

**Gender *Habitus*: tensioning the concept of *habitus* in  
Bourdieu<sup>1 2 3 4</sup>**

***Habitus de gênero: tensionamentos ao conceito de *habitus* em  
Bourdieu***

***Habitus de género: tensar el concepto de *habitus* en Bourdieu***

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**Abstract**

Bourdieu's notion of habitus is considered an important conceptual tool that helps to understand the dynamics of social relations mediated by external and subjective social conditioning. The article aims to discuss Bourdieu's concept of habitus in order to present the concept of "gender habitus" as a way to problematize the understanding of social/educational relations. We present a bibliographic review of part of the feminist literature to articulate Bourdieu's thought with the concept of gender habitus and reaffirm the richness of Bourdieu's sociology for the educational field. The field of education has a gender habitus that moves with the capacity to (re)produce practices, which can cause micro-dislocations or transform socially-established power relations.

**Keywords:** Genre, Habitus, Gender habitus

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## **Resumo**

*A noção de habitus de Bourdieu é considerada um importante instrumento conceitual que auxilia compreender a dinâmica das relações sociais, mediadas pelos condicionamentos sociais exteriores e subjetivos. O artigo objetiva tensionar o conceito de habitus de Bourdieu, de forma a apresentar o conceito de "habitus de gênero" como um recorte que problematiza o entendimento das relações sociais/educacionais. Apresenta-se uma revisão bibliográfica de parte da literatura feminista para articular o pensamento de Bourdieu com o conceito de habitus de gênero e reafirma-se a fecundidade da Sociologia do autor para o campo educacional. O campo da educação tem um habitus de gênero que se movimenta com capacidade de (re)produzir práticas, que podem provocar microdeslocamentos ou transformar as relações de poder socialmente constituídas.*

**Palavras-chave:** Gênero, Habitus, Habitus de gênero

## **Resumen**

*La noción de habitus de Bourdieu se considera una importante herramienta conceptual que ayuda a comprender la dinámica de las relaciones sociales mediadas por condicionamientos sociales externos y subjetivos. El artículo pretende tensionar el concepto de habitus de Bourdieu para presentar el concepto de "habitus de género" como un recorte que problematiza la comprensión de las relaciones sociales/educativas. Presentamos una revisión bibliográfica de parte de la literatura feminista para articular el pensamiento de Bourdieu con el concepto de habitus de género y reafirmar la fecundidad de la sociología del autor para el ámbito educativo. El campo de la educación tiene un habitus de género que se mueve con la capacidad de (re)producir prácticas, que pueden causar microdesplazamientos o transformar las relaciones de poder socialmente constituídas.*

**Palabras clave:** Género, Habitus, Habitus de género

## **1. Introduction**

The Bourdiesian notion of *habitus* has been considered an important conceptual instrument that helps us to understand the dynamic of social relations, mediated by exterior social conditionings and the subjective of the subjects (Adkins, 2003; Almeida, 1997; McLeod, 2005; McNay, 1999; Neves, 2013; Ramires Neto, 2006; Setton, 2002; Setton & Vianna, 2014). This text aims to dialogue with the bibliography developed in the field of human sciences to articulate the concept of genre with the notions of *habitus*, field, and symbolic power, created by Pierre Bourdieu.

The increase of the debate around gender relations and the understanding of gender as a category of analysis of reality (Scott, 1995) has given human sciences a deeper look at human relations and actions. Understanding the possible intercrossing of gender in the dispositions that characterize the human being as a social being— *habitus* — is an important theoretical-methodological contribution to the educational field.

In this sense, the aim of this article to tense the concept of *habitus* of Pierre Bourdieu, from the concept of genre, to present the concept of “habitus of genre” as a perspective that problematizes and deepens the understanding of current social relations. To do so, we are grounded on the theories of the sociology of action and gender and feminist studies.

This article is organized in three sections, besides this introduction and final remarks. In the first section we present the analyses of an inevitable tension that translates into the rupture of dualities in *habitus*. In the second part, we approximate Bourdieu’s perspective to education and deal with possible “leaks” in the relation between field and *habitus*. In the third, based on feminist studies about Bourdieu’s theory, we tense his work regarding the articulation structure *versus* interaction, as this articulation rarely considers a gender analysis. Thus, from Bourdieusian arguments, we invoke the generation of *habitus* and specific gender disposition, which can transform the studies of the current social reality

## **2. Bourdieu and the rupture of dualities between objectivity and subjectivity**

Modernity, normally characterized by a paradigm change, implied the rupture of scholastic thought, the establishment of reason as an autonomous way to construct knowledge, and the consequent dichotomization of the relation subject-object in the epistemological field. These changes are mainly crucial to conduct studies in social sciences and education (Bourdieu, 2005; Chauí, 2003; Touraine, 1994).

The problem of the dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity in the process of building knowledge and human action was a great concern of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu (2005) conducted a robust analysis of the dilemma objectivism-subjectivism, aiming to transcend this dichotomy represented respectively by structuralist and existentialist theories, which are deeply

rooted in the ways of thinking in the modern world. For example, in the research about Algeria (1958), Bourdieu understood that there should be a reconciliation between these two traditions of modern thought, so he analyzed the structures as symbolic systems to discover the logic of the practice. Hence, he tried to develop a theoretical approach to explain the hybrid activity of social practice.

Bourdieu also developed his debate through the Weberian theory, pointing out what he believed to be a paradox in Weber. To Bourdieu (2005), there is an acclamation of the charismatic ideal type created by Weber which understands the charismatic leader as “the specifically creative revolutionary force of history” (p. 79), aiming to establish a relation between agents’ intentions and the historic meaning of their actions, an effort to seek the historic effectiveness of religious beliefs against the more reductionist expressions of Marxist theory.

Answering this paradox, Bourdieu (2005) highlights what was not, in his opinion, and object of analysis for both Weber and Marx- the religious work. To Weber, the religious work is done by agents and spokespeople, invested with the power (institutional or not) to answer, through a certain type of practices and discourses, a particular category of needs of specific social groups.

However, in Bourdieu’s (2005) perspective, Weber would have problems to define the ‘protagonists’ of the religious action: the prophet, the magician, and the priest. To Bourdieu (2005), this difficulty would arise from his concept of “ideal type” which uses universal, but poor, definition. Thus, he proposes a double rupture: the first with Max Weber’s methodology on representation, called interactionist by Bourdieu (2005), because *habitus* are shaped by the interactions within the relations of those religious agents. Bourdieu seeks explanations through similarities in *habitus* and not the other way around. The second rupture suggested by him would be to subordinate the analysis of the logic of interactions (which can be established between directly confronted agents) and, particularly, the strategies that oppose them to the construction of a structure of objective relationships (positions they occupy in the religious field). This relation with the structure determines the shape of their interactions and their possible representations. Aiming to carry author this rupture, the author (2005) uses the notion of the

social field. To him, the concept of the social field<sup>5</sup> aims to overcome the Weberian concept of charisma, which he considers subjective.

To the author (2005), breaking away with this definition, grounded on recognition, means to understand the prophet not as “an isolated individual, deprived of any bond, except himself” (p. 93). He reinforces the need to understand him “as an individual in relation to collective representations (feelings, appropriations) that have existed before him, though in an implicit, semi, or unconscious way” (p.93). The author continues his thought, saying that one should not oppose individual creation and collective habit. One should not confuse collective organic causes with the actions of individuals who are more interpreters than creators. This breaks away with the representation of charisma as a property connected to the nature of a singular individual, thus, subjective.

Therefore, the theory of practice characterizes Bourdieu’s studies that aimed to see an “ontological complicity” between objective and internal structures (Grenfell, 2018). The base of Bourdieu’s science is to identify the connection of the individual with the material and the social world, in which it is “possible to analyze how the same structural relations are enacted in the social sphere and in the individual through the study of the structures of organization, thought, and practice” (Grenfell, 2018, p. 71). Bourdieu (1990) questions “how behaviors can be regulated without being the result of the obedience to rules?” (p. 83). Thus, the notion of *habitus* tries to understand social practice.

### **3. The *habitus* and the field: on the reproduction bias and permanence to the possibility of discontinuity, leaking, and rupture**

As an intellectual field is established<sup>6</sup>, the responsibilities of each group tend to gradually become a unifying and creative principle (and, therefore, explanatory) of the different cultural

<sup>5</sup> Connected to the concepts of *habitus*, position, and social capital.

<sup>6</sup> The intellectual and artistic life gains (relative) economic and social autonomy from the protection of the aristocracy and the Church, as well as their ethical and aesthetical demands, by the following reasons: 1) a formation of a consuming public that, besides providing financial autonomy, granted artists and intellectuals legitimacy; 2) the professionalization of symbolic goods; and 3) the diversification of consecration instances, competing for cultural legitimation, such as the academy and the salons (Bourdieu, 2005).

position-taking and the principle of its transformation during the time, depending on their position in the relatively autonomous system of intellectual production relations.

This field will tend to consider only the rules established by the tradition of its predecessors, which give it a starting or a rupture point: to free its products of any social dependence, be them moral censorships and aesthetical programs, the academic controls and the demands of government. This tendency accelerated with the industrial revolution and, with the romantic reaction, developed a cultural industry (series production of works, novellas, melodramas, etc.), which coincided with the generalization of regular education in developed countries.

Bourdieu (2005) affirms that every pedagogical action is defined as an act of imposition of a cultural arbitrary which dissimulates itself as such and hides the arbitrary it inculcates. Inevitably, the educational system plays the role of cultural legitimation<sup>7</sup>. This takes place when transforming into legitimate culture, exclusively through a dissimulation effect, the cultural arbitrary which a social formation has by simply existing. More precisely, it also reproduces what deserves to be transmitted and acquire, and what should not.

According to its own historical traditions, each social formation and their roles of reproduction and legitimation can be concentrated in one single institution or divided through different ones, such as the educational system, academia, and official and semi-official bodies of dissemination, such as museums, theater, and concert halls. They can also use less recognized instances but that express more directly the claims of cultural producers, such as magazines and galleries.

The author (2005) talks about a “process of canonization” that is “assembled by these instances before its consecration. [Such process] will depend directly on to what extent is authority is recognized and able to impose itself in a lasting way” (pp. 121-122).

Hence, the slow pace of evolution, parallel to a strong structural inertia, is a characteristic of the educational system – which can affect and structure its relations with the other instances

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<sup>7</sup> Weber inspires Bourdieu on the notion of legitimation. The system of instances of cultural conservation and cultural, invested by its delegated power to defend the sphere of legitimate culture against competing messages, fulfils, within the system of production and circulation of symbolic goods, a similar role as the Church. To Weber, the Church should have the role of systematically found and delineate a new victorious doctrine or, on the other side, defend the old doctrine against the “prophetic attacks” and establish what should and should not be a sacred value. Finally, it should inculcate all this in the faith of laic people (Bourdieu, 2005).

of symbolic goods production and circulation. This slowness<sup>8</sup> and inertia characterize the institution of cultural conservation and teachers are agents involved in this “slow action” regarding possible ruptures (Bourdieu et al. 2004).

Therefore, there is a time gap between intellectual production and school consecration – between school, their agents, and living art. This is an opposition between the field of erudite production and the system of instances responsible to disseminate, conserve, and consecrate a certain type of cultural good and, at the same time, incessantly produce new producers and consumers endowed with a lasting disposition, so that they can symbolically appropriate these goods.

Another opposition is that, as the field of erudite production increases its autonomy, the producers tend to conceive as “intellectuals of divine right”. Thus, they become “creators” and demand a place of authority by their charisma (such as Weber’s prophets) and almost always forge themselves as small churches or sects, as they exclusively recognize the authority of the peer group; reducing it even the scientific activities.

Such resistance (opposition) is even greater when the educational agents are perceived as mere *readers* that comment and expose the works produced by others. On the other hand, there is an ambivalent relation between producers and school authority, the latter will grant them recognition, that is, the same authority contested by practices and professional ideology.

These instances are much more equipped to seem founded in a principle of proper cultural legitimacy in opposition to the mismanagement of econômico político ou religioso, or religious, as they act covering the latter. The action of the social mechanisms tends to secure a type of pre-established harmony between positions and occupants, such as readers’ modesty, and the creative invention of the author. Here, we have a social division of symbolic work.

Starting from this idea, Bourdieu (2005) highlights that one of the ideological effects produced by the educational system, more paradoxical and determinant, lies in the fact that each system can obtain from those entrusted (i.e., almost all individuals, as schooling is obligatory)

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<sup>8</sup> Perhaps this perception of slowness, which characterizes a supremacy of the structure over the subject, is also one of the facts that position Bourdieu among the structuralist. However, we should highlight that he does not deny the change provoked by the agents’ action.

with the recognition of the cultural law objectively implied in the ignorance of the arbitrary<sup>9</sup> of this law, including teachers.

However, in Bourdieu's (2005) understanding, would there be a way out for the cultural arbitrary? The excerpt below gives us the impression that the author presupposes the possibility of people creating "leaks" in this dissimulated cultural arbitrary:

cultural law cannot determine the practices, it can only present exceptions, it can even not be felt or recognized, *especially in cases where it is transgressed*, for example, the law which cultural conducts obey when they are or intend to be legitimate, or even, as in the case of non-written code that allows, among other things, to judge and classify any possible conduct from the perspective of its conformity to such code [our highlight]. (Bourdieu, 2005, p.135)

Likewise, the transgression of the cultural arbitrary appears in the example presented by Bourdieu (2005) when the thief that recognizing the legitimacy of the law hides himself to steal. In the case of school and the action towards the discussion of gender, we can think about the actions of resistance against sexism produced by students and teachers as transgressions to the cultural arbitrary, which legitimizes oppression and secular domination against women, as well as their expression through the binary opposition built between masculine and feminine.

About the subjects' positions and position-taking by the subjects, Bourdieu (2005) tells us that the practices of different agents in the cultural field depend directly on their position within the system of production and circulation of symbolic goods and, simultaneously, their opposition in the properly cultural hierarchy of the consecration degrees. Regardless of consciences and wills, this position imposes itself, making its own ideology<sup>10</sup>, and engendering position-taking, even when the agents want to challenge or transgress the established order.

There is no position in the system of production and circulation of symbolic goods (and, in general, in social structure) that does not involve a given type of position-taking and that does not exclude a whole repertoire of position-taking or, if inevitable, become the object of prohibitions or explicit prescriptions. The law that guides the relation between objective

<sup>9</sup> Here, Bourdieu's (2005) base is on the notion of cultural arbitrary that, starting from an anthropological concept of culture, understand that no culture can be objectively defined as superior to another. In this perspective, the values that guide the attitudes and behaviors of different groups would be arbitrary, because they are not grounded in any objective or universal reason. Nevertheless, these values, though arbitrary to the culture of each group, "would be experienced as the only possible ones or, at least, the only legitimate ones" (Cavalcanti, 2014, p. 2).

<sup>10</sup> The theory of symbolic violence and unfamiliarity in Bourdieu leads to what we think establishes his notion of ideology.



structures in the field (particularly, the objective hierarchy of consecration degrees) and the practices through *habitus*<sup>11</sup> – a generative principle of unconscious or partially controlled strategies to guarantee the adjustment to the structures from which they result – are only a particular case of a law that defines the relations between structures, *habitus*, and practice, according to which the subjective aspirations tend to adjust itself to objective opportunities.

To Bourdieu (2005), the more unconscious dispositions, as those resulting from the internalization of a primary *habitus* of class, established themselves through the internalization of a objectively selected system of signs, indexes, and sanctions, which is no more than the materialization in objects, words, and behaviors, of a particular objective system of structures. From Bourdieu's idea of class, we can infer that this also takes place regarding the internalization of gender.

Summing up, according to Bourdieu (2005), the most personal judgments (in the case of our study, gender relations, the public policies of gender, and the feminization of teacher work) are collective judgment. They are position-taking (direct and conscious, as well as indirect and unconscious) through the mediation of objective relations between the positions of the authors in the field. Judgments are simultaneously determined and determinant, through objective sanctions imposed by the market of symbolic goods to the agents' "aspirations" and "ambitions". In particular, they are also imposed by the degree of recognition and consecration that the market grants them, facing them with the full structure of the field that interposes the agents and their past and future actions, imposing on them the delimitations of the field of ambitions experienced as legitimate or illegitimate, whose probability of enactment is objectively inscribed in their position, or excluded from them.

Thus, the position occupied by teachers in the educational field and how they occupy it, depend on their trajectory, i.e., their initial position, their family, which is also defined by a certain trajectory. These are the conditions to detect everything that is fictional in this issue. The most important social factors to determine the working laws of an educational field are structural ones, such as the hierarchical position of careers and the position of different agents in the hierarchic of each of these careers. These positions are lived as if they were inspired by the "vocation" or determined by the logic of an intellectual itinerary. However, these are

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<sup>11</sup> *Habitus* is an open structure because it can engender unconscious or semiconscious strategies that can be produced to answer a structured situation, according to the constitutive schemes of *habitus*. For the author, the agents can use unconscious strategies engendered by *habitus*.

conversions aimed to guarantee the best economic or symbolic performance of a certain type of cultural capital.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, for a solid and internal analysis of the structure of symbolic relation systems, we need to subordinate it to a sociological analysis of the structure of the social relations systems of production, circulation, and symbolic consumption, in which these relations are engendered and the social roles played in a given moment are defined.

According to Bourdieu (2005), to understand the agent in the educational field, first we need to situate the *corpus* established within its ideological field and determine the relations between this *corpus* position in the intellectual field produced by the group of agents. In other words, to Bourdieu, social order is also an order of the bodies. Hence, we should consider the the principle of the social knowledge theory, according to which the objective conditions determine practices and limits, even Assim, cabe considerar o princípio da teoria do conhecimento social, segundo o qual as condições objetivas determinam as práticas e os limites mesmo da experiência que o indivíduo pode ter de suas práticas e das condições que as determinam. In this perspective, the class condition does not determine the individual, but the agents determine themselves from their partial or total awareness of the objective truth of their class (and, why not gender?)

Making an analogy of how Bourdieu (2005) analyzes the agent “writer”, we should not question how the teacher became as she is, but how different categories of teachers situated in a certain time and society should be from the perspective of socially built *habitus*. We should analyze how was it possible for them to occupy the positions offered by a specific state of the educational and intellectual field and, at the same time, to adopt the aesthetic and ideological position-taking objectively connected to these positions.

To Bourdieu (2005), the unifying and generative principal of all practices and, mainly, the common guidelines described as “choices” of “vocation” and, often, considered as effects of “awareness”, are simply the *habitus*. The *habitus*, taken as a system of unconscious dispositions that constitutes the product of internalization of the objective structures and the geometric place of objective determinants and a determination, of an objective future and subjective hopes,

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<sup>12</sup> Bourdieu’s notion of “cultural capital” is based on the perspective that culture itself does not bring elements that makes it superior or inferior but it is considered as such by the action of dominant groups.

tends (therefore, a tendency and not a determination) to produce practices and, through it, careers objectively adjusted of objective structures.

The educational field, to Bourdieu (2005), is basically a space of strategy games in which relations between participants are established, which he calls agents. These established reflections are related to struggles, to conflicts of interest. Each agent participating in this field of strategies does it from a position within this field, from where they can fight, create, and recreate. They are not static subjects because, in this field, there is a margin of maneuver. The agents (of different classes, genders, races/ethnicities, submitted to several types of inequalities) positioned in this field fight for a symbolical capital. Thus, they make alliances, build strategies, create, and disrupt seeking the symbolic capital that can grant them legitimacy, prestige, and authority. Different and diverse fields are created, each with their institutions and specific rules.

*Habitus* is a central concept in Bourdieu's theory of the social field. It helps us to understand how agents move within a field, i.e., how they manipulate it. Thus, *habitus* is an element that connected the subjective and the objective world. It is a way of acting and thinking based on the agent's position in the field. This concept encompasses the margins of maneuver, because agents learn the institutional rules, that is, what is expected from them. The agents internalize the specific agendas and rules of the institutions given by objective conditions, they are not static pieces in the process. The agents also learn how to move depending on what is expected from them, including in the pre-established gender relations, behaviors, attitude, and the ways of act in the profession.

This field has pre-determined positions, even when it comes to gender, and the subjective refers to how agents think, feel, and act within this field. This action is explained by the concept of *habitus*, which aims to apprehend the relations of affinity between the behaviors of positioned agents and the social structures and conditioners. To Bourdieu (2002, p. 83), "*habitus* is an operator, a matrix of perception and not an identity or a fixed subjectivity". This concept refers to the dispositions incorporated by these agents during their socialization process, integrating past experiences. These dispositions offer us the necessary schemes for our perceptions, appreciations, and actions, that is, our everyday life interventions. As a product of history, it is an open system of dispositions, permanently confronted by new experiences and affected by them. According to Bourdieu (2002), the *habitus* is durable because it expresses a

practical faith, that is, a belief in the rules of the field it is immersed, thus, inclining agents to act following these rules. However, the *habitus* can change.

From all this, we believe that Bourdieu (2005) proposes an important methodological inversion that helps the analysis we propose. Such inversion carries three intertwined moments. First, an analysis of the position of intellectuals in the structure of the ruling class (or regarding this structure when they are not part of it neither by their origins nor their condition). Second, an analysis of the structures of objective relations between the positions that the groups competing for intellectual legitimacy occupy at a certain time in the structure of the intellectual field. Third, the construction of habitus as a system of socially constructed dispositions that, as structured and structuring structures, are the generating and unifying principle of the ensemble of practices and ideologies typical of a group of agents. Such practices and ideologies could update themselves on more or less favorable occasions, which can allow them a certain position and trajectory within an intellectual field that, in its turn, occupies an established position in the structure of the ruling class.

Summing up, Bourdieu (1996, 2005), sees human action as praxis but deepens his analysis by perceiving what is possible in this action: pointing out the bias of reproduction and permanence, as well as the possibility of discontinuity and rupture, when he announces the idea of social field, cultural capital, and *habitus*. The author makes a theoretical effort to understand the educational field and how education agents move and position in this field. Therefore, to establish a relation between agents' intentions and the historical senses of their actions, he uses, from a criticism to Weber, the idea of social field and *habitus* as important elements to solve the dichotomous relation between objectivity and subjectivity.

To Bourdieu (1996, 2005), depending on the volume of a certain capital, the agents determine the structure of the field proportionally to their power and those of other agents, that is, the space itself. Therefore, they depend on the volume and the structure of efficient capital within the field at stake. Thus, Bourdieu created an interdependence between the agents and between the agents and the field. In this sense, it is as if agents' praxis was also characterized by the agents' range of capital in relation to the field and the space.

However, to some authors, Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* can be controversial. For instance, the work of Lahire (2002) dialogues with Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, reflecting on

its limits, mainly its ability to apprehend all social practices, pointing out what he calls abusive generalizations.

Lahire (2002) proposes a more attentive look at the diversity of experiences in the process of socialization, the plural and even contradictory character of dispositions, and the multiple action contexts to which the same agent is submitted. The socialization experiences, for example, can be more or less precocious, systematic, intense, and coherent among each other. The plural and contradictory character of dispositions would lie in the fact that they can be more or less strong, stable, and transferable. The contexts of actions would be multiple because they cannot always be described as a field. Hence, to Lahire, the agent would be socialized by a plurality of heterogeneous worlds and, sometimes, contradictory, and not by a unique generative form, as he believes is Bourdieu's proposal.

Lahire's (2002) argument is that Bourdieu, following a premise of general sociology, tends to invoke abstractly the process of incorporation of past experiences by the actors and propose the use of these experiences in practical situations of actions. According to Lahire (2002), on one hand, there is the need for a more detailed and empirical analysis of the complexity of socialization processes, through which, on one hand, dispositions are incorporated. On the other hand, the analysis of action contexts, from which part of the behaviors, practices, and past representations are incorporated and reactivated.

Marangon (2003) considers that Lahire ends up in the same reductionism criticized by Bourdieu, suggesting to contrapose "the plurality to the unicity of the actor and the homogeneity of the social world" (p. 412). This is because the complex experiences of actors' socialization are, at the same time, homogeneous and heterogeneous. Therefore, unicity and plurality articulate in human formation.

Lahire (2002) calls attention to the importance of researchers to directly and empirically investigate the dispositions of culture to identify and interpret the behaviors, practices, and representations, which would show the strategies and principles that create the different incorporations, be they ethical or aesthetical.

Despite the controversies presented by Lahire (2002), the strength of the notion of *habitus* is the proposal of a conceptual instrument (Setton, 2002) that allows us to think more deeply about the dynamics of social relations, which are processed between practices, structure

and symbolic conditions of life. In this dynamic, we can glimpse possibilities and forms of fabrication and leaks between objective and subjective structures.

Some scholars of gender (Almeida, 1997; McCall, 1992; McLeod, 2005; McNay, 1999; Ramires Neto, 2006) have been making an effort to tense the notion of *habitus*, considering it as an interesting instrument of analysis for gender studies, provoking and operating a gender perspective in the notion of *habitus* – what has been called *habitus* of gender.

## 4 Tensing the *habitus* through genre

Pierre Bourdieu was heavily criticized by feminists, which believe he was not influenced enough by gender discussions. Among other criticisms,<sup>13</sup> for a long time, Bourdieu took sexual roles as static, seeing them as a demographic variable. Only after the emergence of an awareness and the feminist movement, mainly with the publication of his work *Masculine Domination*, he started to evoke the idea of “sexual classes” and uses the notion of hierarchic between classes and genders in the shape of Marxist analysis of class, i.e., sex would be a secondary character compared to class, because sex would be less “social” than class (Devreux, 2014).

According to Devreux (2014), in *Masculine Domination* Bourdieu designed his conception “completely ignoring the works of sociologists and ethnologists, feminists or not, who dealt with the issue of women and gender” (p. 85). However, despite this “relative negligence” towards the discussion on gender issues, some scholars on the theme and feminists have been critically appropriating themselves of his theories and concepts to think social relations through a gender perspective. In this direction, though considering that Bourdieu’s studies rarely consider the gender analysis in his articulation structure versus interaction, these studies invoke, based on Bourdieusian arguments, the creation of a *habitus* and specific dispositions of gender that can transform the studies about current social reality.

Leslie McCall (1992), in the article “Does gender fit? Bourdieu, feminism *and conceptions of social order*” uses *habitus* theory to reverse its own logic. She states, for example, that the position

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<sup>13</sup> Leslie McCall (1992), for example, criticizes the perspective *habitus* for women, because this *habitus* is globally connected to women’s position in the domestic and family dimension, and their participation in the public world of work and formation do not seem to be a source of *habitus* transformation. Thus, the differences of position between men and women in the field seem to have no consequences to the formation of sexual *habitus*.

of feminist researchers in the academic field (and women in general in the social field) create an specific *habitus* and dispositions because, through the experience of oppression and domination lived by these researchers, it is possible to see that they are socialized in a such a way that mobilizes “visual technologies” which allow them to see what was hidden, what is subtly established and, therefore, acquire a specific sociological perspective ( of gender) of the social world that modifies the social world itself.

A great part of the criticisms towards Bourdieusian ideas lies on the belief that his theory would have problems to accept social change in the context of analysis. This criticism is mainly supported by the idea that the *habitus* presupposes that the field would be its own condition of possibilities, i.e., that the *habitus* expresses a “practical faith”, a belief in the truth of rules in this field which would “incline” agents to act according to them. However, as we have stated, when Bourdieu (1996, 2005) talks about inclination he seems to leave an opening for another possibility of action by the agents, which is not simply following the rules of the field. We can see this when he refers to the agents’ margins of maneuver within the field and the relations between fields.

Lois McNay (1999), in the article “*Gender, habitus and the field: Pierre Bourdieu and the limits of reflexivity*”, argues that Bourdieu’s theory encompasses social change as transforms reflexive thought into a possibility of social transformation. Such reflexivity would arise from the disagreement between *habitus* and *campo*. To McNay (1999), Bourdieu’s work about the incorporation of the social into the body is more developed than other theories of reflexivity on two aspects. First, the idea of *habitus* produces a more dynamic theory of incorporation, because it considers the materiality of the body and its vacillations between determinism and voluntarism<sup>14</sup> For the author, this dynamic notion and non-dichotomous of embodied dispositions is central for a feminist understanding of gender as a durable, but not immutable, norm. Second, the idea of “field” provides a more distinguished analysis of the social context in which the reflexive transformation of gender identity takes place. In turn, the latter offers a way of thinking about possible transformations of gender identity as unequal and non-synchronic phenomena. McNay (1999) believes that the increasing feminization of the public world can transform women’s *habitus* into a space that it is dissonant with social relations,

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<sup>14</sup> When approaching the terms determinism and voluntarism, she mentions the discussion in France in the post-war between two eminent thinkers, Lévi-Strauss and Sartre. Bourdieu was educated in this atmosphere and sought to overcome the opposition between objectivism and subjectivism (McNay, 1999).

therefore, it can raise awarenesses and break away from traditions. While Bourdieu attributes certain durability to gender norms, McNay believes in a greater instability (McLeod, 2005).

On another hand, highlighting the value of Bourdieusian theory to understand gender relations, McNay (1999) criticizes certain theories on the transformation of reflexive identity that, when considering the issues connected with gender identity, tend to strongly emphasize the expressive possibilities created by the processes of rupture with traditions, ignoring the materiality of the bodies. This excessive emphasis on the changeable nature of identity is, in part, the result of a tendency that understand gender identity as a type of symbolic identification and not as something deeply rooted in the incorporated existence.

Hence, according to McNay (1999), when these theories ignore deeply incorporated aspects and do not consider the obstacles a person faces to transpose a *habitus* of gender within different fields of action, it ends up reproducing a sexist mentality. She concludes by stating that “*Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and the field offers a theory of embodiment in the context of differentiated power relations that maybe of use for feminist social theory*” (p. 114).

Adkins (2003) is another author that considers Bourdieu’s theory useful to gender studies. Similarly to McNay (1999), she states that Bourdieu’s theory embraces social change, as it makes reflexive thought the viability of social transformation. However, Adkins (2003) diverges from McNay (1999) on the way and the consequences of reflexivity. While McNay (1999) understands that the increasing feminization of the public can lead to a “transposition of the feminine *habitus*” and the possibility of raising awareness and breaking traditions, Adkins (2003) believes that reflexive thought can be an engendering factor of new gender commitments that keep the *habitus* of gender as a social division.

In the article “*Feminists re-reading Bourdieu old debates and new questions about gender habitus and gender change*”, McLeod (2005) analyzes that McNay’s perspective has a greater recognition of the instability of rules, while Adkins adopts a more careful and skeptical explanation of the possibilities of transformation.

In our point of view, the degree of political tensions provoked in the relations of force and created about the experiences and social practices will be able to sera capaz de tender o pensamento reflexivo dos(as) agentes ao rompimento ou a manutenao do *habitus* de genero como divisao social. This tension will be as powerful as “the material and symbolic power accumulated by the agents involved in these relations” (Setton & Vianna, 2015, p. 230).



As stated by Joan Scott (1995), “the political processes will determine which result will prevail” as, in this process, different actors and different meanings “fight between themselves to assume power” (p. 93). For the author, the nature of this process, the actors, and their actions can only be determined in the context of specific times and spaces.

McLeod (2005) defends an approach that points towards a coexistence of change and continuity in the relations and identities of gender, allowing a more contextual analysis of the different degrees of correspondence between *habitus* and the social field. She understands that the renewed interest to discuss *habitus* and the field of Bourdieusian theory is not only to retake the old debate between “reproduction” and “freedom”, but an opening to examine in-depth the process of contradiction and ambivalence that govern relations.

Scott’s (1995) and McLeod’s (2005) analyses bring an interesting perspective to our study, as they place experience, relations, and human practices under a position of constant tension between reproduction and freedom.

In Brazil, professor Marlise Almeida published in 1997 the work “*Pierre Bourdieu e o gênero: possibilidades e críticas*” [Pierre Bourdieu and gender: possibilities and criticisms/ in which she investigates some concepts of Bourdieu, such as *habitus*, symbolic power, class, masculine domination, among other, to establish parameters to better understand the possible articulations with gender studies. From Bourdieu’s concepts, she sought to find a new space to discuss gender relations. In this sense, question-se se if is plausible or possible to talk about a *habitus* of gender.

Almeida (1997) initially grounds herself in the studies MacCall’s studies (1992) to answer her interest in the theories that could relate the structure of masculine domination and women’s intersubjective experiences. Based on the questions of MacCall (1992) and Bourdieu’s writings, Almeida (1997) perceives *habitus* as “what intermediates structures and the practices of agents” (p. 21), producing a double process (dialectic) to internalize the exterior and the exteriorization of inwardness. Almeida (1997) presents several changes in the patterns of gender relations – women who work outside their homes, who are heads of households, who control their fertility, who invest in their professional formation, etc. – understood as “new *habitus* of gender”.

For the author, there is an ongoing “symbolic revolution” that processes and modifies the plan of culture and subjectivity. Many transformations are in course in love relationships, new sexual practices, new ways to negotiate power, etc. However, these changes, which normally

start at the micro level, are not able to abolish the action of masculine domination mechanisms, including how women operate with the forms of masculine control. Even so, according to Almeida (1997), we can already “perceive the presence of alternative and heterogeneous devices, social and subjective, from which a new society seem to be remodeled and reconstructed” (p. 41).

In fact, we should research the possible leaks that are established in this historical process that moves the structures and symbolic representations that participate in society throughout time. The field of education has a *habitus* of gender that moves with the ability of (re)producing practices and that can provoke micro-displacements or transform the power relations socially established. The agents’ action, in the game of strategies in the educational field, will move the structures and symbolic representations, in which the critical participation and the collective organization of teachers have a crucial role.

## **Final remarks**

The agents’ actions in the educational field, as structured and structuring practices, tend to be established considering the practices typical of the producers’ social position, including gender. In this field, the different agents (class, gender, race/ethnicity, submitted to different types of inequality) can establish fights for symbolic capital. In this fight, they create alliances and strategies, establish ruptures, and incorporate models to seek a symbolic capital that will grant them legitimacy, prestige, and authority. Different fields, such as the educational one, are constituted and each one has its specific institutions and rules, which are also places of symbolic violence established to maintain power.

The reflections presented in this text, regarding the thought of Bourdieu and other authors that tense his theory, lead us to understand that the configuration of new *habitus*, including gender, is always a possibility. That is because the agents of the field of organizations, among which those of education, have a margin of maneuver that confronts the structure and the agents’ freedom to act and transform the structured order. The forces mobilized by agents provoke displacements in the adjustment between field and *habitus*. Thus, breaking away from

institutionalized stigmas and stereotypes, questioning the reality established and desired, and maybe even “leaks”.

*Habitus*, regarding gender relations, show this displacement with several changes in relationships and social organizations (women who assume new work territories, who reject stereotypes of mostly feminine work territories, who control their bodies, adopt new forms of relationship, etc.), delineating “new *habitus* of gender”.

Hence, we understand that the *habitus* of gender is a crucial and necessary concept to understand social relations, within gender and education studies, because it allows a gender perspective about the dispositions incorporated by education works. Therefore, this article reaffirms the fruitfulness of Pierre Bourdieu’s work in the educational field, from a gender perspective and the field of gender studies itself.

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