



The Reproduction Of Practice In Habitus And Its Implications For Social Mobility

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The Reproduction Of Practice In Habitus And Its Implications For Social Mobility

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Abstract

In this paper it is argued that Bourdieu's theory of practice presents an overdeterministic picture of practice. Furthermore the weaknesses of habitus are systematically discussed. This is followed by a discussion on how these weaknesses overemphasize reproduction of practice. This leads to a scheme in which social mobility rarely occurs. Empirical studies are used to evaluate how accurate this scheme is. It is concluded that it is partly accurate, and that habitus is useful for explaining the problems of social mobility. Habitus can be used to frame public policies in areas such as immigration and upwards social mobility.

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Introduction

Pierre Bourdieu is a French philosopher and sociologist who was raised by uneducated parents in a small mountain village. Despite his upbringing, he eventually became the head of the sociology department at the *Collège de France*, a prestigious French university.¹ Even though Bourdieu was successful and had adapted to the academic lifestyle, it always felt somewhat wrong to him. He had feelings of betrayal and guilt for leaving the way of life of his parents. Interestingly enough, Bourdieu finds the explanation for this feeling in his theory of practice. He argues that by climbing the social ladder, he experiences a feeling of distress due to being torn between his upbringing and his new social environment.

He develops his theory of practice in the book 'The Logic of Practice'.² In this book, he tries to transcend the theoretical opposition of objectivism and subjectivism that was present in sociology. Additionally, Bourdieu tries to create awareness, with his work, of the relations of domination in society that limit social mobility.³ With his theory of practice, he tries to understand the logic of practices (praxis) of people. The concept of habitus is central in his theory. Habitus is defined as a system of dispositions that is owned by a person. Dispositions are conditioned responses to the world. They are, like a habit, almost automatic responses to certain triggers.⁴ These dispositions predispose people to act and behave according to the logic of the field. For example, a person might be inclined to shake someone's hand as a greeting without giving it any thought because of their habitus. Habitus is generated by the objective conditions, the

field, in which the social class is situated. Bourdieu defines a social class as a group of people that have the same habitus as a result of the same conditions of existence.⁵ The field can be any social arena in which the agents are located. Each field has a specific logic to which habitus adapts itself. Habitus adapts to the field because agents adapt to the logic of the field and acts accordingly. The repetition of practices in the field motivates and structures future experiences. These practices will then be incorporated as dispositions in habitus.^{6,7}

An acquired habitus allows agents to successfully engage in the field, because they can operate according to the logic of the field. Bourdieu argues that habitus makes the free production of all thoughts and actions possible, within the predefined constraints of the field.⁸ Essentially, habitus has filtered out the actions that are unsuccessful in the field and allows people to choose from actions that are acceptable. This can be compared with the rules of a game like baseball. You know what plays are acceptable and which are not, and you are free to choose which of the acceptable plays you make.

Despite the major importance of Bourdieu's theory in the sociological field, it is not devoid of criticism.⁹ His theory of practice is criticized for being unable to account for change and for having a deterministic understanding of practice, which means that actions of agents are determined by habitus.¹⁰ Jenkins argues that habitus is mechanistically deterministic because the field causes habitus, which then causes actions that reproduce the

¹ Sam Friedman, "Habitus Clivé and the Emotional Imprint of Social Mobility." *The Sociological Review* 64, no. 1 (2016). 129–47. 129-130

² Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 25-27

³ A. Faber. "From False Premises to False Conclusions. on Pierre Bourdieu's Alleged Sociological Determinism." *American Sociologist* 48, no. 3-4 (2017): 436–52. 448

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 53-54

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 49

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 56

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 58

⁸ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 55

⁹ Nick Crossley. "The Phenomenological Habitus and Its Construction." *Theory and Society* 30, no. 1. (2001). 81

¹⁰ Yang. "Bourdieu, Practice and Change: Beyond the Criticism of Determinism." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 46, no. 14 (2014). 1522–23

conditions of the field.¹¹ People, in this sense, are reduced to 'machines' that follow instructions and are not able to change those instructions. Bourdieu argues against this notion. According to him, habitus is an acquired generative scheme that is mediated by the subjective expectations of objective reality, which allows agents to have a meaningful influence on habitus.¹² The problem is, however, that Bourdieu does not make clear how this mechanism works.¹³ This paper will argue that this weakness is one of the major issues that lead to the theory's understanding that social change only rarely happens.

This understanding of practice becomes problematic for explaining social mobility. Whereas habitus is good at explaining consistency, Bourdieu only briefly touches upon mechanisms for social change and social mobility.¹⁴ Social mobility is the movement from one social class to another, which also means a change in habitus. The problem is that a person's habitus is so aligned with the particular field they were originally from, that they struggle to adapt to the new field.¹⁵ Bourdieu argues that a person's habitus can change, however, it can only do so slowly and gradually and is alike to a second birth.¹⁶ In this understanding, people can only be successful in a new field after a long and slow process of adaptation. However, there seem to be many successful cases of social mobility in reality, such as Bourdieu himself.^{17,18}

Even though habitus does not adequately explain the amount of social mobility in reality, it can be a useful tool in

understanding the impact of social mobility on people. This is useful for the field of public administration, because an important part of public policies in European nations is aimed at creating upwards social mobility.^{19,20} Habitus can be a useful tool to better design and evaluate public policies regarding social mobility.

In this paper, it will be argued that habitus and the surrounding theory of practice, as presented in *The Logic Of Practice*, offer an understanding of practice that limits social change and therefore has problems explaining the amount of successful social mobility in reality. In this paper, firstly, the concept of habitus outlined in *The Logic of Practice* will be critically evaluated. Secondly, it will be discussed how social change is limited in Bourdieu's theory. Thirdly, the implications of the limits to social change for social mobility will be illustrated and it will be evaluated how habitus can be used empirically. In the last section, the conclusions and the recommendations for public policies will be presented.

The theory of practice

With 'The Logic Of Practice' Bourdieu sets out to move beyond the dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity in social sciences. He believes that this divide is ruinous for social sciences because both modes of knowledge fail to accurately represent the social world.²¹ On the one hand, objectivism sets out to create objective rules, mechanisms, and laws that explain how social reality works, independent of individual phenomena. On the other hand,

¹¹ Richard Jenkins. "Pierre Bourdieu and the Reproduction of Determinism." *Sociology* 16, no. 2 (1982). 270

¹² Richard Jenkins. "Pierre Bourdieu and the Reproduction of Determinism." 272

¹³ Richard Jenkins. "Pierre Bourdieu and the Reproduction of Determinism." 270

¹⁴ Yang. "Bourdieu, Practice and Change: Beyond the Criticism of Determinism." 1531

¹⁵ Sam Friedman, "Habitus Clivé and the Emotional Imprint of Social Mobility." 132

¹⁶ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 29

¹⁷ Elizabeth Lee and Rory Kramer. "Out with the Old, in with the New? Habitus and Social Mobility at Selective Colleges." *Sociology of Education* 86, no. 1 (2013). 19

¹⁸ Sam Friedman, "Habitus Clivé and the Emotional Imprint of Social Mobility." 129

¹⁹ Sam Friedman, "Habitus Clivé and the Emotional Imprint of Social Mobility." 129

²⁰ Rik Peeters. "Sociale Stijging: Een Onuitgesproken Beleidsthema." *Sociale Vraagstukken*, July 24, 2017.

²¹ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 25-27

subjectivism sets out to explain the social world through individual lived experiences. Unfortunately, this means that it cannot explain the impact of the external world on the individual. Both perspectives thus have shortcomings that prevent them from creating a comprehensive theory of practice. To overcome these shortcomings Bourdieu presents the concept of habitus. He defines habitus as:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.²²

Thus, habitus is a way of explaining how agents regularly behave, without resorting to definite rules or mechanisms.²³ It is a scheme of dispositions, based on the conditions of the field, that generates action. In this section, the relation between habitus and the concepts embodiment, temporality, capital, and the social class will be discussed. These will be discussed to further explain what habitus is and to highlight its strengths and weaknesses.

Firstly, Bourdieu argues that the acquisition and internalization of habitus are inherently linked with the body, because agents acquire habitus on a level below that of consciousness.²⁴ They acquire it through a process of mimesis, which is an unintentional process of embodiment. This happens by unintentionally reproducing a generative

scheme of actions through socialization. It is different than intentional mimicry of other people's behavior because the agent is unaware of the mimicking of actions and therefore believes that the actions are their own. Eventually, the agent will embody (parts of) the habitus, meaning that the actions have been internalized. For example, college students will unintentionally start to mimic students from a perceived higher social class to fit in and will eventually only behave in the new way.²⁵

Bourdieu argues that an agent can only have one native habitus. Only the habitus that the agent was raised in is the habitus that is natively embodied by the agent, because of the self-evident belief the agent has in that habitus.²⁶ Nevertheless, there is a way to change habitus. Bourdieu argues that becoming part of a different social class is not something that can be done instantaneously, but only through a slow process of "co-option and initiation".²⁷ He calls this the equivalent of "a second birth".²⁸ The sooner an agent gets acquainted with a different habitus, the easier it is to acquire the habitus. This is because the agent is still open to accepting the different 'rules' of another habitus. An important precondition is that this process is done via mimesis, as well.²⁹ This is the first weakness of habitus. The individual can only slowly and unintentionally change their habitus. This means that social mobility should only rarely occur, as I will argue in the next chapters.

Secondly, temporality is another core characteristic of habitus. Habitus is a product of all of the current and previous experiences and dispositions of a certain social field. The combined experiences and dispositions of the people in the same field shape the structure of habitus and the dispositions that it generates.

²² Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 53

²³ Elaine M. Power. "An Introduction to Pierre Bourdieu's Key Theoretical Concepts." 48-49

²⁴ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 72-73

²⁵ Elizabeth Lee and Rory Kramer. "Out with the Old, in with the New? Habitus and Social Mobility

at Selective Colleges." *Sociology of Education* 86, no. 1 (2013): 18-35. 20-21

²⁶ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 67-68

²⁷ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 68

²⁸ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 68

²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 68

So, habitus is a product of time.³⁰ For habitus to be generated, there needs to be a consensus by the agents of the social class on what is the most favorable action. Bourdieu argues that this process of homogenization of action happens automatically and non-deliberately as a response to the conditions of the field.³¹ The shared objective history and conditions of existence are what co-ordinates the practices of the agents living in the same class. Agents in the same class thus have harmonized practices because they follow the same 'rules', inscribed through historical experiences and the conditions of the field. For example, when you are given a gift you will thank that person because that is what has always been done by you and the people before you, which is also the most beneficial strategy according to the logic of the respective field. Concretely, historical actions shape the habitus of people in a way that is the most successful for the field.

This is useful because the 'social game' is being played in real-time so the agents do not have time to rationally evaluate all possible choices, but rather have to make decisions in the heat of the moment.³² Practice is therefore 'in the moment', directional, consequential, and with a certain tempo. Agents have to be sensitive to the hidden rules of the game to be able to play the game in the right way. The acquirement of habitus allows them to sense these rules. Consequently, habitus is able to explain decisions by creating generative schemes that take the temporal nature of practice into account.³³ This is one of the strengths of habitus. Agents do not constantly have to think on how to act in every situation but can rely on problem-solving strategies from prior generations.

The fact that habitus is shaped by previous actions, thereby predisposing people to act in the same line, means that habitus is self-reinforcing.³⁴ Bourdieu argues that the earliest shared experiences have the most

weight in determining habitus. That is because habitus ensures its constancy by rejecting information that challenges the accumulated experiences. The oldest experiences have therefore shaped which information, behavior, and perceptions will be accepted in the future, which ensures its consistency. Another way of looking at this is that habitus provides itself with the field it is the most adapted to, which reinforces the dispositions.³⁵ Concretely, habitus generates all the approaches that are reasonable and are likely to have a positive reaction from other agents within the respective field. Actions that are not a part of habitus are deemed as unthinkable and would likely invoke negative reactions from other agents in the same habitus, which adds another layer to the self-reinforcing mechanism. This self-reinforcement is a weakness of habitus. It makes for a scheme that increasingly favors a specific set of actions, that reproduces the same conditions of the field in a circular way. This circularity will be further elaborated in the next chapter.

Thirdly, Bourdieu argues that capital can be used to misrecognize and legitimize objective conditions of the field. According to him, there are two kinds of capital, namely economic capital and symbolic capital.³⁶ Economic capital is capital in the sense of economic exchange value. Symbolic capital is a sort of social credit that is given to someone by a group through symbolic and material guarantees. For example, a medieval count protects his serfs and gives feasts in his castle and is therefore recognized as the rightful lord of the land, which grants him certain powers and privileges.

When symbolic capital is taken into account, it becomes clear that practice is not always based on economic logic but can also be based on a misrecognition of economic logic through symbolic capital. An economic exchange can be misrecognized as a symbolic

³⁰ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 56

³¹ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 58-59

³² Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 98-99

³³ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 100

³⁴ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 60-61

³⁵ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 61

³⁶ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 114-116

exchange, through performing certain rituals ingrained in habitus. The types of capital are mutually convertible. When they are exchanged asymmetrically, power differences are produced.³⁷ The difference in power leads to domination. At first, this domination has to be through personal exchanges, however, when there is an objective system in place that can durably recreate the exchanges, the domination becomes institutional. A clear example of this institutionalization of symbolic capital is the process of acquiring a degree, license, or certificate through an educational institution.³⁸ One can exchange economic capital for the symbolic capital of a degree. In this sense, the education institution is misrecognized as symbolic while it is actually an economic exchange, from which people with low capital can be excluded.³⁹ Consequently, agents misrecognize the objective conditions while simultaneously seeing them as legitimate. This is both a strength and a weakness of habitus. On the one hand, it shows how institutions reproduce class inequalities. On the other hand, it is limited to the idea that agents cannot recognize class relations and that it leaves little room for a change in class relations, as will be shown in the next chapter.

Fourthly, there is an important distinction between class habitus and individual habitus. According to Bourdieu, a social class is a group that shares the same habitus. As was discussed before, habitus is a product of a social field; however, this does not mean that a social field only has one social class. The social field is the general context the group is situated in, while a social class is a specific group in a field that shares a social situation that is expressed in a shared habitus. In 'The Logic Of Practice', Bourdieu fails to make this distinction sufficiently clear.

The difference between class habitus and individual habitus is that the individual

habitus can deviate from the class habitus.⁴⁰ Every individual in the same class cannot have the same past experiences. Therefore, it cannot be said that every individual will act in the same way. The individual habitus is thus a variant of the class habitus. It is slightly different due to the different experiences, but largely the same.⁴¹ The individual habitus is an individual expression of the class habitus, which means that the expression is a deviation of the class expression, but the individual habitus can always be related to the class expression. The deviation of the individual expression in relation to the class 'norm' is what confirms the class habitus. What Bourdieu fails to make sufficiently clear is that the individual habitus constitutes the class habitus. Individuals firstly need to perform actions to bring a habitus in existence. For example, imagine that all harbor workers normally smoke, and one harbor worker does not, this exception of the individual habitus is what confirms and constitutes the class habitus of smoking harbor workers. Likewise, if all harbor workers adopt a new practice, such as tattooing an anchor on their chest, this will in the long run be incorporated in the class habitus. The weakness here is that Bourdieu fails to make sufficiently clear how habitus is tied to individual practice. In the appropriation of habitus, the agent transforms and slightly changes the dispositions of the class habitus. Therefore, habitus is a dynamic and performative scheme that never reproduces practices in exactly the same way.

In conclusion, Bourdieu's theory is good for explaining the regularities of behavior. It explains how people can behave without constantly having to evaluate which action is needed in each specific instance. Nevertheless, his theory has three weaknesses. Firstly, the acquirement of a different habitus is a slow and seemingly rare occurrence. This means that people would rarely change habitus and

³⁷ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 123

³⁸ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 130

³⁹ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 112, 122

⁴⁰ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 59-60

⁴¹ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 60

experience successful social mobility. Secondly, there is a circularity in the production of practice. Habitus reinforces itself and favors practices that have proven to be successful. Furthermore, the current conditions are normalized and legitimized through systematic misrecognition of domination relations. So, habitus favors the reproduction of the conditions in the field, as I will argue in the next chapter. Thirdly, the difference between the individual and the class habitus is ambivalent. The individual habitus is constitutive of the class habitus, but it is at the same time always a derivative of the class habitus. Bourdieu did not make sufficiently clear how individual practices can shape and change the class habitus.

The limits and possibilities of social change

As was shown in the previous chapter, habitus has three main weaknesses. In this chapter, it is further discussed how these weaknesses limit social change. Next, it will argue how these weaknesses lead to the reproduction of practice. However, several aspects of habitus that enable social change will be discussed as well.

The circularity enclosed in the concept of habitus leads to a deterministic understanding of practice. The objective conditions generate habitus, which generates practice, which, in turn, generates the same structure.⁴² The influence of individual practice is, according to Jenkins, not accounted for. This leads to a self-reinforcing loop that determines practice.⁴³ Habitus is reproducing the practices that are the most optimal for the conditions of the field. Bourdieu acknowledges that objective structures are only objective to the

extent that they are recognized as such by the subjective actors and that the subjective actions play a role in the generation of that objective reality.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, habitus cannot account for the role of the subjective actions individuals perform in reproducing their structures and habitus. As exemplified in the Marxist base-superstructure metaphor Jenkins uses: the objective structure of society (base), mediated through habitus, generates practice (superstructure).⁴⁵ The objective conditions are seen as a given and the actions of agents reproduce the conditions. Consequently, the actions of agents are limited to a specific set of responses, over which the agents have no influence.

This is supported by the argument that the actions of agents are not a result of a strategy based on habitus, but are directly caused by habitus itself.⁴⁶ Bourdieu argues that actions are a result of a generative scheme that gives agents options based on their habitus. Therefore, agents are able to create a strategy within the boundaries of habitus, based on the dispositions embodied through habitus.⁴⁷ Yang argues that agents are not able to create their own strategy, but that their strategy is already determined by habitus. Habitus does not allow for the creation of strategies, rather it puts people with the same conditions of existence on the same trajectory towards the same actions. So, the reproduction of practice leads to a scheme where agents are limited to a specific set of actions.

Bourdieu's scheme of legitimization of domination through institutions also contributes to the reproduction of the objective conditions. In his framework, educational institutions can be used to gain symbolic capital and to legitimize symbolic domination.⁴⁸ Therefore, people with more

⁴² Richard Jenkins. "Pierre Bourdieu and the Reproduction of Determinism." 270

⁴³ Richard Jenkins. "Pierre Bourdieu and the Reproduction of Determinism." 270

⁴⁴ Richard Jenkins. "Pierre Bourdieu and the Reproduction of Determinism." 272

⁴⁵ Richard Jenkins. "Pierre Bourdieu and the Reproduction of Determinism." 272

⁴⁶ Yang. "Bourdieu, Practice and Change: Beyond the Criticism of Determinism." 1529.

⁴⁷ Yang. "Bourdieu, Practice and Change: Beyond the Criticism of Determinism." 1529

⁴⁸ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 130

symbolic capital are inclined to gain more capital through the education system than people with lower symbolic capital. On the other hand, the habitus of the subordinate class, which has less symbolic capital, inclines them to accept the legitimacy of the elites and inhibits them to strive for higher education.⁴⁹ This creates a class of elites that is in a position of legitimized dominance towards the subordinate class. Habitus is thus reproducing the class relations by legitimizing those relations through an objective scheme.

Furthermore, the agents in Bourdieu's framework rarely question the practices that are ingrained in their habitus.⁵⁰ Because of the reproduction of practice and the legitimization of class relations, we are left with agents that do not make conscious rational choices but make instinctive decisions that are the most optimal for the conditions of the field.⁵¹ Then, from the perspective of the agent, what seems to be their own action was already determined by the objective structure, which the agent is not actively aware of. As Bourdieu himself puts it, agents have a feel for the game and try to play it as good as possible.⁵² Therefore, the specific circumstances are irrelevant to the actor as he/she would try to play the game as good as possible in any arbitrary set of conditions. In other words, agents are automatically inclined to live out the objective social destiny that is set upon them by habitus.⁵³ This becomes problematic if the

automatic actions inscribed by habitus fail. The agent then needs to somehow adapt to the new conditions, which calls for the agent to reflect on their practices.

At the root of this problem is Bourdieu's underestimation of the reflexivity of agents.⁵⁴ As mentioned above, agents have a sense of the game. However, this knowledge of the game does not exist at a conscious cognitive level. Rather, it resides at a pre-reflective level of consciousness.⁵⁵ This leads to a lessened ability of agents to be reflexive about their surroundings, which further inhibits the ability for transformative behavior by agents. In later works, Bourdieu does introduce reflexivity in his framework. However, he introduces it to justify the reflexive capabilities of scientists, instead of inscribing it to all agents.⁵⁶ So, to improve the concept of habitus, Bourdieu needs to attribute the capacity of reflexivity in his framework to all agents as well.⁵⁷

The points above have shown the limited possibility of social change. However, there are also mechanisms that enable social change, as Faber points out.⁵⁸ In one of Bourdieu's later works, he argues that there is an ongoing competitive battle between the dominant and subordinate class, in which the subordinate class is objectively interested in changing this relation.⁵⁹ This means that there is a mechanism in the framework of habitus that would allow for changing objective

⁴⁹ Richard Jenkins. "Pierre Bourdieu and the Reproduction of Determinism." 274-275

⁵⁰ Paul DiMaggio, "On Pierre Bourdieu," *American Journal of Sociology* 84, no. 6 (1979): 1460-74. 1470

⁵¹ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 98-99; Paul DiMaggio, "On Pierre Bourdieu." 1470

⁵² Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 66-67

⁵³ Anthony King. "Thinking with Bourdieu against Bourdieu: A 'Practical' Critique of the Habitus." *Sociological Theory* 18, no. 3 (2000): 417-33. 423

⁵⁴ Yang. "Bourdieu, Practice and Change: Beyond the Criticism of Determinism." 1529

⁵⁵ Kontos, Pia C. "Habitus: An Incomplete Account of Human Agency." *American Journal of Semiotics* 22, no. 1 (2006): 9-85, 212. 3

⁵⁶ Yang. "Bourdieu, Practice and Change: Beyond the Criticism of Determinism." 1529

⁵⁷ Nick Crossley. "The Phenomenological Habitus and Its Construction." *Theory and Society* 30, no. 1. (2001). 93

⁵⁸ A. Faber. "From False Premises to False Conclusions. on Pierre Bourdieu's Alleged Sociological Determinism." 445

⁵⁹ Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction. A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press (1996). 132-135; A. Faber. "From False Premises to False Conclusions. on Pierre Bourdieu's Alleged Sociological Determinism." 445

structures. Even though it is unlikely to happen due to the, in relation, lower amount of capital of the subordinate class.

This would indeed allow for some form of social change. The people in the subordinate class are, in this view, doomed to an eternal struggle for power, while the dominant class is doomed to struggle for maintaining power. This does not eliminate the source of the problem, namely that habitus is the source of the actions of agents. In this view, the social conditions that agents want to achieve, inscribed in them by habitus, is dominance over the other class. This approach could be interpreted as more limiting because it further solidifies the trajectory of certain classes. Furthermore, in the framework presented in 'The Logic Of Practice' this mechanism would not be possible because of the legitimization of dominance through institutions and the lack of reflexive capabilities that prevent people from acknowledging the power relations, as was discussed above.⁶⁰ This means that the subordinate class does not struggle to gain the power of the dominant class, because it sees the relationship as legitimate. So, this addition from Bourdieu is a step in the right direction; however, in the framework presented in 'The Logic of Practice' this mechanism would not, or rarely, work.

Another mechanism for social change can be found in the ambivalence between the individual and class habitus. According to Bourdieu, the individual habitus is a derivative of the class habitus and should therefore reflect the class habitus.⁶¹ However, there can potentially be a mismatch between the habitus of the individual and the current objective social conditions.⁶² It could be possible that the habitus of the individual agent is too far ahead or too far behind the current class habitus.⁶³ For example, Mozart was ahead of his time by

becoming a freelance musician. As a result, he faced difficulties (he could not get commissions), but he did not fatalistically adapt to the current dominant habitus. Therefore, the class habitus is not necessarily the source of action, rather the individual habitus is the source.

There is merit to this argument because if the class habitus can be ignored and your own habitus can change, it could be questioned whether individual habitus is the *source* or a *result* of the class habitus. Still, the individual is the one taking action, and this is key to understand how the class habitus is constituted. The individual practices are what constitute the class habitus. It is also in the individual habitus, where the room for social change is situated. The individual practices are not merely an expression of the established social structures, rather the practices are an individualized and transformed version of the class practices. Habitus must therefore rather be seen as "a source of structured improvisation."⁶⁴ Habitus shapes and delineates action, but the individual practice is what constitutes and sustains habitus. Agents have the freedom to innovate and improvise and can transform habitus in that way. When new or different practices are acquired by the agents of the class, the class habitus is also transformed.

In conclusion, habitus limits social change in several ways. The reproduction of practices leads to a deterministic understanding of practice wherein the agents merely reproduce the practices inscribed by habitus. This is added upon by the misrecognition of class relations through institutional domination. Moreover, agents lack reflexive capacity to critically evaluate their habitus and objective conditions. These conditions lead to agents who are severely

⁶⁰ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 130

⁶¹ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 60

⁶² A. Faber. "From False Premises to False Conclusions. on Pierre Bourdieu's Alleged Sociological Determinism." 446-447

⁶³ A. Faber. "From False Premises to False Conclusions. on Pierre Bourdieu's Alleged Sociological Determinism." 446-447

⁶⁴ A. Faber. "From False Premises to False Conclusions. on Pierre Bourdieu's Alleged Sociological Determinism." 447

limited in their actions and opportunities to change. However, there are also several ways in which habitus can be adapted to create a better explanation of social change. Firstly, habitus needs to attribute more reflexive capabilities to agents. Even though class relations are hidden and legitimized, agents are capable of uncovering the hidden relations through critical evaluation. For example, when they are confronted with a situation where their usual practices are no longer effective. Secondly, there is an implicit possibility for social change already present in habitus. The class habitus is a result of the individual habitus of a social class. The individual habitus is shaped by the class habitus, but in the process the class habitus is transformed and individualized to create individual expressions that constitute. The individual habitus can therefore change the class habitus.

Implications for understanding social mobility and its uses for public policy

In this section, it will further elaborate how the limited possibility of social change in habitus leads to a limited possibility of social mobility. It will make explicit how the elements discussed in the previous chapter limit social mobility and to what extent social mobility is possible. Next, the empirical examples that exemplify how habitus can be used to understand and explain social mobility will be presented. Lastly, it will discuss how Bourdieu's framework can be used as a tool for public policies regarding social mobility.

Firstly, as was argued in the previous chapter, habitus reproduces actions based on the conditions of the field and is, therefore, unable to explain social change. Bourdieu's focus on stability led to a circular self-reinforcing framework. The objective social

conditions generate habitus, which generates actions, that in turn reproduce the objective social conditions.⁶⁵ Consequently, this excludes the possibility of social mobility as it inherently requires a change in the social conditions for the individual agent. This leads to a scheme in which the social position of the agent is constantly reproduced. Agents will stay within the same social class, as long as there is no change in the objective reality, and the objective conditions cannot be changed through individual action.

Secondly, agents are automatically inclined to act in accordance with the social field because of their feel for the game. This feel for the game is acquired in the form of habitus, which leads to agents that instinctively follow the rules of habitus without actively knowing that they are doing so.⁶⁶ Agents will follow the rules of the specific social class they are in. So, agents are automatically inclined, without actively knowing it, to reproduce the conditions of their social class and their position in that class.

Thirdly, in Bourdieu's framework agents have limited capacity to be reflexive of their actions. This means that agents only rarely acknowledge that their actions are a result of their embodied habitus.^{67,68} This further prevents the possibility of agents taking action that deviate from their habitus. It also prevents the agent to be critical about the objective reality, as they will take it for granted. Therefore, they will not question their position in the social hierarchy, which means that they will not take active deliberate action towards improving their social conditions.

Fourthly, the agent sees the existing class relations as legitimate. The class relations are legitimized through objective institutions, such as the educational system. Through this mechanism, the hierarchy between the dominant class and subordinate class is

⁶⁵ Richard Jenkins. "Pierre Bourdieu and the Reproduction of Determinism." 270

⁶⁶ Anthony King. "Thinking with Bourdieu against Bourdieu: A 'Practical' Critique of the Habitus." 423

⁶⁷ Yang. "Bourdieu, Practice and Change: Beyond the Criticism of Determinism." 1529

⁶⁸ Kontos, Pia C. "Habitus: An Incomplete Account of Human Agency." 3

misrecognized and legitimized.⁶⁹ This creates a situation in which the position of each social class is normalized. So, an agent cannot derive any motivation to move up on the social ladder through the recognition of dominance relations, because they perceive that relation to be legitimate.

These points show that social mobility in habitus is understood as a phenomenon that does not often occur. Habitus is adequate at explaining the consistency of practice and social conditions, but it does not suffice at explaining social change. Nevertheless, Bourdieu implicitly touches upon the mechanism of social change in two places.⁷⁰ Firstly, acquiring a new habitus is a slow process that is alike to a second birth.⁷¹ In this sense social mobility is possible, but it will be unlikely that the agent is successful in the field because acquiring the associated habitus is difficult. Secondly, in the difference between the individual habitus and the class habitus.⁷² It is the collection and repetition of individual practices in a group that constitutes and sustains a class habitus. The individual actions are shaped by the class habitus, but do not merely reproduce the class practices. The class practices are transformed and individualized to create something new. This means that agents are not stuck in their social class and can transform their habitus through practice. The individuals can thus change their habitus, meaning that they can experience social mobility.

Now that it is established that social mobility should only rarely occur in Bourdieu's theory, habitus will be applied to empirical examples. Firstly, the Kabyle will be revisited,

where Bourdieu has conducted much of his sociological research that formed the basis for his theory of practice.⁷³ The Kayble is an ethnic group in Algeria, that traditionally was a group of lower social standing in comparison to other regional ethnic groups. With the French colonization of Algeria, the objective conditions of all Algerians changed. The French colonials stigmatized rural communities and tried to create an Algerian national identity that was Arab rather than Kayble. The colonial government also required the population to work in a 'modern' way, which especially the rural, traditional, and tribal habitus of the Kayble was not equipped to.⁷⁴ Moreover, the French government opened up education for all inhabitants of Algeria. However, this education system was intentionally biased and reproduced the existing inequalities.⁷⁵

As a result, the existing social relations were reproduced and the Kayble were unable to move up the social hierarchy. The Kayble were unable to exchange their rural, traditional, and tribal habitus in favor of the Algerian 'modern' habitus. This happened because the relations of dominance were legitimized through several institutions by the French colonies, resulting in self-exclusion and self-imposed lessened ambition by the Kayble.⁷⁶ This reinforced their objective condition, which further reinforced the self-exclusion and lessened ambitions associated with their habitus. This is consistent with the notion that habitus will lead to a self-elimination of ambition and therefore inhibits social mobility.⁷⁷

Another case that can be compared to the Kayble of Algeria is the Haratine in the

⁶⁹ Richard Jenkins. "Pierre Bourdieu and the Reproduction of Determinism." 274-275

⁷⁰ A. Faber. "From False Premises to False Conclusions. on Pierre Bourdieu's Alleged Sociological Determinism." 437

⁷¹ Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 29

⁷² Pierre Bourdieu. *The Logic of Practice*. 60

⁷³ Craig Calhoun, "Pierre Bourdieu and Social Transformation: Lessons from Algeria."

Development and Change 37, no. 6 (2006): 1403–15. 1406

⁷⁴ Craig Calhoun, "Pierre Bourdieu and Social Transformation: Lessons from Algeria." 1405-1406

⁷⁵ Craig Calhoun, "Pierre Bourdieu and Social Transformation: Lessons from Algeria." 1408

⁷⁶ Craig Calhoun, "Pierre Bourdieu and Social Transformation: Lessons from Algeria." 1406

⁷⁷ Anthony King. "Thinking with Bourdieu against Bourdieu: A 'Practical' Critique of the Habitus." 430-431

south-Moroccan desert, but in this case social mobility did occur. The Haratine also faced changes in objective conditions due to the French colonization. The Haratine is also a traditional, rural, and tribal community, that was dominated by, in this case, the Berber nobility.⁷⁸ The colonization by France led to losing some degree of self-governance for the Haratine; however, they were now able to move freely around the country.⁷⁹ This allowed them to seek employment in other places and send back remittances. After acquiring independence from France, the market to procure land was now accessible for groups other than the Berber nobility.⁸⁰ This allowed the Haratine to buy land from the remittances they received. Thereby, further reducing Berber domination, who traditionally owned the land. This has led to an increase in the financial and social mobility of Haratine households.⁸¹ And ultimately to a higher social standing of the Haratine minority in the region.

In this case, the habitus of the Haratine did adapt to the changing objective conditions, despite their tribal and community focused habitus. The struggle against Berber domination forced them to take the opportunities that could free them from domination. Because this opportunity was presented to them in the form of land acquisition, their habitus was reworked to a system in which honor and recognition is based upon land ownership.⁸² However, a large part of the Haratine habitus remained the same. So, in this case, there is social change and social

mobility. It seems that at the root of the change in habitus is a change in objective conditions.

These are two cases from less developed nations that both experienced changes in objective conditions. Next, I will discuss the case of college students in the United States of America. Non-elite college students in the USA experience pressure to conform to the dominant elite culture. They experience a clash between their habitus and that of the elite, which poses difficulties with 'fitting in'. Therefore, the students copy rituals and dispositions of the elite to fit in, which leads to a nonintentional internalization of the elite habitus.⁸³ This process is felt as a painful dislocation between the perceived superior elite habitus and the perceived inferior original habitus.⁸⁴ The individuals perhaps still identify with the habitus of their original community, but their dispositions have changed. The social mobility has thus caused a 'cleft habitus' (or habitus clivé) in which the individual has embodied a hybrid habitus, that belongs to multiple habitus at once but to none fully.⁸⁵

Bourdieu himself is a good example to further explore what a cleft habitus entails. Bourdieu has experienced long-range upwards social mobility. Originally, he was from a small rural village raised by uneducated parents and went on to become a prominent figure in French academia. However, the social mobility of Bourdieu came at a cost. Just like the college students, Bourdieu felt torn by contradictions and internal division because of the conflict between his original and current habitus.⁸⁶

⁷⁸ Hsain Ilahiane, "The Social Mobility of the Haratine and the Re-Working of Bourdieu's Habitus on the Sahara." *American Anthropologist* 103, no. 2 (2001). 382-383

⁷⁹ Hsain Ilahiane, "The Social Mobility of the Haratine and the Re-Working of Bourdieu's Habitus on the Sahara." 386

⁸⁰ Hsain Ilahiane, "The Social Mobility of the Haratine and the Re-Working of Bourdieu's Habitus on the Sahara." 386

⁸¹ Hsain Ilahiane, "The Social Mobility of the Haratine and the Re-Working of Bourdieu's Habitus on the Sahara." 386

⁸² Hsain Ilahiane, "The Social Mobility of the Haratine and the Re-Working of Bourdieu's Habitus on the Sahara." 392

⁸³ Elizabeth Lee and Rory Kramer. "Out with the Old, in with the New? Habitus and Social Mobility at Selective Colleges." 20-21

⁸⁴ Elizabeth Lee and Rory Kramer. "Out with the Old, in with the New? Habitus and Social Mobility at Selective Colleges." 20-21

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Lee and Rory Kramer. "Out with the Old, in with the New? Habitus and Social Mobility at Selective Colleges." 21

⁸⁶ Sam Friedman, "Habitus Clivé and the Emotional Imprint of Social Mobility." 129

Recognizing that it is because of conflicting habitus, Bourdieu even diagnosed himself with a cleft habitus. Empirical research shows that the majority of the people that experience long-range social mobility have some degree of a cleft habitus.⁸⁷ However, the extent of the emotional imprint of social mobility is dependent on the range, speed, and direction of movement. A quick, bumpy, and long-range upwards trajectory has led to a cleft habitus for most people. On the contrary, a slow, short movement towards the new habitus is less likely to leave the individual with a cleft habitus.⁸⁸ Social mobility thus comes with a profound hidden psychological imprint. This requires individuals that experience social mobility to exert significant mental work to cope with the difficult emotions associated with social mobility.⁸⁹

Although social mobility is an explicit policy goal in European countries such as the UK and an implicit goal in other countries such as the Netherlands, the complexities of social mobility are sometimes overlooked by policymakers.⁹⁰ Habitus can be used as an effective tool to design and evaluate social mobility policies, despite its philosophical imperfections. Through the framework of habitus, it is possible to better understand the impact of social mobility. Such as the psychological impact of a cleft habitus. Consequently, it allows policymakers to evaluate whether social mobility is beneficial and should remain a policy goal. That is because the emotional and psychological costs may outweigh the economic benefits of social mobility.⁹¹ Furthermore, it can be used to create more fitting policies for immigrants,

who often experience short-term long-range mobility and have a different habitus than the dominant class.⁹² Policies can also be created to encourage social mobility for immigrants without forcing cultural assimilation, which could otherwise result in a habitus clivé.

In conclusion, in the philosophical framework presented by Bourdieu, it is not specified how social mobility concretely takes place. The reproduction of structure, the embodiment of habitus, the lack of agent reflexivity, and legitimization of domination through institutions make social mobility an exception to the rule. However, in reality, social mobility is observed more often. From empirical evidence, it seems that habitus generally favors a stable situation, like in the case of the Kayble. Social mobility becomes possible either through an inherent class struggle, public policies, or changing objective conditions. If the social mobility is short-range and slow, social mobility can go along rather unproblematic. This is illustrated in the case of the Haratine in which the process is stretched over a long time period. In that specific case, the habitus of the group as a whole changed and the group had little interaction with people with another habitus because of their isolated villages. On the other hand, Long-range social mobility and interaction with other habitus can lead to a habitus clivé. Like in the case of the college students and Bourdieu. This shows how stubborn habitus is and how difficult it is for people to switch social fields. The awareness of this function of habitus can be used to frame issues in public policy surrounding social

⁸⁷ Sam Friedman, "Habitus Clivé and the Emotional Imprint of Social Mobility." 144

⁸⁸ Sam Friedman, "Habitus Clivé and the Emotional Imprint of Social Mobility." 144

⁸⁹ Sam Friedman, "Habitus Clivé and the Emotional Imprint of Social Mobility." 145

⁹⁰ Sam Friedman, "Habitus Clivé and the Emotional Imprint of Social Mobility." 129; Rik Peeters.

"Sociale Stijging: Een Onuitgesproken Beleidsthema."; Friedman, Sam, Daniel Laurison, and Andrew Miles. "Breaking the 'Class' Ceiling?

Social Mobility into Britain's Elite Occupations." *The Sociological Review* 63, no. 2 (2015): 259–89. 282-284

⁹¹ Sam Friedman, "Habitus Clivé and the Emotional Imprint of Social Mobility." 145

⁹² Marguerite van den Berg, "Subjective Social Mobility: Definitions and Expectations of 'Moving Up' of Poor Moroccan Women in the Netherlands." *International Sociology* 26, no. 4 (2011): 503–23. 135-136

mobility and immigration to create effective solutions.

Conclusion and recommendations

In this paper, I argued that habitus and the surrounding theory of practice, as presented in 'The Logic of Practice', has an understanding of practice that limits social change and therefore limits social mobility.

Social change is limited in Bourdieu's framework. Firstly, because of the reproduction of practice. The objective conditions determine habitus, which determines actions, which reproduces the objective conditions. Secondly, because of the misrecognizing and legitimization of class relations agents are unable to see the true objective conditions and will see the misrecognized conditions as legitimate. Thirdly, agents do not normally reflect on their daily behavior as long as these practices keep fitting the field. Consequently, agents rarely critically evaluate their actions and the objective reality they are situated in. However, when an agent enters a different field, and their previous practices no longer work, they have to engage in critical reflection.

The characteristics that enable social change are only implicitly mentioned by Bourdieu. This possibility lies in the distinction between individual and class habitus. The individual habitus is shaped by the class habitus, but it is individual practice that constitutes, sustains, and transforms the class habitus. Through changing individual practices, social change can be possible.

As a result of the above mentioned, is a theory in which social mobility only rarely occurs. The reproduction of objective conditions through habitus favors stability and consistency. So, the objective position of a person on the social ladder remains the same. The lack of reflexive capabilities means that agents are unlikely to question their social position and therefore rarely think that their position needs to change. This is further

solidified by the legitimization of the class relations through institutions. As a result, the underprivileged class will see their situation as legitimate and will lower their ambitions regarding social mobility.

Through an analysis of empirical research on social mobility, four findings were gathered. Firstly, habitus favors a stable position. Habitus inclines agents to stay within their social class. Secondly, when objective conditions change due to external influences, the opportunities and likeliness of social mobility increases. Thirdly, social mobility is also possible due to the actions of the individual. For example, when a person chooses to attend college instead of looking for employment. People are thus able to reflect on their habitus and actions. Fourthly, when people experience social mobility it can lead to a cleft habitus. This is a situation in which the person is divided between several habitus at once and has psychological difficulties dealing with the situation. The severity of this cleft depends on the range and speed of their mobility. Quicker and longer-range mobility seems to create more significant psychological impact.

From these findings, I conclude that the interaction with, what Bourdieu calls 'the field', is an important aspect in explaining change and thus social mobility. It is the relation with the events in the world that can drive change in the habitus of people and open up opportunities for social mobility. I also conclude that reflexivity and individual practices are important for explaining social mobility in the framework of habitus. The individual practices are an important part of understanding how habitus comes to exist and how it can change. It is the individual practice that, through repetition and creation, creates a class habitus.

Lastly, I will present my recommendations on how habitus can be used for public policies regarding social mobility. Habitus can be used to understand the difficulties people face who move between habitus and it can help explain why social

mobility is not always successful. Specifically, habitus can be used to understand why people who experience social mobility have trouble adapting to their new environment. Especially the notion of a habitus clivé can be useful in this regard. Habitus can also be used to understand why people, who have seemingly adapted to their new environment, are still not successful. Even if they are adapted to the environment, the others might still see them as outsiders. This can lead to a lower income compared to the original 'natives' in similar positions, which can be regarded as unsuccessful social mobility. This is especially useful for policies regarding immigration and upwards social mobility because these groups often deal with quick long-range social mobility.

With the added understanding of habitus, the (implicit) policy goal of social mobility can be re-evaluated. It can be questioned whether social mobility should always be strived for. The psychological distress and unsuccessfulness of adapting to the new environment could outweigh the benefits of social mobility for the individual. Nevertheless, I recommend that social mobility should remain a policy goal because of its significant positive effects on societies, such as decreased wage gap, which has further positive effects. New policies should, therefore, focus on decreasing the negative psychological effects of a cleft habitus. The socially mobile should have access to counseling and support groups. Moreover, the class that 'receives' the socially mobile should be informed of the difficulties of social mobility, to make them more accepting and welcoming. Concerning immigrants, I recommend focusing on the integration of the second and third generations of immigrants. They can more easily adapt to the new habitus as they have lived there from birth, in comparison to the first generation. With habitus, more adequate policies can be created that takes the difficulty of moving between social classes into account.

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