

## Suffering and Justice: Symbolic Violence, Oppression, Legitimacy

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**Abstract:** Stephen Lukes has argued that how political theorists conceive of power always entails normative judgments because they always involve normative assumptions about whether one agent affects – exerts power over – another agent in *significant* ways. Similarly, political theorists incorporate claims about what counts as *significant* suffering – who suffers and in what ways – into their accounts of justice. This paper compares and evaluates three models of what could broadly be described as suffering: Foucault's conception of normalization, Young's conception of oppression, and Bourdieu's conception of symbolic violence. The considerable overlap among these three accounts makes identifying their differences and distinguishing their premises about power, subjectivity and collective action all the more important. This task is made all the more important by the waning of the identity-based politics Foucauldian and anti-oppression theories of power inspired and the apparent return of politics centered on economic and democratizing aspirations as manifested in the alter-globalization and 'Occupy Wall Street' movements.

The central argument of this paper is that Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence provides a more coherent account of domination than normalization or oppression. Further, using symbolic violence as the conceptual lens through which we understand suffering and justice permits critical insight into the social movement politics that seek to remedy suffering and provides tools for normatively evaluating movement goals and strategies and identifying distortions of justice therein.

**Keywords:** Pierre Bourdieu, Habitus, Symbolic Violence, Suffering, Oppression, Justice

## Introduction

Suffering is a politically and socially mediated experience; our understanding of suffering therefore has explanatory and normative implications. Critical political theory, oriented toward normative reflection provoked by, as Young suggests, “hearing a cry of suffering, or distress” (1990: 6) seeks to develop and defend conceptions of justice interested in ameliorating suffering and therefore, implicitly or explicitly, fostering robust opportunities for all members of society to pursue their full human potential. Such critical projects demand that we engage with what Lukes, following Gallie calls “essentially contested” concepts (2005: 14). Describing power, for example, Lukes notes that the basic way political theorists tend to conceive of power, the concept of power they use – that A has power insofar as A affects B – always involves smuggling normative commitments into that conception because theorists never simply mean ‘A affects B’, but that ‘A affects B *in a significant way*’ (Lukes, 30). Asserting and measuring significance inevitably entails normative judgments. Asserting a relationship between suffering and justice involves similar normative partiality. Central problems for normative political theory therefore include determining what counts as politically relevant suffering and what institutional or procedural mechanisms (operating against existing background conditions characterized by unequal distributions of power and resources) can best remedy that suffering without producing new forms of politically significant suffering. As importantly, critical social and political theory concerns itself with mechanisms by which suffering obtains a collective or social and therefore politically contestable status. Pierre Bourdieu, for example, held this to be a central task of critical sociology, and he called upon social scientists to recognize the social efficacy of “allowing those who suffer to find out that their suffering can be imputed to social causes and

thus to feel exonerated; and in making generally known the social origin, collectively hidden, of unhappiness in all its forms, including the most intimate, the most secret” (1993: 629).

In this article, I examine the implications of treating symbolic violence and symbolic suffering as central categories for normative considerations of justice. First, I briefly introduce Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* and symbolic suffering. I then compare the sociological and political assumptions of symbolic suffering and the superficially similar notion of oppression, a comparison that proceeds by distinguishing between Bourdieuan and Foucauldian conceptions of power as the theoretical foundations of conceptions of symbolic violence and oppression. I conclude very briefly with the implications attention to symbolic violence has for critical political theories and projects .

## **Habitus, Affectivity, and Symbolic Suffering**

Bourdieu grounds the analysis of the effects of neoliberalism he and his co-authors describe in *The Weight of the World* on a distinction between material poverty (‘la grande misère’) and the daily, or ‘ordinary’ suffering social exclusion and domination produce (‘la petite misère’) (4). This Rousseauian conception of sociality argues that suffering increases within ‘multiplied social spaces’ created by capitalist social inequalities, even when overall poverty has been somewhat reduced. Indeed, attention to symbolic domination and the suffering it produces is central to Bourdieu’s critique of liberalism and to the individualizing, pathologizing and demobilizing effects of efforts to conceive of justice solely in terms of liberty or distribution.<sup>1</sup> There are three components to this critique: the mimetic origins of affect; the dynamics of stratification, recognition and misrecognition central to Bourdieu’s conception of subjectivity, and the constant, practical and strategic pursuit of symbolic capital central to Bourdieu’s

conception of agency. Combined, these arguments provide grounds for serious doubts about the communicative and atomistic assumptions underpinning liberal theories of justice.

Bourdieu's account of agency is centered on his understanding of *habitus* as an embodied system of dispositions by which agents perceive and act upon the social world.

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 without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (1990: 53).

The *habitus* emerges from an individual's structured encounter with other individuals, through the minutiae of everyday life and through 'reproachful looks' or 'tones' and 'disapproving glances'. The powerful, often silent injunctions that police our posture and our behaviour are inscribed directly into our bodily comportment without necessarily passing through language and consciousness. This embodied sense then organizes how we perceive our social environment and how we distinguish its various components (1991: 50-51). Importantly, these inscriptions are not haphazard, or individualistic. They are the products of particular 'classes of conditions', which is to say that people occupying particular regions of social space will be systematically exposed to similar 'reproachful looks' and other sanctions. Thus, one can speak of a working class *habitus* and a bourgeois *habitus*, as well as *habitus* that are inflected with differences based on region, ethnic background, gender and sexuality. *Habitus*-bearing agents then participate in various social fields – economic, political, and so on – in order to accumulate the specific stakes (what Bourdieu calls 'capital') available in those fields. Thus, as Skeggs notes, "for Bourdieu the habitus is not just subject to external forces/structures which organize within and with sometimes reverse impact, it is also a very explicit model of accumulation, based on knowledge of the game and how to play it" (2004: 85). *Habitus* only

operates within fields, which provide it with durable 'rules' within which to act and motivation in the form of opportunities to accumulate.

The central elements of the *habitus* then, are: 1) that it is structured through encounters with other *habitus*-bearing actors; 2) it is an embodied 'feel for the game', a set of rules by which we interpret the social world from our particular, and therefore always partial, perspective within it; 3) it is a system of 'perception and appreciation' that can function consciously and reflexively, but fundamentally works on a pre-conscious and embodied level; and 4) the *habitus* consists of dispositions that generate practices that are consistent across various social fields and contexts, without pre-determining specific actions. When Bourdieu refers to dispositions generating action across contexts, he is referring, among other things to the patterns of consumption and action which have a surprising unity within classes and diversity among classes; in short, he is referring to lifestyle (1984: 101). Thus, people with specific dispositions that lead them to prefer horse-riding, boating and champagne to beer and football also make them more likely to be industrialists and commercial employees than foremen and office workers, and to vote for the right than to vote for the left (Bourdieu, 1998: 5). These choices are neither structurally determined nor entirely immune to reflexive consideration, but do represent statistically regular patterns of preferences relatable to the classed and gendered conditions of production for various *habitus*.

Bourdieu's account of symbolic suffering hinges on his treatment of the symbolic as a structured construction of a shared classification of the social world, which is to say a shared schema of perception and meaning by which agents understand the value of objects, agents and actions within social space. For Bourdieu, the symbolic has three central features that give it its affective power. First, the symbolic depends entirely on recognition. If a symbolic object or

representation did not meet with agents bearing *habitus* disposed to perceiving and appreciating that object, then it would have no social value or effect. Thus, Bourdieu describes *habitus* as a form of potential energy, a spring-like mechanism triggered by symbolic claims (1995: 169). Without the recognition appropriate dispositions afford, the *habitus*' energy remains potential and representations have no meaning.

Second, and demonstrating Bourdieu's reliance on structuralist thinking, the symbolic depends on relational logic to ascribe meaning and value to all objects within a symbolic system. As Schinkel notes, Bourdieu adopted the Saussurian *principle of difference* by which the meaning of every object within structured space (or in Saussure's case, the meaning of each word and phrase within language) can only be determined in relation to all of the other objects within that space (2003: 76). We designate something as a 'pencil' insofar as it is not a 'crayon' or 'pen' or 'stick' and so on. Therefore, the symbolic is a representation of the world, but not a direct, positive representation capable of nominally expressing some essential truth about the objects represented. Rather, meaning is derived from the relations between objects. The meaning of a worker is, in part, that she or he is not bourgeois and vice versa, rather than because they embody some definitive set of substantial and essential properties. The symbolic has its most powerful expression where it represents and naturalizes the system of arbitrary distinctions by which social fields are hierarchically organized and by which positions in social space receive their differential esteem or value.

Finally, the symbolic is a schema by which agents act upon the world and engage in struggles over the construction and shape of the structured system of meanings just described. The constructed systems of meaning that organize the symbolic are not spontaneous, random, or easily transformed – they exist durably in buildings and the physical structures of human

geography but are also incorporated into the durable dispositions of *habitus*. Further, these schemes of classification, produced through long histories of struggles over interpretations of the world, having been objectified in *habitus* and geography, produce a ‘logical conformism’, that is, a homogeneous conception of time, space, number and cause. This shared logic enables different agents to reach sufficient agreement about the basic meaning of the natural and social worlds in order to act upon them in socially intelligible ways (Bourdieu, 1991: 166).<sup>2</sup> This logical conformism, fundamental agreement about the meaning of worlds and objects, manifests in the dispositions of the *habitus* as pre-conscious structures underlying cognition and the basis on which agents encounter the world. Classed, gendered, and embodying unequally distributed capacities for participating in social fields but nonetheless sharing fundamental logical and normative assumptions and vested in social participation, *habitus*’ encounter with the practical exigencies of the social world and the possibilities and obstacles it contains reflects the schemes of classification in accordance with which the social world and actions within it are organized back onto the body in the form of emotional experience and evaluation.

The *habitus*’ embodied nature is centrally important for Bourdieu, as this embodiment is the result of the inculcation of the rules, divisions, and hierarchies of social space, and therefore a forgetting of those divisions and hierarchies. Because they are so fundamentally inscribed in our body, in how we are disposed to view the world, these divisions appear natural to us, and become misrecognized as such. In turn, this implies a close relation among the mimetic, cognitive and affective aspects of *habitus*:

The body believes in what it plays at: it weeps if it mimes grief. It does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the past, it *enacts* the past, bringing it back to life. What is ‘learned by body’ is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is (1990: 73).

To emphasize, what is ‘learned by body’ is the entire cosmology of the body’s social environs; the body learns schemes of classification that articulate power and authority to *value* through a regime of what is sanctioned as legitimate, desirable, beautiful and good. Affectivity, then, involves a two-stage process. First, agents acquire, in the form of *habitus* a practical bodily knowledge capable of giving them a sense of one’s present and potential position in social space (a ‘sense of one’s place), which is also a ‘sense of placement’ (awareness of rank, how to behave within that rank and to maintain it) (1995: 184). Highly embodied and laden with emotional content structured by the (also structured) dynamics of symbolic violence and suffering, these senses of place and placement are then retriggered in social situations where bodies are re-placed in concrete relations of power and judgment.

The practical recognition through which the dominated, often unwittingly, contribute to their own domination by tacitly accepting, in advance, the limits imposed on them, often takes the form of bodily emotion (shame, timidity, anxiety, guilt), often associated with the impression of regressing towards archaic relationships, those of childhood and family (1995: 169).

Sense of place and placement take the form of emotion (unease if out of place, comfort when in one’s place) and when re-positioned in subordinate postures the *habitus* expresses unease through behaviors such as avoidance or unconscious adjustments to speech and can have visible manifestations including blushing, inarticulacy, clumsiness and trembling (1995: 169 and 84). A key insight provided by Bourdieu’s framework is that these apparently pre-political sensations are in fact the product of hierarchies produced by the unequal distribution of skills and dispositions within *habitus* and therefore the product of power-laden regimes of symbolic differences and suffering.

Taken together, Bourdieu’s account of the origin of affect and his account of the symbolic constitute what he calls symbolic violence: pre-conscious acceptance and incorporation of schemes of classification whose morally arbitrary nature neither dominant nor dominated

agents recognize but whose expression in various fields provides opportunities for dominant agents to accumulate symbolic value while excluding dominated agents. Importantly, because the schemes that legitimate this unequal distribution of opportunities are pre-consciously accepted, because they are based on the ‘logical conformism’ of the symbolic world, dominated agents suffer from bad conscience and understand the affective experiences of symbolic domination – shame, timidity, anxiety, guilt – as reflections of their own shortcomings. Thus, symbolic violence exists where the origins of symbolic suffering in unequal distributions of relevant skills and opportunities is misrecognized and therefore remains unarticulated, individualized, and unchallenged.

Two emotions demonstrate particularly well the socially organized, power-laden and collectively produced yet individually experienced nature of emotions: shame and disgust. Sayer (2007: 90) describes learned classification as ‘lay normativity’ and credits Bourdieu with attending to the fact, ignored by most social science, that decisions over momentous considerations and minutia alike are guided by reference to things we value. He acknowledges that these valuations come from culture but their internalization is only possible because human agents are the kinds of objects that are needy, radically incomplete and indeterminate, but capable of receiving culture and therefore not only capable of flourishing and suffering but also capable of evaluating (however fallibly) the extent to which they are flourishing. Following Bourdieu, Sayer connects lay normativity and the evaluations it entails to emotional content via bodily awareness of the congruity or gap between the norms and evaluations that structure social space and an agent’s sense of their ability to meet those norms. He takes shame to be exemplary of this awareness and the result of an agent’s internalization of other agents’ real or perceived

judgments. Shame is therefore deeply social, though experienced individually, and is exacerbated by its tendency to remain unarticulated.

Describing what is arguably the flip side of the same coin, Lawler (2005) points to disgust as a particularly visceral mechanism by which social hierarchies are reproduced through a pre-conscious and affective evaluation of the self in relation to people in different areas of social space. Lawler notes that disgust is a particularly strong indication that there is a norm that is both presently operative and being violated – by definition a social evaluation, an evaluation based on internalized collective judgment. Like shame, however collective or social the origin of the evaluation, the experience is individual and visceral; in limit cases, disgust results in an actual physical expulsion – vomiting – in response to a norm's violation.

Both Sayer and Lawler are interested in the class-based dynamics of shame and disgust, and though Sayer's analysis of the relationship between judgment and emotion is well-articulated, his overall argument is problematic. In particular, he falls into an intellectualist error by suggesting that people justify their actions based on normative evaluations, an error characteristic of the abstracted perspective typical of the liberal theory Bourdieu rejects. Sayer continues by distinguishing between morality and aesthetics on the claim that morality is primarily about relations to others while aesthetics is something akin to personal expression (2007: 90). These claims miss both the corporeality and the relational logic at the core of Bourdieu's framework. Aesthetics are *intrinsically* about relations to others because they are expressions of taste associated with class, gender and other symbolically laden classifications. At stake here is not just whether aesthetics are morally neutral as implied by Sayer's contrast between aesthetics on the one hand and the practice of being honest or deceitful, generous or selfish, and so on the other, but whether domination is the product of conscious, intentional acts

as implied by the notion of ‘justification’ and by Sayer’s efforts to restrict morality to actions that are ‘about relations to others’ in the limited way he suggests. Contrast Sayer’s notion of justification-based lay-normativity to Lawler’s account of class and disgust:

‘Class’ is rarely explicitly invoked in contemporary expressions of disgust: instead, the ‘disgusting’ traits are presented as the outcome of individual and familial pathology. Representations of working-class people are marked by disapproval or disdain, not for the ‘objective’ markers of their position, but for (what are perceived to be) their identities. Everything is saturated with meaning: their clothes, their bodies, their houses, all are assumed to be markers of some ‘deeper’, pathological form of identity. This identity is taken to be ignorant, brutal and tasteless (Lawler, 2005: 437).

Lawler demonstrates the close relationship between aesthetic judgments, emotional evaluation and identity. She also points to how groups and individuals reproduce social space by acting upon these judgments (that is, acting upon their own sense of shame or disgust) to reproduce the sense of placement sanctioned by the logical conformism underpinning dominant schemes of classification. As McRobbie argues, these dynamics gain expression in such current forms as the ‘What Not to Wear’ television show, where gendered and classed judgments about aesthetics, shaped and reinforced by popular culture, provide ‘corrections’ to promote *habitus* that conform to “contemporary requirements of the fields of employment, consumer culture and sexuality” (2004: 108).

These dynamics are not, however, relegated to the fields of employment and popular culture. Researchers have also done considerable empirical work examining how affectivity and suffering plays out in class contexts. Frost and Hoggett (2008), for example, have reviewed considerable literature on the relationship between hurt and class as well as hurt and race. They argue that class needs to be understood through patterns of fantasy and longing (what one seeks to be and avoids being) and that individualization (individualized blame for failure, for being a ‘loser’) and suffering are exacerbated by the distance between the popular delusion that there is no such thing as class (determination and hard work are all that are required for social mobility)

and the reality of negative consequences and barriers produced by class circumstance. Similarly, Reay ("Beyond Consciousness? The Psychic Landscape of Social Class", 2005) points to the daily operation of class hierarchies in educational settings and finds examples of visceral aversion to school interactions because of conflicts between middle-class norms and working class *habitus*, and therefore heightened feelings of inferiority and superiority in routine, daily aspects of school. Working class children, for example, were almost uniformly treated as stupid and felt unable to confide in teachers, while middle-class students resented being forced to sit next to 'stupid' students – where 'stupid' operated as a proxy for 'working class'.<sup>3</sup>

These dynamics of symbolic violence and suffering also play out in journalistic representations of collective action. Lawler, for example, shows how media portrayals of protesters are more sensitive to demands presented by middle-class, 'respectable' women than when similar demands are made by working class women. She found that working class women participating in demonstrations and protests in working-class neighbourhoods were vilified for "their bodily appearance (assumed to mark a deeper, pathologized psychology); their ignorance or lack of understanding; [and] their inadequacy as mothers" (2004: 917-18). By contrast, middle-class protesters were represented as sympathetic, devoted mothers. Such differences in media representation suggest that more fundamental mechanisms than simple framing, 'getting out the numbers', or the rational exchange of justifications central to liberal and communicative political ethics operate in the political field.

## **On Oppression and Symbolic Violence**

Young's important conception of oppression as a way of understanding how suffering is socially organized provides a useful contrast to Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence and is worth considering both for its own conceptual merits and because of its considerable influence

over how social movements have understood themselves since the 1960s and 1970s. Young's use of Foucault's notion of disciplinary power in her articulation of group-based politics foreshadows much in contemporary identity and post-identity political movements. Nonetheless, I will argue in this section, Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence offers important explanatory and normative resources that are missing from Young and Foucault.

Young's general conception of justice is the absence of domination and oppression, where domination consists of institutional constraints on agents' self-determination and oppression is institutional constraints on self-development. Young seeks to maintain liberal commitments to individuals' ability to autonomously select and pursue whatever life goals they value.<sup>4</sup> She rejects, however, liberal conceptions of power that ignore the structural and group-based social contexts that differentially distribute opportunities to select and pursue one's conception of the good life. In short, Young measures social justice by the degree to which institutions and norms allow agents to develop and exercise their capacities, express their experience and participate in determining their actions and the conditions of their actions (1990: 37). Making this argument depends on establishing a social ontology – in contrast to liberal individualism – that recognizes both the existence of groups and the structured power relations that produce those groups (3). Although democratic participation (non-domination) is important to her account, her treatment of oppression is particularly relevant because it is an overtly political attempt to understand the organized suffering of various groups, of describing various forms of suffering – racism, sexism and homophobia, for example – without reducing them to a single, unified axis (as was typical of Marxist conceptions) (42). To that end, Young recommends five overlapping categories for understanding oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.

Young's conceptualization of oppression is motivated by a number of normative and theoretical goals. First, she is interested in establishing the grounds for justifying group-based policy and representation. This depends, as discussed above, on distinguishing her conception of justice from the more limited conceptions typically advocated from within the distributive paradigm. Doing so demands focusing on the institutional context of distribution, particularly the structures, norms and practices that guide distribution and the language and symbols that mediate social interactions in the state, family and civil society (15 and 22). Young is also interested in following the communicative ethics of Habermas and Heller. Focus on group-based relations to structures of power, for Young, draws attention away from the substantive, pattern-based conceptions of justice typical of distributive paradigms and toward proceduralist accounts that link participatory deliberation and decision-making to positive evaluations of group difference (see esp. 34, 163 and 84).

There are important family resemblances between some of what Young describes as oppression and what Bourdieu might label symbolic violence. Both are concerned with the patterns of exploitation and material suffering capitalism produces. Further, cultural imperialism, for example, "involves the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture and its establishment as the norm" (Young, 1990: 59). Universalization and imposition of dominant groups' judgments is central to symbolic violence as well, but where cultural imperialism appears to connote specific, substantive beliefs about groups and individuals, symbolic power operates through deeper divisions, homologously organized sets of distinctions. In a sense, Bourdieu is concerned with deeper cognitive classificatory structures that are both more misrecognized or doxic and also (and therefore) more resistant to transformation. Indeed, this is why conformist and distorting strategies can plague social movements: consciously rejecting the

substantive, superficial definitions imposed through symbolic power does not transform the bodily dispositions by which underlying schemes of classification gain affective hold over dominated agents.

Admittedly, the kinds of suffering that Young labels oppressive and Bourdieu describes as instances of ‘la grande’ and ‘la petite misère’ are, for the most part, the same phenomena. Where their approaches diverge is not on the substance of the suffering of concern, but on the conception of power that explains how suffering comes to be institutionally and contextually organized in the ways that it is. The relevant distinction, therefore, is not just between oppression and symbolic violence, but between Young’s use of Foucault’s disciplinary power and Bourdieu’s conception of symbolic power.

Young’s interest in Foucault’s conception of power is to reject conceptions that treat power as an object to be distributed, wielded, or shared. Foucault famously argued for treating power as positive, as productive, as immanent to and circulating among ‘relations of force’, which is to say that power operates in the minutiae of spontaneous strategies available to subjects through multiple, overlapping discourses (Foucault, 1978: 93-95). Foucault was particularly interested in how institutions – prisons, schools, and psychiatric hospitals provide paradigm cases – produce subjects through constant surveillance and discipline. Bourdieu’s superficially similar insistence on the connection between daily minutiae and social behavior occasions an important distinction he drew between his work and Foucault’s. Bourdieu argued that Foucault was wrong to focus on how institutions such as schools, churches, and hospitals produce subjects through discipline and confessional moments. Subjectivity truly emerges, according to Bourdieu, in the everyday minutiae of social interactions, what he calls the ‘ordinary order of things’ rather than through power’s officially authorized – that is, institutional – manifestations (Bourdieu,

1995: 141).<sup>5</sup> Therefore, Bourdieu was less interested in normalization and the production of variously disciplined subjects – the psychiatric subject, the prison subject, etc. – and more interested in how the ordinary order of things and the continuous stream of corrections and adjustments to which agents are exposed in ordinary life operate on the body to instill a preconscious sense of social space and its rules through the *habitus*.

In so distinguishing himself from Foucault, Bourdieu neglects a central feature of Foucault's approach to power, namely that, as Cronin notes, Foucault treated institutions as laboratories, where strategies of control and techniques of normalization are developed and subsequently exported beyond the institution (1996: 59). Cronin rejects Foucault's vision, arguing that the mechanisms of control available in institutions – above all surveillance and discipline enacted directly on the body – are either unavailable outside those settings or insufficient for explaining phenomena of power such as racism and class conflict. But Cronin, like Bourdieu, misses a central feature of the export of techniques, namely their articulation through discourses or organized sets of knowledges and practices that constitute the means by which subjects understand themselves and the strategies that are available to them. Indeed, these dual aspects of discourse, their organization of knowledge and their production of strategies, are precisely how Foucauldian subjectivity operates: institutions are no longer required for surveillance and discipline as individuals, in adopting and incorporating discourses, become the agents of their own normalization. Foucault offers the paradigmatic example of families, caught in contradictions between sexuality and alliance. Families experience conflicting demands produced by psychiatric and medical discourses but turn to psychiatrists and doctors as the experts authorized by these discourses for rescue from these contradictions. They become, as Foucault says “the chief agents of a deployment of sexuality which drew its outside support from

doctors, educators, and later psychologists” (1978: 110-11). Bourdieu and Cronin are wrong, therefore, to suggest that Foucault’s conception of power is overly institutional; power gains its efficacy precisely at the moment of export when the institutional discipline of subjects is taken over, through accession to the discursive demands of normalization, by the subjects themselves.

Cronin’s refusal of the centrality and complexity of discourse in Foucault’s analytics of power leads him to further suggest that Foucault’s account of resistance is problematic in two ways. First, Cronin argues that a discourse, the discourse of ‘rights’ for example, is meaningful only within the terms of the relevant discourse and institutions themselves, but those institutions don’t exhaust what is meant by ‘right’ and ‘legitimate’. We can, Cronin asserts, compare specific, contingent organizations (such as states) and demonstrate that one is more repressive than another. He takes this as evidence that we have normative measures that are external to discourse and that provide content to resistance (62). Further, Cronin argues that Foucault’s notion of force-relations as the loci of power’s capillary circulation and deployment is overly naturalistic and mechanistic and insufficiently linked to macro-operations of power (61). If Cronin understands the content of discourses to be fully detached from external normative judgments and power to be the expression of naturalistic force relations among quasi-atomistic mechanistic individuals, it is not surprising, that he understands Foucault’s conception of strategies as tactics that “seem to crystallize spontaneously out of a chaos of shifting relations of force between interchangeable subjects and to float free of any specific social relations” (1996: 60).

A Foucauldian response to Cronin could legitimately suggest that while discourses of ‘rights’ and ‘legitimacy’ can be evaluated through external criteria, the simple exteriority of such normative criteria does not imply that they are not themselves bound up in their own discourses.

Strategic action in this light is not simply a mechanistic response to the demands and opportunities produced by a single discourse, but must involve selection among multiple discourses. But this points to a more fundamental problem with Foucault's approach: if families turn to psychiatry as agents of their own normalization, then we need to explain why they make that particular turn as opposed to a turn to religion or nihilism or politics or some other discourse by which they might understand and seek to resolve the contradictions they experience. Further, there is no room in Foucauldian conceptions of power and discourse for explaining why various agents, pursuing exactly similar strategies from within the same discourses are likely to have different levels of success.

At this point we can begin to re-engage with Young's use of Foucauldian power to explain institutional contexts. As discussed above, Young uses a social ontology intended to recognize structures and groups to support her claims of the existence of oppression (and therefore oppression's usefulness as an analytic category) and subsequent claims about justice. Surprisingly, Young does not provide an explicit definition of structure, preferring instead to describe it in terms of institutional context and linking structure to "the unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules" (1990: 41). Elsewhere, Young argues that power is relational, but non-dyadic, which means that, with Foucault, Young is suggesting that power exists only in relations between groups and individuals and that the exercise of power depends on the position one holds, an agent's nodal point within a network of force relations (31). The essential difference between Bourdieu and Young/Foucault hinges on what gives structures their durability and therefore conditions the kinds of resistance available to groups and individuals within them. Young's network-based conception of structures derives its durability from the

homogenizing and ever-deepening operation of normalization. The fundamental contrast between the operation of an incorporated norm and an incorporated scheme of classification – between normalization and *habitus* lies in the fundamentally homogenizing nature of the former and the generative, but class-specific, nature of the latter. Normalization’s totalizing ambition derives its efficacy from the ever-deepening submission of the subject to the bounds and limits of discourse. As argued above, this ever-deepening impulse provides no conceptual grounds for understanding how subjects strategically shift from one discourse to another. By contrast, the efficacy of *habitus* lies in its non-specific incorporation of general schemes of classification that reflect the co-existence of homologously structured fields and therefore provides, through dispositions, an account of the generative mechanism by which the potential success of a particular strategy is articulated to and within the specific field whose immanent demands require practical action. The relative durability of fields in Bourdieu’s framework derives from the coincidence between the specific rules and demands of a particular field and the dispositions of *habitus*-bearing agents who participate in a field precisely because they are disposed to accept and therefore reproduce the existing structure of that field.<sup>6</sup>

As importantly, reproducing fields depends upon agents deploying certain kinds of strategies depending on their kinds of capital they bring to those fields. In particular, the cultural capital and the general range of skills and competencies an agent is able to mobilize depends on the conditions of the production of their *habitus* (that is, their class and ethnic background, their position within gendered divisions of labor, access to time spent in educational institutions, and so on) and is always linked to both an agent’s own symbolic evaluation of what kinds of strategies and positions are ‘for us’ and the evaluations of all other participants in a field as to whether or not a strategy or position is ‘for them’. The dual face of action – resources and

symbolic permissibility, which is to say opportunity – depends on two instances of differentiation: differentiation produced through the differentiated conditions of the acquisition of dispositions and differentiation within the field of action produced by symbolic distinctions manifested through the rules of division and action that inhere in particular fields. This dual face and dual differentiation contrasts with the homogenizing operation of disciplinary power through norms. It also means that the hierarchical organization of power and therefore the uneven production and distribution of suffering has already operated prior to the operation of oppression through exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness and so on. Indeed, the operation of oppression depends on prior incorporation of the rules and divisions underpinning symbolic domination by dominant and dominated alike. Symbolic power depends on the pre-existing coincidence of structures and dispositions, rather than the negative sanctions and prohibitions oppressive structures present.

Ultimately, the distinction described above may be usefully cast as the distinction between ‘justice as opportunities’ in the oppression model and ‘justice as equitable distribution of skills and resources’ in the symbolic violence model. Young’s understanding of structures as creating institutional norms and rules that exclude certain groups suggests a negative liberty political agenda, to be undertaken by groups that either share an understanding of oppression and its redress or, at the very least, have sufficiently similar capacities to engage in fair negotiations over that vision. That is, oppressed groups ought to collectivize in order to construct a form of power capable of challenging the rules and norms that exclude them. Once those rules and norms are removed then previously oppressed groups will be able to flourish. In this vision, collectivization provides a mechanism for coalescing diffuse power and reversing the disciplinary and exclusive pressures exerted by institutions. However, symbolic violence

suggests that maldistributions of skills and resources even within dominated groups creates potential for distortions in collectivization and therefore distortions in how potentialities are opened (that is, for whom, under what conditions, and so on). How collective actors understand and resist material suffering, sexism, homophobia, ablism, racism, neoliberalism, and other forms of symbolic violence is itself the product of differentiated distributions of skills and resources in the process of negotiating and defining the collective actor itself – not simply an aggregation, refusal, and reversal of homogenized experiences of disciplinary power.

## **Conclusion: Symbolic Violence and Justice**

A conception of justice ought to focus on promoting a relationship between *habitus* and field founded in fair terms of play: a distribution of capacities such that each has access to the universal and to political participation, and objective structures that both reproduce that distribution and allow for innovation, conflict, and conflict resolution. Reproduction is key here because the conception of politics I am relying upon does not imagine an end-of-history type teleology wherein a ‘perfectly just’ society is achievable. Rather, I rely on a basic assumption – an assumption that is itself grounded in Bourdieu’s empirical and theoretical findings – that the nature of interest and our induction into the social means agents will generally try to secure their own profits even, though not necessarily, at other agents’ expense. Thus, the relationship between objective conditions and the distribution of capacities ought to be such that political struggle ensures the reproduction of fair terms of play. Justice, in this view, is a procedural requirement wherein suffering is politicized, recognized as socially organized, and acted upon within the context of a relationship between field and *habitus* just described. The absence of both the field conditions necessary for this relationship and *habitus* disposed to participate in these conditions produces distortions. These distortions manifest primarily through schemes of

symbolic meaning that prioritize some forms of suffering while marginalizing others, and in strategic political efforts to alleviate the suffering of some while replicating the suffering of others.<sup>7</sup>

For this approach to be successful, however, an account of suffering and justice is required that captures the complex dynamics of domination and resources for resistance. Many of the identity based movements that mobilized between the 1970s through the 1990s such as feminist and gay and lesbian movements sought to understand their suffering through the conceptual lens of oppression. This lens valuably pointed to double-binds, privilege, and multiple forms of exclusion as injustices around which oppressed groups could organize. And yet, as Gamson argues with reference to LGBT and queer organizing, the tensions intrinsic to identity-based mobilization created massive obstacles for those groups.

Attention to oppression derives different claims to justice than attention to dynamics of symbolic violence, though the distance between the two conceptions of justice is naturally much less than between either of these models and the redress for suffering offered by liberal attention to legitimacy or various, more strictly Marxist, conceptions of justice. Because Young maintains a normative commitment to the value of allowing every individual to achieve their full human potential, justice requires the elimination of oppression and domination. In turn, this requires a group-based ‘politics of difference’ in which decisions are made through deliberative and participatory procedures capable of recognizing and valuing group differences. Young takes social movement politics as the origin of both the critical insights that justify her normative vision and the vehicle through which this vision is most likely to be achieved.

Bourdieu’s conception of justice similarly demands procedural remedies, but fundamentally requires a prior step, namely the universalization of political capacities. For

Bourdieu, the political field is a specific context in which specifically political stakes are exchanged and accumulated and where the tendency for agents to be dominated through arbitrary rules and divisions is particularly pernicious. Bourdieu's vision demands exposing the arbitrary divisions of the political field – and other fields in which domination can be said to produce suffering – primarily through the conceptual tools of sociologists and what he calls the 'ordinary means of political action – creation of associations and movements, demonstrations, manifestoes, etc' aimed at setting up the proper relationship between field and habitus (1995: 126).

The primary distinction the vision of oppression and symbolic violence afford rests in the degree of optimism or generosity we can defend in terms of the 'ordinary means of political action' to which Bourdieu refers and the social movements Young lauds. The homogenizing effect of normalization and oppression fits well with the dominant notion of collective identity, traceable back to Melucci as the process of negotiation by which groups become self-aware and oriented toward specific political activities (1996: p. 70). Symbolic violence, by contrast points to the varying levels of resources and opportunities agents bring not just to social fields in general, but also to movement organizations, events, and, pointedly, to processes of collective identity formation. For example, wealthy gays and lesbians may be oppressed by virtue of their sexuality but may nonetheless be better positioned within specific regimes of cultural and economic capital than queers living in poverty to impose a definition of suffering on LGBT collective identity, a definition that may not capture the lived suffering of working class or economically marginal LGBT people. This implies that collective identities are not simply sites where suffering is negotiated and expressed, but where domination potentially replicates suffering.

Ultimately, then, Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence demands a two-fronted politics of what Wacquant describes as a "historical process of negation of social negation, a never-ending effort to make social relations *less* arbitrary, institutions *less* unjust, distributions of resources and options *less* imbalanced, recognition *less* scarce" (2004: 11). On one front, social scientists ought to work to render visible symbolic violence's hidden and unrecognized operation. This involves using the tools of social science for critique, analysis and interpretation but always focused on the social as a space of domination. On the second front, social movements and collective actors in the political field must struggle to institutionalize the less arbitrary regimes social science recommends. Fundamentally, this involves the double objectification – achieved only through struggle – of less hierarchical schemes of classification in bodies and, through access to the state and other key resources within the political field, in institutions and practices.<sup>8</sup> Importantly, however, justice demands these two fronts also operate recursively to expose replications of patterns of domination and symbolic suffering within collective identities and academia.

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent critique of liberal distributive justice, see Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990) Chapter One.

<sup>2</sup> What exactly constitutes logical conformism is tricky. On one level, it refers to the realm of 'common sense' for example, agreement over the 'obvious' need for a state, for certain kinds of politeness, of the authority of parents over children, of sex roles and so on. But it can also refer to more fundamental ways of thinking about the world, as in the difference between substantive and relational conceptions of language, meaning and so on as discussed above. As with any Bourdieuan concept, then, the social level and context to which it is being applied will determine what the conditions of transformation, extent of agreement and homogeneity, and so on.

<sup>3</sup> For case studies on classed emotional dynamics of mothers' participation in their children's education, see: Diane Reay, "Gendering Bourdieu's Concept of Capitals? Emotional Capital, Women and Social Class," *The Sociological Review* 52.S(2) (2005).

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<sup>4</sup> Marilyn Frye's influential discussion defines oppression in the same way: "The experience of oppressed people is that the living of one's life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction." Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality* (Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1983) 4.

<sup>5</sup> For the importance of silent, ordinary injunctions see also Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) 50-51.

<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu suggests, in this regard that it is equally true that agents take advantage of the opportunities of a field to satisfy their drives and desires and that fields make use of agents by forcing them (through sublimation and reward) to adapt to the structure of demands and opportunities the field presents. Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995) 165.

<sup>7</sup> Although central to debates within many movements, such exclusions and replications have been particularly contested through queer and liberationist critiques of gay and lesbian 'rights' and 'equality' discourses. See: Diane Richardson, "Desiring Sameness? The Rise of a Neoliberal Politics of Normalisation," *Antipode* 37.3 (2005). See also Joshua Gamson, "Must Identity Movements Self-Destruct?: A Queer Dilemma," *Queer Theory/Sociology*, ed. Steven Seidman (Oxford; Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> For an interesting account of social movements as capable of transforming *habitus* and therefore objectifying new schemes of classification and action see: Randolph Haluza-Delay, "A Theory of Practice for Social Movements: Environmentalism and Ecological Habitus," *Mobilization* 13.2 (2008).

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