

# Responding to the ‘Weight of the World’: Unveiling the ‘Feeling’ Bourdieu in Social Work

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## Abstract

The world continues to lurch from crisis to crisis. Amidst environmental decline, growing disparities in wealth and social dislocation, a minority of the world’s population ironically prosper while the silent majority struggle to maintain basic standards of economic and social well-being. Social workers are compelled to respond to societal issues such as these but need theories to make sense of disparities in lived experience and life outcomes. Responding to this necessity, some social work scholars have drawn on Pierre Bourdieu’s meta-theory to explain social injustice and guide anti-oppressive practice. While this growing corpus of work is encouraging, further critical appraisal of Bourdieu’s work is required. In this article, we identify a gap in Bourdieu’s meta-theory: the relative inattention to human affect and how it connects with his formative concepts of ‘habitus’, ‘field’ and ‘capital’. This focus on human affect is salutary given its centrality in social work practice. To address this gap, we proffer some tentative thoughts about the nature of ‘affective habitus’, ‘affective fields’ and ‘affective capital’. The implications of these enriched concepts for social work are finally considered.

**Keywords:** anti-oppressive practice, Bourdieu, emotion

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## Introduction

Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) was a distinguished social theorist whose pioneering insights into modern society have left a noteworthy legacy. Noticeably, his work has been cited by many scholars from a range of disciplines. One text, in particular, *The Weight of the World* (2002), had much to say to social work audiences (Wiegmann, 2017; Beddoe, 2019). As an authoritative polemic railing against the injustices pertaining to neoliberal societies, the narrative was unsettling. The book's emotive tone depicted the precarity, poverty and destitution of modern-day life, evoking stories characterised by egregious, social misery. Tellingly, *The Weight of the World* was a bracing tonic for those inebriated by 'champagne socialism' and the lure of 'trickle down economics'. Not only was it a work of academic sociology but also moral invocation: a rallying call to assuage oppression in many of its forms. Yet, despite Bourdieu's prodigious 'oeuvre' centring on these and other transgressive themes, his influence on social work theorising is still at a nascent, if growing, stage (Garrett, 2018). This is the case even though it has much to say about social justice (Fram, 2004; Emirbayer and Williams, 2005): a prominent theme in the Internal Federation of Social Work's global definition of the profession (Hare, 2004).

Centrally, Bourdieu's meta-theory on agency and structure equips social workers with a conceptual cache for explaining the asymmetries and hierarchies in social life (Fram, 2004). It further clarifies the disproportionate allocation of resources favouring social workers to the detriment of service users: a primary issue within anti-oppressive practice (Healy, 2005). What is more, this focus on agency and structure is an indispensable component of anti-oppressive social work intervention as it seeks to lighten the weight of the world (Dalrymple and Burke, 2006).

In this article, we build on Bourdieu's main constructs examining the interplay between human agency and social structure. More specifically, we identify a lacuna in Bourdieu's *meta-theoretical* work: his limited attention to human affect (or emotion) and how it is sculpted by social structure (Sweetman, 2003; Probyn, 2004; Sayer, 2005; Reay, 2015). That social workers engage with human affect 'day in and day out' is incontrovertible (Morrison, 2006).

In this article, the unfolding thesis proceeds by first outlining the core concepts in Bourdieu's inimitable theory of agency and structure; that is, his notions of habitus, field, capital and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2003). Next, we review how social work scholars have considered these concepts and their contribution to various facets of social work practice. Subsequently, and on the back of the lacuna referred to earlier, we examine the aforementioned concepts to consider their affective dimensions. This attempt to unveil the 'feeling Bourdieu' leads to the articulation of

what we have termed ‘affective habitus’, ‘affective fields’ and ‘affective capital’. With this enlarged, deepened and enriched understanding of these pivotal Bourdieusian concepts, social workers are better equipped, it is argued, to respond to the ‘emotional’ and ‘political’ weight of the world.

## Bourdieu’s conceptual architecture of social life

Let us first consider Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’. It denotes ‘the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways’ (Wacquant, 2005, p. 316). Consequently, habitus contains our practical or common-sense, taken-for-granted knowledge about ways of reasoning and acting. This is the kind of knowledge to which we do not consciously refer but routinely employ on autopilot. It influences a diverse range of practices from the trivial and mundane—ways of walking, blowing one’s nose, eating and talking—to decorous ways of behaving concomitant with our social status and social class. Significantly, not only is it an optic to the world, but is also embodied in our posture, bodily movement, gait and gesticulation.

We would be wrong, though, to conclude that habitus is unequivocally obdurate even though Bourdieu’s critics have viewed the concept as deterministic (Lane, 2000) and static (Garrett, 2007a). On the contrary, for Bourdieu people can be creative, to some extent, and break out of their habitus through pedagogic reflection (Eagleton, 1991). Yet, when exploring the possibilities for regulated improvisation, Bourdieu portrays habitus as a mainly cognitive, rational faculty built around organised thoughts or schemata (Lizardo, 2004; Wiegmann, 2017). To reiterate, though, this cognitivist, schematic construction largely neglects human emotion. It also says little about moral action as a form of social practice (Sweetman, 2003; Sayer, 2005).

These reflections bring us to another of Bourdieu’s central concepts: that of the ‘field’. The field is a social space where people perform daily actions. It is structured by rules that shape habitus. There are many different types of field: commercial, business, educational, professional, cultural, legal, political, social, religious, sporting and welfare (Peillon, 1998; Bourdieu, 2004). According to Bourdieu, the common characteristic of all fields is that they are arenas of struggle where social actors strategise, manoeuvre and vie for recognition. The struggle is directed at accumulating different forms of capital offered by the field such as status, prestige, or money. Importantly, each field ‘is both the product and producer of the habitus which is specific and appropriate to the field’ (Jenkins, 2007, p. 84).

Notably, within different fields, people can experience forms of ‘symbolic power and violence’ (Bourdieu, 1991). This subtle, insidious misuse

of power invariably stigmatises or devalues the person through a kind of cultural osmosis but is often seen as deserved or legitimate by those subjected to it. Symbolic power is appropriated by dominant groups when they seek to control lower social classes. The latter accept the hegemonic domination because they see their lesser social position in society as ordained and natural, a placing that is sacrosanct and beyond repudiation. To reiterate, symbolic violence (as a form of embedded power) works as an ideological mechanism spreading a false consciousness as regards hierarchy, rank, social position and entitlement.

Within different fields, people are centrally motivated to acquire various forms of 'capital'. Bourdieu refers to four main kinds, namely: (i) 'economic capital' epitomised by fiscal and monetary resources; (ii) 'cultural capital' exemplified by the possession of educational qualifications, manners, language abilities and knowledge of culture; (iii) 'social capital' demonstrated in having influential social contacts and (iv) 'symbolic capital' characterised by recognition signifiers such as honour, status, designation and standing. Those who are in possession of the correct sort and right amount of capital can dominate a field. Moreover, individuals who have one type of capital can use it to gain other types. Capital, it is further argued, can be transferred from one generation to the next to socially reproduce habitus, the system and its distribution of power.

A small number of social work commentators have reviewed these ideas in detail, appraising their relevance for practice. However, before we consider this 'corpus', it is important to state that Bourdieu explicitly referenced social work in his published works. He noted how the welfare field imposed numerous administrative constraints on welfare recipients (Peillon, 1998; Wiegmann, 2017). In the 'Weight of the World', for instance, he was sympathetic to the profession's plight under neo-liberalism (Garrett, 2007b). Social workers were obligated, he recognised, to implement bureaucratic protocols (under the aegis of the 'right hand of the State'), and yet, still promote social justice (as directed by the 'left hand of the State'). Being placed in this antinomy, or contradictory position, they succumbed to a form of 'social suffering' or crisis that came with the 'bad faith' of compromised welfare principles (Smith *et al.*, 2017; Donovan *et al.*, 2017).

When considering the literature reviewing Bourdieu's ideas for social work, some salient categories of application emerge. First, there are sources that elucidate Bourdieu's central ideas in a mainly affirmative manner, claiming their relevance for 'emancipatory and culturally-sensitive' social work (Houston, 2002; Garrett, 2007b; Walter *et al.*, 2011; Smith *et al.*, 2017; Wiegmann, 2017; Sinha and Juvva, 2020). Wiegmann (2017), for instance, considered the social work field in detail, observing its bureaucratic, iron-cage tenor and dalliance with professionalism, managerialism and evidence-based approaches. For this author, the negative impact of the field on service users, its structure of domination (Peillon,

1998), could be ameliorated through reflexive and relational practice aimed at exposing symbolic violence. Yet, in addition to this plea, it has been argued that social work intellectuals could learn much from Bourdieu's politically, engaged practice confronting the scourge of neo-liberalism (Garrett, 2007b).

Second, are 'emancipatory research applications' targeted at understanding inequality, discrimination, social problems and poverty (Fram, 2004; Emirbayer and Williams, 2005; Fairtlough *et al.*, 2014; Nissen, 2014). Notable here was Emirbayer and Williams' (2005) in-depth consideration of how to conduct a Bourdieusian field analysis, much akin to a relational, network analysis in social research, but with the imported concepts of doxa, power and capital, for added measure. Given this stance, the article made a valuable contribution to anti-oppressive social work research (Strier, 2006).

Third, are applications of 'critical evaluation' (e.g. Garrett, 2007a; Houston, 2010; Houston, 2019). Prominent, in this suite, was Garrett's (2007a) mainly sympathetic, yet measured, appraisal of Bourdieu's theory and its relevance for social work. Here, the author enumerated several shortcomings in Bourdieu's work including the turgid articulation of ideas, the limited attention to race and ethnicity and the presentation of habitus as an inert entity. Nonetheless, for Garrett, 'social work's chief theoretical and practical preoccupations should orientate the profession in the direction of Bourdieu' (p. 372).

The fourth area of application revealed sources dealing with 'social work education'. Under this category, a small number of authors (Fairtlough *et al.*, 2014; Beddoe, 2019; Fearnley, 2020a,b) have harnessed Bourdieu's constructs to examine student and staff experiences of professional learning and pedagogy. Fearnley (2020a,b), by way of illustration, aligned the notions of habitus and capital with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory to theorise practice education in social work. The argument was that practice educators, and students on placement, had a distinctive social ecology shaping the 'self'. This ecology, the argument went, was infused by habitus and one's access to capital. As an example of an innovative theory-building endeavour in practice learning, it was congruent with Beddoe's (2019) call to contest dominant expressions of doxa in social work education and Fairtlough *et al.*'s (2014) concern to overturn educational disadvantage for ethnic minority students on placement. The latter perspective was significant because it applied Bourdieu's meta-theory to race. This area was largely neglected by Bourdieu who privileged social class when examining the interplay between habitus, capital and field in social life (Garrett, 2007a).

While the subject of emotion does feature to some extent in these four areas of application (see, e.g. Smith *et al.*, 2017), there has been no concerted, critical examination, so far, of the affective dimensions of Bourdieu's central concepts (covered earlier) in the social work

literature, and what they mean for social work practice. As previously indicated, this omission may be due to the fact Bourdieu did not spend much time clarifying the affective facet of habitus or how emotional expression was imbricated in fields. Nor did he fully consider how human affect was a form of capital to be used for strategic gain. The next section addresses these gaps with some thoughts about the nature of the 'affective' in social life and how it links with some of Bourdieu's major constructs.

## **Some thoughts on affective habitus, affective field and affective capital**

The sociology of emotion is growing in its depth and range of inquiry (Heaney, 2019). This body of work cultivates insights into the social nature of emotion and the emotional nature of social phenomena. It suggests that, to comprehend emotion, we must understand social interaction; and to appreciate social interaction, we must grasp the nature of emotion (Bericat, 2016). Clearly, there is a danger of ignoring this Janus-faced truism and resorting to a form of psychological reductionism that locates emotion solely within a hermetically sealed person, buried deep within their psyche. Below, the imbrication between the emotional and social domains is explored tentatively with reference to the concepts of habitus, field and capital. The comments under each heading are by no means exhaustive and represent initial, fledgeling considerations into these immensely complicated areas of human experience.

### **Affective habitus**

It is self-evident that the human subject's (un)consciousness can never be limited to, or defined solely by, cognitions, schemas or thoughts. Embodied consciousness also encompasses social values and emotions (Robbins, 1991). These complex dimensions of being fold into each other, forming a rich tapestry of visceral stirring within habitus (Denzin, 2009). One's 'feel for the game' in any social situation will be triggered as much by deep-seated, intuitive perception as by primeval sentiment: fear, in the face of social threats to identity being just one example. The boundaries between the two become blurred in the frisson of critical life events or moments of significant meaning. Put alternatively, we can say that emotion and thought are two interconnected types of disposition within habitus. They are shaped by meaningful day-to-day interactions in fields of various kinds. Over time, emotions collectivise as dispositions within habitus the same way as thoughts. However, we should add at this point that emotion and thought also interconnect and register with

the body (Probyn, 2004). Emotional affect, for instance, displays through the ‘feeling body’ in one’s non-verbal countenance, corporeal posture and ambient style of movement. Body is soul—‘soul body’, according to the Irish poet, Derek Mahon. Gabriel Marcel’s edict captures this sentiment well: ‘Je suis mon corps’ (I am my body).

Importantly, for Thompson (2001, p. 2), the feeling of empathy (a master emotion) is the precondition of consciousness: ‘one’s consciousness of oneself as an embodied individual in the world is founded on *empathy*—on one’s empathic cognition of others, and others’ empathic cognition of oneself’. A habitus founded on empathy is more likely to lead to relations built on trust. Hochschild (1990), in a parallel moment, stipulated that what we feel is as important as what we think, when it comes to understanding such interpersonal processes and outcomes. A habitus that limits the possibilities of the ‘self’, that subliminally says, ‘this is not for me’, or ‘I am not worthy’ is rarely experienced in a depersonalised, detached, unemotional way. Rather, such injunctions precipitate various kinds of sentiment: envy, shame, ennui, anger or plaintive introspection.

Relatedly, human subjects often apply attributions to explain their experience (Moskowitz, 2005). These attributions, ‘this is my fault’, for instance, are again far from dispassionate cogitations. Instead, the ‘this is my fault’ attribution might be linked to a feeling of self-denigration, learned helplessness or attenuated self-efficacy. It has been suggested that attributes such as these, and their accompanying emotions, are centrally linked to a habitus shaped by class identities and positions (Reay, 2015). More specifically, for Bourdieu (2004), they relate to class identities moulded by the education field.

In Bourdieu’s estimation, habitus comprises myriads of disposition stored in memory (or embodied history, for Bourdieu) over time. But emotional reactions are deposited as well, and deeply ingrained in remembrance. For example, a situational trigger factor, such as an episode of interactional ineptitude with a significant other, can set off a shame reaction affecting self-perception (Probyn, 2004). Traumatic experiences in the past can return in the form of debilitating flash backs. ‘Trauma is the overwhelming feeling of too much feeling’ (Probyn, 2004, p. 224). This surge of inner stirring can overwhelm and debilitate habitus.

Some of the most salient auto-biographical memories in life occur when emotions were acutely felt and expressed. Bereavement and loss are pertinent examples. Moments of transcendence in human lives can have a durable presence, particularly when the present is stressful. Our ‘feel for the game’ of social life is as much about how the game ‘felt’ emotionally in the past—‘when then is now’. Thus, emotions have a history (Scheer, 2012). The presentation of one’s psychosocial-biographical narrative, one’s story, is irrevocably entwined with emotional affect. What makes the human narrative distinctive is its association with loss, change, crisis, moments of vulnerability, resilience and coming through despite the odds. Such events

reverberate with Bourdieu's (1984) notion of 'divided or cleft habitus'. This is a habitus riven with disparate, unintegrated experiences coalescing around 'repressed' elements of trauma. A divided habitus can unleash febrile emotion particularly when the fields in which a person interacts are impeding the existential need for recognition.

Building on the latter point, a divided habitus that is pulled in different, contradictory directions, might implode through psychic enervation. The tension caused by neoliberal self-interest competing against egalitarian liberal discourses within habitus, can be demonstrable. Reay (2015) provided the pertinent example of a white working-class boy struggling to meet the high expectations of his teachers in the neo-liberal education field. However, beyond the school gate, he must appease his peer network. 'Street kudos' and 'male machismo', rather than academic success, are the determining features of the latter field. The pressure of meeting both sets of requirements and holding contradictory forms of behaviour and presentation together in an ambivalent double-bind, possibly over a long period, is likely to be emotionally unbearable. Similarly, when a person is thrust out of one field (where the habitus is operating spontaneously without interruption), into another foreign, cultural field, emotional desolation and dislocation can set in. In this instance, the predictive power of the divided or cleft habitus can start to wane. For example, a teenager from Syria, claiming asylum status in a western country, might understandably feel 'like a fish out of water'. The issue here is whether the officials processing the teenager's claim have empathy for this perturbing response.

### Affective fields

Identity theorists (Stryker, 2004) posit that group and social identities operate in culturally defined positions and social spaces (akin to Bourdieu's notion of social position). These positions can either authenticate or undermine identity—affecting various types of emotion. For example, in Ken Loach's iconoclastic film and critique of neo-liberal welfare, *I Daniel Blake*, the protagonist is disarmingly entrapped in the UK benefits field at a time of personal vulnerability and raging austerity measures. The negative impact on the character's felt and embodied emotion is palpable as he succumbs to a range of objectifying, depersonalising and commodifying reactions from bureaucratic officials devoid of human empathy. Such are the 'hidden injuries of class' (Sennett and Cobb, 1993) perpetrated by 'emotional capitalism' (Illouz, 2007).

Critically, one manifestation of symbolic violence occurs in fields encouraging individuals to identify with harmful regimes of power. Social, political and cultural fields within neo-liberal governance, for instance, engender certain emotional states such as a restless, consumptive desire, acquisitive

longing, disenchantment, status envy, the burden of personal responsibility, ambient insecurity, contingent intimacy and emotional alienation. Neoliberalism both monetarises and commodifies human affect. In doing so, it leads to disaffection when competition with others in the field results in a zero-sum game, or the enactment of intensified individualism leads to anomie. Marcuse (2002), in a complementary vein, witnessed a dumbing down of affect in capitalist society, transforming it into a monotone, shallow and one-dimensional internal state. His intellectual counterpart, Fromm (2005), warned of the existential dangers of acquisitive longing. Authentic being was at risk from this unremitting drive.

What is more, social fields imbued with a neo-liberal ideology emphasise material and symbolic differentials between people. For Kemper (1978), primary feeling states are the product of social interactions where differentials of power and status are to the fore. Unjustified power differentials in a field can generate fear for subaltern groups. Comparably, unfair status differentials often lead to anger while a pre-emptive loss of status, due to competitive relations in a commercial field, can evoke a forlorn sadness. Referring to the dispossessed, Reay (2015, p. 12) astutely observed that ‘the learning that comes through inhabiting spaces within the field often results in a predilection for shame, fear, anxiety’.

Theorising in a different line of inquiry, Hochschild (2012) connected emotional expression with the nature of surrounding and enveloping social space. People employed in certain roles, such as flight attendants, were required, she contended, to adopt feeling rules and engage in emotion management, despite how they might have internally felt. One might hypothesise, too, that social workers in the welfare field are required to engage in the same kind of emotional work to maintain a ‘managed heart’. Taking up a different theme, Scheff (2003) posited how cultural fields and processes of early socialisation led to shame-sensitive dispositions in many different cultures. Not only that, destructive, shame-rage cycles were often the outcome, leading to social conflict, sometimes on a grand scale. Poignantly, ‘shame can also bleed into sorrow’ (Probyn, 2004, p. 225). Elias (2000), complementing Scheff, highlighted the power of cultural formations to instil manners based on an underpinning shame dynamic.

Much earlier sociological theory likewise recognised the link between emotion and social structure. Durkheim (1912), one of the founding thinkers in sociology, argued that religious settings had the power to instil collective and social shared emotions of solidarity and well-being. By way of contrast, Weber (2013) noted the stultifying effects of bureaucracy. The German sociologist, Tonnies (1999), made a distinction between society as ‘Gemeinschaft’ and society as ‘Gesellschaft’. The former referred to the ‘lifeworld’ of community and strong, interpersonal bonds. The latter depicted social relations based on impersonal, rational action with ties to modernity and the marketplace. Gemeinschaft gave

rise to emotion and sentiment compared to Gesellschaft's subjugation of feeling in favour of strategic action.

In summary, both classical and contemporary social theorists recognised the salient connection between emotional well-being and the maintenance of vibrant social bonds. However, this connection is influenced by the surrounding social spaces in which actors participate and the rules imposed on them by the field. Significantly, the primary emotions of fear, anger, shame and pride require an understanding of the cultural and political fields shaping their expression.

## Affective capital

The notion of emotional or affective capital has been considered in a growing range of scholarly fields such as the sociology of families (Gillies, 2006), education (Zembylas, 2007) and care work involving women (Virkki, 2007). So, what is meant by the term? Inferred in Bourdieu's work (but not explicitly theorised by him as such), we might view it as a form of 'cultural capital' that is both a resource and embodied capacity for ensuring that emotions are expressed and managed prudently when interacting in diverse personal and social fields (Scheer, 2012; Cottingham, 2016; Heaney, 2019). It is developed through early socialisation by significant others and later, secondary socialisation as a person moves through the life cycle (Cottingham, 2016). It is important to register at this point that, when it comes to socialisation, emotional capital is neither gender-neutral nor exclusively feminine (Cottingham, 2016). For instance, mothers play an active role in childhood socialisation (Gillies, 2006) but so do fathers. Relatedly, the link between social capital and children's emotional health has been argued (Morrow, 2004). Deficits in early socialisation, because of child neglect, for instance, may have deleterious implications for the attainment and use of affective capital. However, we must remember that child neglect is often linked with impoverished, poverty stricken, social fields surrounding the child and parents.

Importantly, in terms of this definition, affective capital is not a synonym for the much popularised (and commercialised) concept of 'emotional intelligence'. The former is generated by habitus and shaped by surrounding social structure. It links micro-level resources with power-infused, macro-level forces (Cottingham, 2016). Emotional intelligence, by way of contrast, does not give the same consideration to the role of social structure in shaping emotional experience and expression.

Affective capital is used to influence others in the field, to sway opinion, to gain advantage, desired outcomes and recognition. For example, a company executive might use empathy (as a resource) to build rapport with her staff, motivate them and encourage a corporate solidarity that

ensures optimal business performance. Alternatively, when in a situation of interpersonal conflict, a person can regulate strong emotions of anger and upset, and assert their case proficiently using negotiating skills to attain the desired outcome. Or, when subjected to humiliation of some kind, a person can stand aside from a shame-rage cycle and engage more productively in actions that restore inner pride so that personal efficacy in the field is restored. In examples like these, the inner resources of self-esteem, self-respect, self-confidence and self-efficacy, and their accompanying emotions, can be deployed to instigate and maintain important relations—relations that bestow success, well-being and advantage in the field.

There are also wider applications of the resource. Hence, politicians use affective capital in the political field to sway public opinion and garner support. By way of contrast, in the field of commercial advertising, affective capital is applied to capture the consumer's attention. Here, the product being canvassed is associated with states of well-being. In a different vein, social care professionals can apply compassion in their field of caring to foster desired professional outcomes for service users. In many cases, affective capital is tantamount to a 'form of power' that is used to enhance one's status within a specific field.

Lastly, the enactment of affective capital is historically and situationally conditioned. Thus, under contemporary 'emotional capitalism' (Illouz, 2007), the resource becomes commodified and linked with economic relations and exchange in the labour market. The expression of emotional satisfaction, when faced with the possibility of monetary gain, testifies to the point. Under 'emotional capitalism', such emotional displays are rewarded while their absence invokes disapprobation. Yet, we must not forget that affective capital can be used as a resource to resist neoliberal norms and practices. Shame, that occurs through misrecognition, can generate emancipatory struggles for recognition (Honneth, 1996).

## Implications for social work

Bourdieu's meta-theory provides an analytical purchase on the weight of the world and an explanatory power to alleviate it. His concepts evince several fundamental implications for social work practice. Let us examine these in turn paying attention to the affective aspects covered in the previous section. Primarily, even though social workers can never fully apprehend the nature of the dispositions forming a service user's habitus, they must develop discerning propositions about them. They should reflect on how habitus shapes the service user's viewpoints, reactions, emotional expression and action. This is an exercise in contextualising a person's thinking, affect and behaviour from a sociological angle. It is an

appreciation of the interplay between habitus, field, capital and symbolic power, and how it has affected personal biographies, opening or closing doors of opportunity depending on whether there is largesse or paucity in amounts of possessed capital (including the affective variant) under neoliberal regimes of governance. Such considerations are at the forefront of critical social work.

Detailed social histories, narrative-based approaches, observation, deep phenomenological listening and systemic assessment are ways of gathering some of the different pieces that make up the habitus jigsaw and the emotional dispositions within it. Of particular concern, is the level of integration or dissociation within habitus. Here, we should note the earlier comments about the impact of a divided or cleft habitus and its emotional entanglement with trauma or repressed feeling. Crucially, intelligent propositions about habitus facilitate ‘structural empathy’ for the service user’s challenges. This is a form of empathy that links personal troubles with wider social processes including class-based affiliations. This connection is integral to critical social work and its mandate to promote social justice. Furthermore, empathy of this kind invokes non-judgementalism, respect for the individual, and a recognition of their strengths and capabilities.

This appreciation of the service user’s habitus is, however, a one-sided, partialised activity. It has value only when social workers recursively realise the impact of their own habitus on perception and affective expression: how it conditions their view of the changing social world, the nature of social issues, and the role of the welfare professional (Donovan *et al.*, 2017). Specifically, professionals must build a prescient awareness of how their habitus has been shaped by their social class, the education and cultural fields in which they have participated, and the privileges or disadvantages embedded in their social positioning.

Not only that, it is also necessary to become aware of the impact of socially-induced, affective dispositions within habitus and how they affect thoughts and actions. Moreover, affective identifications and attachments are central to the (re)framing of risk, need and required resources. As such, they must be critically reviewed. This conceptual exercise embraces Bourdieu’s notion of reflexivity with its challenge of orthodox norms and openness to heterodox beliefs. Some of the social work commentators, referred to earlier, endorse this conceptual exercise linking it with anti-oppressive practice and the promotion of social justice (Wiegmann, 2017; Fearnley, 2020a,b). For Garrett (2007b, p. 240), ‘Bourdieu’s work could help social work to reflexively *fold inwards* with social workers and ‘social work academics’ scrutinising their own personal and collective habitus’. Yet, to fold inwards also necessitates that we then ‘reach outwards’. The practice of these inner-outer dynamic guards against social work becoming yet another form of symbolic

domination or using its structural power to unfairly circumvent human rights and freedoms in situations of risk and safeguarding vulnerable people.

In terms of the construct of the 'field', social workers may find it salutary to conduct a social network analysis of the formative spaces within which service users are located. Here, it is important to map out the total range of fields within which the service user is situated: educational, social, familial and institutional. The questions here are: how do these fields restrict or enable opportunities? Where does power lie in the field—and who wields it? Can the range of fields be expanded, to diversify and enable the service user's affective experience? How does the welfare field impinge on or empower the recipients of welfare? To what extent is the welfare field culturally sensitive and responsive to the emotional double-bind of clashing fields? From the standpoint of critical social work to what degree has neoliberal discourse penetrated the field and how has it impacted on affect and emotional bearing? How have differentials in power and status shaped the primary negative feeling states of anger, fear and shame?

Social workers should strive to introduce service users to fields that inculcate pride to offset shame. In all of this, it is essential to appreciate the constraints and opportunities provided by the fields in which service users are located and mitigate the impact of the former while maximising the benefits of the latter. In line with a rallying missive from Bourdieu, this may well be a process of resisting the scourge of neo-liberalism and the retreat of the welfare State. Such resistance chimes with [Marcuse's \(2002\)](#) clarion call for a 'great refusal' of capitalist ideology.

When it comes to social work assessment, social workers might focus explicitly on the degree of social support within any given field within which the service user participates or is excluded. Does the field encourage emotional nurture, respite and containment? Does it support cohesive social networks that restore emotional well-being or is there a dearth of social connectedness? Are actors in the field critical or reinforcing, recognising a person's strengths and contribution to various fields around her? Is the field transient causing emotional anxiety or stable, offering a secure base? Do any of the fields stigmatise, label or scapegoat the service user? To what extent does the field recognise the sanctity of human identity or cause it to feel shame?

Importantly, the concept of the field takes on a particular purchase when it comes to safeguarding practices with populations who may be emotionally vulnerable. Contextual safeguarding, as termed by [Firmin \(2020\)](#), points to the extra-familial harm affecting children and young people. For instance, young people within a particular locality can succumb to sexual and criminal influences in sites such as parks, shopping centres and youth clubs. These extra-familial sites (located in educational, leisure and cultural fields) are often beyond the control of

parents and their protective measures and tend to disrupt parental authority. Typically, they distort the boundary between victimisation and perpetration in the light of grooming and other nefarious processes with often dire emotional ramifications for young people (Firmin, 2020). Social workers need to be vigilant to the influence of these fields and respond to them through coordinated, inter-professional and community-based interventions.

Let us conclude this section with some comments about ‘capital’ in social work. Fundamentally, social workers can empower service users to accumulate, efficaciously apply and exchange different forms of capital—economic, cultural, social, symbolic and affective. The aim here is to enhance lived experience in a range of fields while promoting equal rights, opportunities and treatment, all of which lie at the heart of social justice and critical social work. Some practical ways of realising these aspirations, can be delineated. For example, mobilising connections, social networks and group affiliations through systemic and ecological interventions are important ways of developing social capital. Advocacy and negotiation within various fields of power, including the field of social security, are a means of addressing discrepancies in economic capital. Initiating empowering interventions, such as self-directed groupwork (Mullender *et al.*, 2013) enable the acquisition of affective and cultural forms of capital. Engaging in recognition-based social work practice (Houston, 2015) fosters the attainment of symbolic and affective capital. Supporting parents emotionally and can enable them to build affective capital for themselves and their children.

Shifting to a macro plane, we can defend against neoliberal norms through forming alliances, field organising, coalition building, campaigning and lobbying. These are ways of championing the more equal distribution of capital within fields: an enduring concern of critical social work (Mullaly, 2006). Schools, and other educational institutions, ought to be primary sites for building cultural, symbolic and affective capital. Prevailing educational norms, teacher and pupil habitus and affective economies (Zembylas, 2007) that limit capital attainment and accumulation, should be challenged. Ultimately, for social workers and service users, the problematisation of the ‘orthodox’ and instatement of the ‘heterodox’, creates a conceptual space for planning how to enhance the distribution of capital in its various forms.

## Conclusion

We can ameliorate the weight of the emotional and political world by transforming its representation: an interpretation moulded by a reinvigorated understanding of the possibilities of human agency transforming structure (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 14.). In this article,

Bourdieu's conceptual set of ideas linking agency with structure has been presented and their relevance for anti-oppressive social work is considered through a review of relevant social work sources. However, a gap was noted not only in Bourdieu's work but also in the social work literature examining it: the relative neglect of human affect. Given that this faculty is central to social work practice, the thesis expounded in this article considered, tentatively, some of the emotional dimensions of Bourdieu's core constructs, namely habitus, field and capital. Finally, the authors outlined the ramifications of this enhanced cache of conceptual tools for social work practice. Unveiling the 'feeling Bourdieu', in the way explicated, gives theoretical substance to anti-oppressive practice as it strives to alleviate the weight of the world.

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