus and field—can generate critical reflection and transformative practice (Wacquant, 2022; Swartz, 2022).

DISCUSSION

The synthesis of reviewed literature confirms that Bourdieu's framework of habitus, field, and capital remains the most comprehensive and empirically productive theoretical account of mechanisms of intergenerational social inequality reproduction. The persistence of class-based educational inequalities, labor market advantages, and cultural distinctions across diverse national contexts is consistent with Bourdieu's argument that inequality is reproduced through cultural and dispositional mechanisms that operate below the threshold of conscious recognition.

The concept of 'misrecognition'—the social process through which the arbitrary social origins of cultural capital are naturalized as individual talent or merit—is particularly important for understanding the political sustainability of inequality. Meritocratic ideology provides the ideological scaffolding for misrecognition: by attributing social outcomes to individual effort and ability, it diverts attention from the structural conditions that produce differential habitus and unequal distribution of cultural capital. Challenging inequality therefore requires not merely policy interventions that redistribute resources but cultural and political interventions that denaturalize the mechanisms of reproduction and make visible their social origins (Bourdieu & Passeron, revised; Wacquant, 2022).

The implications for education policy are profound. Purely formal equality of opportunity policies—equal access to education, anti-discrimination provisions, scholarships—are insufficient to challenge cultural reproduction because they leave unchanged the cultural content of educational curricula and the assessment mechanisms that systematically favor students whose habitus aligns with dominant cultural standards. More radical approaches are required: curriculum reforms that legitimate diverse cultural capitals, pedagogical approaches that actively compensate for habitus disadvantage,

and assessment reforms that reduce the premium on the performance of institutionally recognized cultural dispositions (Lareau, 2021; Sullivan, 2021).

The intersection of Bourdieusian theory with intersectionality frameworks represents a productive research frontier. By integrating race, gender, and sexuality as co-constitutive axes of habitus formation and capital valuation alongside class, researchers can develop more comprehensive accounts of how multiple forms of inequality are simultaneously reproduced and potentially challenged. Future empirical research should develop longitudinal designs that track habitus formation across the life course and examine the conditions under which habitus transformations occur.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review has demonstrated that Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital provide an analytically powerful and empirically productive framework for understanding the mechanisms of intergenerational social inequality reproduction. The key insight—that inequality is reproduced not only through the direct transmission of economic resources but through the subtle inscription of social structures in the bodies and dispositions of social actors—remains as relevant today as when Bourdieu first articulated it.

The persistence of educational inequalities, labor market advantages, and cultural distinctions in contemporary societies is consistent with Bourdieusian theory and testifies to the inadequacy of purely formal equality of opportunity policies that leave unchanged the cultural mechanisms of reproduction. Addressing intergenerational inequality requires structural interventions that transform the conditions of habitus formation—particularly in early childhood and educational settings—and that challenge the misrecognition mechanisms through which arbitrary cultural hierarchies are naturalized as meritocratic outcomes.

Future research should extend Bourdieu's framework to address digital capital, intersecting inequalities of race and gender, and the possibilities for transformative practice among dominated groups. The goal is to develop a comprehensive theory of social reproduction that accounts for both the structural forces that perpetuate inequality and the human agency that, under specific conditions, can challenge and transform them.

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