



A BOURDIEUIAN PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL PRACTICE AND SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE: WOMEN'S AGENCY IN SWIPED (2025)"

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Abstract

Women in the technology industry are often still judged by whether powerful male figures choose to recognize their contributions, rather than by their actual skill or effort. This study looks at the film *Swiped* (2025) through Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practice, focusing on the concepts of habitus, capital, and field, to understand how women's agency develops within a male-dominated tech environment. The film follows Whitney Wolfe Herd's career, starting from her early work on Tinder to her later founding of Bumble, and shows how her choices and opportunities are shaped by workplace culture, company structures, and unequal power dynamics. Using a qualitative descriptive method, this study closely examines selected scenes, dialogue, and story elements to see how these social structures influence her decisions. The findings show that her professional position is shaped not just by personal skill, but by how her internalized habits, the resources available to her, and the competitive nature of her workplace interact with one another. The film also shows that her sense of agency grows through an ongoing back-and-forth between limitation and opportunity, rather than through one single turning point. Based on this, the study argues that *Swiped* (2025) is more than a biopic — it works as a cultural text that reflects and shapes how we understand women's agency and power within today's digital industry.

Keywords: Bourdieu; capital; habitus; symbolic violence; women's agency.

Abstrak

Perempuan di industri teknologi seringkali masih dinilai berdasarkan apakah tokoh laki-laki berkuasa mau mengakui kontribusi mereka, bukan berdasarkan kemampuan atau usaha mereka yang sebenarnya. Penelitian ini mengkaji film *Swiped* (2025) melalui teori praktik sosial Pierre Bourdieu, dengan fokus pada konsep habitus, capital, dan field, untuk memahami bagaimana agensi perempuan berkembang dalam lingkungan teknologi yang didominasi laki-laki. Film ini mengikuti perjalanan karier Whitney Wolfe Herd, mulai dari keterlibatan awalnya di Tinder hingga pendirian Bumble, dan memperlihatkan bagaimana pilihan serta peluang yang dimilikinya dibentuk oleh budaya kerja, struktur perusahaan, dan ketimpangan relasi kekuasaan. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis secara mendalam adegan-adegan terpilih, dialog, dan unsur naratif untuk melihat bagaimana struktur sosial tersebut memengaruhi keputusan yang diambilnya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa posisi profesionalnya tidak hanya dibentuk oleh kemampuan pribadi, tetapi juga oleh interaksi antara kebiasaan yang telah terinternalisasi, akses terhadap berbagai bentuk capital, dan sifat kompetitif dari lingkungan kerja tempatnya berada. Film ini juga menunjukkan bahwa rasa agensinya tumbuh melalui negosiasi yang terus-menerus antara keterbatasan dan peluang, bukan melalui satu titik balik tunggal. Berdasarkan hal ini, penelitian ini berargumen bahwa *Swiped* (2025) bukan sekadar film biografi, melainkan juga teks budaya yang merefleksikan sekaligus membentuk cara kita memahami agensi perempuan dan kekuasaan institusional dalam budaya digital saat ini.

Kata Kunci: agensi perempuan; Bourdieu; capital; habitus; symbolic violence.



INTRODUCTION

Male-dominated leadership structures continue to define much of the technology industry, and within these structures, women's contributions are routinely minimized, doubted, or absorbed into someone else's narrative. Even where a woman holds an official title of authority, that authority tends to remain conditional—dependent less on what she has actually built than on whether men in positions of power are willing to acknowledge it. Swiped (2025) dramatizes exactly this dynamic through its portrayal of a woman's rise within the tech sector, tracing both the resistance she meets and the strategies she uses to carve out a position of her own. This study takes that portrayal as its starting point, applying Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field to examine how power relations and professional practice are constructed, contested, and reproduced across the film's narrative.

Directed by Rachel Lee Goldenberg, *Swiped* (2025) turns Whitney Wolfe Herd's real career path—from her early role at Tinder to her eventual founding of Bumble—into narrative form. What the film resists is any suggestion that her success can be explained by talent or drive alone; instead, it keeps returning to the institutional conditions of a male-dominated tech industry, where being recognized as legitimate, being taken seriously as an authority, and simply being allowed to hold a title all depend on assumptions tied to gender. Her agency, as the film frames it, is less something she possesses outright than something she has to keep re-establishing against workplace structures, expectations, and power imbalances that rarely work in her favor.

Structural inequality remains a defining feature of how women navigate professional and technological fields, not because individual women lack capability, but because patriarchal norms and institutional hierarchies continue to determine who gets perceived, heard, and recognized in these spaces. Butler (2004) offers a useful way of understanding why these patterns persist: gender, in her account, is not something fixed but an effect that societies continually produce through repeated practices, and it is this constant repetition that allows identity to be policed and existing hierarchies to hold their ground. Connell (2005) and Walby (2009) extend this point by locating gender inequality not in individual attitudes but in the social structures that organize power and authority more broadly. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that women's empowerment cannot be reduced to a matter of personal confidence or ambition alone; it has to be examined through the structural conditions that either open up or foreclose women's ability to act.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practice offers a useful framework for analyzing this issue. At the core of Bourdieu's (2001) framework lies a relational logic: social practice cannot be reduced to habitus, capital, or field in isolation, but only to how the three continuously act on one another. Habitus supplies the dispositions people carry into a situation without thinking; capital supplies what they can draw on, whether economic, cultural, social, or symbolic; and field supplies the arena—governed by its own rules of

competition—where that habitus and capital either gain traction or fall flat.

In addition to habitus, capital, and field, symbolic violence is also important in understanding gendered domination. Symbolic violence refers to subtle forms of domination that are accepted as natural, normal, or unavoidable by those who experience them (Bourdieu, 2001). This form of violence does not operate through physical force, but through language, institutional procedures, recognition, silence, and everyday practices. Wacquant (2013) explains that symbolic power shapes the categories through which people understand social reality, while Thapar-Björkert, Samelius, and Sanghera (2016) emphasize that symbolic violence often works invisibly through ordinary habits and practices. In a male-dominated workplace, symbolic violence may appear when women's contributions are minimized, their concerns are dismissed, or their professional legitimacy is treated as conditional.

Several previous studies have applied Bourdieu's theory to examine social positioning, power relations, and symbolic domination in film and media texts. Fatahillah analyzes Siti (2014) and Turah (2016) to show how symbolic violence is reproduced through everyday social relations and accepted as something normal within the characters' lives. Ardianto and Gultom examine *A Bug's Life* by discussing habitus, capital, field, and strategy in relation to domination and class struggle. Choirunnisa applies Bourdieu's concepts to *Emily in Paris* and explains how the main character's practices are shaped by cultural adaptation and professional positioning. Santoso analyzes superhero representation in *X-Men: Days of Future Past* by focusing on character construction, authority, and ideological meaning. Meanwhile, Aini, Amilia, Dzarna, and Susetyo examine *Ali & Ratu Queens* through habitus, capital, and field to explain how social dynamics are constructed in film. These studies show that Bourdieu's framework is relevant for analyzing character positioning and social practice. However, none of them specifically discusses *Swiped* (2025), especially in relation to women's agency in a digital and technology-driven professional environment. Therefore, this study fills the gap by analyzing how habitus, capital, field, and symbolic violence shape women's position and agency in *Swiped*.

Based on this gap, this study analyzes how *Swiped* represents women's agency through the interaction of habitus, capital, field, and symbolic violence. The research is guided by two questions: first, how do habitus, capital, field, and symbolic violence shape the main character's experiences in *Swiped* (2025)? Second, how does the main character utilize her capital within the male-dominated field and transform her position in the film? Through these questions, this study aims to show that women's agency in the film is not presented as complete freedom, but as a negotiated practice formed within unequal social structures.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. This method is suitable because the research aims to describe and interpret meanings found in a film rather than measure numerical data. Sandelowski (2000) explains that



qualitative descriptive research allows researchers to present events, experiences, and meanings in a detailed and direct way. In this study, the method is used to examine how Swiped (2025) constructs women's agency through narrative events, character interactions, dialogue, and visual representation.

The primary data source of this research is the film Swiped (2025), directed by Rachel Lee Goldenberg. The data consist of selected scenes, dialogues, character interactions, and visual elements that represent gendered barriers, workplace hierarchy, professional recognition, symbolic violence, and women's agency. The secondary data consist of books, journal articles, and previous studies related to Bourdieu's theory, gender studies, symbolic violence, film analysis, and qualitative research.

The data were collected through several steps. First, the researcher watched and rewatched the film to understand its plot, character development, and thematic structure. Second, key scenes related to women's agency, gender inequality, workplace domination, and professional transformation were selected. Third, important dialogues were transcribed and visual moments were documented. Fourth, the data were categorized based on Bourdieu's concepts: habitus, capital, field, and symbolic violence. Finally, secondary sources were used to strengthen the interpretation of the selected data.

The analysis followed the qualitative data analysis process proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The selected scenes were first identified according to their relevance to the research questions. Then, the data were grouped into thematic categories. After that, each category was interpreted using Bourdieu's theoretical framework. The analysis focused on how Whitney's position is shaped by the technological field, how her capital is recognized or refused, how symbolic violence operates within institutional interactions, and how she transforms her position through Bumble.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that Whitney Wolfe Herd's position in Swiped is shaped by the interaction between social practice and symbolic violence. Her experience in the technology industry is not presented as a simple story of individual struggle, but as a process formed within a male-dominated professional field. Through selected scenes, the film shows how gendered assumptions influence perception, how professional capital depends on recognition, how the field limits women's authority, and how symbolic violence makes exclusion appear ordinary. The findings are summarized through four main concepts: habitus, capital, field, and symbolic violence.

1	Habitus	Whitney is mistaken for a hired hostess at the startup event.	The male attendee's assumption shows a gendered habitus in which women's presence in a technology space is interpreted through appearance rather than professional ability.
2	Capital	Whitney raises harassment concerns in Tinder's internal meeting.	Whitney's cultural and social capital appear through her understanding of female users' experiences, but this capital is not fully recognized because the company prioritizes growth over safety.
3	Field	Justin turns Whitney's personal breakup into a question of workplace hierarchy.	Tinder functions as a field where professional authority and personal relations overlap, allowing male power to challenge Whitney's position as co-founder.
4	Symbolic Violence	Whitney is excluded from the <i>Time</i> magazine photoshoot.	The exclusion minimizes Whitney's contribution while making the harm appear as a simple oversight, showing how symbolic violence works through normalization and misrecognition.

Table 1. Findings of social practice and symbolic violence in Swiped (2025)

No.	Bourdieu's Concept	Evidence in the Film	Interpretation
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Habitus and the gendered logic of the technology field

The first major finding is that Whitney's experience is shaped by gendered habitus within the technology startup field. In the startup event scene, Whitney attempts to present herself as a founder with a professional idea. However, a male attendee assumes that she is a hired woman invited to balance the gender ratio at the event. This scene reveals how habitus operates as an internalized system of perception. The man's response is not presented as a formal rule, but as an automatic assumption. He does not need to directly evaluate Whitney's idea because his perception has already been shaped by the gendered logic of the field.



Figure 1. Whitney Facing Gendered Assumptions at the Startup Event

Source: Swiped (2025), minute 1:54.

This scene shows that Whitney is judged before her professional explanation is properly considered. The man's response does not reject her idea directly, but first places her into a gendered category that has little connection to entrepreneurship. In this situation, habitus works through a spontaneous perception that makes women appear less expected in a startup environment. Whitney's presence is therefore read through the social expectation attached to her gender, not through the professional role she is trying to perform. This makes the scene important because it shows how gendered assumptions can limit recognition before formal evaluation even begins.

In Bourdieu's framework, habitus refers to dispositions that guide perception and action without always being consciously recognized (Bourdieu, 2001). What the man assumes about Whitney says more about the field than about her. Long before competence enters the picture, gender and appearance have already done the work of sorting who belongs in a technology space and who does not. Haryatmoko's (2016) point about habitus reinforcing institutional power is useful here precisely because it explains why the man never has to justify his assumption—it already feels self-evident to him. Whitney's professional capital, then, is not simply overlooked; it is never given the chance to enter the conversation at all.

Capital, recognition, and the limits of professional legitimacy

The second major finding concerns the role of capital. Whitney's capital is clearly shown in the internal meeting

when she raises the issue of harassment experienced by female users. Her cultural capital appears through her understanding of user experience and platform safety, while her social capital is connected to the voices of women who report discomfort on the application. She does not bring the issue as a personal complaint, but as a professional concern related to the sustainability of Tinder as a dating platform. However, Bourdieu (2005) emphasizes that capital only becomes effective when it is recognized within a specific field. In Swiped, Whitney's capital is present, but its recognition is unstable.

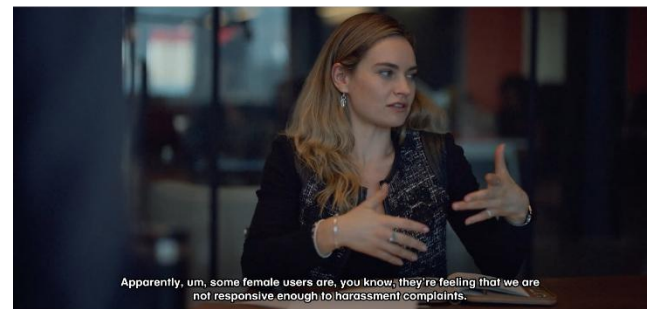


Figure 2. Whitney Voicing Safety Concerns during the Internal Meeting

Source: Swiped (2025), minute 41:38.

However, Whitney's capital does not automatically give her authority in the meeting. Justin and Sean respond by minimizing the issue and redirecting attention to business growth. This shows that capital only becomes effective when it is recognized by the field. Although Whitney has relevant knowledge about female users and platform safety, the dominant actors in the company do not treat this knowledge as valuable enough to influence policy. Her capital is therefore present, but its effect is weakened by the company's gendered hierarchy.

This finding is significant because it complicates the idea of women's empowerment. The film does not suggest that Whitney lacks ability, knowledge, or ambition. Instead, it shows that women's professional legitimacy depends on whether the field recognizes their capital. In a male-dominated field, women may possess the necessary resources but still be positioned as less credible. Therefore, women's agency requires not only personal confidence, but also access to recognition, authority, and the ability to convert capital across fields.

Although this section does not separate agency as an independent category, Whitney's use of capital remains important in explaining her changing position. The film shows that the knowledge, experience, and professional awareness she gains from Tinder later become the basis for her movement toward Bumble. In this sense, her agency is not treated as a separate finding, but as the result of how capital is negotiated and redirected within a different professional field.



Field, doxa, and institutional power

The third finding shows that Tinder functions as a field governed by its own doxa. For Bourdieu (2001), field refers to a structured social arena where actors struggle for position, recognition, and authority. Each field has its own rules and values, including unstated assumptions that are accepted as natural. These assumptions are called doxa. In *Swiped*, the doxa of Tinder's field prioritizes rapid growth, male leadership, platform expansion, and institutional stability. Within this logic, Whitney's concerns about safety, recognition, and gender equality are treated as secondary.



Figure 3. Whitney Rejecting Justin's Claim of Authority over Her

Source: *Swiped* (2025), minute 43:42.

The field is clearly shown when Whitney tries to end her romantic relationship with Justin, but Justin immediately responds by saying that she works for him. Although the scene takes place outside the office, the logic of the workplace still controls the interaction. Justin does not treat the conversation as a personal boundary, but as an opportunity to redefine Whitney's professional position. This shows that Tinder as a field is not limited to the office space. Its power relation follows the characters into personal situations because both Whitney and Justin occupy positions within the same company.

Through this scene, the film shows that Whitney's authority as a co-founder remains unstable. Her formal title does not fully protect her from being positioned as subordinate. The field allows Justin to use professional hierarchy to challenge her legitimacy, even in a personal conflict. In Bourdieu's terms, this means that field is a relational space where actors struggle over recognition and position. Whitney's agency is limited because her role can still be contested by someone who has stronger symbolic power within the company.

Symbolic violence and the normalization of exclusion

The fourth finding concerns symbolic violence. In *Swiped*, symbolic violence appears through exclusion, minimization, and procedural language. Whitney is excluded from important moments of public recognition, including award and media-related events. These exclusions are harmful because they erase her contribution from the company's public narrative. However, the harm is made to appear ordinary, accidental, or procedural. This is what

makes symbolic violence powerful: it does not always appear as open aggression.



Figure 4. Whitney Left Out of the *Time* Magazine Founders' Cover

Source: *Swiped* (2025), minute 48:31.

The *Time* magazine photoshoot becomes an important example of symbolic violence because Whitney's absence from the public image of the company reduces her visibility as a contributor. The exclusion is not presented as direct aggression, but as something that can be explained away as a normal decision or simple oversight. This makes the harm difficult to challenge because the act does not appear openly violent. Instead, it works through recognition: those who are shown become publicly associated with the company's success, while Whitney's contribution is pushed to the background.

In this scene, symbolic violence works by making unequal recognition appear natural. Whitney is not physically removed from the company, but her public legitimacy is weakened. The problem lies not only in being excluded from a picture, but in how the company's image is constructed without fully acknowledging her role. This supports Bourdieu's idea that symbolic violence often operates through misrecognition, where domination is accepted as ordinary rather than seen as injustice.

Bourdieu (2001) explains that symbolic violence operates when domination is misrecognized as natural or legitimate. In Whitney's case, her exclusion is not framed as intentional discrimination. Instead, it is treated as an oversight or a normal business decision. This makes it difficult for her to challenge the harm without being seen as emotional or unreasonable. Symbolic violence works by making the dominated person carry the burden of proving that harm has occurred.

This finding connects to Thapar-Björkert et al. (2016), who argue that symbolic violence often occurs through everyday practices that normalize domination. In *Swiped*, the harm Whitney experiences is not always spectacular. It is ordinary, quiet, and institutional. Her exclusion from public recognition shows how symbolic violence can shape women's professional lives without appearing as direct violence. The harm is not presented through open force, but through the unequal distribution of visibility and legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *Swiped* (2025) represents women's agency through the interaction of habitus, capital, field, and symbolic violence. The selected scenes show that



Whitney Wolfe Herd's experiences are shaped not only by personal ambition, but also by gendered assumptions, unequal recognition, workplace hierarchy, and symbolic exclusion within the technology industry. The study also shows that Whitney's changing position is closely related to the way her capital is negotiated within different professional spaces. At Tinder, her knowledge and contribution are repeatedly minimized, but these experiences later inform her movement toward Bumble. Therefore, *Swiped* does not portray women's agency as independent from structure, but as a practice shaped by recognition, exclusion, and the ability to respond to unequal conditions. The film contributes to discussions of gender, film, and digital culture by showing how women's professional position can be limited by symbolic domination while still opening possibilities for transformation.

Future studies may expand this research by comparing *Swiped* with other biographical films about women in technology or entrepreneurship. Further research may also examine audience reception to understand how viewers interpret symbolic violence and women's agency in the film. In addition, future studies can explore how digital platform design functions as a cultural response to gendered inequality.

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