Masculine domination, radical feminism and change

Feminist Theory

SAGE Publications
(London,
Thousand Oaks, CA
and New Delhi)
vol. 6(3): 325–346.
1464–7001
DOI: 10.1177/1464700105057367
www.sagepublications.com

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Abstract Feminists are starting to look to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, in the hope that it might provide a useful framework for conceptualizing the tension between structure and agency in questions of gender. This article argues that Bourdieu's analysis of gender can indeed be useful to feminists, but that the options Bourdieu offers for change are problematic. The article suggests that Bourdieu's analysis of gender echoes the work of earlier radical feminists, particularly Catharine MacKinnon, in important ways. Consciousness-raising, one of MacKinnon's strategies for change, sits well with Bourdieu's concept of habitus, despite Bourdieu's own scepticism. The article argues that recasting the role of consciousness-raising in Bourdieu's theory helps to undermine the deterministic elements of his work. It concludes that a feminist turn to Bourdieu as an attempt to understand gender's entrenchment-and-malleability can be fruitful, and that such a turn might find a re-engagement with the idea of consciousness-raising helpful.

keywords *agency, Bourdieu, change, consciousness-raising, gender, habitus, MacKinnon, structure*

> I have always been astonished . . . that the established order, with its relations of domination, its rights and prerogatives, privileges and injustices, ultimately perpetuates itself so easily, apart from a few historical accidents, and that the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural. And I have also seen masculine domination, and the way it is imposed and suffered, as the prime example of this paradoxical submission. (Bourdieu, 2001: 1–2)

> When one gets to know women close up and without men present, it is remarkable the extent to which their so-called biology, not to mention their socialization, has failed. (MacKinnon, 1989: 91)

These excerpts imply that their authors, Pierre Bourdieu and Catharine MacKinnon, have diametrically opposed analyses of gender. At first glance, the two theorists appear to represent the opposing standpoints of structure versus agency. For Bourdieu, gender appears to be if not immutable then at least extraordinarily resistant whereas, for MacKinnon, gender seems to

be a much more fluid, transcendable discourse. In general, it may seem strange to suggest that a radical feminist has anything in common with a mainstream sociologist.

However, Bourdieu has more in common with radical feminists in general, and MacKinnon in particular, than these initial observations suggest. At the most basic level, both theorists share a basic concern to portray gender and gender inequality as overwhelmingly socially constructed, while at the same time explicitly theorizing change. This combination is useful for feminists, since feminists often face a dilemma. On the one hand, they believe that gender, as a social category and construct, limits people's choices in part by shaping their preferences. Thus women desire symbols and causes of female inferiority, such as shoes and clothes that are uncomfortable or beauty practices that are inefficient or even damaging to health. On the other hand, feminists want to argue that *change* is both desirable and possible, and that women themselves can be the agents of that change. Feminism is a revolutionary (or, at least, revisionary) project, and it calls upon women to be the agents of their own emancipation. But valuing women's agency inclines feminists to value women's wishes and choices, and to provide a political framework within which women's real experiences and actual choices are taken seriously, even though those choices may sometimes be the result of patriarchy.

Both Bourdieu and MacKinnon claim to have negotiated a path between the extremes of determinism and voluntarism. It is partly this claim that has led feminists to begin to consider Bourdieu's work on gender, and to question whether it might offer a corrective to the more deterministic moments of the more popular Michel Foucault (Adkins, 2003; Lovell, 2000; McNay, 1999, 2000; Mottier, 2002). This recent feminist work on Bourdieu does not tend to invoke the ideas of radical feminism. But although the approaches of Bourdieu and MacKinnon are not usually compared, they have much in common. As I show in this paper, they have similar analyses of gender, with Bourdieu's account in terms of symbolic violence echoing MacKinnon's account in terms of the eroticization of male dominance and female submission. However, the two depart in their views about the possibilities for change. Despite his claims to the contrary, Bourdieu risks denying the possibility of women's agency – a key problem for feminists. I argue that, while Bourdieu's work is useful for understanding the entrenchment of gender, the strategies he proposes for change – principally a disjunction between field and habitus, and the regulated liberties – are not best suited to changes in gender systems even on his own terms, since gender operates across fields, and regulated liberties concerning gender are often reactionary. I suggest that Bourdieu's account is more conducive to change if we combine it with a strategy for change endorsed by MacKinnon: consciousness-raising. This strategy is particularly suited to Bourdieu's approach, despite his occasional scepticism about its efficacy, and so deserves renewed attention among feminists who endorse his analysis.

Constructing gender inequality

In *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu considers the mechanisms and persistence of patriarchy. Why is it, he asks, that gender inequality has persisted throughout history despite significant social change? In general, Bourdieu is concerned with the question of why it is that many forms of domination persist with relatively few challenges. He seeks to examine the ways in which, left to themselves and in the normal course of things, individuals will not act so as to disrupt structures of domination, such as patriarchy, from which they suffer (or benefit). Even if they have read and agreed with key feminist texts, most women do not stop wearing makeup, taking on the lion's share of the housework and childcare, wearing restrictive and uncomfortable clothes and shoes which emphasize sexual availability, avoiding physical violence, or being attracted to men with characteristics of dominance such as a powerful physique or job. Even if we believe that our desires are indeed the product of the norms and expectations of a patriarchal society, still we do actually *like* makeup, high heels and tall muscly rich men.[1]

A central reason for the success of patriarchy, Bourdieu argues, is its ability to naturalize its distinctions. At the heart of any system of hierarchy is the distinction made between those who occupy different hierarchical positions. The system of masculine domination owes its success at least in part to its provision of 'natural', biological explanations for hierarchy. Women *are*, according to the patriarchal story, different from men in that they have different bodies and different biological functions. They *must be* different from each other so as to reproduce – the differences could not be wished away, for without sex differences we would have no means of perpetuating the species. Moreover, these differences *justify* different positions on a hierarchy in that they dictate different behaviours for men and women as regards things such as childcare, breadwinning and 'mate choice' (in the language of the evolutionary psychologists, who are the most zealous proponents of biological justifications for patriarchy), which have knock-on effects for the wider social positions of the sexes.

Instead, Bourdieu argues that the categories of gender are constructed and not necessary (2001: 11–12, 15). Gender differences start with the socially constructed and thus contingent division of people into two kinds according to their bodies, and specifically their genitals. To say that this is a contingent division is not to say that people could in theory have the same genitals, or that there is no biological difference between men and women, but it is to say that differences between genitals need not be socially significant. Christine Helliwell describes a tribe in Indonesian Borneo, the Gerai, for whom differences in work, not differences in genitals, are the determinants of a system of classification comparable to gender (2000: 805–6). Although there are people with different genitals in the Gerai tribe, this fact is not seen as particularly significant, and certainly not as the determinant of gender. While there is a correlation between different genitals and different genders for the Gerai, this correlation is contingent and not necessary. In Britain, for example, it is overwhelmingly

women and not men who provide the primary care for babies in their first weeks of life. However, genitals and not childcare are the determinant of gender: a person with a penis who is the prime carer of a newborn baby is still a man. For the Gerai, in contrast, it is the work that is determining – a person who performs certain tasks in rice-cultivation is a man, even if that person has a vulva. Helliwell herself was categorized as a man for some time after her arrival in the tribe as a result of the work she was able to do, despite the fact that everyone in the tribe frequently observed her genitals when she urinated in the stream used for that purpose. Thus: 'As someone said to me at a later point, "Yes, I saw that you had a vulva, but I thought that Western men might be different"' (2000: 806).

Genital difference, then, does not necessarily signify different roles or identities. Once the difference between genitals has been instituted as a socially significant one, however, it is justified by reference to the naturalness of the distinction. In other words, in answer to the question 'why are genital differences socially significant?' the answer given would be something like 'because there are differences in genitals'. Moreover, this difference is further idolized by its naturalness. If we ask 'why are there differences in genitals?' we will receive the answer 'because that is how nature is', which is something like saying 'because it couldn't be any other way'. This circular reasoning leads, Bourdieu argues, to symmetry between the subjective and objective elements of domination. Subjectively, people believe that there are significant differences based on genital differences. Objectively, there are genital differences. The circularity comes in as follows: people believe that there are significant differences based on genitals because they are inclined to notice and reify differences based on genitals, and people are inclined to notice and reify such differences because they believe that they exist. In sum, one of the key reasons for success of the system of male domination is its ability to make itself appear as natural – not only in the sense that differences between genitals are natural, but also in the sense that social differences based on differences between genitals appear natural.

This analysis is strongly redolent of that of MacKinnon. She fundamentally rejects the idea that categories of gender are primarily biological, or that gender inequality is precluded by biological differences. For MacKinnon, sexuality is the prime site of gender inequality, but this is not the result of any biological imperative (1989: 109). Rather than being a matter of biology – or indeed a matter of morality or psychology – gender is, she argues, a matter of *politics* and a matter of *power*. This analysis of gender in terms of power is, of course, at the heart of feminism. As MacKinnon puts it:

> Distinctions of body or mind or behavior are pointed to as cause rather than effect, with no realization that they are so deeply effect rather than cause that pointing to them at all is an effect. Inequality comes first, difference comes after. (1989: 219)

A side-effect of MacKinnon's analysis is that the terms 'sex' and 'gender' lose their distinctiveness. 'Sex' is often taken to refer to the natural,

biological differences between men and women, with 'gender' reserved for the social differences. However, the foregoing implies that the division is not so clear-cut: any difference is social in the sense that it is a social contingency that the difference is considered significant. As a result, MacKinnon uses the terms 'sex' and 'gender' interchangeably, as I do in this article (MacKinnon, 1989: xiii).[2]

Veronique Mottier criticizes this aspect of Bourdieu's approach (and therefore, presumably, of MacKinnon's), arguing that the failure to distinguish sex and gender is 'the most problematic aspect of his gender analysis' (2002: 350). Mottier argues that a failure to distinguish the two concepts equates to an analysis of gender solely in terms of sexual difference, without any reference to the role of gender power. However, as the foregoing analysis shows, this criticism is incorrect. The denial of a difference between sex and gender can take either a patriarchal or a feminist form. The patriarchal form is the focus of Bourdieu's criticism: the idea that inequalities of status or power are the natural result of, and therefore justified by, differences in sexual organs. In countering this patriarchal form, feminists can either introduce a sex/gender distinction, as Mottier advocates, or they can argue that sexual differences are themselves imbued with, are in some sense the result of, gender power. As MacKinnon points out, a sex/gender distinction rests on the assumption that there is such a thing as sexual difference that is not imbued with power, and it is precisely this assumption which her radical feminist theory challenges. As she puts it, pointing to sexual difference *at all*, even from a feminist perspective, is an effect of gender power. Bourdieu, far from returning to the patriarchal rejection of the sex/gender distinction, joins MacKinnon in rejecting the distinction from the radical feminist perspective.

Symbolic violence and sexuality

If gender is socially constructed, it remains to be seen what form that social construction takes and what its organizing principle is. Bourdieu conceptualizes gender in terms of symbolic violence; for MacKinnon, sexuality is the organizing principle. The two ideas are similar since, for MacKinnon, sexuality is characterized by the eroticization of male dominance and female submission, an idea which resonates with symbolic violence and which Bourdieu explicitly endorses.

MacKinnon analyses gender in terms of the eroticization of male dominance and female submission. Like symbolic violence, this patriarchal form of sexuality imprints itself deep into the bodies, thoughts and identities of individuals. Like symbolic violence, moreover, sexuality is deeply hierarchical. For MacKinnon, the eroticization of hierarchy pervades sexuality within patriarchy and, moreover, defines patriarchy politically (1989: 241, 137). Men's power over women writ large is structured around male sexual power. Power and sexuality are intimately intertwined for MacKinnon, with power structuring sexuality and sexuality reinforcing power (1989: 151). As is the case in Foucauldian analysis, pleasure plays a central role in this process. Sex, and eroticized inequality, are deeply pleasurable for both women and men. Ranging from Pat Califia's fervent defence of

sadomasochism (1998), through the rape fantasies of the many women interviewed by Nancy Friday (1973), to the clichés of men sweeping women off their feet in Mills and Boon novels,[3] hierarchical sex is as much the source of pleasure and fantasy as it is the source of rape, abuse and distress. For MacKinnon, sexuality's 'pleasure [is] the experience of power in its gendered form' (1989: xiii).

Bourdieu agrees with MacKinnon's analysis, stating that sexual relations are 'constructed through the fundamental principle of division between the active male and the passive female', a division which 'creates, organizes, expresses and directs desire – male desire as the desire for possession, eroticized domination, and female desire as the desire for masculine domination, as eroticized subordination or even, in the limiting case, as the eroticized recognition of domination' (Bourdieu, 2001: 21). For Bourdieu, this phenomenon is understood in terms of symbolic violence, defined as 'the *violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity*' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 167, original emphasis). Symbolic violence is expressed not physically on the bodies of those it violates, but mentally on thoughts. It causes those who are subject to it to assent to, and thus be complicit with, its dictates. Gender inequality is *symbolic* violence because women (and men) comply willingly, with no need for coercion, and because its effect is to create symbolic normative images of ideal gendered behaviour. Compliance is willing precisely because it never needs to be sought: patriarchy operates significantly through the construction of desires and thoughts, influencing what choices people want to make so that some options are ruled out beforehand. As will be discussed in the next section, Bourdieu conceptualizes this shaping of individuals in terms of 'habitus': a durable set of dispositions formed in response to objective social conditions. As a result, patriarchy does not need to rely on the heavy-handed and resistance-prone mechanism of ruling out options after people have decided that they would like to choose them. Instead, compliance is secured more easily by ruling out options before they are considered, so that people never come to choose. Women's compliance is a *pre-reflexive* compliance: it does not need to be consciously accepted and affirmed because it is always and already the organizing idea of consciousness. As Bourdieu puts it: 'The dominated apply categories constructed from the point of view of the dominant to the relations of domination, thus making them appear as natural' (2001: 35). The combination of apparent naturalness and symbolic violence renders systems of male domination extremely solid.

Habitus

As is well documented, Bourdieu uses the concept of habitus to explain the way in which social norms become embedded in individuals. An individual's habitus develops, for Bourdieu, in response to the social sphere in which the individual lives and acts: a space that Bourdieu terms the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 97). A field is a sphere of action that places certain limits on those who act within it, according to their status within the field. That status in turn is determined by the capital, or the collection

of resources, the individual has. Different fields prioritize different forms of capital, such as education, money, honour or beauty.

As Bourdieu points out, the fact that a field imposes certain rules on its members does not in itself explain why those rules are obeyed. Why is the logic of the field compelling to its members? Bourdieu offers an explanation in terms of habitus. The habitus is the means by which objective social structures are reproduced *in the body*, and thereby influence individuals' actions. The habitus is produced in response to certain external conditions, and itself produces certain kinds of actions. The habitus is a durable disposition to act in a certain way, which comes into existence as a result of the objective conditions of existence within a particular society or field. The habitus is both a 'structured structure' – the effect of the actions of other people – and a 'structuring structure' – it suggests and constrains the individual's actions (Bourdieu, 1990: 53). The habitus is the result of human interaction. Thus Charles Taylor argues that 'following rules is a *social* practice' (1993: 48, original emphasis) and describes the habitus as capturing 'this level of social understanding' (1993: 51).

As people respond to the circumstances within which they live, they become accustomed to those particular responses and, over time, repeat them with little or no conscious awareness or choice – whether or not the conditions that first made the response appropriate actually pertain. Bourdieu's preferred example is 'the small, quick steps of some young women wearing trousers and flat heels' (2001: 29) which become habitual as they are required when wearing short skirts and high heels. In this way, the habitus prompts us to act in certain ways without needing to go via the mechanism of conscious thought and rational decision-making. Instead, the habitus operates through the mechanism of embodiment. We understand the norms we obey through acting them out. We do not think consciously about them, and consider on each occasion whether to comply with them. Rather, we comply as a result of pre-reflexive, habitualized action (Bourdieu, 2000: 170–1). Moreover, as MacKinnon argues, what is at stake is not merely whether we will *act* in certain ways. What is at stake is whether we *become* certain sorts of people, how particular discourses construct our identities. Thus MacKinnon cites a woman coerced into pornography: '"You do it, you do it, and you do it; then you become it"' (1989: 123).

For Bourdieu, an individual's range of possible actions is already suggested by her habitus. If the habitus and field are aligned, what an individual feels inclined to do will match the expectations of the field in which her action takes place. There will be compatibility between action and expectation, and the individual is unlikely to be aware of, or consciously assess, her actions and dispositions. Individuals are thus very significantly influenced by the surroundings and structures in which they live (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 136). As individuals tend to remain in social contexts in which they feel comfortable, their habituses are reinforced and tend to remain constant. It follows, moreover, that the social structures that influence an individual's habitus will be strengthened over time as individuals act in ways that are suggested by, and serve to

reinforce, those structures. In other words, in the absence of the kind of dissonance between habitus and field which can lead individuals to become conscious and questioning of their dispositions, systems of disadvantage are unlikely to be disrupted by those who are disadvantaged.

Gender and field

It is not entirely clear how gender fits in to Bourdieu's analysis of habitus and field. It clearly makes sense to think of a gendered habitus, a set of bodily dispositions ordered along gendered lines. The gendered body is a prime example of one ordered by norms, or discipline: women and men hold and use their bodies differently in ways that cannot be explained by biological difference alone. Bourdieu himself provides many such examples of a gendered habitus in *Masculine Domination*, documenting, for example, the effect of clothing on the gendered habitus.[4]

As a central element of Bourdieu's work is his argument that habitus develops in response to field, it is natural to ask which field is responsible for the development of a gendered habitus. Some feminists have suggested, albeit in other terms, that the *family* is the field in which the habitus is gendered (Okin, 1989), or the field to which women are confined and in which the female habitus is developed, with male habitus developing in response to the field of the workplace (Friedan, 1983). Bourdieu explicitly rejects these ideas. The family does operate as a field for Bourdieu, but in the sense that it is the general site of transmission of 'economic, cultural and symbolic privileges' (1996: 23; see also 2000: 167; 1998: 19, 64–7), such as those associated with class; gender is not mentioned specifically. Moreover, in *Masculine Domination*, he suggests that 'the principle of the perpetuation of this relationship of [masculine] domination does not truly reside (or, at least, not principally) in one of the most visible sites in which it is exercised – in other words, within the domestic sphere, on which some feminist debate has concentrated its attention' (2001: 4). Instead, he argues, it is 'in agencies such as the school or the state . . . where principles of domination that go on to be exercised within even the most private universe are developed and imposed' (2001: 4).

We are left, then with a problem: if the habitus is formed in the context of a specific field, but if there is no specific field in which the habitus becomes gendered, what is the source of hierarchical gender difference? Terry Lovell argues that, in the context of Bourdieu's work, gender should be understood in terms of *capital*. Women should be understood simultaneously as 'objects – as repositories of capital for someone else' and as 'capital-accumulating subjects' (2000: 22). But while this interpretation does shed light on many aspects of gendered experience, it does not explain how the suggestive concept of habitus plays a part: how gender becomes embodied. Perhaps the best way to integrate habitus with gender is to conclude that the gendered habitus develops not in response to any one specific field, but rather in response to the gender norms, the symbolic violence, occurring throughout society. Thus, although the family clearly is a site of the perpetuation of gender norms, it is by no means the only such site. We might think of each field as containing (at least) three sets of

rules. First, each field is susceptible to some extent to the economic rules of capitalism (or the prevailing economic order). Some fields are more autonomous in this regard than others, but Bourdieu follows Marx in believing that the economic order invades all fields and is partly responsible for their structure.[5] Secondly, a field contains the rules that pertain to it specifically. Thus the academic field, for example, is influenced by material concerns, but also places value on other forms of capital such as tenure and publications. Thirdly, each field contains and enforces a set of gender rules: norms about the appropriate behaviour of the sexes within that field. These gender rules may merely be those that are common to many other fields (general appearance norms, for example), or they may be specific to that field (for example, formal or informal rules concerning which tasks in a factory should be performed by which gender). As with economic rules, some fields may be more autonomous from gender rules than others, but all fields embody some gender rules, and some gender rules apply in all fields. The gendered habitus thus develops in response to all fields, as gender norms are enforced in comparable if not identical ways across all fields.

Although Bourdieu does not make this argument in the specific form in which I present it here, I propose that it is the best way to combine his analysis of gender with his argument that habitus develops in response to field. Moreover, this analysis sits happily with many feminist accounts, not least because it implies, as Bourdieu points out, that 'a vast field of action is opened up for feminist struggles, which are thus called upon to take a distinctive and decisive place within political struggles against *all* forms of domination' (2001: 4, original emphasis). In other words, the possibility of change is introduced.

Change

Lois McNay suggests that the very value of Bourdieu's work is that it demonstrates the *difficulty* of change: it 'provides a corrective to certain theories of reflexive transformation which overestimate the extent to which individuals living in post-traditional order are able to reshape identity' (1999: 113). The concept of habitus draws our attention to the ways in which norms are imprinted on our bodies, so that it will take more than a simple act of will or a consciousness-raising class for us to resist or alter them. Change, then, is difficult. The key question for feminists is whether Bourdieu's work gives any chance for change.

In line with McNay's argument, no reader of *Masculine Domination* could get the impression that gender norms can easily be resisted. Indeed, the explicit message is often that such norms cannot be resisted at all. In passages that echo Shulamith Firestone's claim 'No matter how many levels of consciousness one reaches, the problem always goes deeper. It is everywhere' (2000: 90), Bourdieu describes how women are 'condemned' to participate in the symbolic violence of gender (2001: 30, 32), and 'cannot fail' to adhere to structures and agents of domination (2001: 35; see also 2000: 170). Moreover, the only strategies that women have to overcome

male domination are deeply problematic: 'women can exercise some degree of power only by turning the strength of the strong against them or by accepting the need to efface themselves . . . These strategies, which are not strong enough really to subvert the relation of domination, at least have the effect of confirming the dominant representation of women as maleficent beings' (2001: 32). It seems we must conclude, with Bourdieu, that: '*All* the conditions for the *full* exercise of male domination are thus combined' (2001: 33, my emphasis).

It is easy to see, then, how the reader could find herself sympathetic to what McNay calls the 'common criticism of Bourdieu's work' (1999: 100) – namely, its implications of determinism – despite Bourdieu's frequent denials. As Lovell puts it, Bourdieu's work 'is at times bleakly pessimistic' (2000: 27). Resisting symbolic violence seems almost impossible on Bourdieu's analysis, as its structures of dominance reach so deeply into the understanding. If we can perceive the world only through such structures, where will we find the material from which to construct an alternative consciousness? If women have only the cognitive instruments of patriarchy, how can we theorize feminism?

These determinist implications have some truth: gender norms cannot be overcome by a 'simple' act of will alone. For example, knowing that we wear makeup because there are significant pressures on us to do so, and regretting that fact as it renders us objectified, is not enough to stop us from deriving at least some pleasure from selecting and applying it. However, parts of Bourdieu's analysis also imply that it will be difficult if not impossible for us even to conceptualize radical change, for he asserts that women living under patriarchy lack the cognitive resources to do so (2001: 35; 2000: 170). Such a conclusion is problematic for it seems to rule out social change, and conflicts with the fact that change does occur, sometimes as the result of radical theorizing, for example of feminists about and against patriarchy. Bourdieu's contention that change in consciousness also requires change in the underlying social structures does have some force. In some cases, structures need to change before individuals can reasonably resist domination. However, consciousness plays a role in this process, and can prompt or hasten changes in the underlying social structures, as MacKinnon demonstrates.

Consciousness-raising and reflexivity

For MacKinnon, consciousness-raising is fundamental to feminism: it is feminism's method (1989: 83). Precisely because gender and gender hierarchy are socially constructed phenomena, it is necessary for feminists to attempt to deconstruct them, via consciousness-raising. Moreover, the fact that women are themselves partially constituted by the symbolic violence of gender makes consciousness-raising more effective, not less so as Bourdieu argues:

> Feminist method as practised in consciousness raising, taken as a theory of knowing about social being, pursues another epistemology. Women are presumed able to have access to society and its structure because they live in it and have been formed by it, not in spite of those facts. . . . Feminist

> epistemology asserts that the social process of being a woman is on some level the same process as that by which woman's consciousness becomes aware of itself as such and of its world. Mind and world, as a matter of social reality, are taken as interpenetrated. (MacKinnon, 1989: 98)

It is not the case, MacKinnon asserts, that the social construction of dominated individuals prevents them from conceptualizing their domination. Whereas Bourdieu's account of symbolic violence casts doubt on the possibility of female emancipation with its idea that women 'cannot fail' to adhere to principles of masculine domination since they have 'only cognitive instruments that [are] no more than the embodied form of the relation of domination' (Bourdieu, 2001: 35), MacKinnon's account asserts that it is precisely *because* women's consciousnesses are formed by patriarchal social structures that women have access to and can understand the nature of patriarchy. Far from entrenching women's inferiority, consciousness-raising 'shows women their situation in a way that affirms they can act to change it' (MacKinnon, 1989: 101).

What MacKinnon's approach shows is that consciousness-raising as a method of change is *particularly* suited to analysis in terms of habitus. Because habitus ties together social structures of domination and the lived experiences, actions and thoughts of individuals, it follows that individuals can understand those social structures by looking inwards, at themselves, as well as outwards, at the world. If we start to think about the way we act and the preferences we have, the wider institutions of gender inequality begin to be revealed. As MacKinnon puts it, 'consciousness means a good deal more than a set of ideas. It constitutes a lived knowing of the social reality of being female. . . . [Consciousness-raising] built an experienced sense of how it came to be this way and that it can be changed' (1989: 90–1). Consciousness-raising complements habitus since habitus forges the link between individual experience and social structure that consciousness-raising investigates.

Indeed, feminist consciousness-raising often did enquire into the minutiae of women's lives, the repeated daily activities that form the habitus. As MacKinnon reports: 'Extensive attention was paid to small situations and denigrated pursuits that made up the common life of women in terms of energy, time, intensity, and definition – prominently, housework and sexuality' (1989: 87). Attention was also paid to the habitualization of appearance and deportment norms, as a 1971 feminist consciousness-raising exercise for men demonstrates. It directs men to: 'Run a short distance, keeping your knees together. You'll find you have to take short, high steps if you run this way. Women have been taught it is unfeminine to run like a man with long, free strides. See how far you get running this way for 30 seconds' (cited in Bordo, 1993: 186). Such exercises aimed to make the gendered habitus explicit and thus open to change. Consciousness-raising thus paved the way for Bourdieu's assertion that the smallest everyday actions of individuals result from, and thus can give insight into, overarching social rules and patterns.

Despite this apparent harmony between consciousness-raising and

analysis in terms of habitus, Bourdieu is ambivalent about consciousness-raising. On the one hand, passages such as those quoted at the start of this section cast doubt on its potential as a method of change. At times, moreover, Bourdieu explicitly rejects the efficacy of consciousness-raising. Thus he states:

> the symbolic revolution called for by the feminist movement cannot be reduced to a simple conversion of consciousness and wills . . . the relation of complicity that the victims of symbolic domination grant to the dominant can only be broken through a radical transformation of the social conditions of production of the dispositions that lead the dominated to take on the point of view of the dominant on the dominant and on themselves. (2001: 41–2)

Bourdieu's reticence on this point echoes his Marxist belief that radical change must be at least institutional and at best economic. This belief cannot be applied to gender without some qualifications, however. Although symbolic violence is perpetuated through social and state institutions, and thus cannot be completely overthrown without institutional change, its symbolic nature isolates it to some degree from the larger economic order. As Nancy Fraser (1997) persuasively argues, it would be mistaken to attempt to remedy recognitional disadvantage with (purely) redistributive measures. At times, it seems as though Bourdieu is prey to such confusion.

On the other hand, some of the methods for change which Bourdieu endorses bear a resemblance to consciousness-raising. Firstly, Bourdieu exhorts women to 'invent and impose forms of collective organization and action and effective weapons, *especially symbolic ones*, capable of shaking the political and legal institutions which play a part in perpetuating their subordination' (2001: ix, my emphasis). This *invention* of new *symbolic* weapons looks very like the consciousness-raising commended in the Manifesto of the Redstockings, the radical feminist group founded by Shulamith Firestone and Ellen Willis in 1969:

> Our chief task at present is to develop a female class consciousness through sharing experience and publicly exposing the sexist foundation of all our institutions. Consciousness-raising . . . is the only method by which we can ensure that our program for liberation is based on the concrete realities of our lives. (cited in Schneir, 1995: 128)

Moreover, Bourdieu's theory of reflexive sociology demands that sociologists reflect on the social contexts that inform their work, and suggests that such reflection or 'reflexivity' can be effective even without institutional change. As Loïc Wacquant argues, reflexivity entails 'the systematic exploration of the "unthought categories of thought which delimit the unthinkable and predetermine the thought"' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 40). Gendered symbolic violence is a paradigmatic example of an unthought category of thought, making reflexivity applicable to gender. If we attempt to identify our habitus, to bring it to consciousness, we can start to resist the social structures to which it corresponds. Bourdieu himself makes this argument when not discussing gender: 'It is difficult to control the first inclination of habitus, but reflexive analysis, which teaches that we are the

ones who endow the situation with part of the potency it has over us, allows us to alter our perception of the situation and thereby our reaction to it' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 136–7).

Of course, the symbolic transformation entailed by consciousness-raising is not enough. Institutions must also change in order to break the cycle of the development of the gendered habitus. The need for institutional change is a crucial feminist claim. But few feminists have claimed that consciousness-raising will, in itself, subvert the general system of masculine domination. The claim, rather, is that consciousness-raising is an important first step, one that prompts wider institutional change. Consciousness-raising is the means by which women come to understand both their oppression and the possible remedies for it. Women 'know inequality because they have lived it, so they know what removing barriers to equality would be. Many of these barriers are legal; many of them are social; most of them exist at an interface between law and society' (MacKinnon, 1989: 241). In other words, we cannot change our institutions without first theorizing the need for change. Only once theorized can change go beyond consciousness and into institutions.

Lisa Adkins argues, in contrast, that reflexivity has become a normal part of gender, such that its transformative and radical effects are lost. She argues that 'for both men and women gender is increasingly taking the form of a self-conscious artifice which can be managed, strategically deployed and performed' (2003: 33), but that this process does not guarantee detraditionalization. The reason is that the sort of reflexivity that is becoming common is accompanied not by a radical questioning of the role of gender, but rather by an increasing understanding of the *proper* roles that men and women must play, an understanding that masculinity and femininity are forms of capital that should be preserved and deployed. Thus Adkins gives the example of a study of female City workers who skilfully plan their appearance, shifting between demure business dress and the '"executive bimbo look"' depending on the audience (2003: 33). Such manipulation of traditional female roles is not, Adkins suggests, indicative of a progressive transformation of gender but is rather indicative of the entrenchment of traditional gender difference. As a result, Adkins concludes that Bourdieu's reliance on the disembodied, cerebral process of reflexivity represents his failure to apply the basic features of his theory to his account of change (2003: 35).

Feminist accounts of consciousness-raising can help to mitigate some of these criticisms since they entail not merely a reflexive awareness of the configurations of gender, but also a *critical* stance on those configurations. As Pamela Allen writes in her advocacy of consciousness-raising: 'We believe that theory and analysis which are not rooted in concrete experience (practice) are useless, but we also maintain that for the concrete, everyday experiences to be understood, they must be subjected to the processes of analysis and abstraction' (2000: 277). This critical stance is aided by the fact that consciousness-raising is a group activity, such that women *share* observations of injustice and ideas for change and encourage others to act radically; the fact, mentioned above, that consciousness-raising

focuses not only on the thought consciousness but also on the embodied practices of gender; and the fact that consciousness-raising begins from a feminist perspective.[6] Kristin Henry and Marlene Derlet's (1993) interviews with members of a consciousness-raising group give many examples of the importance of the intersubjective elements of that particular form of reflexivity. Group interaction provides the members with new ideas about the injustices of gender and with support for instigating change; as Allen points out, 'the emphasis is on teaching one another through sharing experiences' (2000: 279). Similarly, Vivian Gornick cites the testimony of a member of a consciousness-raising group who also focuses on the importance of interaction:

> None of them have been through what I've been through if you look at our experience superficially. But when you look a little *deeper* – the way we've been doing at these meetings – you see they've *all* been through what I've been through, and they all feel pretty much the way I feel. God, when I saw *that!* When I saw that what I always felt was my own personal hangup was as true for every other woman in that room as it was for me! Well, that's when my consciousness was raised. (2000: 289)

Of course, it would be wrong to suggest that group interaction is always transformative. Traditional women's groups foster conformity just as radical groups encourage revolution. Nonetheless, the combination of the group setting with the shared desire to act reflexively can be a potent force for change. As Susan Bruley notes of her own group: 'The general feeling really was that CR had changed our lives' (1976: 21).

Regulated liberties

It is important to consider consciousness-raising as a possible strategy for change not least because the strategies that Bourdieu suggests are problematic. A preliminary method of practically resisting prevailing norms is through what Bourdieu calls 'regulated liberties'. Regulated liberties are actions that arise in the context of the existing social order, but which subvert or resignify it in some way. McNay likens the regulatory liberties to Butler's idea of political agency, according to which individuals can resist structures of dominance by participating in them in a subversive or unorthodox manner, such as via drag (McNay, 2000: 59; Butler, 1999a: 175). Bourdieu's regulated liberties occur when the disadvantaged or oppressed subversively apply oppressive or unjust norms, questioning and resisting their dominant meaning. Bourdieu gives the example of the images used to characterize male and female genitals in the Kabyle society which he has studied. Although female genitals are described in derogatory terms, women can exercise a regulated liberty by applying those terms to male genitals:

> The partial indeterminacy of certain objects authorizes antagonistic interpretations, offering the dominated a possibility of resistance to the effect of symbolic imposition. Thus women can draw on the dominant schemes of perception (top/bottom, hard/soft, straight/curved, dry/wet, etc.), which lead them to form a very negative view of their own genitals, in order to understand the male sexual

> attributes by analogy with things that hang limply, without vigour; . . . and they can even draw advantage from the diminished state of the male member to assert the superiority of the female sexual organ, as in the saying: 'You, all your tackle (*laâlaleq*) dangles, says the woman to the man, whereas I am a welded stone.' (2001: 14)

Even from the oppressed position, therefore, women can use the labels of their oppression to refer to their oppressors. Alternatively, the oppressed can accept and 'reclaim' the labels of their oppression, transforming them into positive descriptions, as when homosexuals reclaim the word 'queer' and use it proudly to describe themselves. Butler herself points out that Bourdieu's work allows for the effects of repeated yet unofficial interpellations on an individual and her habitus: 'Being called a "girl" from the inception of existence is a way in which the girl becomes transitively "girled" over time. This interpellation need not take on an explicit or official form in order to be socially efficacious and formative in the gendering of the subject' (Butler, 1999b: 120). This fact, Butler argues, allows alternative interpellations and performatives to have a transformative effect: 'The performative is not merely an act used by a pregiven subject, but it is one of the powerful and insidious ways in which subjects are called into social being, inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations. In this sense the social performative is a crucial part not only of subject *formation*, but of the ongoing political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well' (1999b: 125, original emphasis).

Bourdieu does not, however, see performativity and other regulatory liberties as opportunities for genuine emancipation from structures of domination, for two main reasons. Firstly, the regulated liberties are performed by individuals, and so lack the cohesive, collective character required for wide-ranging social change. Thus Bourdieu contrasts the '*political* mobilization' necessary for collective and thus effective resistance with a Butlerian approach, arguing that the latter is insufficient (2001: viii, original emphasis).

The second limitation on the emancipatory potential of the regulated liberties is that they take place within the confines of the overall structures of domination, and do not really subvert those structures. Regulated liberties are limited because they take place from *within* the dominant context and corresponding habitus. As a regulated liberty is defined as an act that takes the dominant labels and applies them subversively, it follows that in doing so the dominant labels are in some sense affirmed. Bourdieu's example of Kabyle genital labelling demonstrates this affirmation. The women exercising the regulated liberties do not question the division of genitals into two groups of hard vs. soft, dry vs. wet. For example, they do not argue that male and female genitals are more similar than different, as the Gerai do.[7] Perhaps more importantly, they do not question the value judgements which are attached to these characteristics (top, hard, straight, dry = good, powerful, superior; bottom, soft, curved, wet = bad, weak, inferior). In fact, the regulated liberty's success relies on an affirmation of

the dominant value system: labelling male genitals as 'soft' has no discursive effect if softness does not imply inferiority. In this way, the regulated liberties might even serve to entrench the dominant structures. The slight shifts in representation and small victories of empowerment that the regulated liberties achieve tend, in the long run, to reinforce structural inequalities. MacKinnon makes a similar point in relation to sexuality:

> The capacity of gender reversals (dominatrixes) and inversions (homosexuality) to stimulate sexual excitement [in pornography] is derived precisely from their mimicry or parody or negation or reversal of the standard arrangement. This affirms rather than undermines or qualifies the standard sexual arrangement as the standard sexual arrangement. (1989: 144)

Sometimes, as this example suggests, the regulated liberties might be reactionary. A case from the United States, the fathers' movement, subverts both traditional gendered parenting norms, which assert that fathers need play only a limited role in parenting, and modified, feminist-influenced parenting norms, which assert that mothers' rights must be paramount after a divorce or that both parents are equal within the home. The fathers' movement subverts these traditionally dominant conceptions but remains within them, by asserting that families need fathers and that fathers need to dominate (Cornell, 1998: 133–4). The shift which may result from this regulated liberty is a reactionary one because it re-asserts male dominance within the home, and emphasizes different roles for men and women in parenting. Although the fathers' movement uses regulated liberties to bring about social change, this change is not for the better. Bourdieu's regulated liberties thus guarantee neither extensive nor emancipatory social change.

Disjunction between field and habitus

Bourdieu suggests a second opportunity for change. If an individual's position in a hierarchy is reinforced by the fit between her habitus and the field within which she operates, this reinforcement can be weakened by a disjunction between habitus and field. When people move between fields, or when communities encounter each other and their norms collide, there will be a disjunction between habitus and field. In multicultural societies, the norms of different groups, or the logics of different fields, provide constant cross-challenges. As people are increasingly mobile, interaction between groups increases and complacency over the dispositions that make up the habitus is lessened. One way of encouraging changes in habitus that open up greater options for people, then, is to encourage interaction between fields, between communities or ways of life, so that individuals become aware of new options.

Such a disjunction between habitus and field is not, Bourdieu emphasizes, a common occurrence. There is usually a fit between field and habitus, as most people remain within compatible fields most of the time. In such circumstances, the habitus is continually reinforced. When the individual encounters circumstances that are incompatible with her habitus, however, it is gradually weakened. In this way, the habitus can be changed, but more usually is not (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 133).

Still, one of the ways in which change in the habitus might occur is via a disjunction between habitus and field. McNay suggests as an example the disjunction that occurs when women move into the workforce (2000: 53). The idea is that the gendered habitus would change when women enter spheres that were previously closed to them, such as the factory or the boardroom. However, this process is by no means guaranteed, as Adkins points out (2003: 28–9). In particular, we can identify two questions. First, what would prompt such a move? Why would women move into non-feminine spheres? Second, how would such a move alter the *gendered* nature of the habitus?

First, consider why women might move into non-feminine spheres. If a disjunction between habitus and field is to be the explanation or cause of a change in the habitus, it follows that the move itself cannot be the result of a changed habitus, or of action that contradicts the existing habitus. Such an account would be question-begging. For this argument to be coherent, social change must result from changes in habitus which are caused by location in an unfamiliar field. The explanation cannot be that the individual decides, from within the confines of one habitus, to move towards another by entering a currently inappropriate field. Why, then, would a woman enter a non-feminine sphere, such as higher education or the workplace? What explains the change in social norms which makes such movements possible and appealing for individual women? If these movements are explained by the choices and campaigns of women, then those women have already engendered social change prior to the disjunction between habitus and field which is supposed to explain that social change.

One option is that a vanguard, perhaps of feminist theorists, actively promotes new ideas or enters new spheres, with the result that non-vanguard women enter the newly opened fields before their habituses have adapted to fit. If this were the case, the disjunction between habitus and field might explain how social change grows in scope. In other words, theory is necessary but not sufficient: it can explain how an emancipatory movement starts, or why emancipatory change in social institutions is initiated, but it is a disjunction between field and habitus which provides the mechanism for altering the beliefs, preferences and choices of the majority.

An alternative interpretation is that the impetus for the social mobility that creates a disjunction between habitus and field is not subjective but objective, not agent-directed but structural. If social mobility were caused by objective economic factors, for example, it might take place before change in habitus and thus before wide-reaching change in social norms or symbolic structures. Thus the woman who starts to work in a factory may do so not because she believes that gendered employment norms must be overthrown, but because her family is in need of extra resources. This need results from objective economic conditions, not subjective rebellion. However, even in this case some habitus-conflicting reasoning must have taken place. Even in times of economic necessity, if women are to work in factories then a feeling must have arisen that, contrary to the prevailing norms, such work is conceivable or appropriate. Economic conditions

cannot force a change in behaviour, with no mediation by normative reasoning. A newly poor woman must decide that it is better for her to work in a factory than to work as a prostitute, to steal or to remain at home to preserve her religious virtue.[8] Such decisions are likely to be implied by the general system of social norms, minimizing the autonomous decision-making that any individual must undergo. However, she must have decided that the existing taboo on entering the non-feminine sphere can be broken (even if she feels she has little choice) and this very fact will cause a change in her prior to entering the sphere and experiencing the disjunction between habitus and field that is supposed to be the source of social change. Indeed, the more the movement into a non-feminine sphere is forced by the prevailing economic conditions and thus runs counter to her habitus, the more the woman about to enter the sphere is likely to think about her move and its implications, to steel herself for unfamiliar practices and to prepare to alter her mode of being. In other words, even mobility between fields caused by economic change prompts changes in consciousness prior to changes caused by disjunction between habitus and field.[9]

This analysis suggests that the most effective form of social change is the combination of an enforced, structural change together with active promotion of a new set of norms. For example, if large numbers of women are to move into the workplace when it has traditionally been a non-feminine sphere, they may need both structural changes (be they advantageous, such as anti-discrimination legislation, childcare provision and education, or disadvantageous, such as economic necessity) *and* symbolic changes in social reasoning (such as consciousness-raising, the feminist movement campaigning for women's rights, or positive media portrayals of working women).

The second question that arises from the notion that a disjunction between habitus and field can cause social change is how and why *gender* would be affected. As I argued earlier, the gendered habitus is not situated in any particular field for Bourdieu. Instead, gender norms are replicated across all fields, in non-identical but nevertheless reinforcing ways. It follows that a woman entering a previously non-feminine sphere may find aspects of her habitus altered, but its genderedness will remain intact.

A good example of the pervasiveness of masculine domination despite social mobility is found in Heather Dryburgh's analysis of women in engineering. Dryburgh studied a group of women who entered the male-dominated profession of engineering, and followed their progress through college. Although their colleagues are also students, and so are not yet fully indoctrinated into the engineering culture, still that field's gender norms are strongly enforced. The presence of the women students appears not to question those norms but further to entrench them. Dryburgh argues:

> As women progress through their professional training, they are making adjustments and learning to manage the masculine culture into which they are entering. . . . [T]his study shows that the educational phase is a period of early socialization into the masculine workplace culture associated with engineering. Women who do make it through the training process . . . face sexism in the workplace that requires new adaptations and strategies. (1999: 665)

The implication of Dryburgh's account is that, while female engineering students do experience a disjunction between habitus and field leading to alterations in habitus ('adaptations and strategies'), those alterations do not in any way undermine gender, or masculine domination. Instead, the sexism which they encounter reinforces the salience of gender (see also Lovell, 2000: 13).

The example of women in engineering supports the claim that, if the gendered habitus is reinforced in all fields, it cannot be significantly undermined by mobility across fields. This may explain the peculiarly pessimistic and deterministic tone of *Masculine Domination* as compared to Bourdieu's other work: the gendered habitus is even less susceptible to change than is the habitus more generally (and more specifically), for it survives transition between fields. It follows that, as gender is transmitted throughout society, it must be countered by a co-ordinated programme of change in such institutions and in wider social norms. We need a proactive, and proactively normative, programme of change, reinforced in the social and state institutions that perpetuate masculine domination.

Conclusion

I have argued that Bourdieu's analysis of masculine domination can be useful for feminists, and that it is enhanced by the observation that it has much in common with MacKinnon's radical feminist analysis. Both thinkers deny the naturalness of sexual difference and its accompanying hierarchies. Both conceptualize gender in terms of the power that infiltrates people's minds and bodies, operating through their everyday experiences and desires, and both identify embodied phenomena such as sexuality and the habitus as the connection between the individual and the social structures in which she operates and is dominated. These similarities of analysis mean that the strategies that MacKinnon proposes for change are well suited to Bourdieu's analysis, and can offer a corrective to the more deterministic moments of his theory. In particular, consciousness-raising is suited to an analysis in terms of habitus, and sits well with Bourdieu's optimism concerning the radical potential of reflexivity. It can also act as a prompt for social mobility that brings about a disjunction between field and habitus, and thus a disruption in the gendered habitus.

Notes

I should like to thank Cécile Fabre, Lois McNay, Susan Mendus, David Miller, Phil Parvin, Adam Swift and the editors and referees of *Feminist Theory* for their helpful comments on this paper.

1. For examples of this process see de Beauvoir (1997: 694–5); Sanchez and Thomson (1997: 766); Schwartz (1994).
2. The distinction between sex and gender, with its implication that 'sex' differences are natural and objective, is also criticized in Butler (1999a) and Gatens (1992).
3. Currently available Mills and Boon titles include: *Christmas at His*

Command, *At the Playboy's Pleasure*, *The Thawing of Mara*, *A Rich Man's Revenge*, *Surrender to a Playboy*, *The Bedroom Surrender*, *Surrender to the Millionaire* and *Back in the Boss's Bed.* All eroticize male domination and female submission.

4. Bourdieu's account of the effects of wearing short skirts and high heels has already been described, but see also Bourdieu (2001: 29).
5. Bourdieu is highly critical of other aspects of Marx's work, such as Marx's failure to separate theoretical classes from actual classes (Bourdieu, 1998: 11), his focus on consciousness (Bourdieu, 2000: 172) and his account of ideology (Bourdieu, 2000: 177).
6. Adkins writes 'why, when it comes to social change, does Bourdieu tend to disembody actors and understand action as a matter of thinking consciousness?' (2003: 35). While she is correct to say that Bourdieu does this, it is interesting to note that the reflexivity of the City workers who deploy alternative images of femininity (a reflexivity which Adkins states is insufficiently transformative) is not merely thought but is also embodied.
7. The Gerai, discussed above, conceptualize the penis and the vagina as the same organ, and differentiate them only according to their placement inside or outside of the body. Similarly, the Gerai think of semen and vaginal fluid as identical (Helliwell, 2000).
8. Martha Nussbaum gives many examples of countries that forbid women from working for religious reasons, even if such women and their families are destitute as a result (1999: 93–4).
9. In *Pascalian Meditations*, Bourdieu argues that our habitus is adjusted to our occupational field even before we enter that field, by processes of socialization and preparation which occur in the family and in school. Thus, for Bourdieu, 'when we deliberate on entry into the game, the die is already more or less cast' (2000: 11). Such a process cannot apply to cases such as a woman's economically prompted move into a non-feminine sphere, however, for the unexpectedness and hitherto inappropriateness of such a move means that there has been no prior familial or educational preparation. The deliberation on entry, then, will be genuinely meaningful for the deliberator.

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