

HABITUS AND SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE ANALYSIS DEPICTED BY VIC VAN ALLEN IN THE FILM *DEEP WATER* (2022)

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Abstract

Human relationships are often shaped by invisible structures of power, where domination is exercised not through overt violence but through subtle cultural mechanisms. This study examines the portrayal of habitus and symbolic violence in the character of Vic Van Allen in Deep Water (2022), directed by Adrian Lyne. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the research analyzes narrative elements and semiotic signs including key scenes, dialogues, and non-verbal expressions to explore how Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic violence operate within the film. The findings reveal that Vic's habitus is shaped by his accumulation of economic capital and embedded within an upper-class sociocultural environment, which allows him to maintain authority through composure, manipulation, and emotional control. Symbolic violence, while invisible, emerges as a destructive force that perpetuates inequality and reinforces power imbalances in intimate relationships. This research highlights how cultural capital and symbolic power function within elite social contexts, providing insights into hidden dynamics of domination in contemporary narratives.

Keywords: *Habitus, Symbolic Violence, Vic Van Allen*

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INTRODUCTION

Human personality is not static, but rather constantly changing according to the needs and social conditions that surround it. According to (Fatwikingingsih, 2020), personality can be understood as the role that a person displays through their daily behavior, where the reactions displayed often vary depending on the situation. This shows that an individual's identity is not only shaped by internal factors, but is also strongly influenced by life experiences and the social environment, including family upbringing, relationships with the community, and the socio-cultural conditions in which the individual lives.

In sociological studies, the concept of habitus introduced by Pierre Bourdieu is relevant to understanding how a person's behavior and perspective are shaped through repeated social experiences (Rooksby, 2017). Habitus allows individuals to adapt to their environment, but it can also reproduce patterns of

behavior that lead to practices of domination and violence. Furthermore, (Bourdieu, 1990) introduced the term symbolic violence, which is a form of violence that is subtle, covert, and often unrecognized by both the perpetrator and the victim. This symbolic violence can have profound psychological and social impacts, even though it is not physically visible.

The phenomena of habitus and symbolic violence are not only found in real life, but are also reflected in popular cultural works such as films. These representations are important to examine because the media has the power to both reproduce and critique certain social practices. Adrian Lyne's film *Deep Water* (2022), adapted from Patricia Highsmith's novel, is one example of a work that represents the dynamics of habitus and symbolic violence in domestic relationships. The main character, Vic Van Allen, shows how social pressure, disappointment, and power relations can drive individuals to reproduce forms of symbolic violence against their partners.

The urgency of this research lies in the need to examine the representation of habitus and symbolic violence in the film *Deep Water* (2022) as a reflection of social practices that still occur in real life, especially in domestic relationships. By analyzing this film through Bourdieu's perspective, this research can contribute to a critical understanding of how non-physical violence occurs covertly and how the media depicts the dynamics of power in family relationships.

Problem Statement

Based on this background, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How is Vic Van Allen's habitus depicted in the film *Deep Water* (2022)?
2. What forms of symbolic violence are represented through Vic Van Allen's character towards his partner?

Research Objectives

In line with the above problem formulation, the objectives of this study are:

1. To describe the habitus that shapes Vic Van Allen's behavior in the film *Deep Water* (2022).
2. To analyze Vic Van Allen's representation of symbolic violence against his partner through Pierre Bourdieu's perspective.

Theoretical Review: Pierre Bourdieu's Theory

In the analysis of literary works and films, Pierre Bourdieu's sociological perspective is often used to understand the relationship between agents, social arenas, and cultural products. (Bourdieu, 2010) emphasizes that art and literature cannot be separated from their social context, because works are born from the interaction of individuals with the environment that shapes certain habits and symbolic capital. A number of previous studies have used this framework to examine the representation of power in cultural works. For example, (Aprilianti & Yulindrasari, 2021) found that symbolic violence is often present in domestic relationships through subtle but oppressive communication practices. Other studies highlight how upper-class habitus influences the representation of characters in films and novels, but most stop at description without discussing in depth how symbolic violence operates behind these power relations.

The weakness of previous studies is the lack of emphasis on the relationship between habitus and the forms of symbolic violence expressed through the medium of film, especially in the domestic sphere. Thus, this study fills that gap by analyzing the film *Deep Water* (2022) through Bourdieu's perspective, to show how the habitus of the main character, Vic Van Allen, influences her actions and how symbolic violence is subtly represented in her domestic relationships.

1. Bourdieu's Theory of Habitus

Human daily behavior is influenced by character and the surrounding environment that shapes their behavior patterns. Human social life is essentially adaptive, following the needs and conditions faced. Etymologically, habitus comes from Latin, meaning something that does not grow naturally. In the context of sociology, habitus is understood as a mental structure related to the social field that is formed through long experience. According to Pierre Bourdieu (Rooksby, 2017), habitus is a collection of preferences and dispositions that enable a person to adapt to their social environment. In other words, habitus is a system of

tendencies in thinking, feeling, and acting that is formed through the process of social interaction since childhood.

(Bourdieu, 1990) emphasizes that habitus is formed through a combination of objective structures and an individual's life history. Habitus is not rigid, but can change according to new experiences and the social conditions that surround it. Habitus functions as a structure that shapes social practices, namely the principles that generate and organize actions without the full awareness of the perpetrator. Through habitus, humans carry out various social practices as if they were natural, even though these practices are the result of the internalization of social rules, values, and norms.

The concept of habitus cannot be separated from capital and field. Capital includes economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital, each of which functions as a resource to influence an individual's position in the social field (Swartz, 2002). The field itself is a social space where interactions take place with certain rules. A person's habitus will function differently depending on the capital they possess and the field in which they practice. Thus, social actions are not only influenced by individual dispositions, but also by position and power relations within the social structure.

In addition, habitus is closely related to doxa, which are norms and beliefs that are accepted without question. Through habitus, individuals unconsciously reproduce doxa in their daily social lives. This explains why certain social practices are considered normal, when in fact they are the result of social constructs that have been passed down from generation to generation.

In the context of Indonesian society, habitus can be found in cultural practices that are instilled from an early age, such as politeness, respect for elders, and solidarity with fellow community or tribal members. These habits are not merely innate traits, but rather the result of the internalization of social values that are inherited and continuously reproduced through daily practices. Thus, habitus functions as an important mechanism in maintaining the continuity of cultural norms while enabling adaptation to social change.

2. Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Symbolic Violence

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence explains how domination in the social sphere can lead to forms of violence that are not physical, but symbolic. According to Bourdieu (Sukmawati, 2022) symbolic violence is a form of obedience based on the power held by individuals or groups. In this framework, domination works subtly through symbols, language, or values that are considered legitimate by society (Syahril, 2012). This type of violence is difficult to recognize because it operates in everyday practices that seem normal, so that those who are subjugated often do not realize that they are in a subordinate position.

As explained by (Siswadi, 2024), the symbolic struggle between groups with dominant cultural capital and those who are weak creates invisible social inequality. This symbolic power often manifests itself through speech, expression, lifestyle, and social norms that serve as standards of domination. Thus, symbolic violence can be seen as a form of power that works silently but effectively in maintaining the social hierarchy.

Although Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence has been widely applied in previous studies, the focus of the study is more often found in the fields of education, politics, and real social practices in society. In contrast, studies discussing how symbolic violence is represented in literary works or films are still limited. In fact, media such as films have great power in representing social relations, including forms of power hidden behind personal relationships. This gap is what this study aims to bridge.

This study aims to analyze the representation of symbolic violence through the character of Vic Van Allen in the film *Deep Water* (2022). The main focus of the study is to reveal the subtle forms of domination that Vic exercises over his wife, Melinda, such as through emotional control, coldness, and oppressive sarcasm. By analyzing the practice of symbolic power in the context of upper-class households, this study seeks to show how Bourdieu's theory is not only relevant for explaining real social structures but can also be applied to fictional representations that reflect the social dynamics of contemporary society.

METHOD

The research method used is descriptive qualitative because this approach is considered most appropriate for examining social phenomena that cannot be explained by numbers, but rather by interpreting meaning. This method was chosen based on the research focus, which analyzes the habitus and symbolic violence in the character of Vic Van Allen in the film Deep Water (2022). The qualitative approach provides space for researchers to understand social practices, power relations, and character representations through film narratives in a deep and contextual manner.

In its application, this study uses narrative analysis to unravel the story structure, dialogue, non-verbal expressions, and social symbols that shape Vic's character. This analysis is relevant because it allows for the disclosure of the relationship between the film text and Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, particularly the concepts of habitus and symbolic violence. Thus, the descriptive qualitative method was chosen because it can bridge the research objectives, namely to reveal the hidden dynamics of power through symbolic practices in film representation.

There are two types of data used in this study, the first type of data is primary data, which is the main habitus, a pattern that the environment forms, involving the individual's subconscious through experiences in a particular social environment. In the film Deep Water, the character Vic Van Allen shows that his mindset, shaped by his social environment when dealing with domestic problems, results from a long-internalised habitus. This habitus serves as the framework Vic uses to understand situations, interact with those around him, and process emotions when making decisions about actions to take, including his involvement in symbolic violence toward his wife (Santoso, 2017). The data used to support this study are two previous studies entitled "Social Approach of Habitus Factors in Allegiant Novels"(Allikathus Rizky Laily Febriyanti et al., 2022) and "Representation of Symbolic Violence in The Television Series *Suara Hati Istri*"(Amelia & Suganda, 2023). In addition, secondary data in this study also

refers to articles or books that have the same topic of discussion as the selected issue, so that it can strengthen the written statement.

The object used as a study in this study results from self-response to the social environment, namely the value of habitus and symbolic violence carried out by the main character, Vic Van Allen, in the film *Deep Water* (2022). Qualitative research methods are a permanent choice for this study. Because the object studied in this study is human behaviour, especially the relationship between human behaviour and the environment. The researcher uses the description method to identify the habitus and symbolic violence in the film so that they can draw conclusions based on the data from the research conducted

A. Data Collection Techniques

The data collection technique is a method used by researchers to collect essential data that can support research. The data used in this research are screenshots in the form of photos and dialogue from the film *Deep Water* (2022). The sequence of data collection techniques in this research is as follows:

1. Downloading the Film *Deep Water* (2022) from the internet makes it easier for researchers to watch films or collect data.
2. Watching the film *Deep Water* (2022) to understand the characters to be researched.
3. Finding problems and areas that be researched more deeply. This film raises psychological and social issues, but this research focuses on how the social environment affects a person's behaviour as the object of research in the film *Deep Water* (2022).
4. Rewatch the film and record the parts that will be used as research material with screenshots and dialogues that represent the behaviour of the character Vic in *Deep Water* (2022).
5. Collecting screenshots that represent habitus and symbolic violence.

B. Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected in the previous stage be analysed at this stage. Data analysis techniques are data processing processes carried out by researchers to interpret data and test data according to the procedures used so that conclusions can be drawn from the analysis results. The stages in processing data in this study are as follows:

1. Identify the data collected from the Deep Water (2022) Film to determine what aspects are related to habitus and symbolic violence.
2. Classifying the data that has been identified, this can be done by classifying the data according to the theory being studied.
3. Analyse data based on theory to find and describe elements of habitus and symbolic violence of Vic Van Allen's character in the film.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Vic was chosen as the focus of this study because his behavior as a husband did not reflect a typical role, but rather reflected psychological and symbolic control over those around him, especially his wife, Melinda. This behavior was not merely an individual action, but rather the result of the internalization of upper-class social and cultural values, which Bourdieu refers to as habitus. Through this habitus, Vic normalizes his dominant attitude through subtle strategies that appear reasonable, but essentially maintain the structure of social inequality.

The symbolic power used by Vic is a manifestation of domination that is not physical in nature, but rather relies on language, attitude, and psychological pressure. This is in line with Bourdieu's view, as explained by (Swartz, 2002) that dominant actions are often not perceived as oppression because they take place through norms and symbols accepted by society, making symbolic violence effective but difficult to recognize.

The theoretical implications of these findings suggest that conflict in the domestic context, especially among the upper classes, does not always manifest itself through physical exploitation, but through subtle forms of power—in line with the mechanisms of symbolic violence in critical sociology studies. This

confirms that the analysis of the film Deep Water not only explores gender roles, but also reveals how cultural and symbolic capital are channeled into embedded tools of domination.

A. Vic Van Allen's Background

Ben Affleck plays Vic Van Allen, the main character in the 2022 film Deep Water. Vic is a man from a well-established social class in America, possessing wealth, intelligence, and a high social status within his community. On the surface, he appears to be a calm man who can control his emotions and behaviour, but behind his seemingly cold demeanour lies a deep psychological complexity.

Vic is a retired drone developer who achieved financial freedom after successfully developing technology for the military. This allows him to live an ideal life with his wife, Melinda, and daughter, Trixie.

Vic's family life is far from perfect. His wife, Melinda, openly has a relationship with another man she refers to as a friend, and Vic consciously accepts the situation as usual without confrontation. However, behind his passive attitude, he harbours jealousy that slowly drives him mad and triggers extreme actions. Consciously, Vic uses psychological manipulation on the community around him to appear normal, especially toward the man Melinda openly acknowledges as her lover. Vic even makes threats that ultimately lead to the deaths of some of them, yet his crimes remain hidden from the surrounding community.

Vic's character reflects the concepts discussed regarding Habitus and Symbolic Violence. As a husband, he tends to control his household situation in a subtle yet gradually dangerous manner, using his intelligence in a way that does not arouse suspicion among those around him. Vic's relationship with Melinda is also filled with psychological games, where both are involved in a mutually destructive dynamic, yet reluctant to separate and remain in the relationship. Vic's character is not an overt reflection of a conventional villain; he operates within moral ambiguity, raising anxiety about whether he is truly evil or a victim of the circumstances he has created for himself. Vic's character is also intriguing because

he appears to act normally toward Melinda. However, he harbours anger not toward Melinda herself but toward her behaviour, which compels him to maintain his household. He upholds the image of a calm and composed man, despite the intensely dark side that exists in reality. Karim explains that dominant groups can establish specific meanings as legitimate and standard by obscuring the power structures that support them (Karim, 2024). This allows Vic to remain accepted by the surrounding community without suspicion, even though he is exercising hidden control over his marital situation.

B. Vic Van Allen's Habitus in *Deep Water* (2022)

Habitus, in Latin, is not-natural, a set of characters that living beings acquire as a result of the social conditions experienced and therefore can be fully or partially in people, who are products of the same social conditions as individuals occupying petty bourgeois positions in society or different eras (Bourdieu, 2018). By understanding Vic through the habitus framework, we can see that the power he displays in his domestic relationships does not manifest directly in the form of physical violence but rather in subtle domination shaped and legitimised by his social environment. This opens the way to see how symbolic violence also stems from a habitus that is deeply ingrained in a person.

1. Vic's Calm Demeanour as a Product of Bourgeois Habitus

Vic's social environment consists of highly educated and economically stable bourgeois circles, who live in elite communities that prioritise politeness, prestige, and self-control. In such an environment, power is not displayed openly. Upper class members do not need to shout or strike to demonstrate dominance, as power operates through symbolic cues: facial expressions, calm intonation, sharp yet non-confrontational word choice, and cool yet assertive body language. In upper-class society, as depicted in the life of Vic Van Allen, power is often not explicitly demonstrated. Instead, dominance is established through accepting norms and social codes that appear ordinary but serve as symbolic power tools that operate subtly and invisibly, as described in the article (Stemper, 2025). In this context,

Vic's habitus as a bourgeois man is reflected in strong emotional control, subtle manipulation, and a tendency to control situations without showing that he is dominating.

The way Vic maintains his dominance over his wife also reflects the social norms that apply to the elite. He allows her directly, but creates a psychological atmosphere that makes his wife feel guilty or depressed. Such power is socially accepted among the upper classes because it is considered part of "class" and "self-control." However, behind this lies a form of symbolic violence, namely psychological and emotional subjugation, that deprives the other party of the space to think and act freely.

As a representation of the upper-class habitus, Vic does not act solely based on personal logic but also internalises the values his social environment upholds. He does not resort to physical confrontation when he feels he has lost control over his wife. However, he begins to play a symbolic role that exerts pressure: adopting a passive-aggressive attitude, using manipulative language, or displaying a calm demeanour that is intimidating. This is part of how the upper class maintains their power through symbols, not shouting.

2. Emotional Suppression and Passive Control

Here, researchers explain the relationship between Vic's habitus and attitude, which appears calm in his responses but conceals anger that is not directly expressed. This habit shows he is accustomed to dealing with similar situations and responds to them similarly. His seemingly passive reaction makes others feel that his actions not cause harm. Within the framework of symbolic power, this attitude reflects how domination can be exercised without physical violence, but rather through accepting social values that are considered normal. As explained by Smith in *E International Relations*, the domination of the upper class occurs subtly because it has been naturalised in the social structure so that it no longer appears as a form of coercion (Smith, 2012).

3. Internalised Masculine Norms and Social Prestige

In upper-class life, men are not only expected to be economically and socially successful but also to maintain an image of being calm, rational, and able to control their emotions in any situation. These norms do not arise spontaneously but are formed and reinforced through habits inherited from the social structures they grow up in. These masculine norms then become ingrained unconsciously within individuals as part of their habitus, shaping ways of thinking and acting that appear natural yet actually contain hidden power relations. This aligns with Bourdieu's thinking that symbolic violence is essential to male domination; without this symbolic mechanism, male social power would not be easily maintained in everyday life (Stahl & Mu, 2022).

C. Representations of Symbolic Violence Committed by Vic Van Allen

As mentioned in the theory, symbolic violence is a form of obedience based on the power held by individuals or groups. Domination in a social sphere can lead to symbolic violence, where individuals become symbolic rather than physical targets. Vic and Melinda, who are perpetrators of indirect violence, are full of calmness, especially Vic, who always has a capable controlling role to deal with his cheating wife. There are two representations of Symbolic Violence.

1. Psychological Manipulation in Domestic Context

Trixie : Daddy?
Vic : Mm-hmm.
Trixie : When Charlie drowned in the swimming pool, did his feet touch the bottom?
Vic : I don't know. I wasn't there.
Trixie : Sure, you were there.
Vic : Well, I was there when we were trying to save him everyone was but everything happened very quickly.
Trixie : But you still know what you did.
Vic : I didn't do it, honey.
Trixie : I think you're kidding me.
Vic : I'm not. I'm not, Trix. [bubbling]
Trixie : Why won't you tell me how you did it? Everyone keeps asking me how you did it.
Vic : Sweetheart if I did kill someone... do you know what they would do to me? They would put me in prison for the rest of my life. Do you understand?
Trixie : I still think you drowned him. You're just telling me you didn't.

Vic : Well, let's keep that between us.

(Lyne, 2022, pts. 01:15:32-01:16:51)

This scene illustrates how Vic's habitus as a father hides symbolic violence toward his child through emotionally stable control. He does not use physical violence or a loud voice to assert his authority, but rather calmness and cold yet controlled body language. This reflects how power relations can exist without coercion, precisely because they have been internalized as usual by the weaker party in the social structure. Ebadi and Zamani explain that symbolic power operates through the internalization of structures and relationships of domination. Hence, those who dominate tend to accept their position as natural or deserved (Ebadi & Zamani, 2018).

In the context of habitus analysis, Vic's attitude in this scene exemplifies a pattern of upper-class parenting that emphasises a rational approach. He does not react impulsively despite being under pressure; instead, he deliberately regulates the rhythm of the interaction to stay calm and in control. Vic's actions also reflect a form of bourgeois masculinity, where dominance is not expressed physically but through emotional restraint and mastery of space. He maintains his authority as the head of the family not through overt threats but through a calmness that projects a sense of superiority in his child's eyes.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the character Vic Van Allen in Deep Water (2022) represents an upper-class habitus that allows symbolic power to operate without physical violence. Vic's dominance is manifested through emotional control, a quiet demeanor, and subtle symbols such as snails, which reveal an invisible yet effective power. These findings indicate that film can be an important medium for revealing the dynamics of symbolic power as formulated by Bourdieu.

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