Social Inequality and Symbolic Domination In Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Social Practice

Rahmat Dermawan[1*], Muhammad Syukur[2], Ahmadin[3]

[1,2,3]Doctoral Program in Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, South Sulawesi 90222, Indonesia
[*] Corresponding Author:
Email: rahmatdermawan@student.unm.ac.id

Abstract.
Social inequality remains a persistent sociological concern, encompassing not only the unequal distribution of material resources but also cultural distinctions, institutional practices, and symbolic relations of power. This study critically reassesses Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practice to explain how symbolic domination legitimizes and reproduces social hierarchies in contemporary society. Using a qualitative critical literature review, the study examines 12 contemporary scholarly works published between 2021 and 2025, along with Bourdieu's foundational theoretical texts. The study analyzed the literature through critical thematic analysis and theoretical synthesis, focusing on the interrelationships among habitus, capital, field, symbolic power, and symbolic violence. The findings reveal five interconnected dimensions of social inequality: the reproduction of social dispositions through habitus, the unequal distribution and conversion of capital, the structuring of power relations within social fields, the legitimization of hierarchy through symbolic domination, and the reproduction of inequality across institutional and everyday contexts. The synthesis demonstrates that symbolic domination operates through the institutionalization of dominant cultural standards, the naturalization of social classifications, and the internalization of unequal relations as legitimate social arrangements. Evidence from educational, organizational, and digital contexts affirms that Bourdieusian theory remains relevant for explaining contemporary forms of social differentiation and power relations. Nevertheless, its application requires conceptual refinement to address emerging forms of capital, evolving social fields, and the potential for individual agency and structural transformation. This study advances sociological theory by integrating habitus, capital, and field into a relational analytical framework that positions symbolic domination as a central mechanism linking structural inequality with social reproduction. It concludes that understanding contemporary inequality necessitates examining both the material distribution of resources and the symbolic processes through which unequal social relations gain legitimacy.

Keywords: *Pierre Bourdieu; Social Inequality; Symbolic Domination; Symbolic Violence; Habitus and Social Reproduction.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Social inequality remains one of the most persistent and complex challenges in contemporary society, shaping how resources, opportunities, recognition, and social positions are distributed among individuals and groups[1]. Although economic systems, political institutions, and cultural practices have changed significantly, inequalities continue to be reproduced through structural arrangements and everyday social interactions[2]. These inequalities are not solely determined by differences in economic wealth or material resources; they are also embedded in cultural classifications, social networks, institutional practices, and mechanisms of symbolic recognition. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of social inequality requires a sociological perspective that extends beyond material dimensions to examine how power operates through socially constructed meanings, norms, values, and legitimate forms of knowledge.

Dominant groups exercise symbolic domination by establishing and legitimizing specific representations of the social world as universally valid, natural, and socially acceptable. Unlike direct coercion or overt political and economic control, symbolic domination often operates through subtle mechanisms such as classification, recognition, and internalization[3]. These mechanisms shape individuals' perceptions of their social positions, assessments of their capabilities, and interpretations of existing inequalities. Bourdieu, defines symbolic power as the capacity to construct and impose legitimate meanings through socially recognized systems of representation[4]. This process is closely linked to symbolic violence, in which historically produced relations of domination are misrecognized as natural or inevitable. These mechanisms show that the persistence of inequality cannot be explained by the unequal distribution of material resources alone, as domination also relies on producing legitimacy and reproducing socially accepted hierarchies.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practice offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing how individual agency and structural constraints interact to perpetuate social inequality[5]. Utilizing the interconnected concepts of habitus, capital, and field, Bourdieu demonstrates how social practices arise from the dynamic relationship between historically constituted dispositions and objective social structures[6]. Habitus denotes enduring, transferable dispositions shaped through socialization and accumulated experience that influence individuals' perceptions, aspirations, and actions. Capital includes economic, cultural, social, and symbolic resources that determine individuals' abilities to attain and sustain specific positions within social spaces[6, 7, 9]. Field refers to a structured domain of social relations where individuals and groups vie for resources, recognition, and power[10]. The interplay among these dimensions shows that social practices are shaped by existing conditions and can reproduce or alter them.

The relationship between capital and symbolic power is especially important for understanding how social hierarchies are reproduced. Bourdieu shows that cultural preferences, educational credentials, linguistic competencies, and consumption patterns are not merely individual expressions of taste or personal achievement but are also linked to unequal distributions of social and cultural resources[11]. These distinctions help construct social boundaries and legitimize class-based hierarchies. Similarly, Bourdieu and Passeron, explain how educational institutions may reproduce existing social inequalities by legitimizing the cultural capital of dominant groups as the standard of legitimate knowledge and competence[12]. From this perspective, symbolic domination is sustained not only through institutional arrangements but also through everyday practices that reinforce particular cultural standards, social classifications, and relations of authority.

Previous scholarship has extensively examined Bourdieu's theoretical contributions to social stratification, cultural reproduction, educational inequality, and power relations. Scholars have widely applied his conceptual framework to examine how unequal distributions of capital shape social mobility, institutional participation, and the formation of class-based identities. However, the relationship between symbolic domination and the broader mechanisms of social reproduction warrants further critical examination. Specifically, the analytical connections among habitus, capital, field, symbolic power, and symbolic violence are often treated as separate conceptual dimensions rather than as interconnected mechanisms within a relational theory of social practice. This fragmentation can limit a comprehensive understanding of how structural inequalities translate into everyday practices, internalized dispositions, and legitimate social distinctions. Moreover, the contemporary relevance of Bourdieu's framework necessitates ongoing theoretical reassessment in light of evolving configurations of power, cultural authority, and social relations.

This study addresses these theoretical concerns by critically revisiting Bourdieu's theory of social practice and examining the mechanisms that connect social inequality and symbolic domination. Unlike research that applies Bourdieusian concepts primarily to specific empirical contexts, this study emphasizes the conceptual relationships through which various forms of capital, embodied dispositions, and field-specific power relations help produce and reproduce social hierarchies. The theoretical contribution of this research lies in integrating these dimensions into a critical analytical perspective that elucidates how symbolic domination operates through both institutional structures and everyday social practices. Additionally, the study assesses the explanatory strengths and conceptual limitations of Bourdieu's framework for interpreting contemporary patterns of inequality, with particular attention to how dominant social classifications gain legitimacy and become embedded in collective understandings.

This study critically reassesses Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practice by analyzing the interrelationships among habitus, capital, field, symbolic power, and symbolic violence in reproducing social inequality. It addresses three central questions: (1) How do habitus, capital, and field interact to produce and maintain unequal social relations? (2) Through which mechanisms does symbolic domination legitimize and reproduce existing social hierarchies? (3) To what extent does Bourdieu's theory of social practice remain relevant for understanding contemporary forms of social inequality? By engaging with these questions, this study aims to advance contemporary sociological debates by clarifying the theoretical role of symbolic

domination in social reproduction and by demonstrating the ongoing analytical significance of Bourdieusian social theory for explaining the relationship between power, legitimacy, and inequality.

II. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research design, specifically a critical literature review, to reassess Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practice and explain the mechanisms by which social inequality and symbolic domination are produced, legitimized, and reproduced in contemporary society[13]. Rather than summarizing existing scholarly discussions, this approach critically examines, interprets, and synthesizes theoretical arguments about the relationship among social structures, individual dispositions, power relations, and mechanisms of social reproduction. The analysis primarily focuses on the interconnected concepts of habitus, capital, field, symbolic power, and symbolic violence as essential elements of Bourdieu's theoretical framework[14].

Data were collected through documentary research, including Bourdieu's foundational theoretical works, relevant academic books, and peer-reviewed journal articles from internationally recognized scholarly sources. The review prioritized contemporary publications, particularly those published between 2016 and 2026, to capture recent theoretical developments and empirical applications of Bourdieusian perspectives. The review also incorporated seminal works by Bourdieu and other influential scholars to provide the conceptual and historical foundations for the analysis. Literature was selected based on its relevance to social inequality, symbolic domination, social stratification, cultural reproduction, and the exercise of symbolic power. We excluded publications lacking conceptual relevance or sufficient academic credibility.

The analytical process comprised three interconnected stages. The first stage involved thematic categorization to identify recurring conceptual patterns and theoretical arguments within the selected literature[15]. The second stage involved critical theoretical analysis to examine how habitus, various forms of capital, and the field shape unequal social positions and legitimize relations of domination. Special emphasis was placed on the role of symbolic violence in transforming historically constructed inequalities into arrangements perceived as natural and socially acceptable. The third stage entailed theoretical synthesis to integrate the identified arguments and assess the explanatory capacity, contemporary relevance, and conceptual limitations of Bourdieu's theory of social practice. This analytical process aims to develop a critical understanding of symbolic domination as a mechanism of social reproduction, as well as the ongoing contribution of Bourdieu's theoretical framework to contemporary sociological debates on power, inequality, and structural transformation.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

The literature identification and synthesis focus on contemporary scholarly studies published between 2020 and 2026 that explicitly employ Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical concepts to investigate social inequality, symbolic domination, cultural reproduction, and power relations. The selected studies include both empirical investigations and critical theoretical analyses across educational, organizational, cultural, and digital contexts. Instead of treating Bourdieu's original publications as research units, this review analyzes how contemporary scholars operationalize, reinterpret, and critically develop his conceptual framework. The synthesis identifies 12 relevant studies that offer insights into five interconnected dimensions: habitus and social reproduction, capital and social stratification, field and power relations, symbolic violence and domination, and the transformation of inequality in contemporary society. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics and principal findings of these studies.

Table 1. Summary of Contemporary Studies on Social Inequality and Symbolic Domination through Bourdieu's Theoretical Perspective (2021–2025).

No	Authors and Year	Research Title	Method / Research Focus	Main Research Findings
1.	Lu, Scandurra, & Bonal(2022)	*An Integral Model of Cultural Reproduction: The Case of China*	Quantitative analysis using Chinese Educational Panel	Parents' and students' habitus plays a crucial role in cultural reproduction. Social position

			Survey (CEPS) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).	influences cognitive development and academic achievement through differentiated mechanisms[16].
2.	Quaye & Pomeroy (2022)	*Social Class Inequalities in Attitudes towards Mathematics and Achievement in Mathematics Cross Generations: A Quantitative Bourdieusian Analysis*	Quantitative Bourdieusian analysis involving 1,079 secondary school students in England.	Social class, cultural capital, and habitus are associated with intergenerational differences in mathematical attitudes and achievement, demonstrating the persistence of educational inequality[17].
3.	Lindell (2022)	*Symbolic Violence and the Social Space: Self-imposing the Mark of Disgrace?*	Quantitative survey involving 2,003 Swedish adults, analyzed using Multiple Correspondence Analysis.	Symbolic hierarchies are associated with the distribution of capital and cultural practices. The study also reveals that anticipated stigma is not necessarily internalized by the lowest social groups[18].
4.	Yu, Hong, & Ma (2023)	*The Mediation of Exam-oriented Cultural Capital: Economic Capital and Educational Inequality of Chinese High School Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic and School Closures*	Longitudinal quantitative research using a moderated mediation model.	Cultural capital mediates the relationship between economic capital and academic achievement, illustrating how economic inequalities are translated into educational advantages[9].
5.	Umeh, Cornelius, & Wallace (2024)	*A Bourdieusian Exploration of Ethnic Inequalities at Work: The Case of the Nigerian Banking Sector*	Qualitative research using interviews and vignettes in the Nigerian banking sector.	Ethnic identity and symbolic markers function as resources through which employees negotiate advantages, establish social positions, and reproduce inequalities within organizational hierarchies[19].
6.	de Moll, Grecu, & Hadjar (2024)	*Students' Academic Habitus and Its Relation to Family Capital: A Latent Class Approach to Inequalities among Secondary School Students*	Quantitative research employing latent class analysis among secondary school students in Luxembourg.	Different configurations of academic habitus are associated with family capital, demonstrating how family resources shape students' orientations toward educational institutions[14].
7.	Fudiyartanto & Stahl (2024)	*Theorizing the Professional Habitus: Operationalizing Bourdieu to Explore the Role of Pedigree in Indonesian Higher Education*	Bourdieusian theoretical operationalization applied to professional identity and academic hierarchy.	Academic pedigree and institutional prestige are significant in understanding professional habitus and the distribution of symbolic capital in Indonesian higher education[13].
8.	Croizet & Millet (2024)	*How Preschool Education Perpetuates Social Inequality: An Ethnographic Study of the Practical Conditions of Symbolic Violence*	Ethnographic research in French pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms.	Educational institutions reproduce sociocultural inequalities by privileging certain family cultural practices, obscuring differences in learning conditions, and legitimizing meritocratic explanations of achievement[20].
9.	Mitre (2023)	*Symbolic Violence: What Added Value to the Sociology of Domination?*	Critical theoretical and conceptual analysis of symbolic violence and domination.	Symbolic violence contributes to the reproduction of domination through the relationship between symbolic capital, social representations, habitus, and social fields[21].
10.	Verwiebe & Hagemann (2025)	*Bourdieu Revisited: New Forms of Digital Capital – Emergence, Reproduction, Inequality of Distribution.*	Theoretical analysis of digital capital, social class, and digital practices.	Digital capital emerges as an important resource that is unequally distributed across social classes, creating new mechanisms of social differentiation and reproducing existing inequalities in digital

				fields[22].
11.	Akhiruddin, Kamaruddin, & Adam (2025)	*Cultural Capital and Educational Inequality: A Critical Analysis of Bourdieu's Thought in the Context of Indonesian Education*	Literature review involving ten national and international scholarly articles.	Unequal cultural capital contributes to differences in educational opportunities and achievement. Schools may reproduce symbolic inequalities by privileging the cultural resources of socially advantaged groups[23].
12.	Reza Aditia, Krisztián Széll (2025).	*Belonging matters: How context and inequalities shape student achievement in Indonesia*	Quantitative analysis of the Indonesian subsample of PISA 2022, using Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus, and field.	Educational inequalities are examined through the interaction of socioeconomic status, school type, geographical location, and gender, illustrating the relevance of Bourdieusian theory to Indonesia's stratified education system[24].

Source: Author's synthesis of contemporary scholarly publications (2021–2025).

The synthesis presented in Table 1 identifies several significant patterns in contemporary applications of Bourdieu's theoretical framework. The relationship between habitus and social reproduction remains central to explaining how inequality persists across generations. The unequal distribution of economic, cultural, and social capital continues to influence access to educational and occupational opportunities. Symbolic domination is enacted through institutional classifications, cultural legitimacy, and routine social practices. Furthermore, contemporary developments such as digitalization and evolving organizational structures underscore the ongoing relevance of Bourdieusian analysis for understanding new forms of social differentiation.

3.2 Discussion

A. The Interrelationship between Habitus, Capital, and Field in Producing and Maintaining Social Inequality

This review's findings show that social inequality is reproduced through the dynamic interaction among habitus, capital, and field, rather than through isolated structural or individual factors. These three concepts constitute interconnected dimensions of Bourdieu's theory of social practice, explaining how individuals' social positions, accumulated resources, and institutional environments shape their opportunities and practices. Their interaction offers a relational explanation of inequality by showing how historically established social conditions shape individual dispositions while also determining access to valuable resources and positions within society. In this respect, inequality is not simply an outcome of unequal economic distribution but also a consequence of the social mechanisms that embody, accumulate, recognize, and reproduce advantages and disadvantages.

Habitus is a crucial mechanism that connects structural conditions to everyday social practices. It encompasses durable dispositions formed through socialization and accumulated experiences, which shape individuals' perceptions, evaluations, and responses to their social environments. Research by Lu and de Moll, demonstrates that family backgrounds and accumulated resources correspond to distinct configurations of academic habitus[16,14]. These variations influence educational orientations, expectations, and engagement with institutional opportunities. Likewise, Quaye and Pomeroy, demonstrate that social class differences are linked to students' attitudes toward mathematics and academic achievement[17]. Collectively, these findings suggest that educational practices cannot be fully understood by considering individual motivation or academic ability in isolation from the social conditions that shape these dispositions. From a Bourdieusian perspective, habitus contributes to the reproduction of inequality by leading individuals to internalize the opportunities and limitations associated with their social positions. These internalized dispositions shape individuals' perceptions of what is achievable, appropriate, or desirable within specific social environments. Individuals from socially advantaged backgrounds often possess dispositions that align more closely with institutional expectations, while those from disadvantaged backgrounds may struggle to navigate institutional environments that privilege unfamiliar cultural practices. However, habitus should not be regarded as a deterministic mechanism that irrevocably restricts individual agency. Instead, it offers a

framework for analyzing how past social experiences shape present practices, while remaining open to change through shifting social conditions and new experiences.

The second dimension addresses the unequal distribution of capital and its role in sustaining social hierarchies. Bourdieu's framework differentiates economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital, each offering distinct resources and advantages within social fields. Yu, demonstrate that cultural capital mediates the relationship between economic capital and educational inequality among Chinese high school students[9]. This evidence matters because it shows how material advantages convert into educational advantages through access to culturally valued resources and practices. Likewise, Fudiyartanto and Stahl, emphasize the importance of academic pedigree and professional habitus in shaping institutional recognition and hierarchy within Indonesian higher education[13].

These studies indicate that inequality reproduction extends beyond the mere possession of economic resources. Cultural capital, such as educational credentials, linguistic competencies, and institutionally recognized knowledge, provides individuals with advantages that are not equally accessible to all social groups. Social capital amplifies these advantages through networks, relationships, and access to influential individuals or institutions. When specific resources gain recognition and legitimacy, they acquire symbolic value and reinforce existing social distinctions. Therefore, converting different forms of capital is a key mechanism by which social advantages accumulate and transmit across institutional and generational contexts.

The third dimension examines the field's role in structuring competition and determining the value of different forms of capital. A field is a relatively structured social space where individuals and groups occupy positions based on their resources, interests, and capacity to exert influence. Umeh, show how ethnic identities and symbolic markers operate within organizational environments to shape employees' social positions and experiences of inequality[19]. In this context, organizational fields are not neutral; institutional expectations, professional classifications, and established relations of authority often privilege certain groups. Fudiyartanto and Stahl, also highlight the significance of institutional prestige and academic pedigree in shaping professional positions and recognition within higher education[13].

The interaction among habitus, capital, and field provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how social inequalities are produced and maintained. Habitus shapes individuals' orientations toward specific opportunities, capital determines the resources available to pursue those opportunities, and field establishes the rules by which resources are evaluated and transformed into social advantages. These mechanisms function concurrently rather than independently. Individuals with greater access to institutionally valued capital are typically better positioned to navigate social fields, and their dispositions often align more closely with dominant institutional expectations. Consequently, existing inequalities are reproduced through practices that may appear individually motivated but are deeply embedded within unequal social structures.

B. Symbolic Domination and the Mechanisms of Legitimizing Social Hierarchies

The second research question addresses the mechanisms by which symbolic domination legitimizes and perpetuates existing social hierarchies. The findings suggest that symbolic domination functions through the production, recognition, and internalization of socially accepted meanings and classifications. Unlike direct coercion or explicit material control, symbolic domination often operates through institutional standards, cultural expectations, linguistic practices, and evaluative systems that render unequal social arrangements legitimate. Its effectiveness depends on dominant groups' ability to establish specific interpretations of the social world as authoritative, appropriate, and universally valid.

A key mechanism is the institutional recognition of dominant cultural standards. Croizet and Millet, through their ethnographic study of preschool education, illustrate how educational practices may privilege specific cultural dispositions and family-based experiences[20]. These practices can result in symbolic violence when institutional expectations are regarded as neutral standards of competence, even though they are more accessible to children from socially advantaged backgrounds. Consequently, people often interpret resulting inequalities as differences in individual ability or achievement rather than as outcomes of unequal

access to culturally valued resources. This interpretation conceals the structural conditions influencing educational outcomes and further legitimizes existing social classifications.

The relationship between symbolic domination and educational inequality is evident in Akhiruddin, and the Indonesian PISA-related study presented in Table 1. These studies underscore the importance of cultural capital, socioeconomic background, and institutional conditions in shaping differentiated educational opportunities[23]. From a Bourdieusian perspective, educational institutions not only transmit knowledge but also establish standards of legitimate knowledge, competence, and achievement. When these standards align more closely with the cultural resources of dominant groups, educational evaluation may convert inherited social advantages into distinctions that appear merit-based. As a result, symbolic domination becomes embedded in institutional practices that are widely regarded as objective and impartial.

A second mechanism is the naturalization of social differences through everyday practices and symbolic classifications. Lindell, demonstrates the relationship between social space, capital distribution, and symbolic hierarchies in the Swedish context[18]. The study qualifies simplistic interpretations of symbolic domination by showing that individuals in different social positions do not internalize anticipated stigma uniformly. This finding indicates that symbolic domination is not an automatic process in which all dominated groups accept imposed classifications. Instead, it depends on specific social conditions, forms of recognition, and the resources individuals have to interpret and respond to symbolic classifications. Mitre, further emphasizes the analyt Mitre further highlights the analytical significance of symbolic violence in explaining domination[21]. Symbolic power operates through socially recognized representations that distinguish legitimate from illegitimate practices, valued from devalued identities, and authoritative from subordinate positions. These classifications are especially influential when people accept them as natural expressions of social order rather than as products of historical power relations. In this way, symbolic domination can reproduce inequality without ongoing direct intervention from dominant groups. The dominated may help maintain social classifications because these distinctions are embedded in established institutional and cultural frameworks.

A third mechanism addresses the relationship between symbolic recognition and the unequal distribution of capital. Cultural and professional credentials, institutional prestige, linguistic competencies, and social identities serve as symbolic markers by which individuals are evaluated and positioned. Umeh, show that ethnic markers and organizational hierarchies shape the recognition and distribution of opportunities within the Nigerian banking sector[19]. Likewise, Fudiyartanto and Stahl, show that academic pedigree contributes to constructing professional legitimacy in Indonesian higher education[13]. Collectively, these findings suggest that symbolic domination extends beyond educational contexts and operates within professional and organizational fields.

The analysis indicates that symbolic domination is maintained through three interrelated processes: institutionalizing dominant cultural standards, naturalizing unequal social classifications, and transforming accumulated capital into socially recognized legitimacy. These processes reinforce one another and perpetuate social hierarchies. Notably, symbolic domination does not require deliberate coordination among dominant actors. Instead, it is reproduced through routine institutional procedures, widely accepted cultural conventions, and everyday practices that continually validate specific forms of knowledge, identity, and social position. The power of symbolic domination lies not only in imposing meanings but also in rendering those meanings legitimate.

C. The Contemporary Relevance of Bourdieu's Theory for Understanding Social Inequality

The third research question addresses the continued relevance of Bourdieu's theory of social practice for analyzing contemporary social inequality. The literature indicates that this framework maintains significant analytical utility by conceptualizing inequality as a relational process involving resource distribution, habitus formation, institutional power, and symbolic legitimacy. Its applicability is demonstrated in educational settings, professional organizations, and digital environments. However, recent studies highlight the need to reassess how various forms of capital and mechanisms of domination function amid evolving social and technological contexts.

A significant development involves the transformation of capital in digital environments. Verwiebe and Hagemann, introduce digital capital as an emerging resource that is unevenly distributed among social groups[22]. This approach extends Bourdieusian analysis by illustrating that access to digital technologies, digital competencies, and the ability to participate in digital contexts generate new forms of social differentiation. Digital capital is closely linked to economic, cultural, and social capital, as individuals' abilities to leverage digital resources are shaped by their broader social positions. Individuals with greater access to educational resources, technological infrastructure, and supportive networks are more likely to accumulate digital advantages.

This development indicates that digital transformation does not inherently eliminate existing inequalities. Instead, digital environments may perpetuate established social distinctions through unequal access to technological resources, disparities in digital competencies, and differing capacities to gain recognition in online spaces. From a Bourdieusian perspective, digital platforms can be conceptualized as emerging or differentiated social fields where actors compete for visibility, influence, and symbolic recognition. Nevertheless, the notion of digital capital requires precise theoretical specification. It should not be regarded as entirely separate from other forms of capital without a thorough examination of how digital resources are accumulated, converted, and recognized within specific social contexts.

The ongoing relevance of Bourdieu's framework is further evidenced by its application to educational inequality across various national contexts. Research by Lu, Yu, de Moll, and Croizet and Millet demonstrates how family resources, academic dispositions, and institutional expectations contribute to the persistence of unequal educational outcomes[16, 9, 14, 20]. These findings underscore the explanatory significance of habitus and cultural capital and show that educational institutions remain key arenas where social advantages are converted into recognized achievement. Additionally, the Indonesian studies indicate that Bourdieusian concepts offer a robust analytical framework for investigating the interplay between educational opportunities, institutional prestige, socioeconomic disparities, and the allocation of cultural resources.

Beyond education, applying Bourdieu's theory to professional and organizational contexts underscores its broader sociological significance. Umeh, show how ethnic identity and symbolic markers intersect with organizational hierarchies[19], while Fudiyartanto and Stahl, highlight how academic pedigree shapes professional recognition[13]. These studies indicate that social inequality is perpetuated not only through the unequal allocation of material resources but also through institutional assessments of professional competence, legitimacy, and social belonging. Bourdieu's relational approach is especially valuable as it enables researchers to analyze how these assessments relate to the distribution of capital and the governing rules of specific fields. However, the ongoing relevance of Bourdieu's theory does not mean that its original conceptual framework can fully explain all contemporary inequalities without adaptation. New forms of digital participation, evolving institutional structures, and shifting configurations of identity and power necessitate further theoretical refinement. For instance, digital environments may enable individuals to gain visibility and symbolic recognition beyond traditional institutional hierarchies. Nevertheless, unequal access to resources, platform architectures, and socially differentiated capacities for participation still shape these opportunities. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the interplay between continuity and transformation, rather than presuming either the complete persistence or the total dissolution of existing hierarchies.

A further limitation involves the interpretation of habitus and social reproduction. If habitus is conceptualized too rigidly, the theory risks underestimating individual agency, social mobility, resistance, and actors' capacity to alter institutional conditions. Lindell's, findings underscore that symbolic classifications are not uniformly internalized[18]. Evolving social and institutional contexts may also create opportunities for individuals to challenge established expectations and develop alternative practices. Thus, habitus's analytical utility lies in its ability to explain the structured conditions of social action without portraying individuals as passive recipients of dominant cultural norms.

Collectively, the reviewed studies show that Bourdieu's theory remains relevant by offering an integrated explanation of how material resources, cultural dispositions, institutional structures, and symbolic

legitimacy interact to produce social inequality. The framework's principal strength is its relational understanding of social practice, linking individual experiences to broader structures of power and reproduction. However, applying Bourdieu's theory requires ongoing conceptual refinement to address evolving forms of capital, newly emerging social fields, and the potential for resistance and transformation. This critical reassessment allows Bourdieusian theory to remain analytically productive without assuming that its original formulations are universally sufficient for all contemporary social contexts.

D. Theoretical Synthesis: Symbolic Domination as a Mechanism of Social Reproduction

Integrating the three research questions shows that symbolic domination functions as a relational mechanism linking the unequal distribution of capital, the formation of habitus, and the exercise of power within social fields. Inequality is reproduced through the interaction of material, cultural, institutional, and symbolic dimensions of social life, rather than a single process. Habitus shapes the dispositions through which individuals interpret social opportunities and limitations; capital determines the resources available to pursue and maintain social positions; and field structures the conditions under which these resources are evaluated and transformed into advantages. Symbolic domination arises when these inequalities gain legitimacy through socially recognized classifications and institutional practices.

This synthesis advances a more comprehensive understanding of social inequality by demonstrating that domination operates concurrently at both structural and symbolic levels. Structural inequalities determine access to resources, while symbolic mechanisms legitimize the social distinctions generated by unequal distributions of capital. Internalizing these distinctions then reinforces the dispositions and practices that perpetuate existing hierarchies. This process is recursive: unequal structures shape social practices, socially recognized practices legitimize unequal positions, and legitimized positions reinforce the continuity of the originating structures.

Nevertheless, social reproduction should not be regarded as a wholly closed or irreversible process. Evidence of differentiated responses to symbolic classifications and the emergence of new forms of capital indicates that social actors can negotiate, contest, and transform established power relations. Modifications in institutional arrangements, resource accessibility, and the structure of social fields may generate opportunities for alternative practices and new forms of recognition. Thus, revisiting Bourdieu's theory matters because it acknowledges both the persistence of symbolic domination and the social conditions that enable its mechanisms to be contested. In summary, this study offers a critical interpretation of Bourdieusian social theory by identifying symbolic domination as a central mechanism that legitimizes and reproduces social inequality. The integration of habitus, capital, and field establishes an analytical framework for examining how unequal social relations are maintained across educational, organizational, and digital contexts. This approach underscores the enduring relevance of Bourdieu's theoretical contributions and emphasizes the necessity for further conceptual development to account for evolving configurations of power, legitimacy, and inequality in contemporary society.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social practice provides a robust sociological framework for analyzing how social inequality and symbolic domination are produced, legitimized, and perpetuated. The findings indicate that habitus, capital, and field function as interconnected dimensions that shape individuals’ social positions, opportunities, and practices. The unequal distribution of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital creates differentiated advantages, while institutional structures and ingrained social dispositions reinforce existing hierarchies. Symbolic domination is also maintained through the institutionalization of dominant cultural standards, the normalization of social classifications, and the internalization of unequal relations as legitimate social arrangements. These mechanisms account for the persistence of social inequality beyond material disparities and its entrenchment in everyday practices and institutional evaluations. The study further affirms the ongoing relevance of Bourdieusian theory for interpreting contemporary inequalities within educational, organizational, and digital contexts. However, applying it requires critical refinement to address emerging forms of capital, evolving social fields, and the dynamics of individual agency and structural transformation. This research contributes theoretically by

synthesizing habitus, capital, field, and symbolic domination into a relational framework for explaining social reproduction. By highlighting the interplay between structural inequality and symbolic legitimacy, this study advances the understanding of how power operates through both material resources and socially constructed meanings. Future research should examine these mechanisms through comparative empirical studies across diverse institutional and cultural settings to assess how symbolic domination is sustained, contested, and potentially transformed in contemporary society.

REFERENCES

[1] L. Warwick-Booth, Social Inequality: Social Inequality 3e. 1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road London EC1Y 1SP United States: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022. doi: 10.4135/9781036231606.

[2] M. Khan, K. Behrendt, D. Papadas, L. Arnold, and A. Sultana, "From Inequalities to Inclusion: Sustainable Development for Smallholders," Sustain. Dev., vol. 33, no. S1, pp. 1520–1536, Nov. 2025, doi: 10.1002/sd.70073.

[3] M. Zafirovski, "The Theory of the Collective Unconscious and Social Coercion: Theoretical Extension and Empirical Application," Hum. Arenas, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 2486–2532, Sep. 2026, doi: 10.1007/s42087-025-00530-w.

[4] C. Samuell, "Shadow education, Bourdieu, & meritocracy: towards an understanding of Juku and inequality in Japan," Curr. Issues Lang. Plan., vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 45–66, Jan. 2024, doi: 10.1080/14664208.2023.2209467.

[5] Å. Wikberg Nilsson, "Bridging Boundaries: Unveiling Bourdieu's 'Thinking Tools' in Design Interventions with Youth," Des. Cult., vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 163–184, May 2025, doi: 10.1080/17547075.2025.2461937.

[6] F. Ershadi, "A Study of Pierre Bourdieu ' s Theory of Inequality Through The Inheritors , Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture, and The Logic of Practice Farnaz Ershadi Thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa In partial fulfillment of the requiremen," University of Ottawa, 2025. doi: https://doi.org/10.20381/ruor-30902.

[7] M. Karatas-Ozkan et al., "Challenging the assumptions of social entrepreneurship education and repositioning it for the future: wonders of cultural, social, symbolic and economic capitals," ***Soc. Enterp. J.***, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 98–122, Apr. 2023, doi: 10.1108/SEJ-02-2022-0018.

[8] S. Uekusa, S. Matthewman, and D. F. Lorenz, "Conceptualising disaster social capital: what it is, why it matters, and how it can be enhanced," Disasters, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 56–79, Jan. 2022, doi: 10.1111/disa.12470.

[9] S. Yu, L. Hong, and G. Ma, "The Mediation of Exam-oriented Cultural Capital: Economic Capital and Educational Inequality of Chinese High School Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic and School Closures," Appl. Res. Qual. Life, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 1189–1204, Jun. 2023, doi: 10.1007/s11482-022-10127-y.

[10] G. Christensen, "Three concepts of power: Foucault, Bourdieu, and Habermas," Power Educ., vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 182–195, Jul. 2024, doi: 10.1177/17577438231187129.

[11] A. Prieur, M. Savage, and M. P. Flemmen, "Distinctions in the making: A theoretical discussion of youth and cultural capital," ***Br. J. Sociol.***, vol. 74, no. 3, pp. 360–375, Jun. 2023, doi: 10.1111/1468-4446.13002.

[12] G. Stahl and G. M. Mu, "Pierre Bourdieu: Revisiting Reproduction, Cultural Capital, and Symbolic Violence in Education," in The Palgrave Handbook of Educational Thinkers, Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2024, pp. 1199–1214. doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-25134-4_128.

[13] F. A. Fudiyartanto and G. Stahl, "Theorizing the professional habitus: operationalizing Bourdieu to explore the role of pedigree in Indonesian higher education," Br. J. Sociol. Educ., vol. 45, no. 2, pp. 157–172, Feb. 2024, doi: 10.1080/01425692.2023.2291324.

[14] F. de Moll, A. L. Grecu, and A. Hadjar, "Students' Academic Habitus and Its Relation to Family Capital: A Latent Class Approach to Inequalities among Secondary School Students 1," Sociol. Inq., vol. 94, no. 1, pp. 190–220, Feb. 2024, doi: 10.1111/soin.12578.

[15] J. D. Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. Sage Publications., 2017.

[16] Y. Lu, R. Scandurra, and X. Bonal, "An integral model of cultural reproduction: The case of China," Curr. Sociol., vol. 70, no. 6, pp. 897–920, Oct. 2022, doi: 10.1177/00113921211028626.

[17] J. Quaye and D. Pomeroy, "Social class inequalities in attitudes towards mathematics and achievement in mathematics cross generations: a quantitative Bourdieusian analysis," Educ. Stud. Math., vol. 109, no. 1, pp. 155–175, Jan. 2022, doi: 10.1007/s10649-021-10078-5.

[18] J. Lindell, "Symbolic Violence and the Social Space: Self-imposing the Mark of Disgrace?," Cult. Sociol., vol.

16, no. 3, pp. 379–401, Sep. 2022, doi: 10.1177/17499755221082375.

[19] C. Umeh, N. Cornelius, and J. Wallace, "A Bourdieusian Exploration of Ethnic Inequalities at Work: The Case of the Nigerian Banking Sector," Work. Employ. Soc., vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 885–910, Aug. 2024, doi: 10.1177/09500170231173604.

[20] J. Croizet and M. Millet, "How preschool education perpetuates social inequality: An ethnographic study of the practical conditions of symbolic violence," ***J. Soc. Issues***, vol. 80, no. 4, pp. 1345–1378, Dec. 2024, doi: 10.1111/josi.12654.

[21] H. Mitre, "Symbolic violence: What added value to the sociology of domination?," ***J. Soc. Sci.***, vol. 7, no. 29, pp. 295–317, 2023, doi: https://journalsocialsciences.de/index.php/jss/article/view/110.

[22] R. Verwiebe and S. Hagemann, "Bourdieu revisited: new forms of digital capital – emergence, reproduction, inequality of distribution," Information, Commun. Soc., vol. 28, no. 11, pp. 1861–1883, Aug. 2025, doi: 10.1080/1369118X.2024.2358170.

[23] Akhiruddin, S. A. Kamaruddin, and A. Adam, "Cultural Capital and Educational Inequality: A Critical Analysis of Bourdieu's Thought in the Context of Indonesian Education," ***IJOLEH Int. J. Educ. Humanit.***, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 256–270, Nov. 2025, doi: 10.56314/ijoleh.v4i2.430.

[24] R. Aditia and K. Széll, "Belonging matters: How context and inequalities shape student achievement in Indonesia," ***Int. J. Educ. Res. Open***, vol. 9, p. 100512, Dec. 2025, doi: 10.1016/j.ijedro.2025.100512.