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From Periphery to Prestige: A Bourdieusian Analysis of Cultural Mobility in *Lady Bird* (2017)

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Abstract

Young people often negotiate their position and identity while attempting to access broader cultural space through education and cultural participation. This phenomenon has also caught the attention of filmmakers, who present it through their cameras. The study analyzes Lady Bird (2017) through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the cultural field. Focusing on the character Christine McPherson as a working-class adolescent, the research explores how cultural mobility is constructed as a gradual and complex process during the coming-of-age phase. This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, combining textual and film analysis methods, to gain a deeper interpretation of how Christine achieves cultural mobility in the film. Data were collected through close reading and viewing the screenplay and scenes, as well as systematic note-taking on key scenes, dialogues, and both mise-en-scène and cinematographic elements. These data were then categorized according to Bourdieu's central concepts: field, habitus, and capital. The findings reveal that Christine's efforts to achieve upward cultural mobility are shaped by the accumulation of her capital and habitus, as seen in her actions and point of view, including her artistic participation, self-representation, and decision-making. This study implies that films can function not only as entertainment but also as a reflection of social structures and movements, revealing a universal experience of the transitional phase during the coming-of-age process.

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Introduction

Early adolescence is when many begin their educational journey and aspire to independence from their current environment (Fakkel et al., 2024). Moreover, adolescence is widely regarded as one of the most challenging and transformative stages of human life. It is a transitional period between childhood and maturity, marked by physical, emotional, and social change, in which young people explore uncertainty, search for identity and belonging, and seek self-sufficiency while questioning their goals, values, and place in a stratified society (Kaya, 2024; Zala & Parmar, 2025). Within this period, young people negotiate their identities and positions in society through different kinds of mobility, one of which is cultural mobility.

Cultural mobility refers to a process in which individuals adopt the cultural styles and practices of their new class (Kallunki, 2022). Bourdieu (1993) argues that such mobility is tied to the accumulation and use of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital, as well as habitus, the values, habits, and ways of thinking formed through family background, social environment, and lived experience.

Cultural mobility is closely tied to the coming-of-age process, in which young people move between cultural environments while forming a self. This phase is characterized by identity exploration, feeling in between, self-orientedness, instability, and experimentation (Skulborstad & Hermann, 2016). Mobility is also a significant part of contemporary youth's transition to adulthood, as exposure to diverse places and ways of life, for example, when many begin their educational journey abroad and aspire to independence from their current environment during early adolescence (Fakkel et al., 2024), prompts young people to reconsider their sense of belonging and gradually shapes their adult identity (Camozzi, 2022).

In the present time, coming-of-age films often occupy a preferred spot in young generations as they portray the formative experiences of adolescence that shape identity and motivation. Coming-of-age films offer a closer lens into adolescence's struggle that explores the issues of self-exploration, sense of belonging, and social positioning (Stewart & Martins, 2025).

An example of this genre, *Lady Bird*, which was released in February 2017 and was both written and directed by Greta Gerwig, stands out as an emotionally nuanced and socially aware narrative of coming-of-age, family dynamics, and characters' desires. Based in Sacramento, California, and set in the early 2000s, the film centers on Christine "Lady Bird" McPherson, a high school senior who is resilient to transcend her working-class life and attend a prestigious college on the East Coast to leave her hometown for a more exciting life, believing it represents sophistication and broader opportunities.

The popularity of *Lady Bird* has led to several studies analyzing it from various perspectives. For example, in a lens of psychology, Herdayanti and Satria (2021) examined the reflection of psychological conflict using psychoanalytic theory by Sigmund Freud to explore the conflict between the ego, id, and superego through Christine's behavior. While that study focused on psychological state, some studies see *Lady Bird* through the lens of feminist theory. For instance, Fatmasari and Kanafillah (2021) discussed the film by focusing on Christine's resistance and employing feminist literary criticism, particularly her rebellion against both familial authority and broader social expectations. Moreover, Villaorduña et al. (2024) perceived the influence of feminism in characters constructed by the director, Greta Gerwig, including the challenges faced by women and featuring female characters with feminist traits that shared a unique visual style shaped by different approaches to art direction, ethics, and aesthetics, but had similar femininity symbols of strength and empowerment.

Further discussion of *Lady Bird* comes from linguistic approaches. Rabbani et al. (2023) examined the daughter–father relationship through Teun A. van Dijk's critical discourse analysis and found that text analysis, social cognition, and social context portray Christine's self-determination. Anugrah and Suwarto (2019) argued that the film

represents self-concept through Roland Barthes' semiotic model of signifier, signified, denotation, connotation, and myth, while Sopiyana (2020) found that its dialogue reflects politeness strategies and cooperative maxims.

Taken together, these studies treat *Lady Bird* (2017) as a psychological, feminist, or linguistic text. Even work on its visual style (Villaorduña et al., 2024) centers on gender representation rather than class or cultural position. Hence, the film's visual construction of Christine's movement across cultural spaces remains unexamined. A cinematic lens is therefore both missing and necessary because film communicates through what is staged in the frame, including setting, costume, lighting, and framing; Christine's accumulation of capital and habitus is visible in the mise-en-scène and cinematography as much as in the dialogue, and an analysis of dialogue or psychological aspects of the characters alone cannot capture it. This study therefore pairs Bourdieu's theory of the cultural field with Bordwell et al.'s (2023) account of mise-en-scène and cinematography to examine how Christine navigates and negotiates her position.

The field of cultural production is a framework by Bourdieu (1993), seeing how cultural goods like film, literature, or art are being produced, cherished, and valued within the field. This theory is mainly concerned with cultural production as a field, as well as power relations and competition, focusing on film, literature, art, and media, including the relationships between actors such as creators, producers, critics, and audiences, and examining the position of a work within a cultural system.

A field is a social construction space, such as art, literature, or education, where agents (individuals or institutions) act in concrete social situations governed by a set of objective social relations, competing for different forms of capital. Bourdieu (1993) identifies four main forms of capital, which are economic, symbolic, social, and cultural, that influence one's position within society. Among these, cultural capital plays a significant role in reproducing and transforming social structures. As an example of this case, Mariona et al. (2021) found that young people from vulnerable neighborhoods were able to gain skills, confidence, social networks, and make decisions through arts education, which helped their mobility. Moreover, the diversity of cultural activities, educational styles, and organizational structures could give more young people access to opportunities by involving young people from different social groups. In his book, Bourdieu's (1993) conception of cultural capital asserts that it is a form of knowledge, an internalized code, or a cognitive acquisition, which equips the social agent with empathy, cultural relations, and cultural artifacts. He adds that the relation between capital and habitus is reciprocal and mutually constitutive.

Moreover, habitus is a system of dispositions that is embedded durably and transposable within individuals, formed from life experiences, especially through the process of socialization from an early age. These dispositions then influence the way a person thinks, feels, acts, and perceives the social world. Habitus works unconsciously, like an "internal rule" that guides people's actions so that it comes naturally, even though it is shaped by social structures. Thus, cultural capital shapes habitus and habitus directs how cultural capital is actualized in everyday social practices. According to Huang (2019), people from different social and cultural classes grow up with different ways of seeing and understanding the world. A family's history, traditions, and experiences shape how a person behaves and how they view life.

The forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic) are distributed unequally between social classes and class fractions. Bourdieu (1993) asserts that agents continuously compete and climb from a working-class position to cultural prestige through cultural practices by accumulating capital in the form of recognition, prestige, honor, or fame along with the habitus they have within the field. Moreover, cultural practices such as art and performance are counted as participation within cultural fields that allow individuals to accumulate capital, and it enables mobility by challenging societal norms and perceptions through high artistic

standards (Leahy & Ferri, 2023).

In addition, cultural practices and tastes reflect social class and are used as forms of capital that structure hierarchy in society; thus, individuals may improve their social and cultural position through the accumulation of cultural capital such as education, knowledge, and cultural competence (Bourdieu, 1993). An example of this is students who grow up with limited exposure to higher education, whose parents also never attended college, who manage to go to an elite university in a big city. Through this opportunity, they encounter exhibitions and classical literature, learn academic writing and networking; they start to produce artworks, write essays, and also get a good job in a reputable company. This reflects institutional cultural capital in the form of a degree and validation.

Furthermore, this study employs a coming-of-age film to examine mobility (particularly cultural mobility), given that today's youth tend to engage more deeply with audiovisual media that offers relatable narratives situated within a specific stage of life (Stewart & Martins, 2025). Film refers to motion pictures that give the audience experience and entertainment; it delivers information and ideas and shows how the world works in a way we have not known before. According to Bordwell et al. (2023), films are artworks because their makers deliberately organize form and stylistic elements that treat them as a system of choice. Both elements, including narrative and style, involve mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound to guide viewers' perception, attention, and interpretation. This meaning emerges from the way these elements work together across the film, not only from a particular scene alone.

Mise-en-scène is considered to be everything placed in front of the camera and arranged within the frame, including setting, lighting, costume and makeup, and performance. Mise-en-scène plays such a big role in shaping how characters are perceived, how space is understood, and how emotions and ideas are visually expressed. Through staging, movement, and visual emphasis, mise-en-scène directs the viewer's gaze and contributes to narrative meaning. Additionally, cinematography (writing in movement) refers to how the camera presents the mise-en-scène; it means how the audience sees the stage on screen. Through camera position, zoom, distance, and perspective, filmmakers decide how creative choices of the cinematographic elements affect audiences (Bordwell et al., 2023).

Bordwell's framework and Bourdieu's theory of practice meet at the point where social position becomes visible. For Bourdieu (1993), capital and habitus are enacted in concrete practices, tastes, and bodily dispositions within a field, while for Bordwell et al. (2023), mise-en-scène and cinematography are the arrangement of setting, costume, lighting, and performance within the frame and how the camera captures and presents all that to the audience. What a character wears, where she is placed, how she is lit, and how she is framed can therefore be read as visible traces of her capital and habitus and of her position relative to others in the field. In this study, Bourdieu's concepts provide the interpretive categories (field, capital, and habitus), and mise-en-scène as well as cinematography provide the visual evidence through which those categories are identified in selected scenes. In this way, film, as a socially constructed space, can be analyzed both autonomously and alongside Bourdieu's (1993) field of cultural production, enriching the interpretations of the text by illustrating how agents compete within social contexts to pursue their goals.

This study then attempts to answer the question: "How does *Lady Bird* (2017) portray the process of Christine in achieving upward cultural mobility?" This research tries to demonstrate that *Lady Bird* (2017) is not only a simple story of a girl growing up in her adolescent phase but also reveals a profound commentary on capital-based social distinction, cultural belonging, and the structures that shape one's social identity.

Methodology

The primary data source of this study is the film *Lady Bird* (2017), specifically several

scenes and dialogues that reflect Christine's process of moving across cultural spaces.

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach that combines textual and film analysis. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a qualitative design explains broad ideas about behaviors, experiences, and attitudes, seeking the meaning of a phenomenon and identifying culture and patterns rather than focusing on measurable data. Textual analysis, in turn, examines the meaning and content of texts, including media such as newspapers, television programs, and fashion, and interprets what is represented and how (Lockyer, 2008).

Data were collected in three stages. First, the researchers closely observed the film to understand how cultural mobility is presented. Then, they selected key scenes that indicate Christine's process of achieving cultural mobility. Finally, they categorized these scenes through Bourdieu's (1993) theory of the field of cultural production, which explains her effort to accumulate capital and habitus, while reading the staging of each scene through Bordwell et al.'s (2023) concept of mise-en-scène and cinematography.

The analysis then followed three steps: identifying Christine's initial position in the field and the limitations she faces as a working-class adolescent; examining how her capital and habitus accumulate through her artistic participation, self-representation, and decision-making; and interpreting how this process shows that upward movement does not happen instantly but through continuous effort. Through this procedure, the study presents a coming-of-age film as a source for understanding youth's upward cultural mobility.

Results and Discussion

Lady Bird (2017) shows Christine's attempt to move upward culturally through education. This process is actualized through her efforts to accumulate and negotiate different forms of capital and habitus that enable her to go beyond limitations and move from a small city, Sacramento, to a big one, New York. The interaction between capital and habitus is reciprocal and mutually integrated (Bourdieu, 1993). The relations of the two are interlinked, as capital can be described as encompassing the resources that Christine possesses, and habitus plays a role in influencing perceptions of engagement based on socioeconomic backgrounds that determine what kind of values, behaviors, and relations she approaches within the field (Darmawan, 2024). Findings show that Christine's desire to move culturally reflects how she perceives the meaning of the life she is living, not only moving geographically. The analysis follows Christine's trajectory through five scenes, each of which is read through its visual composition and its Bourdieusian meaning, beginning with Figure 1.



Figure 1. Christine expresses her desire to go to "where the culture is" (Gerwig, G. (Director). (2017). Lady Bird [Film]. A24.)

The scene in Figure 1 highlights Christine's initial process of upward cultural mobility. Christine's growing dissatisfaction with her current situation and her desire for something she believes is more meaningful and culturally rich depict her habitus, which reflects how she perceives opportunities, taste, and personal preferences (Bourdieu, 1993). Christine's desire to attend college on the East Coast, particularly in New York, reflects her habitus in seeing the world, as she is constantly looking for something meaningful or 'cultured' in this case.

Visually, the scene uses a medium close-up shot of Christine seated in the passenger seat, framing the body from the chest up (Bordwell et al., 2023). This framing narrows attention to her face and upper shoulders, making her subtle facial expressions and eye movements clearly visible, particularly her earnest, off-screen gaze as she speaks, influencing the audience's emotional

engagement and perception of the character's situation (Balint & Rooney, 2019). Part of the car remains in the frame, including the window and headrest, while the blurred landscape outside suggests movement beyond her. The car signifies physical travel, but her hopeful expression, combined with her line "*I wanna go where culture is,*" shows that her desire is about reaching a different cultural environment, not just a different place. This symbolizes that cultural mobility is not only about changing locations but also about navigating different cultural environments, not just a physical movement. The camera is positioned at an eye-level angle as it is placed straight in, emphasizing emotional intensity and inviting the audience to observe the character (Bordwell et al., 2023).

Unfortunately, Christine's habitus clashes with her current field as a student from a working-class background, which indicates that she has limited capital. The form of capital can give meaning to agents' position in society and have a direct effect on access to various opportunities, education, and healthcare, contributing to mobility based on certain geographical areas (Ganapathi, 2024). However, Christine's economic struggles do not affect her way of thinking since she tries to overcome the barriers. Her exchange with her mother in Figure 2 makes this tension explicit.



Figure 2. Marion and Christine have an ongoing car argument (Gerwig, G. (Director). (2017). Lady Bird [Film]. A24.)

"MARION: "Your dad and I will barely be able to afford in-state tuition."
CHRISTINE: "There are loans, scholarships!""
(Gerwig, 2017, 20:13-20:16)

As seen in Figure 2, Marion shows how she perceives herself as economically unstable since she, as Christine's parent, cannot afford college tuition. In contrast, Christine's response shows her resistance by saying that there are loans and scholarships as alternative ways that allow her to go to a prestigious university. Her persistence and resilience are captured not only through words but also in the way that she takes action to make her desire possible. She applies for scholarships, pays for application fees through part-time work, saves her money, and actively seeks ways to overcome her financial limitations.

Visually, Figure 2 uses a medium close-up shot. Christine's side profile is shown from the shoulders up with the camera positioned slightly to her side. The angle is at eye-level, emphasizing Christine's facial expression and gesture with subtle performance. Additionally, the camera position allows for maintaining spatial continuity within the car and clear screen geography (Kelly, 2020). The profile composition creates a strong graphic line, separating her face from the blurred background outside the car's window (Bordwell et al., 2023). This selection shows that Figure 2 emphasizes how the audience perceives and engages emotionally with the character's situation.

In Bourdieusian terms, the exchange shows that the relationship between forms of capital is transformational but irreplaceable (Huang, 2019). Economic capital provides access to material resources that can be converted into other forms of capital, such as education and social networks, which in turn shape social position (Darmawan, 2024). Christine's attempts to overcome financial constraints are realized through her personal efforts as well as the dynamics of family and social groups. This means that although her current field does not align with her view, Christine sees this not as an obstacle, but an opportunity. She does not let the limitation define her; she constantly defines who she is.

The process of Christine achieving upward cultural mobility is further illustrated by her involvement in theater performances. This cultural participation depicts the knowledge and competencies that she possesses for showing appreciation, taste, and interest toward cultural relations and artefacts (Bourdieu, 1993). Figure 3 shows this participation on stage.



Figure 3. *Christine performs Merrily We Roll Along show (Gerwig, G. (Director). (2017). Lady Bird [Film]. A24.)*

"*CHRISTINE AND ALL: "Merrily we roll along, roll along catching a dream.*"
(Gerwig, 2017, 32:44-32:48)

Christine's cultural participation is a kind of cultural capital in the form of embodied state, which refers to the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and competencies internalized in a person (Bourdieu, 1993). Moreover, Christine's background as a student in a Catholic private school contributes to the formation of this cultural capital through its emphasis on literature, theatre, and academic achievement (Bourdieu, 1993). The school captivates her tastes and dispositions (embodied capital) and positions her toward college credentials (institutionalized capital). It also shapes her aspirations by exposing her to ideas of what a culturally rich life looks like.

In addition, her participation in school activities such as theater, as seen in Figure 3 when she performed the *Merrily We Roll Along* show, reflects the development of cultural competencies and an appreciation of the arts, which Bourdieu (1993) considers a socially valued cultural practice. Within the Catholic school setting, such practices are institutionally recognized and rewarded, which allows them to function as cultural capital, where the value of cultural practice depends on its recognition within a particular field. However, in early-2000s Sacramento, where Christine's family faces financial pressure, this capital does not easily convert into economic security. This tension shows that the value of cultural practice is socially situated, and it helps explain why Christine looks beyond her hometown for an environment that validates her cultural aspirations.

Visually, Figure 3 uses stage lighting that appears to be high-key with minimal shadows. This kind of lighting allows a balanced and accessible performative atmosphere, controlling the visibility and emphasizing the character's appearance (Bordwell et al., 2023). This lighting showcases Christine's theater involvement as her deliberate decision-making, as she appears to immerse herself fully during the performance.

Furthermore, cultural capital includes non-financial assets like education, skills, and cultural knowledge. These elements influence an individual's tastes and preferences to determine the way they interact within society (Mudd et al., 2023). Christine's educational background and engagement with the arts contribute to how she perceives herself and how she attempts to navigate and reposition herself within different cultural spaces, that is, toward upward cultural mobility. Through this form of cultural capital, Christine enables an ongoing exclusion as a working-class agent from attaining the class above her by education (Julien, 2020).

Another example of how Christine consciously decides to do something can be seen in her action that tends to be performative, precisely when she addresses herself as "Lady Bird". This action is part of the process of achieving upward cultural mobility, as Christine works to form a social identity to negotiate her position in society (Darmawan, 2024). Figure 4 illustrates an early instance of this tendency.



Figure 4. *Christine is called by Sister Sarah-Joan for her campaign posters (Gerwig, 2017, 05:04)*

"SISTER SARAH-JOAN: "You have a performative streak, I think."
(Gerwig, G. (Director). (2017). Lady Bird [Film]. A24.)

Figure 4 shows Christine being called to Sister Sarah-Joan's room because of the campaign posters she made, whose pictures the school finds bothersome. This scene highlights Christine's performative identity and her self-representation. The controversial poster shows her tendency to challenge norms and provoke reactions, even when she downplays its meaning. Christine frequently expresses herself through acts meant to be seen and noticed. Moreover, a medium close-up of two campaign posters is shown being held in Sister Sarah-Joan's hands. The camera angle appears slightly at a high level, looking down at the posters placed on the desk. The posters dominate the composition, making them the primary visual focus that emphasizes the props as narrative details (Bordwell et al., 2023). The combination of Christine's head and a bird's body is seen as a prop design that has expressive meaning, which is to show her style and taste.

Christine's attempt to seek recognition through a performative tendency is not limited to a single moment. Throughout the film, Christine repeatedly performs and constructs a new identity, such as the moment when she demands that her mother address her as "Lady Bird". Christine's insistence on being called that way signals her attempt to define herself on her own terms, separate from the identity given to her by her family.

Additionally, the moment when Christine enrolls herself in the theater and refers to herself as Christine "Lady Bird" McPherson instead of her real name further reflects Christine's attempt to create a new identity and reposition herself in the field by addressing her new name. Those moments show how she wants to be seen, addressed, and prominent.

Christine's actions are the result of reforming habitus based on novelty and interactions in society as a response to the intercorporation of the norms and practices that exist in the stratified society (Harrington, 2017). The interaction between lifestyle and an individual's identity as part of habitus is constructed and presented through Christine's preferences, reflecting her indication of social status, peers' affiliation, and cultural identity (Hisyam et al., 2024). Thus, she tries to be performative and more dominant in her environment, as this form of action enables her to gain access to more resources (Darmawan, 2024) that can help her achieve upward cultural mobility.

Moreover, Christine joins a popular peer to gain social capital through networks and connections, supporting her access to other forms of resources. Social capital is described as the acknowledgement and admiration of individuals or groups in the field (Darmawan, 2024). This kind of capital can promote collective action that leads to certain traits or behaviors. Figure 5 shows this attempt in a school environment.



Figure 5. Jenna joins Kyle, Jonah, and friends in the parking lot along with Christine (Gerwig, G. (Director). (2017). Lady Bird [Film]. A24.)

"JENNA: "KYLE! Lady Bird and I just decorated the nun-mobile like "just married to Jesus!""
(Gerwig, 2017, 42:05-42:10)

Christine begins to explore a different social circle by getting close to Jenna, who is portrayed as attractive, popular, and wealthy, and eventually becomes part of her group. As seen in Figure 5, this effort allows Christine to gain access to new friendships and connect with other popular and wealthy students by impressing Jenna and her friends. However, the shift comes at a cost, as it gradually distances her from her previous peers. By getting closer to popular circles, including Jena and Kylie, Christine shows an attempt to accumulate social capital to make herself more ideal in supporting her mobility. Moreover, she joins the more popular peers and adopts new traits that help her acquire social relationships and networks with other popular and rich students in order to be part of or build up more networks and relationships (Huang, 2019).

In addition, Figure 5 uses a long shot as it captures the characters' prominence yet visibly shows the dominance of the background (Bordwell et al., 2023). The camera is positioned at eye level. The background remains visually dominant through its spatial arrangement, thus creating a tension in visual hierarchy, where the setting competes with the character for the audience's attention. This arrangement of visual elements guides selective attention as the character carries the position and interaction that has narrative importance, showing the reinforcement of characters' meaning and social situation; thus, the audience can experience observing the character while watching (Gibbs, 2002). Kyle is seated in the car, wearing a casual jacket with an open collar and reading a book, in a relaxed posture, suggesting that they wear the uniform untidily and are socially distinct. On the other hand, out of the frame, Christine wears the uniform normally, which contrasts with the surrounding environment, making her seem out of place. Christine's absence from the frame and her fashion support the idea that she actually does not belong to that social group, but she needs that circle to accumulate her social capital.

Read together, the five scenes show that Christine's mobility is built step by step rather than achieved at once. Christine's acceptance into a prestigious university in New York City at the end of the film reflects the endgame of the process of accumulating capital and habitus to achieve upward cultural mobility. Unexpectedly, throughout her mobility process, Christine shows individual growth through the increase in emotional maturity and self-awareness. There is a moment in her that shows identity resolution and acceptance of her situation. Eventually, she decides to refer to herself as "Christine" instead of "Lady Bird", capturing an important shift from the part of the film when she keeps rejecting her given name as a way to distance herself from her background and construct the identity of "Lady Bird" instead. The message she delivers to her parents at the end of the film, particularly to her mother, mirrors a new emotional awareness and her sense of belonging when she recalls driving through Sacramento and appreciates where she comes from.

Moreover, Christine perceives mobility as not only where she lives, but also how she is living. She wants to change how she is seen from an "ordinary Sacramento girl" to someone more sophisticated by going to a bigger city like New York, which represents a different cultural world. To move culturally means attempting to shift her position within the field rather than simply changing where she lives. She tries to redefine how she is seen and how she sees herself by adopting new tastes, forming connections with different social groups, and wanting to enter spaces she associates with greater prestige that represent a different cultural background, including going to college in New York, as she says, "I want to go where culture is, like New York." At the same time, this movement involves a distancing from her family background that makes her realize that the authentic self she ever had is the one she is seeking.

Previous Bourdieu-based studies, such as Mahbub and Shoily (2016), examine how cultural products like painting, music, and theatre gain symbolic and social capital through the enthusiast's social status and align with the hierarchical traditional concept of social status (high or low). Moreover, Lin (2020) highlights the persistence of inequalities due to family background and social situation that affect life chances, indicating unequal distribution of capital for upward mobility. Those studies emphasize the existence of class and unequal distribution of capital for competing for upward cultural mobility within the field. On the other hand, *Lady Bird* (2017) presents a coming-of-age narrative and frames mobility not only as a structural and geographical movement but also as a process of reaching acceptance and growing maturity. It is not only about achieving better material conditions, but it is also about reaching spiritual inner peace. This is reflected through Christine's shift in seeing the world. She does not deny her initial field completely, but rather incorporates it with her new field after achieving upward cultural mobility.

Across the scenes, the mise-en-scène and cinematography elements consistently externalize the Bourdieusian processes discussed above: framing and staging keep Christine at the center of attention while her surroundings signal the field she seeks to enter or leave (Figures 1, 2, and 5), and costume, lighting, and props mark her cultural competence and self-presentation (Figures 3 and 4). This convergence of visual and sociological evidence supports reading her artistic participation, self-representation, and decision-making as the accumulation of capital and habitus through which she reinterprets what it means to be "culturally rich and sophisticated" (Soong et al., 2017).

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how *Lady Bird* (2017) portrays Christine's upward cultural mobility. Reading the film through Bourdieu's theory and Bordwell et al.'s mise-en-scène and cinematography, it finds that mobility is portrayed as a gradual process of adolescence, built through the accumulation of capital and habitus rather than a single moment of departure. Beyond this case, the film suggests that cultural mobility for young people is as much a question of identity and belonging as of economic or geographical change: moving upward requires negotiating what is gained and what is left behind, and Christine's eventual acceptance of Sacramento shows that mobility need not mean rejecting one's starting field. This echoes Soong et al. (2017), who recognize that mobility involves a complex negotiation of resistance and acceptance.

The study also shows that pairing a sociological framework with film analysis lets social structures be read in a film's visual choices, and that coming-of-age films can serve as accessible texts for understanding how structural limits and personal aspiration interact in youth experience. Future research could extend this approach to other coming-of-age films, compare portrayals across class, gender, and cultural contexts, or draw on audience reception to examine how viewers interpret cultural mobility.

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