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Matthäus, Sandra

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Matthäus, S. (2017). Towards the Role of Self, Worth, and Feelings in (Re-)Producing Social Dominance: Explicating Pierre Bourdieu's Implicit Theory of Affect. *Historical Social Research*, 42(4), 75-92. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.42.2017.4.75-92>

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<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-55206-4>

# Historical Social Research Historische Sozialforschung

*Sandra Matthäus:*

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doi: 10.12759/hsr.42.2017.4.75-92

Published in:

*Historical Social Research* 42 (2017) 4

Cite as:

Matthäus, Sandra. 2017. Towards the Role of Self, Worth, and Feelings in (Re-)Producing Social Dominance. Explicating Pierre Bourdieu's Implicit Theory of Affect. *Historical Social Research* 42 (4): 75-92. doi: 10.12759/hsr.42.2017.4.75-92.

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doi: [10.12759/hsr.42.2017.4.227-249](https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.42.2017.4.227-249)

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# Towards the Role of Self, Worth, and Feelings in (Re-)Producing Social Dominance. Explicating Pierre Bourdieu's Implicit Theory of Affect

Sandra Matthäus\*

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**Abstract:** »Zur Rolle von Selbst, Wert und Gefühl im (Re-)Produktionsprozess sozialer Herrschaft. Eine Explikation Pierre Bourdieus impliziter Affekttheorie«. In this theoretical article it is argued that Pierre Bourdieu's Social Theory provides us with a convincing account of how the subjectivated social actor, social evaluation procedures, and affective states are inherently intertwined. Therefore, it contains an implicit theory of affect offering not only a better understanding of the role affective states play within sociological theory building, but also in the (re-)production of social order, especially in terms of social inequality or social domination in (late) modernity. In doing so, it also illuminates processes of social transformation. A twofold analysis is provided: A reconstruction of Bourdieu's perspective on the general structure of (late) modernity especially emphasizing his (late) modern anthropology, as well as an examination of his theoretical considerations of the habitus. As a result, on a social theoretical level, feelings, emotions, sensations, etc. appear as a specific, particularly naturalized evaluative social practice. On the level of societal analysis feeling appreciated as the result of practically referring appreciatively towards oneself emerges as the legitimate (late) modern subject structure.

**Keywords:** Pierre Bourdieu, affect theory, habitus, subject, practices of (e)valuation, reproduction of social domination, (late) modernity, social theory.

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## 1. Introduction

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It is stunning just how much emotions have been neglected within analytic commentary on the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), especially when it comes to his theory of habitus (e.g., Swartz 1997; Webb, Schirato and Danaher, 2002; Krais and Gebauer 2002; Fröhlich and Rehbein 2009; Lenger, Schneickert and Schumacher 2013; Müller 2014). It is stunning, however not because his emotionality influences his work in any unique way, as some would like to claim (Brumlik 2009), but because human affectivity

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\* Sandra Matthäus, Department of Comparative Cultural Sociology; European University Viadrina Frankfurt, Große Scharrnstr. 59, 15230 Frankfurt (Oder), Germany; matthaeus@europa-uni.de.

plays in fact a central role not only in reference to certain aspects of his work (Lane 2012), but in his theory as a whole. So, although Bourdieu did not carry out explicit systematic studies on this issue, the main thesis of this article is that Bourdieu's writings convey not so much an "anti-affective attitude" (Reckwitz 2015, 32; my translation), but rather an implicit theory of affect unfolding *en passant* in his analyses of (late) modern society, particularly in his more theoretical writings.<sup>1</sup> Feelings, emotions, sensations, etc. are therefore not only central for explaining the (re-)production and in fact transformation of social order in the sense of social inequality or social dominance, consequently deepening our understanding of his theory of habitus. They are also specified by Bourdieu very fundamentally and in an extremely insightful manner as intricately intertwined with processes of evaluation, so that Bourdieu's model actually goes far beyond many conceptions within the sociology of emotions. Hence, Bourdieu's theory should not be extended too hastily by adding emotions as an extra (e.g., Cottingham 2016; Penz and Sauer 2016; Reay 2000). Rather, his implicit theory of affect should be explicated first, since it makes an innovative contribution towards a better understanding of the yet somewhat puzzling role that affectivity plays within sociological theory building (Reckwitz 2015), with respect to both the analysis of societies and their social theoretical fundamentals, which becomes especially apparent in light of the recent development of a sociology of valuation (Lamont 2012; Cefai et al. 2015; Peetz et al. 2016).

Turning towards Bourdieu's implicit theory of affect will therefore be the main task of this article. As a first step, Bourdieu's considerations regarding the general structure of (late) modern society will be reconstructed, for which his specific (late) modern anthropology plays a crucial role. In doing so, it can be shown that human evaluation processes, especially in their emotional dimension – fundamentally in terms of feeling appreciated or not – are decisive for Bourdieu's understanding of the (re-)production of (late) modern social dominance. Against this background, and as a second step, an analysis of the role of affectivity<sup>2</sup> specifically within Bourdieu's theory of habitus follows, which represents his understanding of the subjectivated subject and is considered to be the element of his overall theory mainly responsible for explaining the (re-)production of social order in the sense of social domination. In this analysis, it

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, Bourdieu seems rather interested in affectivity even at the beginning of his academic career, as the title of his original PhD thesis, "Emotional Structures of Time", indicates (e.g. Jurt 2009; my translation).

<sup>2</sup> As will become clear hereafter, Bourdieu does not differentiate between different states of human emotionality. Since they all fall in the category of perceptions, with perceptions for him being always bodily bound, Bourdieu does not establish a systematic difference between emotions, feelings, sensations, affects, etc. Therefore, my use of these different terms also does not mark a systematic difference but is rather for the sake of convenience and legibility.

will become apparent that it is because of feelings, emotions, sensations, etc., that societal structures can be incorporated as well as excorporated, and thus, unconsciously reproduced. This is due to Bourdieu's understanding of affective phenomena as part of his corporeal conception of intentionality as the manifestation of (self-)evaluation processes that are essentially what the habitus consists of in (late) modernity. Therefore, to Bourdieu, feelings are basically the manifestation of a practical, unconscious, and learned process of self-evaluation mainly acquired due to evaluation processes during primary socialization, and in this way an expression of a specific evaluative subject structure that is contingent upon its social background of formation. They are, thus, a completely naturalized social practice and in this capacity equipped with a distinct power to motivate further social practices typically reproducing social order. It is in this sense of connecting the subjectivated subject, social evaluation processes, and affectivity in social practice that we speak of here as *self.worth.feelings*. The article ends with a summary of the main arguments and a brief outline of their theoretical implications

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## 2. Bourdieu's Theory of (Late) Modern Society and Its Subject's Feelings<sup>3</sup>

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“[S]ociety is god” (Bourdieu 2000, 245). Reaffirming Durkheim's diagnosis of modernity, with this thundering statement, Bourdieu concludes the Pascalian Meditations (Bourdieu 2000), arguably his most theoretical work, in which he explicitly lays out his “idea of ‘the human being’” (ibid., 8) that underlay his writings that is almost completely overlooked in the discussion of his oeuvre.<sup>4</sup> In doing so, he expresses in a nutshell his notion of the fate of modern man as influenced by the decline of a divine social order and a parallel rise of the recognition or appreciation of others understood as society. In this connection, Bourdieu speaks in reference to Pascal of the “wretchedness of man without God” (ibid., 239), with this wretchedness grounded in man doomed to be “a being without a reason for being haunted by the need for justification, legitimation, recognition” (ibid.), meaning more precisely haunted by the need for the

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<sup>3</sup> It is especially Reckwitz (2008 2011) who establishes Bourdieu as a representative of subjectivation theory. See here also Section 3.1. Furthermore, although Bourdieu is not a designated theorist of late modernity, using the construction of “(late) modernity” seems appropriate. On the one hand, following Giddens (1991), late modernity represents not so much a radical break with modern structures than a process of their radicalization. On the other hand, Bourdieu's studies were carried out at a time typically considered to be the transition phase to late modernity. Furthermore, in their capacity as structural analyses they have the advantage of detecting profound structures of meaning before they rise to the level of societal awareness (Oeverman, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> An exception from this is Peters (2011).

“esteem of men” (ibid., 238). According to Bourdieu, this appreciation of men is, however, “what is rarest” (ibid., 240) in the social world and, thus, of greatest value in that world. Therefore, in a society without a firm divine order and an increased idea among society’s members that they can influence their own fate, hence their social position, such a society is dominated by a “symbolic struggle of all against all in which what is at stake is the power of *naming*, or categorization, in which everyone stakes his being, his value, the idea he has of himself” (ibid., 238, original emphasis) and this in order to enforce categories of valuation, against which one can appear valuable. This is due to Bourdieu’s conceptualization of social order as being made up of “categories of perception and appreciation” (Bourdieu 1996a, 483) that he equates with “the social world itself” (ibid.). Consequently, perception beyond these categories of appreciation does not exist, or, to put it differently, any kind of perception contains evaluations so that processes of perception are always also processes of evaluation.<sup>5</sup> Thus, society is ultimately a hierarchical system of classifications determining relationally the worth of any of its entities, hence, determining what is seen as how valuable, as how legitimate. It is for this reason that Bourdieu speaks of symbolic dominance, for which the notion of the legitimate subject is the most fundamental dimension – social “[c]onflicts [...] would not be so dramatic [...] if they did not involve the ultimate values of the person, a highly sublimated form of interests” (ibid., 310).

Now, this central appreciation of others exhibits an intricate relationship with affectivity. That is to say that according to Bourdieu, appreciation to the portrayed extent matters precisely because it is felt. This can be seen for example when Bourdieu states, “[o]ne of the most unequal of all distributions, and probably, in any case, the *most cruel*, is the distribution of symbolic capital, that is, of social importance and of reasons for living” (Bourdieu 2000, 241; emphasis added); or when he writes that “[a]ll the manifestations of social recognition [...] saves those it touches from the *distress* of an existence without justification” (ibid.; emphasis added), and that there is “no *worse* dispossession, no *worse* privation, perhaps, than that of the losers in the symbolic struggle for recognition, for access to a socially recognized social being, in a word, to humanity” (ibid.; emphasis added). Therefore, ‘to feel’ means ‘to recognize’ – to recognize in practice, i.e. *practically* recognize – that social order against which the social subjects are to be endowed with more or less value and thus with more or less legitimacy.

This becomes even more apparent when Bourdieu states that the “effect of consecration [is] capable of rescuing one from the sense of the insignificance and contingency of an existence without necessity” (ibid.) – a state that is called “happiness” (ibid.), which is grounded in “feeling oneself objectively,

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<sup>5</sup> See here also Prinz (2014, 30 ff.).

and therefore subjectively, endowed” (ibid.). The subjectively felt, the feeling of being more or less appreciated, is thus the objective, that which is decisive for analyzing social dominance. Hence, if symbolic capital is distributed unequally, fundamentally that means that just how much social subjects (can) feel appreciated, is distributed unequally.

Therefore, (late) modern social class as classification struggles are about changing the categories of perception and appreciation in a way that one’s own existence is perceivable as valuable even by oneself. The opportunities to do this, however, are unequally distributed due to the unequal distribution of symbolic capital – a vicious circle Bourdieu tries to capture with the term symbolic violence. This includes for example the fact that only “dominants always tend to impose the skills they have mastered as necessary and legitimate and to include in their definition of excellence the practices at which they excel” (Bourdieu 1996b, 119). In contrast, dominated groups can typically only perceive themselves with categories of perception rendering them as appearing less valuable, so that within the social struggles of dominance they cannot move up those categories that are advantageous for them. Bourdieu points this out when writing that symbolic violence is a

coercion which is set up only through the consent that the dominated cannot fail to give to the dominator (and therefore to the domination) [...] when the schemes they implement in order to perceive and evaluate themselves or to perceive and evaluate the dominators [...] are the product of the incorporation of the (thus naturalized) classifications of which their social being is the product. (Bourdieu 2000, 170)

Additionally, this becomes clear when Bourdieu states that according to symbolic violence, “dominated lifestyles are almost always perceived, even by those who live them, from the destructive and reductive point of view of the dominant aesthetic” (Bourdieu 1998, 9). In this way, ultimately it becomes apparent here that essentially that kind of subject can be considered as the legitimate (late) modern way of subjectivation that appreciates itself in terms of feeling appreciated, so that a *norm of self-appreciation* can be assumed for (late) modernity within Bourdieu’s theory (see also Matthäus 2014, 231).

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### 3. Bourdieu's Theory of Habitus: On Self, Worth, and Feelings

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#### 3.1 Habitus – Subject – Structure

Human affectivity and the connected relationship between appreciation and feeling appreciated does, however, not only play a decisive role in Bourdieu’s notion of (late) modern social order. In a theoretically stringent and substantiating way, it also plays an important role in his theory of habitus. However,



before we can get to that, three essential aspects of this theory have to be outlined.

- 1) Due to Bourdieu's general practice- and social dominance-theoretical framework, there are two fundamental ideas that apply also for his theory of habitus: 1) Every society is *in principle* divisible between a dominant and a dominated group; and 2) the (re-)production of social dominance is always dependent upon the actual activity of social subjects. In terms of these practice-theoretical considerations,<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu's theory is fundamentally a theory about "the mode of generation of practices" (Bourdieu 2013, 72). Therefore, Bourdieu is not so much interested in social practices themselves, but rather in the conditions, processes, and mechanisms of their emergence which he basically models as the "*dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality*, or, more simply, of incorporation and objectification" (ibid.; original emphasis) within his concept of habitus.
- 2) The habitus as such a "principle generating and unifying all practices" (ibid., 124) is understood by Bourdieu as "an individual or a socialized biological body, or as the social, biologically individuated through incarnation in a body" (Bourdieu 2000, 157). Speaking of the habitus therefore means to not speak of an entity in the sense of an extra organ or the like, but of individuals as always becoming social beings, as essentialized and existentialized subjects. "The social world is essentialist" (ibid., 238), Bourdieu also states. Hence, he makes clear that when analyzing the (re-)production of social structures, especially in terms of structures of social dominance, the decisive level of analysis should be that which is generally considered to be essential or natural. That means that which most self-evidently seems good, valuable, despicable, or horrid, thus ultimately comprising those perceptions that make our world appear in a specific way for which the question of alternative does not even seem to be possible. Consequently, the notion of habitus refers to the social molding of society's members understood as their "second nature" (Bourdieu 1996a, 474), and this in a twofold sense: On the one hand, Bourdieu's theory of habitus captures the time and space specificity of the social subjects on the macro level as for example described in Section 2. On the other hand, it is focused especially on how these structures are (re-)produced on the micro level by socialization practices as will be described in the following. Therefore, the social subject is always influenced by both – by the general structuring of society, for example in respect to what is considered a legitimate lifestyle or a legitimate subject; and in connection with that, by the structuring of a subject's immediate society during (primary) socialization particularly in the form of familial relationships, and therefore by the social position one is born into and the social trajectory covered since

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<sup>6</sup> For an introduction to and overview of practice theory see Hillebrandt (2014) and Schäfer (2015).

then. Hence, within the theory of habitus as laid out by Bourdieu, both the collective and the individual history are influencing the shaping of, the becoming of, and thus the *being* of social subjects.

- 3) Although the habitus has been described as a specific scheme of perception, thought, and action, for our endeavor it is its more fundamental definition as a “structuring and structured structure” (ibid., 171) that is especially important, since it fully captures the notion of the theory of habitus being essentially a theory about the production of practices. According to this definition, habitus is first of all defined as a structure – a structure, however, formed by structures and producing structures. In doing so, Bourdieu resorts to a basic definition of structure, perceiving it as a relatively constant way of relating between at least two elements, so that the concept of habitus essentially refers to the relatively constant kind of a relationship between us and ourselves. This can be demonstrated, for example, when Bourdieu highlights that the “[h]abitus constructs the world by a certain way of orienting itself towards it” (Bourdieu 2000, 144), because an ‘orienting itself towards it’ implies an orienting taking place, hence a referring to oneself that orients oneself in a certain way towards the world. Thus, the specific relation between the actor-subject and itself produces a specific relation between the actor-subject and the world, which in turn always implies a specific act of the subject referring to itself. It is in this sense that Bourdieu describes the habitus as “a particular but constant way of entering into a relationship with the world” (ibid., 142). In consequence, speaking of different forms of habitus essentially means speaking of different subject structures as in different self-/world-relationships (Matthäus 2014, 222). This means that, if one is interested in the (re-)production process of (late) modern structures of social dominance, the objects of reference or distinct social practices are essentially only important in connection with the *way* they are referred to or carried out. This can be seen also when Bourdieu refers to the habitually differentiated tastes of the social classes that “cannot be considered in complete independence of the other dimensions of the *relationship* to the world, to others and to one’s own body, through which the practical philosophy of each class is enacted” (Bourdieu 1996a, 193; emphasis added). So, in principle it is more important *how* something is referred to, e.g. tennis, opera, or hamburgers, than *that* it is referred to. Consequently, relational thinking plays a crucial role not only in identifying social classes as phenomena fundamentally being in relation to each other, but also in Bourdieu’s conception of the social subject itself, as will be further demonstrated in the following analysis of Bourdieu’s considerations of affect in his theory of habitus.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In reference to Gabriel’s argument that only Elias enables consequent relational thinking, I would like to point out that conceptualizing the subject itself as a relation is an extremely

### 3.2 Corporeal Affectivity

As established so far, it is thus this subject structure that produces as a “*modus operandi*” (Bourdieu 1998, 55; original emphasis) our social practice as an “*opus operatum*” (ibid.; original emphasis), typically in a way that reproduces social dominance. With respect to the question of exactly how the subject structure does that, human affectivity comes into play. This is caused by our corporeal and therefore practical being-in-the-world that includes our emotions as the entity particularly connected with what is perceived as the essential and natural, as Bourdieu conceptualizes with reference to German philosopher Martin Heidegger:<sup>8</sup>

With a Heideggerian play on words, one might say that we are *disposed* because we are *exposed*. It is because the body is (to unequal degrees) exposed and endangered in the world, faced with the risk of emotion, lesion, suffering, sometimes death, and therefore obliged to take the world seriously (and nothing is more serious than emotion, which touches the depths of our organic being) that it is able to acquire dispositions that are themselves an openness to the world, that is, to the very structures of the social world of which they are the incorporated form. (Bourdieu 2000, 140-1; original emphasis)

Therefore, it prevails that

[w]e learn bodily. The social order inscribes itself in bodies through this permanent confrontation, which may be more or less dramatic but is always largely marked by affectivity and, more precisely, by affective transactions with the environment (ibid., 141),

which, as shown above, in (late) modernity is a valuation system particularly with respect to the value of subjects, in which those subjects that feel appreciated are perceived as more valuable.

Consequently, the body in its capacity to feel is of special significance in Bourdieu’s thought, because it stores structures of the social world – the specific order of a society – in the form of subject structures, thus in form of specific ways subjects refer to themselves (ibid., 182-3). Bourdieu’s notion of the bodily hexis as “a basic dimension of the sense of social orientation, [...] a practical way of experiencing and expressing one’s own sense of social value” (Bourdieu 1984, 474), highlights this especially. Therefore, Bourdieu speaks of “the values given body” (Bourdieu 2013, 94) and of embodied values as “placed

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relational perspective that should not be dismissed too easily (see Gabriel 2017, this HSR Special Issue).

<sup>8</sup> For more information on the affinity between Bourdieu and Heidegger, see Koppetsch (2001), who concludes her analysis by stating the importance of Heidegger for practice-theoretical thought in general and highlighting that only Bourdieu thought out consistently “the implications of Heideggerian existential philosophy with respect to an understanding of social practice” (ibid., 349; my translation). Moreover, Prinz (2014) shows how not only the existential philosophy by Heidegger, but also the phenomenology of the body by Maurice Merleau-Ponty deeply influenced Bourdieu’s thought.

beyond the grasp of consciousness” (ibid.). For this reason and because bodily affective states are as part of the dominant (late) modern notion of a Cartesian subject seen as completely individual rather than representing the social structure and one’s own position therein (ibid., 63-4), they are most effective within the hidden process of reproducing structures of social dominance. This can be also seen when Bourdieu states that what is constituted during to the above-mentioned bodily confrontation with the social world as basically a system of valuation categories is

an immediate adherence, at the deepest level of the habitus, to the tastes and distastes, sympathies and aversions, fantasies and phobias which, more than declared opinions, forge the unconscious unity of a class (Bourdieu 1996a, 77).

Hence, it is exactly this unreflected, bodily-emotional way of being that is structured by structures of social dominance and that functions as their reproducer. The self-/world-relationship is therefore always bodily constituted, and thus, according to Bourdieu, also always emotional, rendering all social practices ultimately as also being affective practices.

So, due to the affective confrontation with the social order, the valuation categories central to the (re-)production process of social dominance permeate the body and in doing so the habitus; thus, they essentially shape how we refer to ourselves evaluatively which manifests itself in our feelings. Subsequently that also means that Bourdieu views our body and its feelings as more fundamental than our thinking consciousness with respect to the production of social practice (see also Bourdieu 2000, 137). In this regard, Bourdieu speaks about a “practical, non-thetic intentionality” (ibid., 143) which is “rooted in a posture, a way of bearing the body (a *hexis*)” (ibid., 144; original emphasis). It is therefore exactly the *practical* perception and recognition in terms of “*the practical sense* and *the practical evaluations*” (Müller 2014, 21; original emphasis; my translation) that are decisive for Bourdieu’s thinking about the (re-)production of social dominance in (late) modernity, implying that the values being referred to and evaluations being made remain mostly unconscious. Consequently, Bourdieu identifies the habitus as “the solution to the paradoxes of objective meaning without subjective intention” (Bourdieu 1990, 62), so that methodologically the objective meaning of social practice is seen as at least equally important as the meaning the subjects themselves offer consciously (also see Bourdieu 2013, 81).

### 3.3 Affect – Worth

Moreover, Bourdieu describes the body as a “memory pad” (Bourdieu 2000, 68) and “a repository for the most precious values” (Bourdieu 1990, 68), which implies that primary experiences have a special significance within Bourdieu’s theory. This becomes even clearer when Bourdieu further specifies the habitus

as “embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten history [which] is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product” (Bourdieu 1990, 56), and also describing the unconscious as being “never anything other than the forgetting of history” (ibid.). Therefore, present processes of confrontation with the social world are always already influenced by past such processes, during which evaluation categories get incorporated, especially with regard to self-evaluation categories. Hence, the present is always viewed in light of the past – a phenomenon for which Bourdieu coined the term “hysteresis effect” (Bourdieu 1996a, 142). For this reason, categories of perception, which are also categories of evaluation and vice versa, that were incorporated during primary socialization, typically are of particular significance for the social subjects. Hence, the formation of subject structures always starts during childhood, not necessarily only beginning with actual birth (Bourdieu 2000, 165).<sup>9</sup>

Hence, the important affective confrontation with the social world that can be understood in terms of a process of subject structure formation in the sense of forming a specific practical relation between the subject and itself in comparison to the world happens during primary socialization, and thus in accordance to the “material and cultural conditions of existence” (Bourdieu 2000, 134) during that time. With regard to this process, referring especially to the “relatively autonomous universe of family relationships” (Bourdieu 2013, 78), Bourdieu especially highlights the translation of social structures into affective, familial structures of interaction that produce subject structures manifesting themselves in feelings (ibid.). To put it differently, Bourdieu assumes societal value judgements of the (immediate) company to be adopted as self-evaluations in the form of affects:

But the social effects of the family-*fatum*, in other words the set of positive or negative verdicts pronounced on the child, performative statements of the being of the child which bring about what they state, or, more subtly and insidiously, the whole set of *silent censures* imposed by the very logic of the domestic order as a moral order, would not be so powerful or so dramatic if they were not charged with desire and, through repression, buried in the deepest level of the body where they are recorded in the form of guilts, phobias, or, in a word, passions. (Bourdieu 2000, 167; original emphasis)

In specifying that, Bourdieu underlines in accordance to his overall construction of the habitus (see Section 3.1) that it is not only important *what* kind of recurring explicit verdicts or value judgements are vocalized by the primary caretakers, but rather *how* the child is typically being referred to as he states:

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<sup>9</sup> For this reason, with Bourdieu it is not only possible to think a “Sein-zum-Tode [Being-toward-death]” (Bourdieu 2000, 239; original emphasis) that he himself wants to overcome in certain regards, but also a “Sein” grounded in birth and therefore in social relations (Schües 2008, 2016).

I am thinking in particular of all the demands and taboos – those, for example, that are implied in all acts of nomination [...] – which, whether implicit, insinuated or simply inscribed in the practical state in interactions, are addressed to the child and help to shape his representation of his (generic or individual) capacity to act, his value and social being. (ibid., 218)<sup>10</sup>

Note here again the equivalent relation between social practice, value, affect, and the essentialized subjective being.

As for the foundation of the significance of these value judgements Bourdieu again refers to the “*search for recognition*” (ibid., 166; original emphasis). However, since the child does not simply adopt the value judgements of his/her parents, but is “[i]n fact, [...] continuously led to take the point of view of others on himself, to adopt their point of view so as to discover and evaluate in advance how he will be seen and defined by them” (ibid.), it becomes clear again that the appreciation of others is indeed primarily a social product of (late) modern social structures and not a universal fact. Moreover, the process of socialization is described as a transactional process “in which the child makes renunciations and sacrifices in exchange for testimonies of recognition, consideration and admiration” (ibid., 167), with this transactional process being “highly charged with affectivity” (ibid.). Children, according to Bourdieu, are therefore incorporating “the social in form of affects” (ibid.).

Thus, that which is important on the structured side of the habitus in terms of a relation of the world towards the self is the way primary caretakers evaluatively refer to the child, because the child adopts these references and transforms them into structuring self-references at the ‘deepest level of the body’ where they manifest themselves as feelings. Therefore, feelings themselves should be considered as social practice – as a social practice, however, that has a special capacity for motivating further social practices, as Bourdieu makes very clear when he talks about the ‘practical philosophy’ and the ‘unity of a class’ that is most importantly shaped by emotions (see Sections 3.1 and 3.2). All kinds of feelings are therefore within the framework of Bourdieu’s theory basically conceptualized as a manifestation of a practical evaluative self-/world-reference produced essentially by a specific evaluative referring of the world towards the self, so that they all can be understood as *self.worth.feelings* – a term that, however, refers ultimately to the inherent connection of the subjectivated subject, social evaluation processes, and the subjects feelings (of being).<sup>11</sup> Therefore, due to the fact that all social practice is a product of the

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<sup>10</sup> For a more empirical account, see the reconstruction of Lareaus (2002) study on child rearing practices of middle class and working poor families in Matthäus (2014, 234 ff.)

<sup>11</sup> This includes distinct emotions and feelings, but also and more importantly in following Ratcliffes (2005) *Feeling of Being*, “existential feelings”, highlighting the fact that we as human subjects are always feeling somehow – a feeling that further motivates our social practice.

habitus, it is not only always affective, but also always evaluative as well. In turn, affects are always also an evaluative social practice.

However, as already indicated, due to the hysteresis effect, subject structures and their subsequent feelings, once developed, do not change easily, because change requires “new experiences” (Bourdieu 2000, 161), while the habitus typically structures the perceptions of the world in its spirit. Furthermore, change “is never radical, because it works on the basis of the premises established in the previous state” (ibid.). That means that perceiving a certain statement as a kind offer of help or, in contrast, as an insinuation at one’s incompetence, is primed by prior experiences due to one’s social background and social trajectory, as Bourdieu expresses pronouncedly when referring to the typical self-deprecating perceptions of the dominated:

The passions of the dominated habitus [...] are not of a kind that can be suspended by simple effort of will, founded on a liberatory awakening of consciousness. A person who fights his timidity feels betrayed by his body, which recognizes paralyzing taboos or calls to order, where someone else, the product of different conditions, would see stimulating incitements or injunctions. (ibid., 179-80)

What follows from this is on the one hand a certain independence of affective (re-)actions towards social situations, because affects are dependent upon a primary incorporated subject structure, as also Bourdieu himself points out:

In a general way, the efficacy of external necessities depends upon the efficacy of an internal necessity. [...] 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 the family. (ibid., 169-70)

On the other hand Bourdieu demonstrates here very clearly that so-called habitus transformations are indeed possible, but also that they are bound to the bodily dimension of the subject’s being. Therefore, changes are not to happen because of conscious and cognitive considerations alone (ibid. 180), but are based on the bodily dimension of affective transactions with the social environment, so that Bourdieu speaks of a bodily “countertraining” that answers the original “training of the body” (ibid., 172): “[S]ymbolic action cannot, on its own, without transformation of the conditions of the production and transformation of dispositions, extirpate bodily beliefs, which are passions and drives” (ibid., 180). For every process of habitus formation, thus also for every process of so-called habitus transformation, it is therefore the affective-evaluative transaction, the affective-evaluative dimension of interactions and relation(ship)s, that is ultimately decisive. Subsequently, once established subject structures in terms of the socially formed affective-evaluative practical perceptions of one’s own person can be overcome only if there are new, relatively

constant emotional experiences of valuation judgements countering those made during socialization processes (so far).<sup>12</sup>

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#### 4. Conclusion

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To conclude, in this article I have argued that within the Social Theory of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu an implicit theory of affect can be found that offers not only a unique perspective on affective states with respect to theory building in general, but also enhances our understanding of the constitution and (re-)production of social order in (late) modernity, especially in terms of (late) modern social dominance.

According to Bourdieu, affective states in general and in particular are fundamentally bodily phenomena included in the concept of bodily intentionality and therefore expressing a specific self-/world reference of the social subjects. To be more precise, this self-/world reference is a practical evaluative process produced by the practical evaluative references of the social world towards the self, of which those during primary socialization are of special importance. As an expression of this habitual subject structure, states of affect are an especially naturalized form of social practice and therefore especially suitable to motivate further social practices that typically reproduce social structures.<sup>13</sup> Feelings, emotions, sensations, etc. conceptualized in this way, are thus not so much expressions of situative occurrences, but expressions of unconsciously learned ways of evaluating oneself in comparison to the world – they are self-worth feelings, a term that marks the fundamental interconnection these three elements hold in (late) modern social practice according to Bourdieu's social theory, as this article demonstrates.

Therefore, with Bourdieu's implicit theory of affect, one can explain why and how affects are an essential element of the (re-)production of social inequality or social dominance in (late) modernity: As part of the incorporation of the material and cultural conditions of existence as produced by subject structures, which are structured due to practical evaluative references by the world towards the self especially during primary socialization, they have the capacity to motivate social practices most effectively that are either self-selecting – such

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<sup>12</sup> An instructive example for this is provided by Schmeiser (1994, 1996), in his still seminal study on the life courses of professors, especially focusing on their social background. His data shows that processes of intragenerational upward mobility can be realized only under the condition of appreciative emotional references by close confidants for whom Schmeiser introduces the term "social godparents" (1996, 149; my translation). Moreover, his analysis demonstrates that the capacity of entering into such a relationship and therefore perceiving these appreciative references as such is dependent upon prior experiences, here especially in form of disruptions within the original habitat, to use a Bourdieusian term.

<sup>13</sup> See here also the conceptualization of Scheer (2012).



as quitting university due to perceptions like “I just didn’t feel like I fit in” (Lehmann 2007) – or serving as the basis for social selection processes by others, because they are perceived, for example, as “slavish, common,” “dull, boring, mediocre” (Bourdieu 1996b, 31) and thus less valuable on the one hand, or as “fine, ingenious, subtle, intelligent” (ibid.) and thus valuable and especially eligible on the other.

For these reasons and also because Bourdieu’s implicit theory of affect shows fruitful similarities with recent developments within the philosophical discussion about the concept of “Affective Intentionality” (Slaby et al. 2011; Slaby 2008; Ratcliffe 2005) as well as with new psychoanalytical considerations of the so-called intersubjective school (e.g. Atwood and Stolorow 1984; Orange et al. 2003; Jaenicke 2006),<sup>14</sup> it enriches the social scientific discourse on emotions that is typically either rather focused on the norm-based management of emotions and their discursive significance, and less on a profound definition of the actual object of investigation (e.g., Elias 1977; Hochschild 1985; Illouz 2007, 2008), or concentrated on single, distinct emotions without going into human affectivity in general, its constitution and actual mode of operation (Scheff 1988; Neckel 1991; Barbalet 1998), which especially holds true for the rather individualistic and empiricist studies of self-worth and feelings thereof (e.g. Sandmeier 2005; Trautwein 2003). Bourdieu in contrast provides us with a theoretically stringent definition of affective states in general and in particular that is even able to answer the so-called problem of individuation that asks how emotions can systematically be differentiated, because emotions according to Bourdieu are a specific way of the subject practically and evaluatively referring to itself and the world according to past experiences of evaluations by this world. Thus, emotions in Bourdieu’s theory are not lopsidedly understood as only cognitive phenomena (e.g. Nussbaum 2001) or as pre-social energy (Massumi 2002), but as both bodily and intentional, structured and structuring. In this way, Bourdieu’s theory not only demonstrates the connection between social positions and certain emotions (e.g. Kemper 1978; Heise 1979; and von Scheve 2009), but actually offers an explanation why social subjects according to their social background and trajectory, thus their social position, react differently due to different emotions to the same social situations, and how this typically leads to the reproduction of social inequality or social dominance in (late) modernity.

Therefore, Bourdieu’s implicit theory of affect helps us to adequately analyze power relations and structures of dominance in the 21st century: First of all, Bourdieu offers us a sound hypothesis regarding subjects being able to refer to themselves appreciatively and thus feeling appreciated as the legitimate subject structure of (late) modernity. Secondly, with Bourdieu’s theory the

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<sup>14</sup> Aarseth, Layto and Nielsen (2016) point to a similar connection with regard to relational psychoanalysis.

question of habitus formation as well as its transformation, i.e., the question of what kind of conditions lead to the production, reproduction, or change of social structures in (late) modernity and how these processes take place, can be answered more precisely. Habitus in (late) modernity are based on relatively persistent practical evaluative-affective references by the world and only change if referred to in manners differing from that. And thirdly, Bourdieu's theory provides us with a theoretical framework that allows us to understand two typical late modern social developments in their interconnectedness – the increasing significance of emotionality on the one side, especially in the sense of understanding emotions as being an expression of our true inner selves (McCarthy 2002),<sup>15</sup> and on the other side the proliferation of evaluation processes implicitly or explicitly aimed at social subjects (e.g. Sauder and Espeland 2009) – as an increasing significance of self-worth feelings in the (re-)production process of social domination in (late) modernity.

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<sup>15</sup> A very insightful example provides Hochschild (1983, 56 ff.) with her studies, in which she describes the increasing expectation of service personnel to exhibit certain emotions and the problems that result from the "deep acting" partly necessary for that – problems, however, that can only occur as such if our feelings are considered to be an expression of our true inner selves.

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