Masculine Domination.

Reviewer: Kathleen E. Hull, University of Minnesota

In *Masculine Domination*, Pierre Bourdieu calls for a new approach to theorizing and researching gender inequality. He seeks to resolve what he calls the “paradox of doxa”: why is the symbolic order of the world broadly respected, even by those who are most disadvantaged by it? Gender inequality provides an especially rich example of this paradox. Why do men and women generally accept a symbolic order that renders gender differences natural and eternal, and thereby justifies men’s domination over women?

To account for the seeming universality of gender differences, Bourdieu suggests that social scientists should turn to the work of identifying the historical mechanisms that accomplish the “dehistoricization” and “eternalization” of sexual difference. Specifically, Bourdieu argues that the role of institutions in reproducing gender inequality needs to be better understood. Though considerable work has been done on the role of the family in reproducing gender asymmetries, the institutional analysis must expand to better capture the role of religion, school, and state in reproducing masculine domination.

Bourdieu draws on his ethnographic data on the Berbers of Kabylia to analyze a society that is thoroughly organized by what he calls the “androcentric principle.” Among the Kabyle, the division and inequality of the sexes appears completely natural and taken for granted and serves as an organizing principle of the society. It is present in both an objective state (e.g., in how Kabyle houses are organized) and an embodied state (literally, in the bodies of men and women, in the form of gendered habitus). The concordance between these two aspects of the sexual division—its objectification in the physical and social order, and its embodiment in gendered dispositions—legitimates the idea of gender difference and inequality as both natural and eternal. Members of Kabyle society do not have to be intentionally socialized to think and act like men and women; rather, their gendered habitus is largely “the automatic, agentless effect of a physical and social order entirely organized in accordance with the androcentric principle.”

Bourdieu proposes that this same “circular causality” is at work in modernized societies. The objective structures of the social space shape individual dispositions,
and people acting and choosing on the basis of these dispositions in turn reinforce the gendered social order. This account of gender difference and inequality differs dramatically from approaches that explain gender oppression as a conscious power play or see gender differences as the product of strategic, performative activity.

Bourdieu acknowledges that significant change has occurred in the wake of second-wave feminism. In modernized societies, masculine domination has lost its transparent, taken-for-granted quality. Bourdieu argues that the most important factors contributing to this change are modifications in the educational system and in family structure. Still, his final analysis is that women’s seeming progress in some areas conceals the persistence of the relative inequality of men’s and women’s positions.

Long-term political action will be required to dismantle masculine domination, and it must start from the recognition of the complicity of the embodied and institutionalized aspects of domination. In the meantime, Bourdieu suggests that the only respite from the “law of masculine domination” is found in the realm of love. The loving dyad has the capacity to escape the symbolic violence of masculine domination through relations of reciprocity, mutual recognition, and disinterestedness. Feminist readers may be skeptical that domination can be thoroughly expunged from heterosexual romantic relationships. But Bourdieu’s brief musings on love should not distract readers from the broader arguments set forth in *Masculine Domination*, a useful and provocative addition to the ongoing efforts to theorize gender relations and gender inequality.

**Problem of the Century: Racial Stratification in the United States.**

**Reviewer:** KARYN R. LACY, Emory University

When Dubois lamented in *The Souls of Black Folk* that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line,” his bleak take on the future of race relations here in the U.S. was grounded in his assessment of the social and economic progress of blacks after the Civil War. DuBois characterized the period as one of racial progress overshadowed by racial oppression. Because blacks had been granted citizenship yet enjoyed few of the benefits associated with this status, DuBois predicted that tumultuous relations between blacks and whites would dominate the American agenda for the remainder of the century.

In *Problem of the Century*, the editors and their colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania have assembled an exhaustive collection of thought-provoking essays, most of which address the permanence of black-white boundaries. Collins begins the theoretical section with an elegant macro-historical model of the social construction of ethnicity. By focusing on the boundary-work of states (rather than