

The Masculine Domination

- La Domination Masculine (1999) is the last text of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. It was translated into English in 2001 as Masculine Domination.

“Symbolic Violence” is Bourdieu's term for the imposition on subordinated groups by the dominant class of an ideology which legitimates and naturalizes the status quo.

- For Bourdieu the State is the space where ‘legitimate identities’ are produced and justify procedures of inclusion and exclusion.
- The State produces the taxonomies and hierarchies that are internalized by the individuals it governs, including those who rebel against it. For Bourdieu, however, the State is not an abstraction: he argues in favor of a sociology of institutions and individuals that make up the meta-field of the State.

The concept of symbolic violence aims to overcome the alternative between coercion and consent in order to understand the mechanisms of domination.

Symbolic violence functions via three components acting simultaneously:

- ignorance of the arbitrariness of domination;
- recognition of this domination as legitimate;
- internalization of domination by the dominated.

Bourdieu sees the naturalisation of power relations, and the resulting symbolic violence, as made up of two processes – ‘dehistoricisation and universalisation’ (Emirbayer and Johnson, forthcoming; 48).

Thus a social relation, such as the gender system, has come about as a result of specific historical and contextual factors.

The denial, or forgetting, of this specificity places gender to a large extent beyond question, even by those who suffer as a result of it.

It appears to be true that, as Cob and Elder argue, naturalised inequalities are not seen as problems to be solved, but as inevitable facts of life (in Koopmans and Duyvendak, 1995; 246).

Bourdieu describes neo-liberalism as a 'mental colonisation' which operates globally (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2000: 4). The sheer scale and pervasiveness of neo-liberalism and the many damaging effects it has, make it a pressing target for criticism – a project which Bourdieu has contributed much to.

For Bourdieu, neo-liberalism is deeply complicit in numerous types of symbolic violence. Not only does it 'betray' and abandon of all types of social workers (Bourdieu, 1998: 3), but the ideals of individualisation and self-help serve to hide the role of neo-liberalism in the creation of suffering and '[make] it possible to 'blame the victim' who is entirely responsible for his or her own misfortune' (ibid.: 7).

Thus, both social workers and those receiving help are denied much of the support they need and exposed to a logic which claims that their worsening situation (meaning tougher working conditions for social professionals) is their own fault.

Based on his fieldwork in Kabylie, Bourdieu shows that the masculine/feminine opposition is one of the fundamental principles of the world's division, which organizes the mythical-cosmological categories of perception of space and time:

high/low, above/below, right/left, outside/inside, discontinuous/continuous, extraordinary/ordinary, event/duration.

Underlying these are the main oppositions that organize social life: culture/nature, public/private, active/passive.

Far from being the expression of biological differences, masculine and feminine identities are socially constructed identities (gender) instilled in individuals via **bodily training**. For boys, expressions of virility, honor, and domination are taught; instilled in girls are expressions of femininity, effacement, and submission (discretion, restraint, lowered eyes, making oneself small, etc.).

Biological differences serve to justify the sexual division of work that results from these gendered identities. As such, socially constructed identities are naturalized, and cultural arbitrariness takes on natural appearances.

In contemporary societies, these identities are reproduced not only by familial education, but also by institutions – first of which are the Church, the State, and School.

In posing the exchange of women as the basis for communication between men, Lévi-Strauss obscured the political dimension of this foundational act of social life, in which violence toward women, turned into objects, is institutionalized.

This approach makes it possible to overcome the alternative between coercion and consent that often underlies debates on masculine domination.

Symbolic violence implies complicit submission on the part of the dominated, which is not the result of a free, voluntary act, but rather results from the internalization of an androcentric world vision.

Habitus, Bourdieu asserts, can be defined as
“a system of long-lasting (rather than permanent) schemes or structures of perception, conception and action”
(2005, p. 43; see also Burkitt, 1999; Reay, 1995; Sweetman, 2003; Wacquant, 1992).

These dispositional schemes might be seen as generative rather than determining, and can be understood as an embodied “generative grammar, but is not an inborn generative grammar It is a principle of invention, a principle of improvisation...The habitus generates inventions and improvisations but within limits” (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 46).”.

The identification of gender somatization, the process of embedding relations of domination into the body, is useful for two reasons.

- First, it further deconstructs the naturalization process to consider how the material body is worked upon within relations of social domination.
- Second, and more importantly, it represents a refusal to dissolve the social significance of the material body into a world of increasingly unstable signs and signifiers. Rather, it allows us to articulate how gender relations operate and interrelate at different levels (i.e., somatic/symbolic)

- **Somatization** concerns the articulation of social, cultural, and historical processes that, through practice, embed symbolic oppositions into and onto the body.

- It is also concerned with, and the concomitant construction of, differentially valued gendered schemes of perception that are normatively generated from these.

According to Bourdieu (2001), masculine domination “comes from the fact that it combines and condenses two operations: it legitimates a relationship of domination by embedding it in biological nature that is itself a naturalized social construction” (p. 23).

Alternatively, we might contemplate this as a process of “somatization of social relations of domination” (p. 23), as through practice, symbolic distinction

becomes inscribed into and onto bodies as two opposing yet complimentary forms of **habitus** (schemes of dispositions).

The result of this process

is seen as somatization because both men and women come to embody and perceive (visually) as self-evident, the “illusio” of a natural legitimacy of their dominating or dominated bodies and the concomitant social positions and practices that legitimately stem from these naturalized qualities.

Therefore, women as well as men consciously and unconsciously come to embody the conditions of their own domination and dominance (see also Bordo, 1989).

Symbolic domination and violence go to the core of embodiment in that “the dominated habitus” is somaticized:

“If it is quite illusory to believe that symbolic violence can be overcome with the weapons of consciousness and will alone, this is because the effect and conditions of its efficacy are durably and deeply embedded in the body in the form of dispositions” (p. 39).

Bourdieu is careful to emphasize that he is not suggesting women or dominated men choose, love, or enjoy their domination. Such a position would concede to the very prevalent conservative discourses of ahistorical individualism, victim blaming, and the circular causality he so constantly castigates.

Far from being the conscious, free, deliberate act of an isolated “subject,” this practical construction is itself the effect of power, durably embedded in bodies of the dominated in the form of schemes of perception and dispositions (to admire, respect, love, etc.) which sensitize them to certain symbolic manifestations of power. (p. 40)

The production of a dominated and dominating habitus is therefore inseparable from that which produces and reproduces them. Just as many women are “woven” into a social structure through their often-dominated habitus, so are men, as their symbolically relational opposites.

We often hear how “natural” it is that boys should (and should want to) engage regularly in muscle- and skeletal-strengthening activities. In contrast, many girls are discouraged from the very same mode of engagement (even if they are permitted to participate in the “same” activity).

The result is often a gendered process that channels the prepubescent girl/body to a profoundly differentiated set of physical conditionings that results in greatly exaggerated anatomical and physiological differences that are then ascribed to **nature** rather than the **socially constructed gendered processes that lead to the optimization of base physiological inheritances.**

At its simplest, this might again be termed anamnesis. Perhaps the real significance of this somatization

of gender relations into anatomical and experiential differences is the generative way these come together to foster a greatly varied way of engaging with the world at the material, physical, and dispositional level and which also feed the circular causality of vision that helps to sustain masculine domination.