

Feminism By Bourdieu

Many feminists have sought to 'appropriate' Bourdieu's theories to explain the subordinate position of women in contemporary western societies; there are certain affinities between the two schools of thought and the theory builds a bridge between theory and practise. Bourdieu believed that the point of social research was to enable people to better understand their own actions, and those of others; 'the study of human lives would not be worth the trouble if it did not help agents to grasp the meaning of their actions'. This echoes many feminists call for research to be an empowering process.

Bourdieu's concept of the 'field' may be useful in thinking through differentiation within gender identity and the 'uneven and non-systematic' nature of subordination; and may aid explanation of the social relations of power in relation to the production of knowledge, and this might explain the marginalisation of much feminist research. Bourdieu also stresses 'symbolic violence', the forceful nature of naming, reiterating the feminist focus; 'Domination has many faces: physical violence, coercion, structural violence...and symbolic violence'. To name a thing as female is to name it as subordinate, and '...it is clear that the symbolic aspects of social practice are an essential part of the repression of women'. Finally, Bourdieu's focus on the everyday, humdrum details is not far removed from feminisms focus on the biographical and personal, enabling a microtheoretical analysis of power.

Thus there are many overlaps between aspects of feminist thought and that of Bourdieu, the question remains however, whether it is necessary to modify the theory to fully explain the subordinate position of women.