

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SYMBOLIC CAPITAL: ANALYSIS THE INFLUENCE OF INTERACTIONS AMONG CAPITALS ON THE BEHAVIOR OF THE CHARACTERS ANA AND WILLIAM IN THE MOVIE *UPGRADED* (2024)

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Abstract

Upgraded (2024), directed by Carlson Young, tells a romance story about the competitive world of work with the protagonist Ana, a young woman who is struggling to establish herself in an art world which is full of expectations and high competition. This article aims to explore the influence of interactions among social capital and symbolic capital on the behavior of the main characters Ana and William in the movie *Upgraded* (2024). This analysis highlights the complexities of social mobility and the transformative power of agency, illustrating how personal capital can impact one's position in the competitive world. Ultimately, *Upgraded* (2024) offers a nuanced exploration of how these forms of capital interact to influence behavior. The characters' journeys reveal that the successful navigation of both capitals is essential to achieving fulfillment in their respective lives. Thus, understanding this dynamic not only enriches our interpretation of the film but also highlights the broader social implications of identity construction and relational dynamics in contemporary culture.

Keywords: *Upgraded, capital, power, behavior, social.*

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I. Introduction

The recently released Netflix movie starring Cami I. Mendes' *Upgraded* (2024) presents an interesting point of view with various dynamics, especially through the main characters, Ana and William. In *Upgraded* (2024), the main characters Ana and William face a complex interaction of social capital and symbolic capital, influencing their choices and behaviors. Social capital, defined as the networks of relationships among individuals that enable

cooperation for mutual benefit, is important in shaping their interactions (Patulny 2014). On the other hand, symbolic capital refers to the prestige and recognition individuals gain through their social standing (Wang et al. 2024). In this narrative, Ana's social connections empower her to pursue opportunities that elevate her status while fostering a sense of belonging within her community. William, conversely, grapples with feelings of isolation although possessing significant symbolic capital due to his family's status. His struggle illustrates how an overemphasis on symbolic capital can lead to detrimental effects on social engagement (Patulny 2014).

According to Pierre Bourdieu, social capital consists of real networks and actual social connections that enable group and institutional support. Symbolic capital, on the other hand, relates to prestige, recognition, and status, which have the quality of legitimizing one's social status, power, and influence (Bourdieu, 1986). The contrasting experiences of Ana and William emphasize the necessity of balancing both forms of capital to foster well-being and meaningful relationships. Eventually, *Upgraded* serves as a reminder that interactions between social and symbolic capitals are crucial for character development and personal fulfillment.

Therefore, this paper attempts to prove the above proposition by examining how Ana and William's capitals interact and influence each other based on Bourdieu's theory and the literature on media in the modern world. Lin (1999) argues that social capital is an asset that helps people access the information necessary to achieve their personal and career goals within a clearly defined social hierarchy. As a result, their status is an asset known as symbolic capital, which is a "credit" of power that often reinforces one's position in the social environment (Bourdieu, 1990). In *Upgraded*, Ana and William's use of social capital and their attempts to gain the top position demonstrate the benefits and constraints imposed by each capital. This research focuses on relevant scenes in *Upgraded*, where Ana and William interact and resist these constraints to bring the available social and symbolic resources to life. This research will inform how *Upgraded* critiques the relationship and influence of class, desire, and appearance in the modern world.

II. Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a content analysis method to reveal the meaning contained in the movie *Upgraded* (2024). This analysis will combine three main theoretical frameworks; Greimas' narrative theory, John Fiske's semiotics, and Bourdieu's theory. The aim is to understand how the film represents and reproduces social structures, power, and capital through narratives, symbols, and characters.

II.I Data Collection

1. Movie Observation: Watch the movie repeatedly to gain a deep understanding of the storyline, characters, setting, and other visual elements.
2. Transcription: Key scenes relevant to the research were transcribed to facilitate analysis of dialog, narration, and visual descriptions.
3. Visual Documentation: Screenshots of scenes taken to document significant visual symbols.

II.II Greimas' narrative

Greimas' narrative theory is a structural approach to analyzing narrative texts. It seeks to identify the basic structure that underlies all stories, regardless of culture or era. Greimas sees narrative as a journey from an initial state to a final state. This journey involves a series of transformations experienced by the Subject. This approach identifies the same basic internal structure in narratives. Analyzing Meaning: Understand how meaning is constructed through relationships between actants. Greimas' theory of narrative is essentially a structural approach that enhances the analysis of narrative texts through substantial analysis. This method, as articulated by Wang and Roberts (2005), allows researchers to dissect the complex power dynamics among characters, or actors, in a narrative. By distinguishing between conflict and communication, Greimas' theory provides a nuanced understanding of character relationships as perceived by the narrator. Unlike other approaches that may impose external sociological categories onto the narrative, Greimas' framework focuses on internal character interactions and their implications for the plot.

II.III John Fiske Semiotics

John Fiske's semiotics focuses more on how signs and meanings are produced and consumed in a cultural context. Thus, Fiske emphasizes the importance of social and cultural context in understanding the meaning of a text.

The analytic framework was developed to categorize observations into themes such as "social relationships," "prestige symbols," and "power dynamics." Each coded instance was analyzed to determine its influence on the characters' behavior and decision-making. Additionally, the narrative arcs of Ana and William were traced to identify key turning points related to their social and symbolic capital, with particular attention to dialogue indicating self-awareness of their positions.

Comparative analysis was conducted by examining scenes before and after critical plot developments to observe shifts in social interactions and status. This qualitative approach allows for a nuanced exploration of how social and symbolic capital shape character identities and influence interactions within the narrative.

Overall, this methodology aims to provide rich insights into the social structures and power dynamics at play in *Upgraded* (2024).

III. Results & Discussion

1. Social Capital and Symbolic Capital in Character Dynamics

The way that social and symbolic capital interact in *Upgraded* (2024) offers a sophisticated analysis of Ana and William's individual paths. Ana is able to create opportunities, succeed, and build lasting relationships because of her reliance on social networks. Although it gives him social recognition, William's reliance on symbolic capital emphasizes how isolated it can be when it isn't counterbalanced by real human connections.

Ana's Empowerment Through Social Capital

Ana's personality serves as a metaphor for how social capital can give her opportunities for both career and personal development. Bourdieu (1986) asserts that the networks and connections that promote collaboration and resource sharing are the source of social capital.

48:37

Ana : *I'm trying to get tickets to go see Midsummer Night's Dream, but it's completely sold out and my assistants have had trouble...*

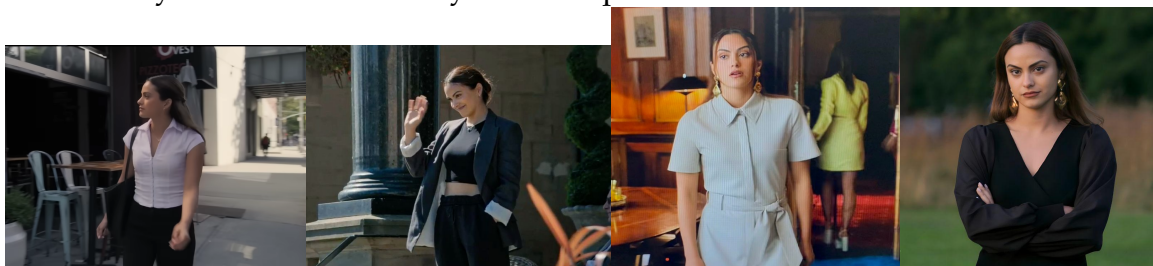
Julian : *I can just get the tickets for you myself. Catherine!*

.....

Catherine : *I'll call Kenneth tomorrow, dear. It shouldn't be a problem.*

The dialogue above is from the pivotal scene, where Ana secured the tickets for *Midsummer Night's Dream* required by her boss by leveraging her connections inside the community. This strengthens her ties to the community and increases her symbolic capital. The scene supports Lin's (1999) claim that social capital acts as a means of obtaining knowledge and accomplishing objectives by showing how the reciprocal reinforcement of these capitals improves her agency and sense of belonging.

Ana's wardrobe transformation also visually symbolizes her evolving capital. Initially portrayed in casual attire, she transitions into more formal clothing as her social connections elevate her status. This change, highlighted through Fiske's semiotic lens, suggests that social capital actively shapes her identity and enhances her symbolic capital.



Picture 1. Ana's wardrobe transformation

William's Isolation Despite Symbolic Capital

Its limitations are highlighted by William's dependence on his family's symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu (1986), symbolic capital legitimizes rank and power but, if it is not combined with strong social networks, can result in isolation. William attends a high-society function in one scene where he is physically surrounded by people but emotionally isolated; the lighting and framing choices highlight his distance from the others.

Because of his symbolic capital, which comes from his family's history, he is estranged from real relationships. William is portrayed in the story as a warning character who demonstrates how placing too much value on symbolic capital might result in a lack of personal fulfillment—a conclusion that Patulny (2014) supports.

2. Narrative Transformations Through Greimas' Theory

Applying Greimas' narrative theory reveals Ana as the Subject, whose journey of transformation represents the synthesis of social and symbolic capital. William, conversely, embodies a static Subject whose struggle with isolation underscores the pitfalls of an unbalanced focus on symbolic capital.

Ana's Narrative Arc

Ana's storyline explores a distinct path of metamorphosis. Ana, who is first presented as ambitious but limited by symbolic capital, succeeds because of her capacity to build social connections. According to Greimas' theory, this transition is a path that leads from a starting point of limitation to a destination of empowerment. Important turning points, like her choice to take the lead on a community initiative, represent her development as a Subject and a change agent. Here are some significant dialogues from *Upgraded* (2024) that reflect Ana's use of social capital to elevate her status and eventually gain symbolic recognition:

Scene 1: Ana discusses a painting in an upscale apartment with colleagues.

Ana:

"Painted in 1914 by Hilma af Klint. She wanted to evoke feelings of contradiction. Some say the vertical line splitting the canvas represents the place where opposing forces meet — the unity necessary for creation."

Scene 2: Ana interacts with Will on the plane, pretending to be her boss, Claire.

Ana:

"Oh, I'm just trying to bring a little culture to your household."

These dialogues illustrate Ana's ability to navigate her social environment effectively. By leveraging her knowledge of art, adaptability, and interpersonal skills, Ana gains access to opportunities that enhance her standing, aligning with Bourdieu's concepts of social and symbolic capital.

Her accomplishments also highlight how crucial it is to understand the relationships between symbolic and social capital. Although her accomplishments are originally based on her social capital, her eventual symbolic acknowledgment validates her place in the social hierarchy.

William's Stagnation

William's storyline, on the other hand, exemplifies stagnation. Even if he has a lot of symbolic capital, he is nevertheless alone and unable to build deep connections or use his position for personal development. According to Greimas' thesis, William is a Subject who remains mostly unchanged throughout the story, having been caught in an initial condition of detachment. In contrast to Ana's experience, his highlights the importance of striking a balance between the two types of money in order to achieve personal contentment.

3. Visual and Symbolic Elements in Character Representation

Fiske's semiotics provides a lens to analyze how cultural symbols and visual elements reinforce the themes of *Upgraded*. The film's use of wardrobe, framing, and setting offers deeper insights into the characters' experiences and transformations.

Ana's Growth Through Visual Symbolism

The movie uses locale and costume changes to show Ana's development. She is depicted in early scenes wearing modest clothing in public places, highlighting her dependence on social capital.

She is portrayed in high-end settings and wears increasingly elegant clothing as her symbolic capital increases, signifying her rise in social standing.

Here are dialogues from *Upgraded* (2024) that reflect Ana's transformation and the reciprocal relationship between her social and symbolic capital, supported by changes in locale and costume:

Early Scene: Ana networking in a crowded art gallery

Ana:

"This piece by Af Klint represents a perfect balance of chaos and order. It's not just about aesthetics; it's a commentary on the harmony we strive for in life."

Art

Enthusiast:

"You really know your art. Are you an artist yourself?"

Ana:

"Not yet, but I'm learning every day. People like you inspire me to keep going."

- This scene shows Ana leveraging her social capital through knowledge and conversation in a modest setting, wearing a simple outfit, while building connections in her field.

Midpoint Scene: Ana gains access to an elite art event

Gallery

Director:

"I wasn't sure about inviting you at first, but I've heard great things about your initiative with the community project."

Ana:

"Thank you. It's been a collaborative effort. I'm grateful to have people who believe in me."

- Ana appears in a sleek cocktail dress, blending into the high-status environment. Her elevated symbolic capital—earned through her recognized efforts—grants her access to this exclusive setting.

Climactic Scene: Ana delivers a speech at a prestigious art exhibition

Ana

(addressing

the

crowd):

"A year ago, I was in the audience, looking up to people like you. Today, I stand here not because of individual success but because of the connections I've made and the people who supported me. This community has taught me that art isn't just about creation; it's about connection."

- Ana is in a designer gown, clearly reflecting her symbolic capital. Her acknowledgment of the role of her social network emphasizes the interdependence of social and symbolic capital.

These dialogues show Ana's journey, where her social relationships lead to recognition and access, and her growing status further strengthens her ability to expand her network. The interplay of her environment, attire, and words reinforces her metamorphosis, aligning with Fiske's emphasis on cultural symbols and Bourdieu's theory of capital.

Fiske's focus on the cultural construction of meaning through visual signals is consistent with this evolution. The reciprocal relationship between social and symbolic capital is shown in Ana's metamorphosis, as her increasing status is both a result of and a support for her social networks.

Visual Isolation of William

Intentional visual choices are used to portray William's loneliness. He is frequently presented by himself in opulent settings in images that emphasize his symbolic capital, which highlights his detachment. His inner seclusion and physical surroundings contrast, which challenges society's overemphasis on symbolic capital. William's internal conflicts are further highlighted by the scenes' frequent use of subdued lighting and hues, which is consistent with Fiske's focus on the cultural background of visual depiction.

Scene 1: The Gala

- **Visuals:** William stands alone at the edge of a lavish ballroom. The lighting casts shadows over his face, separating him visually from the vibrant, well-lit crowd. The camera lingers on his distant expression, contrasting his physical proximity to others with his emotional solitude.
- **Dialog:**
Acquaintance: "William, you've inherited such a legacy. You must feel so proud."
William: (forced smile) "Pride doesn't feel like much when you have no one to share it with."

IV. Conclusions

Here is a movie *Upgraded* (2024) which has a comment more than huge on how the social capital - that is itself as symbolized capital - works out in the lives of Ana as well as William. The theory of both Pierre Bourdieu talks more about how much culture comes into play concerning the interface of identities, actions, and relationships within a competitive social system. Social capital allows access to networks and supports such access; symbolic capital, however, brings both recognition and legitimacy, both of which powerfully serve as primary forces in effective social navigation.

Ana demonstrates how social capital opens things. The networking relationships she builds are not just engines for her career bumps but also carry symbolic capital that supports her position. The symbol is visible both in her outward appearance and actions defining her increasingly visible presence in society. Ultimately, she has attained the mastery of both types of capital which is laying ground for her success and welfare.

William shows the effects of dependency on symbolic capital. He is left empty even with his relatively high status due to his family legacy because he does not have so many thriving social connections. It restates the hollowness that can be caused by such a state because symbolic capital is empty without genuine relationships.

An *upgraded* critique on the experience of Ana and William is in itself for the phenomenon of social stratification by which they have to wage contest for identity formation in a very competitive system. The film revolves around how one can cope with the trade-offs between the two kinds of capital toward self-actualization and while building legitimate relationships.

In addition to examining Ana and William's individual journeys, the movie questions the larger social structures that influence success and identity development. In the end,

Upgraded challenges readers to consider how social and symbolic resources should be balanced, arguing that self-actualization and deep connections can only be attained with the integration of both capitals. The movie asks viewers to think about how their own agency and cultural dynamics affect how they negotiate intricate social systems.

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