

2012

Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies

Miliann Kang

University of Massachusetts - Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.umass.edu/wost_ed_materials



Part of the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#)

Kang, Miliann, "Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies" (2012). *Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies Educational Material*. Paper 1.

http://scholarworks.umass.edu/wost_ed_materials/1

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies Educational Material by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

Table of Contents	Page
Chapter I: An Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies and Grounding Theoretical Frameworks and Concepts	
A. Critical Introduction to the Field	3
B. Theorizing Lived Experiences	5
C. Conceptualizing Structures of Power	9
D. Social Constructionism	11
E. Intersectionality	16
Chapter II: Challenging Binary Systems and Constructions of Difference	
A. Introduction- Binary Systems	21
B. Theorizing Sex/Gender/Sexuality	
C. Sexualities	25
D. Masculinities	27
E. Race	28
F. Class	32
G. Alternatives to Binary Systems	35
Chapter III: Institutions, Culture, and Structures	
A. Introduction to Institutions, Cultures, and Structures	38
B. Family	42
C. Media	47
D. Medicine, Health, and Reproductive Justice	50

E. State, Laws, and Prisons	55
F. Intersecting Institutions—Case Study: The Struggle to End Gendered Violence and Violence Against Women	58
G. Conclusion	62
 Chapter IV: Gender and Work in the Global Economy	
A. Introduction	65
B. Gender and Work in the US (adapted from guest lecture by Dale Melcher, 10/26/09)	65
C. Gender and the US Welfare State	70
D. Transnational Production and Globalization	73
E. Racialized, Gendered, and Sexualized Labor in the Global Economy	77
F. Conclusion	79
 Chapter V: Historical and Contemporary Feminist Social Movements	
A. Introduction	82
B. 19th Century Feminist Movements	83
C. Early to Late 20th Century Feminist Movements	87
D. Third Wave and Queer Feminist Movements	93
E. Conclusion	98

Chapter I: An Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies and Grounding Theoretical Frameworks and Concepts

A. Critical Introduction to the Field

There was a time when it seemed all knowledge was produced about men for men. This was true from the physical and social sciences to the canons of music and literature. Looking from the angle of mainstream education- studies, textbooks, and masterpieces were almost all authored by white men. It was not uncommon for college students to go through entire courses only reading the work of white men in their fields.

Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies is an interdisciplinary field that challenges the androcentric production of knowledge. **Androcentrism** is the privileging of male-centric ways of understanding the world. Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies (WGSS) scholars argue that the common assumption that knowledge is produced by rational, impartial (male) scientists often obscures the ways that scientists create knowledge through gendered, raced, classed, and sexualized cultural categories. Scholars within WGSS include biologists, anthropologists, sociologists, historians, chemists, engineers, economists and researchers from just about any identifiable department at the university. Diversity among scholars in this field means that WGSS facilitates communication across the disciplinary boundaries within the academy to more fully understand the social world.

The Women's Liberation Movement and Civil Rights Movement of the mid-20th Century called attention to these conditions and aimed to address these absences in knowledge. Beginning in the 1970s, universities across the United States instituted women's and **ethnic studies** departments (African American Studies, Asian American Studies, Latin American

Studies, Native American Studies, etc.) in response to student protests and larger social movements. These departments were reclaiming a buried history and asserting the knowledge production of less recognized groups. While early incarnations of Women's Studies stressed the experiences of white, middle-class women at the expense of other identities, in more recent decades studies and contributions of women of color, poor and working class women, and LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) people have become integral to Women's Studies. More recently, analyses of ability, age, masculinities, and religious identities have also become incorporated into the field. As a result of this opening of the field to incorporate a wider range of experiences and objects of analysis, many Women's Studies departments are now re-naming themselves 'Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies' departments.

Scholars within WGSS recognize the inextricable connection between gender and sexuality in American society, not only for women but also for men and other genders, across a broad expanse of topics. In an introductory course, you can expect to learn about the impact of stringent beauty standards produced in media and advertising, why childrearing by women may not be as natural as we think, the history of the gender division of labor and its continuing impact on the economic lives of men and women, the unique health issues addressed by advocates of reproductive justice, the connections between women working in factories in the global south and women consuming goods in the United States, how sexual double-standards harm us all, the historical context for feminist movements and where they are today, and much more.

More than a series of topics, Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies offers a way of seeing the world differently. Scholars in this field make connections across institutional contexts (work, family, media, law, the State), value the knowledge that comes from lived experiences, and

attend to, rather than ignore, marginalized identities and groups. Most WGSS scholars see the world **through the lens of intersectionality**. That is, they see social phenomena (structures, institutions, identities) working in concert rather than in isolation. For instance, the way sexism is experienced depends not only on one's gender but also on his/her experiences of race, class, age, and other identities within particular historical and cultural contexts. By recognizing the complexity of the social world, Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies advocates for social change and gives us insight into how this can be accomplished.

B. Theorizing Lived Experiences

You may have heard the phrase “the personal is political” at some point in your life. This phrase, popularized by feminists in the 1960s, highlights the ways in which our personal experiences are shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces within the context of history, institutions, and culture. **Socially-lived theorizing** means creating feminist theories and knowledge from the actual day-to-day experiences of groups of people who have traditionally been excluded from the production of academic knowledge. A key element to feminist theories and knowledge is a commitment to the creation of knowledge grounded in the experiences of white women, women of color, gay, lesbian, queer, and trans people, poor and working-class people, and people with disabilities. Feminist theorists and activists argue for beginning theorizing from the experiences of the marginalized because people with less power and resources often experience the effects of that social system in ways that members of dominant groups do not. From the “bottom” of a social system, participants have knowledge of the power holders of that system as well as their own experiences, while the reverse is rarely true. Therefore, their experiences allow for a more complete knowledge of the workings of systems of

power. For example, you can tell the story of the development from industry in the 19th century from the perspective of the owners of factories, and the story would be one of capital accumulation and industrial progress; or you can tell the story from the point of view of the immigrant workers, and the story would be one of working sixteen-hour days to feed themselves and their families and fighting for employer recognition of trade unions so that they could secure decent wages and the eight-hour day. Depending on which point-of-view you begin with, you will have very different theories of how industrial capitalism developed, and how it works today.

Feminism is not a single school of thought but encompasses diverse theories and paradigms— such as socialist feminist theories, radical sex feminist theories, third wave feminist theories, and queer feminist theories. The common thread in all these feminist theories is the belief that all knowledge is shaped by the political and social context in which it is made. Due to this acknowledgement that all knowledge comes out of particular social locations, feminist theorists argue that **reflexivity**—understanding how one’s social position influences the ways that they understand the world—is of utmost necessity when creating theory and knowledge. Furthermore, it is important to underscore the fact that people do not inhabit just one category of identity that determines their subjectivity—instead they have **multiple identities** of race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, and ability, all at the same time. At certain times, specific dimensions of their identity may be more salient than at others, but at no time is anyone without multiple identities. We will go into it in detail a bit later, but we should recognize up front that **categories of identity** are **intersectional**—they inform and shape each other, influencing the experiences that individuals have and the way they see and understand the world around them.

In the United States, we often grow up thinking about people as self-activating, self-actualizing individuals. We repeatedly hear that everyone is unique and that everyone has an

equal chance to make something of them self. While feminists also believe that people do have **agency**—or the ability to influence the direction of their lives—they also argue that people’s agency is limited or enhanced by their social position. A powerful way to understand one’s self and the multiple identities we inhabit is to situate one’s experiences within multiple **levels of analysis—micro- (individual), meso- (group), macro-(structural), and global**. These levels of analysis offer different analytical approaches to understanding a phenomenon in social life. Connecting personal experiences to larger, structural forces of race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and ability allows for a more powerful understanding of how our own lives are shaped by forces greater than ourselves, and how we might work to change these larger forces of inequality. Like a microscope that is initially set on a view of the most minute parts of a cell, moving back to see the whole of the cell, and then pulling one’s eye away from the microscope to see the whole of the organism, these levels of analysis allow us to situate day-to-day experiences and phenomena within broader, structural processes that shape whole populations. The **micro** level is that which we, as individuals, live everyday—interacting with other people on the street, in the classroom, or while we are at a party or a social gathering. Therefore, the micro-level is the level of analysis focused on individuals’ experiences. The **meso** level of analysis moves the microscope back, seeing how groups, communities and organizations structure social life. A meso level-analysis might look at how churches shape gender expectations for women, how schools teach students to become girls and boys, or how workplace policies make gender transition either easier or harder for genderqueer and transgendered workers. The **macro** level consists of government policies, programs, and institutions, as well as ideologies and categories of identity. In this way, the macro level consists of national power structures as well as cultural ideas about different groups of people according to race, class,

gender, and sexuality that are shared and widespread through various national media sources. Finally, the global level of analysis includes transnational production, trade, and migration, global capitalism, and transnational trade and law bodies (such as the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, the World Trade Organization)—larger transnational forces that bear upon our personal lives but we often ignore or fail to see.

Recognizing how forces greater than ourselves operate in shaping the successes and failures we typically attribute to individual decisions allows us see how inequalities are patterned by race, class, gender, and sexuality—not just by individual decisions. The following example illustrates the ways in a multi-level of analysis gives a more integrative and complete understanding of both personal experience and the ways in which macro structures affect the people who live within them. Let's look at the experiences of a Latino woman working in a **maquiladora**, a factory on the border of the US and Mexico built to take advantage of the difference in the price of labor in these two countries, through multiple levels of analysis. At the micro level, we can see her daily struggles to feed herself and her family we can see how exhausted she is from working everyday for more than eight hours and then coming home to care for herself and her family. Perhaps we could see how she has developed a persistent cough or skin problems from working with the chemicals in the factory and using water contaminated with run-off from the factory she lives near. On the meso-level, we can see how the community that she lives within has been transformed by the maquiladora, and how other women in her community face similar financial, health, and environmental problems. We may also see how these women are organizing together to attempt to form a union that can press for higher wages and benefits. Moving to the macro and global levels, we can situate these experiences within the Mexican government's participation within global and regional trade agreements such as the

North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) and the Central American Free Trade Act (CAFTA) and their negative effects on environmental regulations and labor laws, as well as the effects of global capitalist restructuring that has shifted production from North America and Europe to Central and South America and Asia. Through looking at labor in a maquiladora through multiple levels of analysis—at the micro, meso, and macro/global levels—we are able to connect what are experienced at the micro level as personal problems to larger economic, cultural, and social problems. This not only gives us the ability to develop socially-lived theory, but also allows us to organize with other people who feel similar effects from the same economic, cultural, and social problems in order to challenge and change these problems.

C. Conceptualizing Structures of Power

A **social structure** is a set of long-lasting social relationships, practices and institutions that can be difficult to see at work in our daily lives. They are intangible social relations, but work much in the same way as structures we can see: buildings and skeletal systems are two examples. The human body is structured by bones; that is to say that the rest of our bodies' organs and vessels are where they are because bones provide the structure upon which these other things can reside. Structures limit possibility, but they are not fundamentally unchangeable. For instance, our bones may deteriorate over time, suffer acute injuries, or be affected by disease, but they never spontaneously change location or disappear into thin air. Such is the way with social structures.

The elements of a social structure, the parts of social life that form a sensible whole and direct possible actions, are the institutions of society. These will be addressed in more detail later, but for now **social institutions** may be understood to include: the government, work,

education, family, law, media, and medicine among others. To say these institutions direct, or structure, possible social action, means that within the confines of these spaces there are rules, norms, and procedures that limit what actions are possible. For instance, family is a concept near and dear to most, but historically and culturally family forms have been highly specified, that is structured. According to Dorothy Smith (1993), the standard North American family (or, SNAF) includes two heterosexually-married parents and one or more biologically-related children. It also includes a division of labor in which the husband/father earns a larger income and the wife/mother takes responsibility for most of the caretaking and childrearing. Although families vary in all sorts of ways, this is the norm to which they are most often compared. Thus, while we may consider our pets, friends, and lovers as family, the State, the legal system, and the media do not affirm these possibilities in the way they affirm the SNAF. In turn, when most people think of who is in their family, the normative notion of parents and children structures who they consider.

Overlaying these social structures are **structures of power**. By **power** we mean two things: 1) access to and through the various social institutions mentioned above; 2) processes of privileging, normalizing, and valuing certain identities more than others. This definition of power highlights the structural, institutional nature of power, while also highlighting the ways in which culture works in the creation and privileging of certain categories of people. Power in American society is organized along the axes of gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, age, nation, and religious identities. Some identities are more highly valued, or more normalized, than others—typically because they are contrasted to identities thought to be less valuable or less ‘normal.’ Thus, identities are not only descriptors of individuals, but grant a certain amount of collective access to the institutions of social life. This is not to say, for instance, that all white

people are alike and wield the same amount of power over all people of color. It does mean that white, middle-class women as a group tend to hold more social power than middle-class women of color. This is where the concept of intersectionality is key. Everyone is composed of multiple identities, some privileged and some disadvantaged, that are experienced simultaneously. Thus a white, heterosexual middle-class woman may be disadvantaged in relation to a white middle-class man, but she may possess advantages in different contexts in relation to a black, heterosexual middle-class woman, or a white, heterosexual working-class man, or a white lesbian upper-class woman.

At the higher level of social structure, we can see that some people have greater access to institutionalized power across the board than do others. **Sexism** is the term we use for discrimination and blocked access on the basis of gender. **Racism** describes discrimination on the basis of race, which is most often based on socially-constructed meanings rather than biological differences. **Classism** describes discrimination on the basis of social class, or access to material wealth and the accompanying status. Sexism does not have to be explicitly enacted or conceptualized as the result of hatred of women, just like racism and classism do not have to reflect individual hatred of people of color and the poor. For instance, in the founding of the United States the institutions of social life, including work, law, education, and the like, were built to benefit wealthy, white men since at the time these were, by law, the only real ‘citizens’ of the country. Although these institutions have significantly changed over time in response to social movements and more progressive cultural shifts, the legacies of their sexist, racist, and classist biases are still felt by people today.

Just like the human body’s skeletal structure, social structures are not immutable, or completely resistant to change. Social movements mobilized on the basis of identities have

fought for increased equality and changed the structures of society, in the US and abroad, over time. However, these struggles do not change society over night; some last decades, centuries, or remain always unfinished. The structures and institutions of social life change slowly, but they can and do change based on the concerted efforts of individuals, social movements and social institutions.

D. Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a theory of knowledge that argues that concepts that are typically thought to be immutable and solely biological—such as gender, race, class, and sexuality—are products of human definition and interpretation shaped by cultural and historical contexts (Subramaniam 2010). As such, social constructionism highlights the ways in which cultural categories—like “men”, “women”, “black”, “white”—are created, changed, and reproduced through historical processes within institutions and culture. Therefore, the social constructionist perspective is concerned with the *meaning* created through defining and categorizing groups of people, experience, and reality in cultural contexts.

For example, what does it mean to be “heterosexual” in contemporary US society? Did it mean the same thing in the late 19th century? As historian of human sexuality Jonathon Ned Katz shows in *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (1999), the word “heterosexual” was originally coined by Dr. James Kiernan in 1892, but its meaning and usage differed drastically from modern understandings of the concept. Kiernan thought of “hetero-sexuals” as not defined by their attraction to the opposite sex, but by their “inclinations to both sexes”. Furthermore, Kiernan thought of the heterosexual as someone who “betrayed inclinations to ‘abnormal methods of gratification’” (Katz 1995). In other words, heterosexuals were those who were

attracted to both sexes and engaged in sex for pleasure, not for reproduction. Katz further points out that this definition of the heterosexual lasted within middle-class cultures in the United States until the 1920s, and then went through various radical reformulations up to the current usage.

In this example, the process of the social construction of heterosexuality becomes visible. First of all, it becomes apparent how social construction occurs within institutions—in this case, a medical doctor created a new category to describe a particular type of sexuality, based on existing medical knowledge at the time. “Hetero-sexuality” was initially a medical term that defined a deviant type of sexuality. Second, by seeing how Kiernan—and middle class culture, more broadly—defined “hetero-sexuality” in the 19th century, it is possible to see how drastically the meanings of the concept have changed over time. Typically, in the United States in contemporary usage, “heterosexuality” is thought to mean “normal” or “good”—it is usually the invisible term defined by what is thought to be its opposite, homosexuality. However, in its initial usage, “hetero-sexuality” was thought to be opposed to the norm of reproductive sexuality and, therefore, deviant. This gets to the third aspect of social constructionism. That is, cultural and historical contexts shape our definition and understanding of concepts. In this case, the norm of reproductive sexuality—having sex not for pleasure, but to have children—defines what types of sexuality are regarded as “normal” or “deviant.” Fourth, this case illustrates how categorization shapes human experience, behavior, and interpretation of reality. To be a “heterosexual” in middle class culture in the US in the early 1900s was not something desirable to be—it was not an identity that most people would have wanted to inhabit. The very definition of “hetero-sexual” as deviant, because it violated reproductive sexuality, defined “proper” sexual behavior as that which was reproductive and not pleasure-centered.

Social constructionist approaches to understanding the world challenge the essentialist or biological determinist understandings that typically underpin the “common sense” ways in which we think about race, gender, and sexuality. **Essentialism** argues that the characteristics of persons or groups are largely similar in all human cultures and historical periods, since they are significantly influenced by biological factors. A key assumption of essentialism is that “a given truth is a necessary natural part of the individual and object in question” (Gordon and Abbott 2002). In other words, an essentialist understanding of sexuality would argue that not only do all people have a sexual orientation, but that sexual orientation does not vary across time and place. In this example, “sexual orientation” is a given “truth” to individuals—it is thought to be inherent, biologically determined, and essential to their being.

Essentialism typically relies on a biological determinist theory of identity. **Biological determinism** can be defined as a general theory holding that a group’s biological or genetic makeup shapes its social, political, and economic destiny. For example, “sex” is typically thought to be a biological “fact” divided into two categories, male and female. These categories are often thought to be dictated by chromosomes, hormones, and sex characteristics. However, “sex” has been defined in many different ways, depending on the context within which it is defined. For example, feminist law professor Julie Greenberg (2002) writes that in the late 19th century and early 20th century, “when reproductive function was considered one of a woman’s essential characteristics, the medical community decided that the presence or absence of ovaries was the ultimate criterion of sex” (Greenberg 2002: 113). In the 20th century, courts have defined sex differently based on the purpose for the sex designation being sought. For instance, over one-half of states in the United States allow postoperative transsexuals to change the sex on their driver’s licenses. These states assume that sex is centrally defined by genitalia, not by

chromosomes or gonads. However, in the case of transsexuals seeking marriage licenses, most courts have ignored surgical or hormonal alterations and defined sex primarily by a combination of gonads, chromosomes, and genitals (Greenberg 2002).

The differential definitions of sex point out two other primary aspects of the social construction of reality. First, it makes apparent how even the things commonly thought to be “natural” or “essential” in the world are socially constructed. Understandings of “nature” change through history and across place according to systems of human knowledge. Second, the social construction of difference occurs within relations of power and privilege. Sociologist Abby Ferber (2009) argues that these two aspects of the social construction of difference cannot be separated, but must be understood together. Discussing the construction of racial difference, she argues that inequality and oppression actually produce ideas of essential racial difference. Therefore, racial categories that are thought to be “natural” or “essential” are created within the context of racialized power relations— in the case of African-Americans that includes slavery, laws regulating interracial sexual relationships, lynching, and white supremacist discourse. Similarly, in the example of the definition of sex above, sexual difference in the 19th century was produced through the heteronormative assumption that women are primarily defined by their ability to have children. These examples illustrate that social constructionist analyses seek to better understand the processes through which racialized, gendered, or sexualized differentiations occur, in order to untangle the power relations within them.

What are the implications of a social constructionist approach to understanding the world? Because social constructionist analyses see categories of difference as fluid, dynamic, and changing according to historical and geographical context, a social constructionist perspective implies that existing inequalities are not inevitable or immutable. This perspective is

especially useful for the activist and emancipatory aims of feminist movements and theories. By centering the processes through which inequality and power relations produce racialized, sexualized, and gendered difference, social constructionist analyses challenge the pathologization of minorities who have been thought to be essentially or inherently inferior to privileged groups. Additionally, social constructionist analyses destabilize the categories that organize people into hierarchically ordered groups through showing the historical, cultural, and/or institutional origins of the groups under study. In this way, social constructionist analyses challenge the categorical underpinnings of inequalities by revealing their production and reproduction through unequal systems of knowledge and power.

E. Intersectionality

The term **intersectionality** was articulated by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) and identifies a mode of analysis integral to women, gender, sexuality studies. Within intersectional frameworks, race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, and other identities are considered **mutually constitutive**; that is, these identities are experienced simultaneously and shape one another. For example, the way a person experiences gender is impacted by race, age, sexuality, class, and ability; likewise, the way a person experiences age is impacted by gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability.

Understanding intersectionality requires a new way of thinking. It is likely different than how you have imagined identities operate. An intersectional analysis of identity sits in opposition to single-determinant identity models and additive models of identity. A **single-determinant model of identity** presumes that one identifier, say, race, dictates one's access to or disenfranchisement from power. A good example of how this idea of identity is insufficient is

the concept of “global sisterhood,” or the idea that all women across the globe share some basic common political interests, concerns, and needs (Morgan 1996). If this were true, it would make sense for women to unite on the basis of gender to fight for social changes on a global scale. Unfortunately, if the analysis of social problems stops at gender, what is missed is an attention to how various cultural contexts shaped by race, religion, and access to resources may actually place some women’s needs at cross-purposes to other women’s needs. While many white, middle-class women activists of the mid-20th Century US fought for legal parity with men and freedom to work, this was not the major problem for women of color or working-class white women who had already been actively participating in the US labor market as domestic workers, factory workers, and slave labor since early US settlement. Today, white American feminists argue, at the international level, that women need equal legal rights and access to the labor market while women of the global South, in particular, may have more pressing concerns: access to clean water, access to adequate health care, and safety from the physical and psychological harms of living in tyrannical, war-torn, or economically disadvantaged nations.

In contrast to the single-determinant identity model, the **additive model of identity** simply adds together privileged and disadvantaged identities for a slightly more complex picture. For instance, a Black man may experience some advantages based on his gender, but has limited access to power based on his race. We can see this kind of analysis in how race and gender wage gaps are portrayed in statistical studies and popular news reports. Below, you can see a median wage gap table from the Institute for Women’s Policy Research compiled in 2009. In reading the table, it can be seen that the gender wage gap is such that in 2009, overall, women earned 77% of what men did in the US. The table breaks down the information further to show that earnings varied not only by gender but by race as well. Thus, Hispanic or Latino women earned

only 52.9% of what white men did while white women made 75%. This is certainly more descriptive than a single gender wage gap figure or a single race wage gap figure. The table is useful at pointing to potential structural explanations that may make earnings differ between groups. For instance, looking at the chart, you may immediately wonder why these gaps exist; is it a general difference of education levels, occupations, regions of residence or skill levels between groups, or is it something else, such as discrimination in hiring and promotion? What it is not useful for is predicting people's incomes by plugging in their gender plus their race, even though it may be our instinct to do so. Individual experiences differ vastly and for a variety of reasons; there are outliers in every group. Most importantly, even if this chart helps in understanding structural reasons why incomes differ, it doesn't give us all the answers.

Table 1: Annual Earnings, 2009, for Year-Round Full-time Workers aged 15 and Older by Race and Ethnic Background			
Race and Ethnicity	Male	Female	Women's Earnings as % of White Male Earnings*
All Races	47,127	36,278	77.0%
White Alone, not Hispanic	51,405	38,533	75.0%
Black or African American only	37,496	31,824	61.9%
Asian only	51,760	42,331	82.3%
Hispanic or Latino (any race)	31,393	27,181	52.9%
*The ratio for All Races is for Male and Females of All Races			
Source: Institute for Women's Policy Research Compilation of Current Population Survey Labor Force Statistics, 2009			
http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032010/perinc/new05_001.htm			

What the additive model does not do is take into account of how our shared cultural ideas of gender are racialized and our ideas of race are gendered and that these ideas structure access to power (material, political, interpersonal) and resources in our culture. Sociologist Patricia Hill

Collins (2005) utilizes an **intersectional framework** when she discusses race, gender, and sexuality in her historical analysis of representations of Black sexuality in the US. Not only does Hill Collins show how Black men and women are sexually exoticized in white American culture, she points to a history of enslavement and treatment as chattel as the origin and motivator for the use of these images. In order to justify slavery, African-Americans were thought of and treated as less than human. Sexual reproduction was often forced among slaves for the financial benefit of plantation owners, but owners reframed this coercion and rape as evidence of the “natural” and uncontrollable sexuality of people from the African continent. Images of Black men and women were not completely the same, as Black men were constructed as hypersexual “bucks” with little interest in continued relationships whereas Black women were framed as hypersexual “Jezebels” that became the “matriarchs” of their families. Again, it is important to note the context-- families under slavery were fragile and often forcefully dismantled—as well as how often this context is left out and instead framed as individual choices or traits. It is shockingly easy to see how these images are still present in contemporary media, culture, and politics, for instance, in discussions of American welfare programs. Through this analysis, we are able to see how race, gender, and sexuality intersect. We cannot simply pull these identities apart because they are interconnected and mutually enforcing.

“Gender” is too often used simply and erroneously to mean “white women,” while “race” too often means “Black men.” Intersectionality points to how identities are related to each other in our own experiences and how the social structures of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and ability intersect for everyone. As opposed to single-determinant and additive models of identity, it gives a more complete and sophisticated understanding of the world and how

membership in differently situated social groups bestows differential access to both material and symbolic resources.

References

- Crenshaw, Kimberlé W. (1991). "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): 1241–1299.
- Ferber, A. 2009. "Keeping Sex in Bounds: Sexuality and the (De)Construction of Race and Gender", Pp. 136-142 in *Sex, Gender, and Sexuality: The New Basics*, edited by Abby L. Ferber, Kimberly Holcomb and Tre Wentling. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Gordon, L. E. and S. A. Abbott. 2002 "A Social Constructionist „Essential“ Guide to Sex." In Robert Heasley and Betsy Crane, Eds., *Sexual Lives: Theories and Realities of Human Sexualities*. New York, McGraw-Hill.
- Greenberg, J. 2002. "Definitional Dilemmas: Male or Female? Black or White? The Law's Failure, to Recognize Intersexuals and Multiracials." Pp.102-126 in *Gender Nonconformity, Race and Sexuality: Charting the Connections*, edited by T. Lester. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Hesse-Biber, S.N. and D. Leckenby. 2004. "How Feminists Practice Social Research", Pp. 209-226 in *Feminist Perspectives on Social Research*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Hill Collins, Patricia (2005). *Black Sexual Politics: African-Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge.
- Institute for Women's Policy Research Compilation of Current Population Survey Labor Force Statistics. (2009.)
http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032010/perinc/new05_001.htm Accessed March 21, 2011.
- Katz, J. N. 1995. *The Invention of Heterosexuality*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Morgan, Robin (1996). "Introduction- Planetary Feminism: The Politics of the 21st Century." In *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology* by R. Morgan (Ed.). New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY. 1-37.
- Smith, Dorothy. 1993. "The Standard North American Family: SNAF as an Ideological Code." *Journal of Family Issues* 14 (1): 50-65.

Chapter II: Challenging Binary Systems and Constructions of Difference

A. Introduction- Binary Systems

Black and white. Masculine and feminine. Rich and poor. Straight and gay. **Binaries** are social constructs composed of two parts that are framed as absolute and unchanging opposites. **Binary systems** integrate these oppositional ideas into our culture. This results in an exaggeration of differences between social groups until they seem to have nothing in common. An example of this is the phrase “men are from Mars, women are from Venus.” Ideas of men and women being complete opposites invite simplistic comparisons that rely on stereotypes: men are practical, women are emotional; men are strong, women are weak; men are leaders, women are supportive. Binary systems mask the complicated realities and variety in the realm of social identity. We know very well that men can be emotional and that some women are physically stronger than some men, but the binary system of gender prefigures men and women to have nothing in common. By situating identities as definitional opposites, binary systems make these two poles (men and women; gay and straight; Black and white) relational to each other; that is, men are defined, in part, as “not women” and women as “not men.” Thus, our understandings of men are influenced by our understandings of women. Rather than seeing identities like race, gender, class, and sexuality as containing only two choices which are total opposites, it is more useful to look at identities on a continuum where there are many points in between, and the poles (men and women, Black and white, etc.) may not be so completely different after all.

B. The Sex/Gender/Sexuality System

The phrase “**sex/gender system**”, or “**sex/gender/sexuality system**” was coined by Gayle Rubin (1984) to describe, “the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity.” That is, Rubin proposed that the links between biological sex, social gender, and sexual attraction are products of culture. Gender is, in this case, “the social product” that is an elaboration upon biological sex. In our culture, everyone is assumed to be heterosexual (attracted to men if you are a woman; attracted to women if you are a man) until proven otherwise. People have used biological sex characteristics (chromosomes, hormones, secondary sex characteristics and genitalia) to make assumptions about how people should act in social life, and to whom they should be “naturally” attracted.

Rubin questioned the biological determinist argument that suggested all people born female will identify as women and be attracted to men. According to a biological determinist view, where “biology is destiny”, this is the way nature intended. However, this view neglects to account for human intervention. As human beings, we have an impact on the social arrangements of society. Social constructionists believe that many things we typically leave unquestioned as conventional ways of life actually reflect historically- and culturally-rooted power relationships between groups of people. Just because female-bodied people are the ones that bear children does not necessarily mean that they are always the best caretakers of those children or that they all have “natural instincts” that male-bodied people lack.

For instance, the arrangement of women caring for children has a historical legacy (which we will discuss more in the section on gendered labor markets). We see not only mothers caring for children but other women too: daycare workers, nannies, elementary school teachers, and babysitters. What these jobs have in common is that they are all very female-dominated occupations AND that this work is economically undervalued. These people do not get paid very

well. One study found that, in New York City, parking lot attendants, on average, make more money than childcare workers (Clawson and Gerstel, 2002). Because “mothering” is not seen as work, but as a woman’s natural role, she is not compensated in a way that reflects how difficult the work is. If you have ever babysat for a full day, go ahead and multiply that by eighteen years and then try to make the argument that it is not work. Men can do this work just as well as women, but there are no similar cultural dictates that say they should. On top of that, some suggest that if paid caretakers were mostly men then they would make much more money. This is referred to as the **glass escalator**, in which men working in female-dominated occupations earn more and gain promotions faster than women. This example illustrates how, as social constructionist Abby Ferber (2009) argues, inequality produces differences between men and women, and not the reverse.

In our culture we often take for granted that someone born with a female body will identify as a woman and that all women are female-bodied. While this is often true, it is not always the case. Some people born as males will identify their gender as women and some people born as females will identify their gender as men. **Transgender people**, or anyone who does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth, challenge the very idea of a binary sex/gender system. For example, transgender women, women born with male bodies but who identify as women later in life, show us that not all women are born with female bodies. Even if you do not know transgender people personally, the fact that they exist should help you question the biological determinist argument that biological sex predicts social gender. Transgender people may go through surgeries or hormone therapies to change their physical bodies or not, but they do change their social gender identities. Also, some transgender people do not identify as men or women. **Genderqueer** is an example of one gender identity people can take on when

they do not identify as either men or women. Genderqueer people often use the gender-neutral pronouns ze/hir or they/them rather than the gendered pronouns she/her or he/his. If you are unsure about which pronouns to use for someone who identifies as transgender or genderqueer, it is always best to ask.

Finally, whereas transgender is the term to describe someone who does not identify with the gender identity they were given at birth, intersex people fundamentally challenge binaries related to biological sex. “**Intersex**” is the term for someone whose hormones, chromosomes, or external genitalia do not fit easily into our binary male/female model of biological sex. Chromosomally-male people have an X and a Y chromosome, while chromosomally-female people have two X chromosomes. However, some people are XXY. Does the presence of the second X mean that the XXY person is female? Does the presence of a Y mean that the XXY person is male? These people are neither clearly chromosomally male or female; they are chromosomally intersexed. Some people have genitalia that is not clearly ‘male’ or ‘female’; that is they are born with reproductive organs associated with both males and females. This is not as uncommon as you might think. According to the Intersex Society of North America (www.isna.org), some 1.5% of newborns are born intersexed—that is 2,000 births a year. So, why is this knowledge not commonly known? Because many children born with genitalia that is not clearly “male” or “female” go through genital surgeries at birth to mask this ambiguity. Although this practice is becoming less common, pediatric surgeons would often decide to reduce the size of the clitoris of genetically female children so they will not look “masculine”, while genetically male children with penises smaller than 2.5 centimeters would have their penises reduced and given a female sex assignment (Dreger 1998). In each instant, pediatric surgeons are literally constructing and reconstructing the bodies of children to fit into the

dominant, binary sex/gender system. While parents and doctors justify this practice as in “the best interest of the child,” many people who later discover they are intersex do not feel it was in their best interest and they are fighting against these practices through intersex organizations, such as Accord Alliance, which was formed by former members of ISNA. Thanks to the efforts of intersex activists, such as ISNA and Accord Alliance, the practice of surgically altering intersex children is becoming less common in favor of waiting and allowing children to choose their gender consistent with their own sense of identity and lived experience.

Students often confuse the terms “transgender” and “intersex,” although these terms refer to very different identities. To review, transgender people go through a process of changing their social genders, while intersex people have biological characteristics that do not comply with the dominant sex/gender system. One term refers to social gender (*transgender*) and one term refers to biological sex (*intersex*). While transgender people challenge our binary (man/woman) ideas of gender, intersex people challenge our binary (male/female) ideas of biological sex. Gender theorists, such as Judith Butler and Gayle Rubin, have even gone onto challenge the very notion that there is an underlying ‘sex’ to a person, arguing that sex, too, is socially constructed. This is revealed in different definitions of “sex” throughout history in law and medicine—is sex composed of genitalia? Is it just genetic make-up? A combination of the two? Various social institutions, such as courts, have not come to a consistent or conclusive way to define sex, and the term “sex” has been differentially defined throughout the history of law in the United States. In this way, we can begin to understand the biological designations of “male” or “female” as social constructions that reinforce the binary construction of men and women.

C. Sexualities

Not all people are heterosexual. As you learned in the section on social construction, heterosexuality is no more and no less natural than homosexuality or bisexuality, for instance. As was shown in the previous chapter on social construction, people—particularly sexologists and medical doctors—had to define what heterosexuality was and what the boundaries of it were. This definition of the parameters of heterosexuality is an expression of power that constructs what types of sexuality are considered “normal” and “natural” and which types of sexuality are considered “deviant” or “unnatural.” In this example, we can see how situated, cultural norms begin to define what is considered “natural.” By defining cross-gender heterosexual sex as acceptable sexual conduct, all sexual conduct outside that parameter is labeled as deviant. However, even within cross-gender sexual relations, gendered cultural norms associated with heterosexuality dictate what is “normal” or “deviant.” As a quick thought exercise, just think of some words for women with many sexual partners then, do the same for men—the results will be quite different. So, within the field of sexuality we can see power in relations along lines of gender and sexual orientation (and race, class, age, and ability as well – but, we are getting ahead of ourselves).

Adrienne Rich (1980) called heterosexuality “compulsory,” meaning that in our culture all people are assumed to be heterosexual and society is full of both formal and informal enforcements that make it easier to be heterosexual than not. Just look at laws; in most states same-sex couples cannot get married, in a few states no gays or lesbians are allowed to adopt children, and gays and lesbians often lose custody battles with former spouses based on their sexual orientations alone. Media depictions of gays and lesbians are few and often stereotyped (as if to say, “who wants to be that?!”). There are no (zero!) “out” gay athletes in the top three men’s professional sports—basketball, baseball, and football—despite the fact that, statistically,

there are very likely to be many (Zirin, 2010). Plus, there is a very concerted effort from many religious groups to deny gays and lesbians any visibility or rights in society. Additionally, there are the every day, taken-for-granted ways in which heterosexuality is privileged and normalized—what theorists of gender and sexuality call **heteronormativity**. For instance, sociologist Karen Martin studied what parents say to their children about sexuality and reproduction, and found that with children as young as three and five years old, parents routinely assumed their children were heterosexual, told them they would get (heterosexually) married, and interpreted cross-gender interactions between children as “signs” of heterosexuality (Martin 2009). Therefore, heteronormativity is instilled in us at a very young age, teaching us that there are only two genders and that we are or should be heterosexual and married in later stages in life.

Just like gender, sexuality is not binary. There are straight people and gay people, but there are also bisexuals, pansexuals, omnisexuals, queers, leather daddies, heteroflexibles, those who are questioning, and many other sexual identities. Most of these other identities recognize both that a) there are more than two genders and thus more than two kinds of people to be attracted to and b) you can be attracted to more than one of them at once!

Another common misconception that needs correcting: not all transgender people are sexually queer. We figure this belief stems from the common “LGBT” initials that put transgender people with lesbians, gays, and bisexuals in a political alliance. A lesbian may transition from female to male and still be attracted to women and be straight-identified post-transition. Another lesbian might transition from female to male and suddenly be attracted to other men, including other transmen, and identify as gay or queer post-transition. This multiplicity tells us that we just cannot capture sexuality within the prevailing binary model and still describe the various ways in which people “do” gender and sexuality within the real world.

D. Masculinities

Another concept that troubles the gender binary is the idea of “multiple masculinities” (Connell, 2005). Connell suggests that there is more than one kind of masculinity and what is considered “masculine” differs by race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender. For example, being knowledgeable about computers might be masculine because it can help you accumulate income and wealth, and we consider wealth to be masculine. However, computer knowledge only translates into “masculinity” for certain men. While an Asian-American, middle-class man might get a boost in “masculinity points” (as it were) for his high-paying job with computers, the same might not be true for a working-class white man whose white-collar desk job may be seen as a weakness to his masculinity by other working-class men. Another example is how expectations for masculinity differ by age; what it means to be a man at 19 is very different than what it means to be a man at 70. Therefore, masculinity intersects with other identities and expectations change accordingly.

Judith Halberstam developed the concept of “**female masculinity**” to describe the ways female-bodied people may “do” masculinity. Halberstam suggests that masculinity is merely the connection between maleness and power and that female-bodied people have access to this through drag-king performances, stone butchness (or, very masculine appearing and acting lesbian women), or female-to-male transgenderism. By separating masculinity from male bodies, we are able to see how performative it really is. By that, we mean that masculinity is accomplished in interactions and not ordained by nature. Halberstam’s (2005) insights push us to recognize how masculinity is socially constructed and can be changed through human activity.

E. Race

“Concepts of race did not exist prior to racism. Instead, it is inequality and oppression that have produced the idea of essential racial differences” (Ferber, 2009: 176).

In the context of the United States, there is a binary understanding of race as either Black¹ or white. This is not to say that only two races are recognized, just to say that these are the constructed “oppositional poles” of race. What do we mean by race? What does Abby Ferber in the quote above mean by race? More than just descriptive of skin color or physical attributes, in biological models of race, race determines intelligence, sexuality, strength, motivation, and the ever-allusive “culture.” These are not ideas only held by self-proclaimed racists, but ideas woven into the fabric of American society in social institutions. For instance, prior to the 20th Century, people were considered to be legally “Black” if they had any African ancestors. This was known as the **one-drop rule**, which held that if you had even one drop of African blood in your veins, you would have been considered Black. The same did not apply to white blood—rather, whiteness was defined by its purity. Even today, these ideas continue to exist. People with one Black and one white parent (for instance, President Barack Obama) are considered Black, and someone with one Asian parent and one white parent is usually considered Asian.

Many cultural ideas of racial difference were justified by the use of science. White scientists of the early 19th Century set out to “prove” Black racial inferiority by studying biological difference. Most notable were studies of cranial capacity that suggested African American skulls had a smaller cranial capacity, contained smaller brains, and, thus, less

¹ Note:

1. Here, we capitalize Black and not white in recognition of Black as a reclaimed, and empowering, identity.

intelligence. Later studies revealed both biased methodological practices by scientists and findings that brain size did not actually predict intelligence. The practice of using science in an attempt to support ideas of racial superiority and inferiority is known as **scientific racism**.

Other, more modern, “studies” of Black Americans have been put to the same purposes. These studies and their applications often are often weighted by ideas about African Americans from the era of chattel slavery in the Americas. For instance, the Moynihan Report, also known as “The Negro Family: A Case for National Action” (1965) was an infamous document that claimed the non-nuclear family structure found among poor and working-class African American populations, characterized by an absent father and matriarchal mother, would hinder the entire race’s economic and social progress. While the actual argument was much more nuanced, politicians picked up on this report to propose an essentialist argument about race and the “**culture of poverty**.” They played upon stereotypes from the era of African-American slavery that justified treating Black Americans as less than human. One of these stereotypes is the assumption that Black men and women are hypersexual; these images have been best analyzed by Patricia Hill Collins (2004) in her work on “**controlling images**” of African Americans—images such as the “Jezebel” image of Black women and the “Buck” image of Black men discussed earlier. Slave owners were financially invested in the reproduction of slave children since children born of mothers in bondage would also become the property of owners, so much so that they did not wait for women to get pregnant of their own accord but institutionalized practices of sexual violence against slave women to get them pregnant (Collins, 2004). It was not a crime to rape a slave since they were seen as property. But, since many people recognized African American slaves as human beings, they had to be framed as fundamentally different in other ways to justify enslavement. The notion that Black people are “naturally” more sexual and

that Black women were therefore “unrapable” (Collins 2004) served this purpose. Black men were framed as hypersexual “Bucks” uninterested in monogamy and family; this idea justified splitting up slave families and using Black men to impregnate Black women. The underlying assumptions in the Moynihan Report—that Black families are composed of overbearing (in both senses of the word: over-birthing and over-controlling) mothers and disinterested fathers and that if only they could form more stable nuclear families and mirror the white, middle-class they would be lifted from poverty—reflect assumptions of natural difference found in the ideology supporting American slavery. The structural causes of racialized economic inequality—particularly, the undue impoverishment of Blacks and the undue enrichment of whites during slavery and decades of unequal laws and blocked access to employment opportunities (Feagin 2006)—are ignored in this line of argument in order to claim fundamental biological differences in the realms of gender, sexuality and family or racial “culture.” Furthermore, this line of thinking disparages alternative family forms as dysfunctional rather than recognizing them as adaptations what enabled survival in difficult and even intolerable conditions.

Of course, there are other racial groups recognized within the United States, but the Black/white binary is the predominant racial binary system at play in the American context. We can see that this Black/white binary exists and is socially constructed if we consider the case of the 19th Century Irish immigrant. When they first arrived, Irish immigrants were “blackened” in the popular press and the white, Anglo-Saxon imagination (Roediger 1991). Cartoon depictions of Irish immigrants gave them dark skin and exaggerated facial features like big lips and pronounced brows. They were depicted and thought to be lazy, ignorant, and alcoholic non-white “others” for decades. Over time, Irish immigrants and their children and grandchildren were integrated into the category of “whiteness” by strategically distancing themselves from

Black Americans and other non-whites in labor disputes and participating in white supremacist racial practices and ideologies. The Irish in America *became* white. A similar process took place for Italian-Americans, and, later, Jewish American immigrants from multiple European countries after the Second World War. Similar to Irish Americans, both groups *became* white after first being seen as non-white. These cases show how socially constructed race is and how this labeling process still operates today. For instance, are Asian-Americans, considered the ‘model minority,’ the next group to be integrated into whiteness, or will they continue to be regarded as foreign threats? Only time will tell.

F. Class

Socio-economic class differences are particularly hidden in the US context. Part of this can be explained by the ideology of the American Dream. According to popular belief, anyone who works hard enough will succeed, and those who do not succeed must not have worked hard enough. There is a logical error in this form of reasoning, made clear in the following two scenarios: What of people who do not work very hard at all and still succeed? What about those who work exceptionally hard and never succeed? Part of this, of course, is about how we define success. Succeeding at the American Dream means something akin to having a great job, making a lot of money, and owning a car, a house, and all the most-recent gadgets. All these are markers of material, that is, economic, wealth. Wealth is not only captured in personal income, but other assets as well (house, car, stocks, inheritances), not all of which are necessarily earned by hard work alone, but can come from inheritance, marriage, or luck.

Though rich/poor may be the binary you associate with class, most people in the US context (no matter how much wealth they have) consider themselves “middle-class.”² The label “middle class” represents more than what people have in their bank accounts, but also summarizes a political ideology. When politicians run for election or argue over legislation they often employ the term “middle-class” to stand in for “average,” “tax-paying,” “morally-upstanding” constituents and argue for their collective voice and prosperity. Rhetorically, the “middle class” is not being compared the super rich (since, in the US, you can never be too rich or too thin), but rather the poor. So, when people talk about the middle class they are also often implying that they are NOT those “deviant,” “tax-swindling,” “morally-base” poor people. This may seem harsh, but this is truly how the poor are represented in news media (Mantsios 2007). If this still seems far-fetched, just replace with phrase “the poor” with “welfare recipients.” Welfare recipients are often faceless but framed as undeserving of assistance since they are assumed to be cheating the system, addicted to alcohol or drugs, and have only themselves to blame (Mantsios, 2007). Welfare recipients are the implied counterparts to the middle class everymen that populate political speeches and radio rants. Thus, in the United States, socio-economic class has been constructed as a binary between the middle-class and the poor. Furthermore, these class-based categories are also assigned racial and sexual meanings, as the “welfare queen” stereotype conjures images of poor, black, sexually-promiscuous women, contrary to the fact that white women as a group are the largest recipients of welfare.

Fred Block and colleagues (2006) discuss how these stereotypes about the poor are written into American poverty policies. For instance, in 1996, President Bill Clinton passed the **Personal Responsibility/Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)**, which

² Pew Research Center. 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2010/12/22/what-does-middle-class-mean-today/who-should-be-the-judge-of-middle-class>

fundamentally rewrote prior US welfare policy. This act limits lifetime receipt of welfare to a maximum of 60 months, or 5 years, and requires that able-bodied recipients work or job-train for low-skill jobs while receiving checks. Under PRWORA, recent immigrants cannot receive welfare for their first five years of legal residence, and undocumented immigrants can never receive welfare benefits (Block et al. 2006). These restrictions are built on the assumption that welfare recipients are ultimately cheating the American taxpayer and looking for a free ride. In spite of these changes, most people still believe that being on government assistance means a lifetime of free money. Media contempt for welfare recipients is accomplished by not humanizing the experience of poverty. People experiencing poverty sometimes face tough choices; for instance, there are barriers to working more hours or getting a slightly better-paying job when making slightly more risks failing the **means test** (an income maximum above which people are ineligible for welfare benefits) for food stamps or Medicaid. The poor are increasingly forced to decide between paying for rent versus food and other bills, as the cost of living has risen dramatically in the past few decades while working-class wages have not risen comparably. The SPENT game captures and humanizes this process of making tough decisions on a tight budget. Try it out and see how you fare: <http://playspent.org/>.

However, class issues are not only about income differences. **Cultural capital** is a term developed by the late sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) to address non-monetary class differences such as tastes in food and music or knowledge of high culture. Bourdieu explained that even when a formerly-poor individual experiences class mobility and becomes middle class, there are still markers of her former status in the way she carries herself and the things she knows. We see many examples of this in popular films. When someone goes from rags to riches, they often use the wrong utensils at a dinner party, call something by the wrong name,

cannot tell the difference between a Chardonnay and a Merlot (wines), or spend their money in a showy way. Thus, someone can have high cultural capital and not be wealthy, or have low cultural capital and be a millionaire. For instance, in the popular (and very campy) movie *Showgirls* (Verhoeven, 1995), the main character, Nomi Malone, goes from homeless and unemployed to a handsomely-paid Las Vegas showgirl at record speed. Along the way, she buys an expensive Versace dress and brags about it. Unfortunately, she reveals her lack of cultural capital, and thus her former status as poor, by mispronouncing the brand (saying ‘Verse-ACE’ instead of ‘Vers-a-Chee’) and is humiliated by some rather mean bystanders. In sum, the concept of cultural capital highlights the ways in which social class is not just about wealth and income, but that social classes develop cultures.

G. Alternatives to Binary Systems

Through all these examples, we hope to show that binary ways of understanding human differences are insufficient for understanding the complexities of human culture. Binaries assume that there are only two options for gender, race, and class identities among others, and that these two options are complete opposites. Just as men are defined as “not women” in a binary system, straights are defined as “not gay,” whites are defined as “not Black,” and middle-class people are defined as “not poor.” Oppositional, binary, thinking works strategically such that the dominant groups in society are associated with more valued traits, while the subordinate groups, defined as their opposites, are always associated with less valued traits. Thus, the poles in a binary system define each other and only make sense in the presence of their opposites. “Men” provide the standard by which “women” are defined, and masculinity only has meaning by being the opposite of femininity. In reality, identities are complex and multi-faceted. For

one, all categories of identity are more richly expressed and understood as continuums of difference. More than that, all of us have multiple identities that we experience simultaneously. Our experience of gender is always shaped by our race, class, and other identities. Our experience of race is different depending on gender, class, and other identities as well. This is why taking an intersectional approach to understanding identity gives us a more complex understanding of social reality. Each of our social locations is impacted by the intersection of several facets of identity in a way that should give us pause when we encounter blanket statements like “all men are _____” or “all Latinas are _____.” or “all lesbians are _____.” The world is a messy place, and rather than reducing human difference to easy-to-digest binaries, we must embrace the world as it is and be prepared to deal with the complexity.

References:

- Block, Fred, Anna C. Korteweg, Kerry Woodward, Zach Schiller, and Imrul Mazid. 2006. “The Compassion Gap in American Poverty Policy.” *Contexts* 5(2): 14-20.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Clawson, Dan and Naomi Gerstel. 2002. "Caring for Young Children: What the US Can Learn from Some European Examples." *Contexts*, 1(4): 28-35.
- Connell, RW. 2005. *Masculinities*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Dreger, Alice. 1998. “Ambiguous Sex’—or Ambivalent Medicine?” *The Hastings Center Report* 28(3): 24-25.
- Feagin, Joe. 2006. *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression*. New York: Routledge.
- Ferber, Abby. 2009. “Keeping Sex in Bounds: Sexuality and the (De) Construction of Race and Gender.” In *Gender, Sex, & Sexuality: An Anthology* by A. Ferber, K. Holcomb, and T. Wentling (Eds.) New York: Oxford University Press. 136-141.
- Halberstam, Judith. 1998. *Female Masculinity*. Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press.

Hill Collins, Patricia. 2005. *Black Sexual Politics: African-Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge.

Intersex Society of North America. <<http://www.insa.org>> Accessed 04 April, 2011.

Mantsios, Gregory. 2007. "Media Magic: Making Class Invisible." In *Race, Class, & Gender: An Anthology, Sixth Edition* by M.L. Anderson and P. Hill Collins. Belmont, CA: Thompson Wadsworth. 384-392.

Moynihan, Daniel Patrick. 1965. "The Negro Family: A Case for National Action."

Rich, Adrienne. 1980. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs* 5(4): 631-660.

Roediger, David R. 1991. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. New York: Verso.

Rubin, Gayle. 1984. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex." In *Pleasure and Danger* by C. Vance (Ed.). New York: Routledge.

Verhoeven, Paul (Dir.) 1995. *Showgirls*. Carolco Pictures. [Film]

Zirin, Dave (Dir.). 2010. *Not Just a Game: Power, Politics, and American Sports*. Media Education Foundation. [Film]

Chapter III: Institutions, Culture, and Structures

A. Introduction to Institutions, Cultures, and Structures

Thus far, we have been concerned with feminist theories and perspectives that seek to understand how difference is constructed through structures of power, how inequalities are produced and reproduced through socially constructed binaries, and how the categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality intersect. At this juncture, we can ask: where do these processes occur? How do they not only get produced, but how are they *re-produced* through daily activities in institutions? In the following section, we identify, historicize, and analyze several of the key institutions that structure our lives, including the family, media, medicine, law and the prison system. We use the struggle to end violence against women as a case to show how multiple institutions intersect and overlap in ways that both limit and enable action. First, we provide a theoretical overview of institutions, culture, and structures.

To answer these questions we need to look at the institutions within which we spend a great amount of our lives interacting with others. An **institution** is a “social order or pattern that has attained a certain state or property...and [owes] [its] survival to relatively self-activating social processes” (Jepperson 1991: 145). In other words, institutions are enduring, historical facets of social life that shape our behavior. Examples of institutions include the family, marriage, media, medicine, law, education, the state, and work. These institutions can be said to structure thought and behavior, in that they prescribe rules for interaction and inclusion/exclusion and norms for behavior, parcel out resources between groups, and often times rely on formal regulations (including laws, policies, and contracts). In almost every facet of our day-to-day experience we operate within institutions—often within multiple institutions at once—without noticing their influence on our lives. As a result, we can conceive of

institutions—primarily the family, schools, religious institutions, media, and peer groups—as primary agents of **socialization** (Kimmel 2007). These are primary agents of socialization in that we are born into them, shaped by their expectations, norms, and rules, and as we grow older we often operate in the same institutions and teach these expectations, norms, and rules to younger generations.

Institutions are primary sites for the reproduction of gendered, classed, racialized, and sexualized inequalities. Everyone does not have access to the same institutions—the same schools, the same hospitals, marriage, etc.—because often times these institutions differentiate between and differentially reward people based on categories of gender, class, race, and sexuality. For example, think of the city or town you grew up in. There may have been different schools located in different areas of the city, in neighborhoods that differed in the class and race composition of the people living in those neighborhoods. Perhaps there was a school located in a middle-class, predominantly white neighborhood and another school located in a working-class, neighborhood of color. Perhaps there were private schools that required high tuition rates, also. Due to the fact that schools in most states are funded based on the tax base of the school district they are in, schools located in different neighborhoods will have different amounts of resources—books, computers, the ability to pay teachers and staff, etc. Those students who live in the middle-class school district will benefit from a well-funded public school, while students who live in the working-class school district will be disadvantaged from the lower amount of funding of their school district. Meanwhile, students who attend the prestigious private school will most likely already be economically privileged and will further benefit from a well-funded school that surrounds them with students with similar class backgrounds and expectations. These students will most likely benefit from a curriculum of college preparatory classes, while

students in public schools are less likely to be enrolled in college prep classes—limiting their ability to get into college. Therefore, the same race and class inequalities that limited access to the middle-class, predominantly white neighborhood school will give those privileged students greater chances to enter college and maintain their privileged status. In this way, race and class privileges (and disadvantage) get reproduced through institutions.

Institutions shape, and are shaped by, culture. **Culture** is a system of symbols, values, practices, and interests of a group of people³. Culture is shot through with **ideology**, which can be understood to be the ideas, attitudes, and values of the **dominant culture**. It is important to point out that “dominant culture” does not describe the most numerous group within society. Indeed, “dominant culture” typically describes a relatively small social group that has a disproportionate amount of power. An example of a dominant culture would be the numerically small white minority in South Africa during apartheid. More recently, the Occupy Movement has critiqued the ways in which the “1%” exerts a disproportionate amount of control and power as the dominant culture in the United States.

Mainstream institutions often privilege and reward the dominant culture. The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) argues that institutions value certain types of culture and reward people who have those types of culture. As we discussed in the previous chapter, different social classes have different types of cultural capital—assets that are not necessarily economic, but promote social mobility. For example, students who attend public schools in middle-class districts or private schools often have access to more language courses, arts courses, and extracurricular activities—skills, knowledge, and experiences that colleges value greatly in their admission decisions. Schools in less economically privileged districts often have fewer of these options.

³ In this definition we are combining Kirk and Okazawa-Rey’s (2004) definition of culture with Sewell’s (1992) definition of culture.

In this way, culture is not an even playing field, and not everyone has equal access to defining what types of symbols, meanings, values, and practices are valued by institutions. Those groups of people with greater access to mainstream institutions—those who have been born into wealth, white, male-bodied, able-bodied, heterosexual—have a greater ability to define what types of culture will be valued by institutions, and often have access to the cultural capital that mainstream institutions value.

The interaction between culture and institutions creates social structures. **Social structures** are composed of 1) socially constructed ideas, principles, and categories and 2) institutions that dole out material resources to stratified groups based on socially constructed ideas, principles, and categories. Additionally, 3) they shape—or structure—experience, identity, and practice. Social structures are relational, in that they function to stratify groups based on the categories that underlie those groups—allocating both symbolic and material benefits and resources unequally among those groups. “Symbolic resources” refers to the non-material rewards that accrue to privileged groups. An example would be the way in which employers often assume that employees who are fathers are more responsible, mature, and hard-working, and deserve more pay a opposed to their child-less peers or to working mothers (Hodges and Budig 2010). In this example, the sex/gender/sexuality system is a structure through which employers—as gatekeepers of advancement through institutions of work—privilege heterosexual fatherhood. The effect of this is the reproduction of the symbolic privileging of heterosexual masculinity, and the unequally doling out of material resources (salary and wage raises, advancement opportunities) to married men with children. Unmarried men without children do not receive the same symbolic and material rewards nor do married

women with children. In this sense, structures limit access to opportunities: educational opportunities, employment opportunities, and opportunities to move up in social class standing.

While there may be a tendency to think of “structures” as unchangeable and monolithic entities, our definition of structure does not make such an assumption. In our definition, social structures are made possible by their reliance on socially constructed categories—that is, categories that change through time and place. Furthermore, while social structures can be said to structure experience and identity, people are not passive observers or dupes—as the history of labor struggles, struggles for self-determination in former colonies, the civil rights movement, and feminist movements have shown, people fight back against the institutions and dominant cultural ideas and categories that have been used to oppress them. Even though socially constructed categories have typically been used to stratify groups of people, those same groups of people may base an activist struggle out of that identity, transforming the very meanings of that identity in the process. For instance, the phrases “Black power” and “gay power” were created by Black and gay liberationists in the late 1960s to claim and re-frame identities that had been disparaged by the dominant culture and various mainstream institutions. This history of resistance within the crux of overarching structures of power shows that people have **agency** to make choices and take action. In other words, while structures limit opportunities and reproduce inequalities, groups of people who have been systemically denied access to mainstream institutions can and have exerted their will to change those institutions. Therefore, structure and agency should not be viewed as two diametrically opposed forces, but as two constantly interacting forces that shape each other.

B. The Family

There is a multiplicity of family forms in the United States and throughout the world. When we try to define the word “family” we realize just how slippery of a concept it is. Does family mean those who are blood related? This definition of family excludes stepparents and adopted children from a definition of those in one’s family. It also denies the existence of **fictive kin**, or non-blood related people that one considers to be part of one’s family. Does family mean a **nuclear family** (composed of legally-married parents and their children), as it so often is thought to in the contemporary United States? This excludes **extended kin**—or family members such as uncles, aunts, grandparents, cousins, nephews, and nieces. It also excludes single parents, the unmarried, and those couples who do not have children. Or does family denote a common household characterized by economic cooperation? This definition would exclude those who consider each other family but cannot or do not live in the same household, often times for economic reasons—for example, South or Central American parents leaving their country of origin to make wages in the United States and send them back to their families—or because of incarceration.⁴ All of these definitions would also deny the importance and existence of what Kath Weston (1991) has labeled “**chosen families**”, or the way in which queers, gays, and lesbians who are ostracized from their families of origin form kinship ties with close friends. The diversity of family formations across time and place suggests that the definition of a “...universal ‘family’ hides historical change as it sets in place or reproduces an ideology of ‘the family’ that obscures the diversity and reality of family experience in any place and time” (Gerstel 2003: 231). What is the dominant ideology of “family” in the United States? How did

⁴ “An estimated 809,800 prisoners of the 1,518,535 held in the nation’s prisons at midyear 2007 were parents of children under age 18. Parents held in the nation’s prisons — 52 percent of state inmates and 63 percent of federal inmates — reported having an estimated 1,706,600 minor children, accounting for 2.3 percent of the U.S. resident population under age 18” (Sabol and West 2010).

the family formation that this dominant ideology rests upon come to be the normative model of “family?”

The dominant ideology of what constitutes a “family” in the United States recognizes a very class- and race-specific type of gendered family formation. This family formation has been labeled the **Standard North American Family (SNAF)** (Smith 1993). Smith (1993) defines the SNAF as

a conception of the family as a legally married couple sharing a household. The adult male is in paid employment; his earnings provide the economic basis of the family-household. The adult female may also earn an income, but her primary responsibility is to the care of the husband, household, and children. Adult male and female may be parents (in whatever legal sense) of children also resident in the household (Smith 1993: 52).

It is important to note that the majority of families in the United States do not fit this ideological family formation. Judith Stacey (1998) calls these multiple and numerous differences in the ways in which people structure their families, **post-modern families**.

When we put the SNAF into a historical perspective, we are able to see how this dominant family formation is neither natural nor outside of politics and processes of race, class, and gender inequality. Historians Nancy Cott (2000) and Stephanie Coontz (2005) have written about the history of the SNAF. The SNAF originated in the 19th century with the separation between work and family, which was occasioned by the rise of industrial capitalism. Previous to an industrial economy based on the creation of commodities in urban factories, the family was primarily an agricultural work unit—there was no separation between work and home. With the rise of industrial capitalism, in working class families and families of color (who had been denied access to union jobs or were still enslaved, maintaining their poverty or working-class status) the majority of family members—including children and women—worked in factories. Middle-class families who had inherited property and wealth—the vast majority of whom were

white—did not need all the members of their families to work. They were able to pay for their homes, hire house servants, maids (who were primarily African American, working-class women) and tutors, and send their children to private educational institutions with the salary of the breadwinning father. Thus, the **gendered division of labor**—wherein women perform unpaid care-work within the home and men are salaried or wage-earning breadwinners—that is often assumed to be a natural, given way of family life originated due to relatively recent economic changes that privileged middle-class, white families.

This false split between the publicly-oriented, working father and the privately-oriented domestic mother produced the ideologies of **separate spheres** and the **cult of domesticity**. The ideology of separate spheres held that women and men were distinctly different creatures, with different natures and therefore suited for different activities. Masculinity was equated with breadwinning, and femininity was equated with homemaking. Correspondingly, the cult of domesticity was an ideology about white womanhood that held that white women were asexual, pure, moral beings properly located in the private sphere of the household. Importantly, this ideology was applied to *all* women as a measure of womanhood. The effects of this ideology were to systematically deny working-class white women and women of color access to the category of “women,” because these women had to work and earn wages to support their families. Furthermore, during this period, **coverture** laws defined white women who were married to be legally defined as the property of their husband. Upon marriage, women’s legal personhood was dissolved into that of the husband. They could not own property, sign or make legal documents, and any wages they made had to be turned over to their husbands. Thus, even though they did not have to work in factories or the fields of plantations, white middle-class women were systematically denied rights and personhood under coverture. In this way, white

middle-class women had a degree of material wealth and symbolic status as pure, moral beings, but at the cost of submission to their husbands and lack of legal personhood. White working-class women and women of color had access to the public sphere in ways white middle-class women did not, but they also had to work in poorly paid jobs and were thought to be less than true women because of this.

The historical, dominant ideology of the SNAF is reinforced by present day law and social policy. For example, most states in the United States do not allow gays and lesbians to marry. Furthermore, when gays and lesbians have children they often rely on adoption or assisted reproductive technologies, including *in vitro* fertilization or surrogacy (where a woman is contracted to carry a child to term for someone else), among other methods. Since laws in most states only recognize the parenting rights of married couples and assume that blood-ties between mother and child supersede non-biological family relations, gays and lesbians who seek to have children and families are extremely limited in their ability to do so. The conventional assumptions of the SNAF are embodied in law, and in this case, do not match with the realities of groups of people who depart from the ideology of the SNAF.

Social policy often assumes that the SNAF is not only a superior family structure, but that its promotion is a substitute for policies that would seek to reduce poverty. For instance, both the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama have promoted marriage and the nuclear family as poverty reduction policy. These programs have targeted poor families of color, in particular. In The Healthy Marriages Initiative of 2004, President Bush pledged \$1.5 billion to programs aimed at “Marriage education, marriage skills training, public advertising campaigns, high school education on the value of marriage and marriage mentoring programs...activities promoting fatherhood, such as counseling, mentoring, marriage education, enhancing

relationship skills, parenting, and activities to foster economic stability” (US Department of Health and Human Services 2009). Such policies ignore the historical, structural sources of racialized poverty and blames the victims of systemic classism and racism. As the history of the SNAF shows, the normative family model is based on a white middle-class model—one that a majority of families in the West do not fit or necessarily want to fit.

C. Media

Take a minute to think about how much media you are exposed to in one day— from watching television and movies, to cruising the Internet, reading newspapers, books, and magazines, listening to music and watching music videos, or playing video games. The majority of this media is produced by corporations, and infused with advertisements. According to the Media Awareness Network, a non-profit organization focused on media literacy, the average North American is exposed to 3,000 advertisements per day.⁵ According to a 2009 Nielson Company—a marketing corporation that collects statistics on media usage—report, the average American now watches more than 151 hours of TV a month.⁶ That equates to just over five hours of TV viewing per day. The pervasiveness of media in culture begs a number of questions: what are the effects of such an overwhelming amount of exposure to media that is often saturated with advertisements? How does media construct or perpetuate gendered, sexualized, and racialized differences and inequalities? What is the relationship between media and consumers, and how do consumers interact with media?

Media expert and sociologist Michael Kimmel (2003) argues that the media are a primary institution of socialization that not only reflects, but creates culture. Media representation is a

⁵ See: http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/parents/marketing/advertising_everywhere.cfm

⁶ <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/feb/24/business/fi-tvwatching24>

key domain for identity formation and the creation of gendered and sexualized difference. For example, think back to Disney movies you were probably shown as a child. The plots of these movies typically feature a dominant young man—a prince, a colonial ship captain, a soldier—who is romantically interested in a young woman—both are always assumed to be heterosexual—who at first resists the advances of the young man, but eventually falls in love with him and marries him. These Disney movies teach children a great deal about gender and sexuality; specifically, they teach children the value of **hegemonic masculinity** and **emphasized femininity**. Hegemonic masculinity refers to a specific type of culturally-valued masculinity tied to marriage and heterosexuality and patriarchal authority in the family and workplace, and maintains its privileged position through subordinating other less dominant forms of masculinity (i.e. dominance over men of lower socioeconomic classes or gay men). Emphasized femininity, meanwhile, refers to a compliance with the subordination of women to hegemonic masculinity.

At this point, you may be thinking “those are just Disney movies, what do they have to do with how people actually live their lives?” However, *because* they are fictional and do not have to be verified by reality, and they are so pervasive in our culture—and shown to us at such a young age—they may shape our gendered and sexualized selves in ways that we do not even realize. How many times have you heard people say that they want a “fairy tale wedding,” or heard the media refer to a celebrity wedding as a “fairy tale wedding?” This is one example of how media reproduces dominant ideologies—the ideas, attitudes, and values of the dominant culture—about gender and sexuality.

Media also reproduces racialized and gendered normative standards in the form of **beauty ideals** for both women and men (transgendered or genderqueer individuals are rarely or never represented in mainstream media). As Jean Kilbourne’s video series *Killing Us Softly*

illustrates, representations of women in advertising, film, and magazines often rely on the **objectification** of women—literally cutting apart their bodies and re-crafting their bodies through digital manipulation in order to create feminized bodies with characteristics that are largely unattainable by the majority of the population. Kilbourne shows how advertising often values the body types and features of Euro-American women—having petite figures and European facial features—while often exoticizing women of color by putting them in “nature” scenes and animal-print clothing that are intended to recall a pre-civilizational past. The effect of this is to cast women of color as animalistic, savage creatures—a practice that has historically been used in political cartoons and depictions of people of color to legitimate their subjugation as less than human. This is just one example of how media reflects and constructs—simultaneously—differences in power between social groups in society through representations of those groups.

Another way in which media reflects and simultaneously produces power differences between social groups is through **symbolic annihilation**. Symbolic annihilation refers to how social groups that lack power in society are rendered absent, condemned, or trivialized through mass media representations that simultaneously reinforce dominant ideologies and the privilege of dominant groups. For example, as we argued earlier, gay and lesbian characters in mass media are often few and when they are present they are often stereotyped. However, try to count the amount of transgendered people you see in mass media. What number do you come up with? Chances are it is less than five. This is a prime example of symbolic annihilation.

While Jean Kilbourne’s insights illustrate how beauty ideals produce damaging effects on women and girls, her model of how consumers relate to media constructs media consumers as passively accepting everything they see in advertising and electronic and print media. As

Michael Kimmel (2003) argues, “The question is never whether or not the media do such and such, but rather *how* the media and its consumers interact to create the varying meanings that derive from our interactions with those media” (Kimmel 2003: 238). No advertisement, movie, or any form of media has an inherent, intended meaning that passes directly from the producer of that media to the consumer of it, but consumers interact with, critique, and sometimes reject the intended messages of media. In this way, the meanings of media develop through the interaction between the media product and the consumers who are interacting with it. Furthermore, media consumers can blur the distinction between producer and consumer through creating their own media in the form of videos, music, pamphlets, ‘zines, and other forms of **cultural production**. Therefore, while media certainly often reproduce dominant ideologies and normative standards, media consumers from different standpoints can and do modify and reject the intended meanings of media.

D. Medicine, Health, and Reproductive Justice

We often think of medicine and medical knowledge as objective, neutral, and vitally important to the well being of ourselves and society. There is no doubt that medicine has produced life-saving technologies, treatments, and vaccines. However, medicine is not a neutral field that exists independent of the cultures and societies within which it is created. Medicine relies on the **medical model**, which contains a number of assumptions. First, it assumes that the body is governed by laws and processes independent of culture, social life and institutions. Second, it assumes that physicians are those qualified to evaluate and define the body’s health or pathology and treat it as they see necessary. In sum, the medical model is a medical-biological understanding of the body in which the systems, pathologies, or indicators of health of the body

are independent of culture, ideology, economy, and the state. Feminist and critical theorists have critiqued this understanding of the body, showing both how doctors and medicine medicalize women's bodies as well as social problems and issues. Furthermore, feminists have argued that we need to pay attention to how race, gender, and class inequalities shape the health outcomes of differently situated groups in society.

Medical sociologist Peter Conrad (2007) defines **medicalization** as the process whereby human problems “become defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of illness and disorders” which are then managed and treated by health professionals. By way of example, we can talk about the recent development and marketing of the first product to treat “female sexual dysfunction”—called EROS—by Urometrics, a pharmaceutical company. The Food and Drug Administration defines “female sexual dysfunction” as “decreased sexual desire, decreased sexual arousal, pain during intercourse, or inability to climax” (Shah 2003). This definition emerged in a specific social context in which Pfizer's \$1.3 billion profit windfall from Viagra in 2000 spurred pharmaceutical companies scrambled to develop a female equivalent.

In this example, heterosexual women's sexuality becomes medicalized to serve various interests other than their own health and pleasure. Feminists have been critiquing the ways in which women's sexual needs and desires are often subordinated to male sexual needs and desires for decades—diagnosing the problem as stemming from exhaustion from work and the **second shift**, as well as inattentive male partners. Urometrics and the doctors who developed EROS, in contrast, diagnose the problem as stemming from female bodily dysfunction. Instead of addressing the deeper social and cultural reasons for why heterosexual women may not be fulfilled sexually, EROS offers a commodified, FDA-approved treatment for a medically-defined “bodily dysfunction.”

Medicalization is an aspect of **bio-power**. Bio-power, according to philosopher Michel Foucault (1979) refers to the practices of modern states to regulate their subjects through technologies of power. At the same time, Foucault argued that in complex modern societies totalitarian uses of state power will not be tolerated by populations. Therefore, modern states must find less overt ways to control their populations, such as collecting data on the health, reproductive capacities, and sexual behaviors of their populations for the purpose of state regulation and intervention. For example, historian Laura Briggs shows how in the United States colonial occupation of Puerto Rico in the early 20th century, public health officials treated the problem of venereal disease in Puerto Rico as a problem of overpopulation and sexual immorality, and sought to institute eugenics policies (discussed below) to limit Puerto Rican women's ability to reproduce. Importantly, Foucault argued that medical knowledge, combined with modern states' collection of data on their populations, created new norms of health which populations internalize. Thus, the intended effect of bio-power is that people regulate themselves according to norms proliferated by medical knowledge and the state.

As we have argued before, it is important to point out that all women's health and sexuality has not been medicalized in the same ways, or with the same effects. Class and race differences and inequalities have made poor or working-class white women and women of color, along with people with disabilities, the targets of campaigns to regulate their sexuality and reproductive abilities. Such was the case with the example of the United States' use of biopower in Puerto Rico above. In that example, working-class and poor Puerto Rican women's sexuality and reproduction became medicalized in ways that wealthy Puerto Ricans' and white women's sexuality and reproduction were not.

The eugenics movement began in the late 19th century, but has had far-reaching impacts around the world. **Eugenics** was a medical/scientific ideology and social movement that understood the root of social and psychological problems (poverty, mental illness, etc.) to be the genetic make-up or heredity of specific groups within the population, and as a result, sought to eliminate those groups through **sterilization** or genocide. Eugenics takes biological determinism and bio-power to their furthest logical conclusions. Eugenicists believed that selective breeding of those groups that were “inherently superior”—middle-class, white, Northern and Western Europeans who were able-bodied—was a rational-scientific answer to solve social problems. The most obvious and well-known example of eugenics in practice is the Holocaust in Nazi Germany, but the eugenics movement also influenced immigration policies and compulsory sterilization laws in the United States into the first half of the 20th Century.⁷

More recently, social relations within conditions of inequality increasingly expose certain groups to environmental and health hazards at rates higher than privileged groups. For example, according to the National Association of City and County Health Officials, in the United States, the wealthier a person is, the lower their risk of health disease, cancer, infant death, and diabetes (NACCHO 2008). However, two physicians who study premature birth—Richard David and James Collins—found that African Americans who were middle-class or upper-class did *not* experience the same lower risks for premature birth as their white peers. They attempted to find out if there was a “premature birth gene” specific to African Americans, through comparing newborns among African American women, white women, and African women. They found that African women and white American women had similar pregnancy outcomes, with *African*

⁷ For more information, see Allen’s (1996) “The social and economic origins of genetic determinism: a case history of the American Eugenics Movement, 1900–1940 and its lessons for today”

American women still being 3 times more likely to have premature births than both these groups—suggesting that there is no genetic basis for difference between pregnancy outcomes for white and black women. Therefore, Physicians David and Collins explain the pregnancy gap by arguing that African Americans, regardless of social class, experience significant amounts of stress due to their daily experiences with racism in the United States. For African Americans—particularly African American women—who are middle-class or upper-class, the necessity of being on the ball constantly and performing at the highest caliber at all times, in order to refute racist stereotypes, results in a continuous, accumulating amount of stress which translates into higher risk for negative health outcomes.⁸ Such findings suggest that intersecting race, class, and gender inequalities have real impacts on the health outcomes of differently situated groups in society.

Recognition of the effects of social inequalities on women's health motivates the activism of the **reproductive justice** movement. A reproductive justice framework for understanding the politics of health and reproduction highlights race, class, and gender inequalities and how these inequalities constrain the abilities of women to control their lives. It centers the necessary social and cultural conditions for poor women and women of color to be able to make choices, including equal wages for equal work, employment, affordable housing, healthcare, and lives free from violence. It is important to understand that the reproductive justice movement was born out of the tensions between white, middle-class feminist activists and women of color activists in feminist movements. White, middle-class feminist activists framed their argument for abortion under a 'rights' framework that relied on a language of "choice,"—an individualizing way of talking about reproductive politics that overlooked the ways that poverty, race, laws and medical authorities imposed control over many women's reproductive lives.

⁸ See the film *Unnatural Causes*, California Newsreel, 2008.

Following the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, the burgeoning conservative movement of the mid to late 1970s succeeded in getting the **Hyde Amendment** passed. The Hyde Amendment prohibits federal funds—specifically Medicaid—from being used to fund abortions. This Amendment disproportionately affects poor women, who are disproportionately women of color. One would think that the National Organization of Women (NOW) would have rallied to block or reverse the Hyde Amendment, but they did not. This led women of color activists to critique the **reproductive rights** framework, arguing that this framework reflects the interests and experiences of white, middle-class feminists and ignores the broader racial and class inequalities that limit the abilities of women to actually make choices about reproduction and family.

The reproductive justice movement challenges the individualizing and depoliticizing tendencies of the medicalization of women’s bodies by arguing that social inequalities limit choice and expose differently situated female-bodied people to illness and disease depending on their social location within multiple axes of identity. As such, it shows how health and illness are deeply social and not solely determined by biology or genetics.

E. The State, Law, and The Prison System

In high school civics and social science classes, students are often taught that the United States is a democratic nation-state because the government is composed of three separate branches—the Executive, the Judicial, and Legislative branches—that work to check and balance each other. Students are told that anyone can run for office and that people’s votes determine the direction of the nation. However, as economist Joseph Stiglitz (2011) points out, the fact that the majority of US senators, representatives in the House of Representatives, and Executive-branch

policy makers originate from the wealthiest 1% of the society should give one pause to think this conventional wisdom.

We take a more critical view of the state than that of high school civics textbooks. We understand **the State** to be an array of legislation, policies, governmental bodies, and military- and prison-industrial complexes. We also hold that the line between civil society and the state is more fluid than solid—citizens and groups of citizens often take extra-judicial actions that bolster the power of the state, even if they are not officially agents of the state.⁹ This definition offers a more expansive understanding of the ways in which government, civil society, and the global economy function together in ways that often reflect the interests of domestic and global elites and international corporations. In the following, we highlight ways that the state—in its various dimensions—plays a central role in maintaining and reproducing inequalities.

The state plays a significant role in reinforcing gender stratification and racism through legislation and policies that influence numerous institutions, including education, social welfare programming, health and medicine, and the family. A primary example of this is the prison system and the “War on Drugs” begun in the 1980s by the Reagan Administration. According to Bureau of Justice Statistics, there are currently over 2.3 million people incarcerated in the United States. Furthermore, over 7 million are either on probation, on parole, or in jail or prison. This means that roughly 3.1% of the adult population of the United States is somehow under surveillance by the US criminal justice system. Indeed, the United States has the highest number of people incarcerated than any other country on the face of the globe. These rates of incarceration are largely the result of the “War on Drugs,” which criminalized drug use and distribution.

⁹ This is powerfully illustrated by Neighborhood Watch Groups and the killing of Trayvon Martin. Additionally, lynchings of Black Americans serve as potent examples of citizens exercising racialized violence to bolster racial segregation.

A significant aspect of the “War on Drugs” was the establishment of mandatory minimum sentencing laws that send non-violent drug offenders to prison, rather than enrolling them in treatment programs. The “War on Drugs” has disproportionately targeted people of color. Seventy percent of inmates in the United States are non-white—a figure that dwarves the percentage of non-whites in US society, which is approximately 30%, according to the 2010 US census. That means that non-white prisoners are far over-represented in the US criminal justice system. While the incarceration of women, in general, for drug-related offenses has skyrocketed 888% between 1986 and 1999,¹⁰ women of color have been arrested at rates far higher than white women, even though they use drugs at a rate equal to or lower than white women (ACLU 2004). Furthermore, according to Bureau of Justice statistics from 2007, nearly two-thirds of US women prisoners have children under 18 years of age.¹¹ Before incarceration, disproportionately, these women were the primary caregivers to their children and other family members. Thus, the impact on children, families, and communities is substantial when women are imprisoned. Finally, incarcerated men and women often engage in prison labor for less than minimum wage. Corporations contract prison labor that produces millions of dollars in profit. Therefore, the incarceration of millions of people artificially deflates the unemployment rate (something politicians benefit from) and creates a cheap labor force that generates millions of dollars in profit for private corporations. How do we make sense of this? What does this say about the state of democracy in the United States?

Feminist activist and academic Angela Davis argues that we can conceptualize the prison system and its linkages to corporate production as **“the prison-industrial complex.”** In the

¹⁰ See “Caught in the Net: The Impact of Drug Policies on Women and Families” by the American Civil Liberties Union:. Available at: http://www.aclu.org/files/images/asset_upload_file431_23513.pdf

¹¹ See “Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: Parents in Prison and their Minor children” by the Bureau of Justice: Available at: <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/pptmc.pdf>

book *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Davis (2003) argues that more and more prisons were built in the 1980s in order to concentrate and manage those marked as “human surplus” by the capitalist system. She sees a historical connection between the system of slavery, and the enslavement of African Americans until the 19th century, and the creation of a prison-industrial complex that not only attempts to criminalize and manage Black, Latino, Native American, and poor bodies, but also attempts to extract profit from them (through prison labor that creates profit for corporations). Thus, the prison-industrial complex is a largely unseen (quite literally: most prisons are located in isolated areas) way through which people of color are marginalized in US society. Similarly, in *The New Jim Crow*, Michelle Alexander (2010) argues that mass incarceration has created and maintains a “racial caste system.” She emphasizes how mass incarceration debilitates individuals and communities through stigma, job discrimination, and the loss of ability to vote in many states. Similarly, sociologist Loic Waquant (2010) argues that mass incarceration within the criminal justice system functions as an increasingly powerful system of racial control.

The prison-industrial system and its racialized and gendered effects make one ask: how far has the US really come in terms of racial and gender equality? Here, we point to the difference between *de jure* and *de facto* realities. De jure refer to existing laws and de facto refers to on-the-ground realities. While the **Civil Rights Act of 1964** legally requires an end to *de jure* segregation, or segregation enforceable by law, in education, voting, and the workplace, *de facto* racial inequality still exists. We can see clearly, just looking at incarceration statistics, that even though explicit racial discrimination is illegal, state policies such as the War on Drugs still have the effect of disproportionately imprisoning people of color.

F. Intersecting Institutions—Case Study: The Struggle to End Gendered Violence and Violence Against Women

At this point, you should begin to be seeing the ways in which social institutions overlap with and reinforce one another. This section uses the case of the struggle to end violence against women as an example of the ways in which the family, media, medicine, and law and the prison system facilitate gendered violence and violence against women. The phrase “**gendered violence**” highlights not only the manner in which transgendered people, gay men, and women often experience violence, but also how violence takes place more broadly within the context of a society that is characterized by a sex/gender/sexuality system that disparages femininity, non-normative sexualities, and those who do not fit within the gender binary. We use Hussein Balhan’s (1985) definition of **violence**, which emphasizes the structural and systematic nature of violence: “Violence is not an isolated physical act or a discrete random event. It is a relation, process, and condition determining, exploiting, and curtailing the well-being of the survivor...Violence occurs not only between individuals, but also between groups and societies...Any relation, process, or condition imposed by someone that injures the health and well-being of others is by definition violent.” As Kirk and Okazawa-Rey (2004) point out, this definition not only includes sexual assault and domestic violence between individuals, but also includes macro-level processes of inequality and violence, such as “colonization, poverty, racism, lack of access to education, health care, and negative media representations” (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 2004: 258). Importantly, Bulhan (1985) refers to people who have experienced violence as “**survivors**” rather than “**victims.**” The difference between the two words is significant, in that the construction of people who have experienced violence as “victims” maintains and reinforces their subordinate position, while “survivors” emphasizes the agency and self-determination of people who have experienced violence. Thus, we wish to underscore not

only that sexual and intimate partner violence is systematic, but that women *and* men have organized to combat sexual and domestic violence, and that women and survivors of sexual and domestic violence have agency and exercise that agency.

Whereas our culture tends to think of the home and family as a “haven in a heartless world”, the family and home are common contexts for emotional and physical violence. As we pointed out in the section concerning Families, the notion of the normative family—with the concomitant gender roles we connote with the SNAF—as a privatized sphere, is an ideological construction that often hides inequalities that exist within families. **Intimate partner violence** refers to emotional and physical violence by one partner against another and includes “current and former spouses, girlfriends, and boyfriends” (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 2004). Intimate partner violence is quite clearly gendered. The US department of Justice reported that 37% of women who went to emergency rooms as the result of violence inflicted by another were injured by intimate partners. Additionally, researchers of sexual violence have found that one in five high school girls surveyed reported that she had been physically or sexually abused. The majority of these incidents occurred at home and happened more than once (Commonwealth Fund 1997). It is important to point out that these statistics only include those who actually sought medical care (in the case of the first statistic) and/or reported that they were injured by an intimate partner—as a result, this number may grossly under-represent the actual number of women injured by intimate partners. Until the 1970s in the United States, most states did not consider rape between spouses—or **marital rape**—a crime. This was a legacy of coverture laws that existed until the 19th century, wherein women were thought to be the property of their husbands, lacking any legal rights to personhood. Thus, the legal history of marriage has played a part in constructing marital rape as somehow less damaging and violent than stranger rape.

Additionally, the de-valuation of women's labor, and the fact that women are, on average, paid 77% of what men receive for the same work, reinforce women's dependence on partners for survival, even if these partners are abusive.

The history of institutionalized racism within police departments and law may make women within communities of color less likely to report intimate partner violence or sexual violence. Women of color with abusive partners may not report violence because they do not want to expose their partners to the criminal justice system, which—as the earlier section on the state, prison, and law discusses—has disproportionately locked up people of color. Furthermore, past experiences with abusive police officers, police brutality, or police indifference to calls for help may make many women of color reticent to involve the police in cases of violence. Similarly, women who are undocumented immigrants and living within the United States may not report sexual or intimate partner violence for fear of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) sending them or their partner back to their country of origin.

Psychologists, psychiatrists, and other medical professionals have crafted several “syndromes” used to explain the effects of violence against women. While they have brought attention to the problem and the need for treatment programs, these approaches to gendered violence and violence against women tend to individualize and depoliticize (i.e. medicalize) gendered violence and often pathologize the survivor, rather than specify the cultural conditions that compel abusers to abuse others. **Battered women's syndrome (BTS)** is an explanation of violence put forward by psychologist Lenore Walker. According to a BTS explanation of violence, women “learn helplessness” and return to their abuser because he (in this theory, only men are abusers and only women are survivors) lures her back with promises not to harm her again, resulting in reoccurring beatings. Another “syndrome” used to explain violence is **Rape**

Trauma Syndrome (RTS). This “syndrome” attempts to explain the “irrational” behaviors of women who have been raped—behaviors that include “...not reporting a rape for days or even months, not remember parts of the assault, appearing too calm, or expressing anger at their treatment by police, hospital staff, or the legal system” (Kirk and Okazawa 2004: 265). Both of these explanations of sexual violence have successfully been used in court to prosecute perpetrators, but they have the effect of constructing survivors as passive, damaged victims who engage in “irrational” behavior. Activists who combat gendered violence and violence against women have argued that people who experience sexual violence are in fact not passive victims, but active agents who have the ability to organize and participate in anti-violence activism and organizations, as well as to hold their assailant responsible for their actions.

G. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show how institutions are not merely benign, apolitical facets of our lives, but active agents in our socialization, laden with ideology and power. They produce and reproduce inequalities. Furthermore, as illustrated in the last section on gendered violence, institutions often overlap and reinforce one another. This is because institutions are deeply social entities—even though we may think of them as unaffected by society and culture (i.e. medicine and science). They exist in the same cultural-historical periods and are created through the same structures of thought of that period. However, due to the inordinate power of institutions and those at their heads—doctors, scientists, policy makers, experts, etc.—the ideas that most benefit institutions are often the reigning ideas of an era. In this way, institutions have an ideological facet—they are not only shaped by particular cultural-historical period, but also shape society to their interests, as well.

References

- Allen, G. (1997). The social and economic origins of genetic determinism: A case history of the American Eugenics Movement, 1900-1940 and its lessons for today. *Genetica*. 99, 77-89.
- American Civil Liberties Union. 2004. "Caught in the Net: The Impact of Drug Policies on Women and Families". Available online at: http://www.aclu.org/files/images/asset_upload_file431_23513.pdf
- Bourdieu, P. (1984 [1979]) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Richard Nice (tr.). Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Bulhan, H. *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression*. New York: University Press of Boston, 1985.
- California Newsreel. 2008. *Unnatural Causes...Is Inequality Making us Sick?* Vital Pictures, Inc.
- Commonwealth Fund. 1997. *The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the health of adolescent girls: Highlights and Methodology*. New York, NY: The Commonwealth Fund.
- Conrad, P. 2007. *The Medicalization of Society: On the Transformation of Human Conditions into Treatable Disorder*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Davis, A. 2003 *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Open Media.
- Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: The Will to Knowledge*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc.
- Gerstel, N. 2003. "Family" in W. Outhwaite (Ed.) *The Blackwell Dictionary of Modern Social Thought*. Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.
- Jepperson, R. 1991. "Institutions, Institutional Effects, and Institutionalism." Pp. 143–163 in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, edited by W. W. Powell, DiMaggio. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kimmel, M. 2003. "The Gendered Media", in *The Gendered Society*, 2nd Edition, edited by Michael Kimmel. Oxford University Press.
- Kilbourne, Jean. 2010. *Killing Us Softly 4: Advertising's Image of Women*.
- Kirk, G. and M. Okazawa-Rey. 2004. "Glossary of Terms in Common Use" in *Women's Lives:*

- Multicultural Perspectives*, 5th Edition, edited by Gwen Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Kirk, G. and M. Okazawa-Rey. 2004. "Violence Against Women" in *Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives*, 5th Edition, edited by Gwen Kirk and Margo Okazawa-Rey. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- LA Times. 2009. "Television viewing at all Time High". Viewed 5/3/2011. Available at: <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/feb/24/business/fi-tvwatching24>
- Media Awareness Foundation. 2011. "Advertising Everywhere". Viewed on 5/3/2011. Available at: http://www.mediaawareness.ca/english/parents/marketing/advertising_everywhere.cfm
- Mink, G. 2004. "Violating Women: Rights Abuses in the Welfare Police State", Pp 350-358 in *Women's Lives, Multicultural Perspectives*, Edited by Kirk, G. and M. Okazawa-Rey. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Sabol, W. & H.C. West. 2010. *Prisoners in 2009*. NCJ 231675. Washington, D.C.: US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Sewell, W. 1992. "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation". *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 1-29.
- Shah, S. 2003. "The Orgasm Industry: Drug Companies Search for a Female Viagra", Pp 328-331 in *Sexual Lives: A Reader on the Theories and Realities of Human Sexualities*, Edited by Robert Heasley and Betsy Crane. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Smith, D. 1993. "The Standard North American Family: SNAF as an ideological code". *Journal of Family Issues* 14(1): 50-65.
- Stiglitz, J. 2011. "Of the 1%, By the 1%, for the 1%" in *Vanity Fair*, May 2011.
- Weston, K. 1991. *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- US Bureau of Justice. 2010. "Total Correctional Population". Viewed 4/26/2011. Available at: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=11>

Chapter IV: Gender and Work in the Global Economy

A. Introduction

Work is an arena in which gendered processes intersect with multiple social inequalities to influence what jobs people have, how they experience those jobs, and whether those jobs provide them with secure, fulfilling and upwardly mobile careers, or relegate them to insecure, dead-end, dangerous, or even degrading labor. In the US, hard work is supposed to lead to a whole host of social and material rewards (i.e.; respect, power, a house, a car, a yacht). The context surrounding hard work, for instance whether that work is paid or unpaid, compensated at a minimum wage or six-figure-salary, is gendered in deep and complex ways. As we mentioned previously, childcare is hard work that is often underpaid or not paid at all and is most often done by women. Furthermore, even if women do not perform most of this work themselves, certain career trajectories are forced on them, and they are placed in lower paying and less prestigious “**mommy tracks**” whether or not they choose this themselves. We can also see institutionalized labor inequalities at the global scale by looking at who cares for North American children when middle-class mothers take on full-time jobs and hire nannies, typically immigrant women from Eastern Europe and the Global South, to care for their children.

B. Gender and Work in the US (adapted from guest lecture by Dale Melcher, 10/26/09)

Now, more than ever, women in the US are participating in the labor force in full-time, year-round positions. This was not always the case. Changes in the economy (namely, the decline of men’s wages), an increase in single-mother homes, and education and job opportunities and cultural shifts created by feminist movement politics from the 1960s and 1970s have fueled the increase in women’s labor force participation. Dual-earner homes are much

more common than the breadwinner-homemaker model popularized in the 1950s, epitomized by the television characters June and Ward Cleaver, in which women stayed home and did unpaid labor (such as: laundry, cooking, childcare, cleaning) while men participated in the paid labor force in jobs that would earn them enough money to support a spouse and children. It turns out this popular American fantasy, often spoken of in political “family values” rhetoric, was only ever a reality for some white, middle-class people, and, for most contemporary households, is now completely out of reach.

Though men and women are participating in the labor force and higher education and paid work in near-equal numbers, a wage gap between men and women workers remains. On average, women workers make 77% of what men make. This gap persists even when controlling for educational differences, full-time work versus part-time work, and year-round versus seasonal occupational statuses. Thus, women with similar educational backgrounds who work the same number of hours per year as their male counterparts are making 23% less than similarly-situated men. So, how can this gap be explained? Researchers put forth four possible explanations of the gender wage gap: 1) discrimination; 2) occupational segregation; 3) devalued work; and 4) inherent work-family conflicts.

Most people believe **discrimination** in hiring is a thing of the past. Since the 1964 Civil Rights Act passed it has been illegal to discriminate in hiring based on race or gender. However, although companies can no longer say “men only” in their hiring advertisements, but they can post their ads in places that are more likely to attract men such as newspapers and magazines geared toward men and men’s interests. The same companies can also have non-accommodating family-leave provisions that may discourage women, disproportionately more likely to be primary caregivers, from applying. In addition, discrimination cases are very difficult to

prosecute legally since rather than a government agency monitoring general trends and practices generally, individuals must complain about and prove specific instances of discrimination in specific job settings. Especially in hiring, discrimination is extremely difficult to prove in a courtroom, and can thus persist largely unchecked. In addition, even when they are hired, women working in male-dominated fields often run into a **glass ceiling**, in that they face difficulties in being promoted to higher-level positions in the organization. One recent example of the glass ceiling and gender discrimination is the class action lawsuit between Wal-Mart and its female managerial staff. Although Wal-Mart has hired some women to managerial positions across the country, they also have informal policies, at the national level, of promoting men faster and paying them at a different wage scale. While the suit was initiated by only six women at Wal-Mart, the number of women that would be affected in this case numbered over 1.5 million. Wal-Mart fought this legal battle over the course of ten years (2001-2011). The case was finally decided in June 2011 when the US Supreme Court sided with the defendant, Wal-Mart, citing the difficulty of considering all women workers in Wal-Mart's retail empire as a coherent "class." They agreed that discrimination against individuals was present, but the fact that it could not be proven that women, as a class, were discriminated against by the Wal-Mart corporation kept them from being found guilty (*Wal-Mart Stores Inc v. Dukes, et al.*). Although Wal-Mart did nothing about its male managers who were clearly and consistently hiring and promoting men over women, this neglect was not enough to convict Wal-Mart of class-action discrimination. In this example, it becomes apparent that while gender discrimination has been made illegal it can still happen in patterned and widespread ways. Additionally, there are a series of factors that make it hard to prosecute gender discrimination.

Occupational segregation is a phrase to describe a split labor market in which one group is far more likely to do certain types of work than other groups. Occupational sex segregation describes situation in which women are more likely to do certain jobs and men others. The jobs women are more likely to work in have been dubbed “**pink-collar**” jobs. While “white collar” describes well-paying managerial work and “blue collar” describes manual labor predominantly done by men with a full range of income levels depending on skill, “pink collar” describes mostly low-wage, female-dominated positions that involve services and, often, emotional labor. The term **emotional labor**, developed by sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983), is used to describe service work in which, as part of their job, employees must control and manage their emotions. For instance, a waitress risks being fired by confronting rude and harassing customers with anger; she must both control her own emotions and help to quell the emotions of angry customers in order to keep her job. Any service-based work that involves interacting with customers (from psychiatrists to food service cashiers) also involves emotional labor. The top three “pink-collar” occupations dominated by women workers—secretaries, teachers, and nurses—all involve exceptional amounts of emotional labor.

Work thought to be “women’s work” is not only underpaid, it is also socially **undervalued**. Care work is an area of the service economy that is feminized, involves intense emotional labor, and is consistently undervalued. Caretakers of children and the elderly are predominantly women. Economist Nancy Folbre (2001) has argued that care work is undervalued both because women are more likely to do it and because it is considered to be natural for women to know how to care. Women have traditionally done care work in the home, raising children and caring for sick and dying relatives, usually for free. Perhaps this is because women bear children and are stereotyped as naturally more emotionally sensitive than men.

Some feel it is wrong to ever pay for these services and that they should be done altruistically even by non-family members. Thus, if stereotypes of women are to be believed, they are all born with natural caring instincts, and, if these instincts come naturally, there is no reason to pay well for this ability. Contrary to these stereotypes, care work requires learned skills like any other type of work. What is interesting is that when men participate in this work, and other pink-collar jobs, they actually tend to be paid better and to advance to higher-level positions faster than comparable women. This phenomenon, in contrast to the glass ceiling, is known as the **glass escalator** (Williams, 1992). However, Adia Harvey Wingfield (2009) has applied an intersectional analysis to the glass escalator concept and found that men of color do not benefit from this system to the extent that white men do.

Finally, the fourth explanation for the gender wage gap has to do with the conflict between work and family that women are more likely to have to negotiate than men. For instance, women are much more likely to interrupt their career trajectories to take time off to care for children. This is not an inherent consequence of childbearing. For instance, many similarly developed countries offer women workers paid leave time and the ability to return to their jobs with the same salaries and benefits as when they left them. In contrast, the strongest legal policy protecting people's jobs in the case of an extended leave to care for the sick, elderly, or take personal time for pregnancy and childcare in the United States is the **Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)** of 1993. Under this act, most employers are obligated to allow their workers to take up to twelve weeks of *unpaid* leave. Unfortunately, few people can afford to be away from their jobs for so long without a paycheck and this policy remains underutilized. Additionally, only about half of the US work force is eligible for leave under FMLA, because the Act only applies to workers who are employed by companies that have more than 50 employees.

On top of that, many employers are unaware of this act or do not inform their workers about their ability to take this time off. Thus, women are more likely to quit full-time jobs and take on part-time jobs while their children are young. Quitting and rejoining the labor force typically means starting at the bottom in terms of pay and status at a new company, and this negatively impacts women's overall earnings even when they return to full-time work.

C. Gender and the US Welfare State

In a previous chapter we discussed welfare in the US context. Welfare does not only come in its most-recognized form, monthly income assistance, but also includes subsidized health insurance (Medicare and Medicaid) and childcare, social security, and food subsidies like food stamps. The distribution of welfare in the US is also a gendered process in which women, especially mothers, are much more likely to receive assistance than men. Since, at the national level, women earn less money than men do and often take time away from the labor force, it is more difficult to maintain a single-parent household on one woman's income than on one man's income. This is even more difficult for women who are working class or poor whose work may not even pay enough to keep themselves well-fed and cared for without additional support from family, friends, or the state.

The **Personal Responsibility/Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)** of 1996 effectively dismantled US welfare policy. As we mentioned previously, the act limits lifetime receipt of welfare to a maximum of 60 months. In addition, the act includes some gender-specific clauses to address the political issue of mothers on welfare. Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich famously suggested that children of welfare mothers should be put into orphanages rather than be raised by the women who birthed them. An incarnation of this

sentiment made its way into PRWORA through an optional state-level clause that would bar mothers who were already on welfare rolls from getting additional money to support any new children (Hays, 2001). This clause, also known as the **family cap provision**, effectively punishes children for being born and plays into the demeaning stereotype that women on welfare have children in order to get more money from the state. Feminist political scientist Gwendolyn Mink argues that welfare reform targets poor single mothers and families of color and contributes to the devaluing of unpaid caregiving work. According to Mink (2009), through welfare reform, poor single mothers became

...a separate caste, subject to a separate system of law. Poor single mothers are the only people in America forced by law to work outside the home. They are the only people in America whose decision to bear children are punished by the government...And they are the only mothers in America compelled by law to make room for biological fathers in their families (Mink 2009: 540).

In this example, we see how state policies devalue the traditionally gendered carework that women disproportionately perform, target poor women of color as subjects to be regulated, and reinforce heteronormative breadwinner-homemaker gender roles.

Another way welfare reform targeted mothers was through the **Healthy Marriages Initiative**, which provides government funding for marriage promotion with the assumption that the promotion of marriage is an effective poverty-reduction policy. It is true: two incomes are often better than one. However, not everyone is heterosexual, or legally able to marry the person they want to—or wants to be married to the father of her child, or even married at all. More than that, marriage is no guarantee of financial security for anyone, especially men and women living in impoverished communities where their marriage pool is composed of other people in poverty. Most people marry within their current economic class (Gerstel and Sarkisian 2006). Gingrich and others especially hoped that women would marry the fathers of their children without

recognizing that many women are victims of intimate partner violence. Finally, we are also living in a period in which most marriages end in divorce. It is clear that this initiative was more about promoting a political ideology than actually attempting to remedy the social problem of poverty.

When people talk about “welfare mothers,” the image they call upon is gendered, classed, racialized, and sexualized. That this phrase speaks to gender and class issues is assumed, but the issues of race and sexuality are equally present. The idea that women on welfare breed children uncontrollably, never marry, and do not know who fathered their children are contemporary incarnations of the Jezebel controlling image of Black women as sexually promiscuous that originated during American slavery (Collins, 2005). This image obscures the historical fact that Black women were systematically raped by white men under slavery and after emancipation. Although most people receiving welfare supports are white, and, in particular, most single mothers receiving welfare are also white, welfare receipt is racialized such that the only images of welfare we seem to see are single mothers of color. As we mentioned before, “the poor” are often framed as amoral, unfamiliar, and un-American. If people had to recognize that welfare recipients are their neighbors, family members, and even themselves, these stereotypes would lose support. For instance, the mother of one of the authors of this text receives social security for disability checks, yet is staunchly anti-welfare. This contradiction is sustained by the idea that “people like us” (the white middle class) do not receive welfare even when they do receive various forms of government support.

Women disproportionately number among those in poverty around the world. The term **feminization of poverty** describes the trend in the US and across the globe in which more and more women live in impoverished conditions, despite the fact that many are working. Women’s

unequal access to resources and disproportionate responsibility for unpaid work set up a situation in which women can either be supported by a breadwinner or struggle to make ends meet. The global economic crisis and long-standing unequal economic relationships between the Global North and the Global South have made sustainable breadwinning wages, even among men, hard to attain.

D. Transnational Production and Globalization

You have most likely heard the term globalization before—it is an oft-cited term that can serve as a useful shorthand. However, such a shorthand runs the risk of lumping together a broad range of complex economic, political, and cultural phenomenon. **Globalization** describes both the benefits and costs of living in a globally connected world. The internet was once heralded as the great equalizer in global communications. Certainly, we are now accustomed to getting news from across the globe from a variety of perspectives. Activists in other countries, like Egypt and Iran, have famously used social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter to report what is happening from the ground, in the absence of formal news sources. Egyptian activists also utilized these social networking websites to coordinate demonstrations and marches, leading to the Egyptian government to shut down the internet for several days during the “Arab Spring” uprisings in early 2011. Globalization is the process that makes it possible for social change activists in different countries to communicate with each other, and for people, information, and products to cross border, with benefits for some and costs for others. It allows for Massachusetts residents to have fresh fruit in winter, but lowers the wages of agricultural workers who gather the fruit in tropical countries, and supports repressive government policies in those countries, and increases the carbon footprint of producing and

distributing food. As such, globalization is not uniformly good or bad, but has costs and benefits that are experienced differently depending on one's social location.

Nations of the world are linked in trade relationships. The US depends on resources and capabilities of other nations to the extent that our economy relies on imports (oil, cars, food, manufactured goods). So, how is it that the US economy is still largely profitable? Factories in the US producing manufactured goods did not simply close down in the face of competition; **multinational corporations**—corporations that exist across several political borders—made concerted efforts to increase their profits (Kirk & Okizawa-Rey, 2007). One way to massively increase profits is to pay workers less in wages and benefits. In the US, labor laws and union contracts protect workers from working extensive hours at a single job, guarantee safe working environments, and set a minimum wage. Thus, American workers are expensive to corporations. This is why companies based in the US **outsource** production to the nations of the Global South where workers' rights are less protected and workers make less money for their labor. One consequence of outsourcing is the development of **sweatshops** (known as *maquiladoras* when based in Mexico in particular) in which workers work long hours for little pay and are restricted from eating or using the restroom while at work (Kirk & Okizawa-Rey, 2007). These workers seldom purchase the goods they assist in producing, often because they could not afford them, and because these **global factories** ship goods to be sold in wealthier countries of the Global North. These factories predominantly employ young, unmarried women workers in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean because they are considered the most docile and obedient groups of workers; that is, corporations consider them less likely to make demands of employers or to unionize (Kirk & Okizawa-Rey, 2007).

Rather than a nation's workers producing goods, selling those goods back to its people, and keeping profits within the nation's borders, multinational corporations participate in **global commodity chains**. As Cynthia Enloe's (2008) article "The Globetrotting Sneaker" makes clear, globalization makes it possible for a shoe corporation based in Country A to extract resources from Country B, produce goods in Country C, sell those goods in Countries D, E, and F, and deposit waste in the landfills of Country G. Meanwhile, the profits from this production and sales of goods return largely to the corporation, while little goes into the economies of the participating nations (Enloe 2008). Companies like Nike, Adidas, and Reebok were initially attracted by military regimes in South Korea in the 1980s that quashed labor unions. Once the workers in South Korea organized successfully, factories moved to Indonesia (Enloe 2008). This process of moving to remaining areas of cheap labor before workers organize is known as the **race to the bottom** logic of global factory production.

With the increasing globalization of the economy international institutions have been created. The purpose of these international institutions is, ostensibly, to monitor abuses and assist in the development of less developed nations through loans from more developed nations. The **World Bank** provides monetary support for large, capital-intensive projects such as the construction of roads and dams. The **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** provides loans and facilitates international trade relationships particularly through **structural adjustment programs (SAP)**. Essentially, in a SAP, a country of **the Global North**—the wealthier countries of North America and Europe, mainly—lends money to another country in the **Global South**—poorer countries in South America, Africa, and Southeast Asia, mainly—in exchange for resources. For instance, the US may lend money to Chile to assist with the growth and harvesting of grapes and production of wine. In exchange, the US would acquire grapes and

wine from Chile at a discounted rate, and have control in how Chile spends the money, while Chile repays the initial loan. The problem with this is that, in many cases, the lending process is circular such that the country accepting the loan remains constantly indebted to the initial lending nation. For example, a nation may produce most of its crop to export elsewhere and be unable to feed its own people and therefore require additional loans. Consequences of SAPs are devalued currency, privatized industries, cut social programs and government subsidies, and increasing taxes to fund the development of infrastructure.

The **World Trade Organization (WTO)** is an international unelected body whose mission is to challenge restraints on free trade. **Free trade** describes a situation in which corporate bodies are permitted to deal only with each other without having to answer to government restrictions or regulations. For instance, some countries have limits on how much pollution is permitted in production; any limits on production are considered by the WTO to inhibit free trade. They operate on the theory that unfettered, free market capitalism is the best way to generate profits. True, it may be more profitable to pay people minimally and circumvent environmental regulations, but the human costs to health, safety, and happiness—costs that cannot be put into dollars and cents—do not factor in for the proponents of free trade. One such free trade agreement is the **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)** of 1994. NAFTA is an agreement between Canada, the US, and Mexico to promote the free movement of jobs and products. The biggest result of this legislation is the mass relocation of factories from the US to Mexico in the form of *maquiladoras* that supply goods at low prices back to US consumers, resulting in a loss of around 500,000 union jobs in North America (Zinn 2003). The **Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA)** of 2002 expands NAFTA to include the entire Western hemisphere (except Cuba due to trade sanctions against its communist government). In

the face of these moves to promote free trade, **fair trade** movements that supports safe working conditions and sustainable wages have also cropped up, especially in the coffee and chocolate industries.

The current global economic system is guided by an ideology of neoliberalism. **Neoliberalism** is a market-driven approach to economic and social policy. That is, the profit motive of capitalism is applied to social policies like welfare and taxation for social programs by cutting them to further profits. A crucial thrust of neoliberalism is the downsizing of the public sphere and social welfare programs that unions and racial justice activists have fought for since the early 20th Century. Feminist historian Lisa Duggan (2003) argues that neoliberalism is more than just the privatization of the economy, but is an ideology that holds that once marginalized groups (GLBTQ people, people of color, the working-class) have access to mainstream institutions (like marriage and service in the military) and consumption in the free market they have reached equality with their privileged peers (straight people, white people, the middle- and upper-classes). Neoliberal ideology therefore assumes that our society has reached a post-civil rights period where social movements that seek to fundamentally alter mainstream institutions and build up social welfare programs are obsolete. However, as this textbook has shown, mainstream institutions and structures of power often reproduce inequalities. Related to neoliberal ideology is **Economic liberalism**, which can be understood to be the belief that markets work best without any governmental regulation or interference; it's summed up in the free trade standard we discussed above and should not be confused with political liberalism.

E. Racialized, Gendered, and Sexualized Labor in the Global Economy

The structure of the global economy affects people differently not only by the economic situations of the nations in which they live, but also by gender and race. Predatory trade relationships between countries roughly reproduce the political situation of colonization in many nations of the Global South. This has led many to characterize neoliberal economic policies as a form of **neo-colonialism**, or modern day colonization characterized by exploitation of a nation's resources and people. Colonialism and neocolonialism are concepts that draw attention to the racialized global inequalities between white, affluent people of the Global North—historical colonizers—and people of color of the Global South—the historically colonized.

Women of color of the Global South are disproportionately impacted by global economic policies. Not only are women in Asian and Latin American countries much more likely to work in low-wage factory jobs than men, women are also much more mobile in terms of immigration (Pessar 2005). Women have more labor-based mobility for low-income factory work in other countries as well as in domestic and sex work markets. When women immigrate to other nations they often sacrifice care of and contact with their own children in order to earn money caring for wealthier people's children as domestic workers; this situation is known as **transnational motherhood**. Domestic work and sex work are two sectors of the service economy in which women immigrants participate. Immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, have few options in terms of earning money, and economic circumstances are such that undocumented immigrants can make more money within illegal and unregulated markets in nations of the Global North, rather than above-ground, regulated markets of the formal economy. Thus, it is not uncommon for women immigrants to participate in underground economies such as domestic work or sex work that employers do not report in their taxes.

Women immigrants also participate in other parts of the service economy of the Global North. Miliann Kang (2010) has studied immigrant women who participate in beauty service work, particularly nail salons. This type of work does not require high amounts of skill or experience and can support women for whom English is a second language or those who may be undocumented. Like any service job, work in nail salons involves emotional labor. While clients may think the technician in the beauty salon is their confidant (think: Queen Latifa's character in *Beauty Shop*), their relationship is primarily an unequal labor relationship in which one party is paid not only for the service they perform but also for their friendly personalities and listening skills. Kang (2010) refers to this type of labor involving both emotional and physical labor as **body labor**. To engage in both emotional and physical labor at work is exhausting. In addition, workers in nail and hair salons are surrounded by harsh chemical smells that are ultimately toxic to their health and make them more susceptible to cancer than the general population.

F. Conclusion

Gender and work in the global economy is an incredibly broad topic that we have only begun to hint at in the previous pages. Not only are do gendered, racialized, and sexualized differences exist in the US domestic labor market leading to differences in work and pay, these differences also characterize the globalized labor market. Trade relationships between countries and the ideology of neoliberalism that governs them have profound effects on the quality of life of people all over the world. Women bear the brunt of changes to the global market place as factory workers in some countries and domestic, sex, and beauty service workers in others. Fortunately, movements like fair trade and anti-sweatshop movements as well as indigenous

feminist and labor movements are fighting to change these conditions for the better in the face of well-funded and powerful multinational corporations and global trade organizations.

References

- Duggan, Lisa. *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Enloe, Cynthia. 2008. "The Globetrotting Sneaker." In *Women, Culture, and Society: A Reader, Fifth Edition* by B.J. Balliet (Ed.). Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt Pub Co. Pp. 276-280.
- Folbre, Nancy. 2001. *The Invisible Heart: Economics and Family Values*. NY: The New Press.
- Hays, Sharon. 2003. *Flat Broke with Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey Wingfield, Adia. 2009. "Racializing the Glass Escalator: Reconsidering Men's Experiences with Women's Work." *Gender & Society* 23(1): 5-26.
- Hill Collins, Patricia. 2005. *Black Sexual Politics: African-Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 1983. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. 2001. *Domestica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Kang, Miliann. 2010. *The Managed Hand: Race, Gender, and the Body in Beauty Service Work*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Kirk, Gwyn and Margo Okazawa-Rey. 2007. "Living in a Global Economy." In *Women's Lives: Multicultural Perspectives, Fourth Edition*. NY: McGraw-Hill. Pp. 387-398.
- Mink, Gwendolyn. 2004. "Violating Women: Rights Abuses in the Welfare Police State", Pp 350-358 in *Women's Lives, Multicultural Perspectives*, Edited by Kirk, G. and M. Okazawa-Rey. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Wal-Mart Stores Inc. v. Dukes, et al.* 2011. Decision by the Supreme Court of the United States. June 20, 2011. <http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/10pdf/10-277.pdf>
- Williams, Christine L. 1992. "The Glass Escalator: Hidden Advantages for Men in the Female Professions." *Social Problems* 39(3): 253-267.

Zinn, Howard. 2003. *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Chapter V: Historical and Contemporary Feminist Social Movements

A. Introduction

History is also everybody talking at once, multiple rhythms being played simultaneously. The events and people we write about did not occur in isolation but in dialogue with a myriad of other people and events. In fact, at any given moment millions of people are all talking at once. As historians we try to isolate one conversation and to explore it, but the trick is then how to put that conversation in a context which makes evident its dialogue with so many others—how to make this one lyric stand alone and at the same time be in connection with all the other lyrics being sung.

(Elsa Barkley Brown 1997: 297-298)

In the above quotation, feminist historian Elsa Barkley Brown seeks to remind us that we cannot think of social movements or identities as separate from each other, as we so often do in contemporary society. She argues that we must have a relational understanding of social movements, and identities within and between social movements—an understanding of the ways in which privilege and oppression are linked and how the stories of people of color and feminists fighting for justice have also been historically linked through overlapping and sometimes conflicting social movements. In this chapter, we use a relational lens to discuss and make sense of feminist movements, beginning in the 19th century up to the present time. Although we use the terms “first wave,” “second wave,” and “third wave”, it is important to note that these “waves” are not mutually exclusive or totally separate from each other; in fact, they inform each other. They inform each other not only in the way that the work of contemporary feminists has, in many ways, been made possible by earlier feminist activism, but also in the way that contemporary feminist activism (“third wave” activism) informs the way we think of past feminist activism and feminisms.

Additionally, feminist movements have generated, made possible, and nurtured feminist theories and feminist academic knowledge. In this way, feminist movements are fantastic

examples of **praxis**—that is, they demonstrate how critical reflection about the world is used to change that world. It is because of various social movements—feminist activism, workers’ activism, and civil rights activism throughout the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries—that “feminist history” is a viable field of study today. Feminist history is part of a larger historical project that draws on the experiences of traditionally ignored and disempowered groups (i.e. factory workers, immigrants, people of color, lesbians, etc.) to re-think and challenge the histories that have been traditionally written from the experiences and points of view of the powerful (colonizers, representatives of the state, the wealthy and powerful) —the histories we typically learn in high school textbooks.

B. 19th Century Feminist Movements

The first wave of the feminist movement began in the mid 19th century and lasted until the passage of the **19th Amendment** in 1920, which gave women the right to vote. White middle-class first wave feminists in the 19th century to early 20th century, such as suffragist leaders Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, were primarily focused on **women’s suffrage** (the right to vote), striking down coverture laws, and gaining access to education and employment. These goals are famously enshrined in the **Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments**, which is the resulting document of the first women’s rights convention in the United States in 1848.

Demanding women’s enfranchisement, the abolition of coverture, and access to employment and education were quite radical demands at the time. These demands confronted the ideology of the **cult of true womanhood**, summarized in four key tenets – piety, purity, submission and domesticity – and which held that white women were rightfully and naturally

located in the private sphere of the household and not fit for public, political participation or labor in the waged economy. However, this emphasis on confronting the ideology of the cult of true womanhood was shaped by the white middle-class standpoint of the leaders of the movement. As we discussed in Chapter 3, the cult of true womanhood was an ideology of white womanhood that systematically denied black and working-class women access to the category of “women,” because working-class and black women, by necessity, had to labor outside of the home.

The white middle-class leadership of the first wave movement shaped the priorities of the movement, often excluding the concerns and participation of working-class women and women of color. For example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony formed the National Women Suffrage Association (NWSA) in order to break from other suffragists who supported the passage of the 15th Amendment, which would give African American men the right to vote before women. Stanton and Anthony privileged “women’s”—meaning white women’s—rights ahead of creating solidarities across race and class groups. Accordingly, they saw women’s suffrage as the end point of the women’s right movement. For example, in the first issue of Susan B. Anthony’s newspaper, *The Revolution*, Anthony wrote, “We shall show that the ballot will secure for woman equal place and equal wages in the world of work; that it will open to her the schools, colleges, professions, and all the opportunities and advantages of life; that in her hand it will be a moral power to stay the tide of crime and misery on every side” (cited by Davis 1981: 73). Meanwhile, working-class women and women of color *knew* that mere access to voting did not overturn class and race inequalities. As feminist activist and scholar Angela Davis (1981) writes, working-class women “...were seldom moved by the suffragists’ promise that the vote would permit them to become equal to their men—their exploited, suffering men” (Davis

1981: 74-5). Furthermore, the largest suffrage organization, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA)—a descendent of the National Women Suffrage Association—barred the participation of Black women suffragists in its organization.

Although the first wave movement was largely defined and led by middle class white women, there was significant overlap between it and the **abolitionist movement**—which sought to end slavery—and the racial justice movement following the end of the Civil War. Historian Nancy Cott (2000) argues that, in some ways, both movements were largely about having self-ownership and control over one’s body. For slaves, that meant the freedom from lifelong toil that was unpaid, as well as freedom from the sexual assault that many enslaved Black women experienced from their masters; for married white women, it meant the ability to be recognized as people in the face of the law and the ability to refuse their husbands’ sexual advances. White middle-class abolitionists often made analogies between slavery and marriage, as abolitionist Antoinette Brown wrote in 1853 that, “The wife owes service and labor to her husband as much and as absolutely as the slave does to his master” (Brown, qtd. in Cott 2000: 64). This analogy between marriage and slavery had historical resonance at the time, but we would critique it now because it conflates the unique experience of the racialized oppression of slavery that African American women faced with the quite different type of oppression that white women faced under coverture. This illustrates quite well Angela Davis’ (1983) argument that while white women abolitionists and feminists of the time made important contributions to anti-slavery campaigns, they often failed to understand the uniqueness and severity of slave women’s lives and the complex system of chattel slavery.

Black activists, writers, newspaper publishers, and academics moved between the racial justice and feminist movements, arguing for inclusion in the first wave feminist movement and

condemning slavery and **Jim Crow laws** that maintained racial segregation. Sojourner Truth's famous "Ain't I a woman" speech, which has been attributed to the Akron Women's Convention in 1851, captured this contentious linkage between the first wave women's movement and the abolitionist movement well. In her speech, she critiqued the exclusion of black women from the women's movement while simultaneously condemning the injustices of slavery.

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me!...I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Feminist historian Nell Painter (1996) has questioned the validity of this representation of the speech, arguing that white suffragists dramatically changed its content and title. This speaks to the question of what social actors have the power and ability to have the final say in the representation of social movements.

Despite their marginalization, black women emerged as passionate and articulate leaders. Ida B. Wells, a particularly influential activist who participated in the movement for women's suffrage, was a founding member of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a journalist, and the author of numerous pamphlets and articles exposing the violent lynching of thousands of African Americans in the Reconstruction period (the period following the Civil War). Wells argued that lynching in the Reconstruction Period was a systematic attempt to maintain racial inequality, despite the passage of the 14th Amendment in 1868 (which held that African Americans were citizens and could not be discriminated against based on their race). Additionally, thousands of African American women were members of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, which was pro-suffrage, but did not receive

recognition from the predominantly middle-class, white National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).

The passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920 provided a test for the argument that the granting of women's right to vote would give them unfettered access to the institutions they had been denied from, as well as equality with men. Quite plainly, this argument was proven wrong, as had been the case with the passage of the 18th Amendment followed by a period of backlash. The formal legal endorsement of the doctrine of "separate but equal" with *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, the complex of Jim Crow laws in states across the country, and the unchecked violence of the Ku Klux Klan, prevented Black women and men from access to voting, education, employment, and public facilities. While equal rights existed in the abstract realm of the law under the 18th and 19th amendments, the on-the-ground reality of continued racial and gender inequality was quite different.

C. Early to Late 20th Century Feminist Movements

Social movements are not static entities; they change according to movement gains or losses, and these gains or losses are often quite dependent on the political and social contexts they take place within. Following women's suffrage in 1920, feminist activists channeled their energy into institutionalized legal and political channels for effecting changes in labor laws and attacking discrimination against women in the workplace. The federal Women's Bureau—a federal agency created to craft policy according to women workers' needs—was established in 1920, and the YWCA, the American Association of University Women (AAUW), and the National Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW) lobbied government officials to pass legislation that would legally prohibit discrimination against women in the workplace.

These organizations, however, did not necessarily agree on what equality looked like and how that would be achieved. For example, the BPW supported the **Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)**, which they argued would effectively end employment discrimination against women. Meanwhile, the Women's Bureau and the YWCA opposed the ERA, arguing that it would damage the gains that organized labor had made already. The disagreement clearly brought into relief the competing agendas of defining working women first and foremost as women (who are also workers), versus defining working women as first and foremost workers (who are also women). Nearly a century after suffrage, the ERA has yet to be passed, and debate about its desirability even within the feminist movement continues to this day.

While millions of women were already working in the United States at the beginning of World War II, labor shortages during World War II allowed millions of women to move into higher-paying factory jobs that had previously been occupied by men. Simultaneously, nearly 125,000 African American men fought in segregated units in World War II, often being sent on the front guard of the most dangerous missions (Zinn 2003). Following the end of the war, both the women who had worked in high-paying jobs in factories and the African American men who had fought in the war returned to a society that was still deeply segregated, and they were expected to return to their previous subordinate positions. Despite the conservative political climate of the 1950s, civil rights organizers began to challenge both the *de jure* segregation of Jim Crow laws and the *de facto* segregation experienced by African Americans on a daily basis. The landmark ***Brown v. Board of Education*** ruling of 1954, which made "separate but equal" educational facilities illegal, provided an essential legal basis for activism against the institutionalized racism of Jim Crow laws. Eventually, **the civil rights movement** would fundamentally change US society and inspire **the second wave feminist movement** and the

radical political movements of the New Left (gay liberationism, black nationalism, socialist and anarchist activism, the environmentalist movement) in the late 1960s.

Although we typically only learn about the stories and lives of the leaders of the civil rights movement, the civil rights movement was a grassroots mass movement composed of working class African American men and women, white and African American students, and clergy that utilized the tactics of non-violent direct action (sit-ins, marches, vigils) to demand full legal equality for African Americans in US society. For example, Rosa Parks—famous for refusing to give up her seat at the front of a Montgomery bus to a white passenger in December, 1955 and beginning the **Montgomery Bus Boycott**—was not acting as an isolated, frustrated woman when she refused to give up her seat at the front of the bus (as the typical narrative goes). According to feminist historians Ellen Debois and Lynn Dumenil (2005), Parks “had been active in the local NAACP for fifteen years, and her decision to make this stand against segregation was part of a lifelong commitment to racial justice. For some time NAACP leaders had wanted to find a good test case to challenge Montgomery’s bus segregation in courts” (Debois and Dumenil 2005: 576). Furthermore, the bus boycott that ensued after Parks’ arrest and lasted for 381 days, until its success, was only possible because of both working-class African American and white women activists. The working-class Black women who relied on public transportation to go to their jobs as domestic servants in white households refused to use the bus system, and either walked to work or relied on rides to work from a carpool organized by women activists. Furthermore, the Women’s Political Caucus of Montgomery distributed fliers about the boycott and had provided the groundwork and planning to execute the boycott before it began. Additionally, the sit-in movement was sparked by the **Greensboro sit-ins**, when four African American students in Greensboro, North Carolina, sat at and refused to leave a segregated lunch

counter at a Woolworth's store in February of 1960. The number of students participating in the sit-ins increased as the days and weeks went on, and the sit-ins began to receive national media attention. Networks of student activists began sharing the successes of the tactic of the non-violent sit-in, and began doing sit-ins in their own cities and towns around the country throughout the early 1960s.

Importantly, the sit-in movement led to the formation of the **Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**, initiated by Ella Baker shortly after the first sit-in strikes in Greensboro. The student activists of SNCC took part in the **Freedom Rides of 1961**, with African American and white men and women participants, and sought to challenge the Jim Crow laws of the south, which the Interstate Commerce Commission had ruled to be unconstitutional. The freedom riders experienced brutal mob violence in Birmingham and were jailed, but The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and SNCC kept sending riders to fill the jails of Birmingham. SNCC also participated in **Freedom Summer** in 1964, which was a campaign that brought mostly white students from the north down to the south to support the work of Black southern civil rights activists for voting rights for African Americans. Once again, Freedom Summer activists faced mob violence, but succeeded in bringing national attention to southern states' foot-dragging in terms of allowing African Americans the legal rights they had won through activism and grassroots organizing.

SNCC's non-hierarchical structure gave women chances to participate in the civil rights movement in ways previously blocked to them. However, the deeply imbedded sexism of the surrounding culture still seeped into civil rights organizations, including SNCC. Although women played pivotal roles as organizers and activists throughout the civil rights movement, men occupied the majority of formal leadership roles in the Southern Christian Leadership

Council (SCLC), the NAACP, and CORE. Working with SNCC, Black women activists such as Fannie Lou Hamer and Diane Nash became noted activists and leaders within the civil rights movement in the early 1960s. Despite this, women within SNCC were often expected to do ‘women’s work’ (i.e. doing housework and secretarial work). White women SNCC activists Casey Hayden and Mary King critiqued this reproduction of gendered roles within the movement and called for dialogue about sexism within the civil rights movement in a memo that circulated through SNCC in 1965, titled “Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo.” The memo became an influential document for the birth of **the second wave feminist movement**, a movement focused generally on fighting patriarchal structures of power, and specifically on combating occupational sex segregation in employment and fighting for reproductive rights for women. This was not the only source of second wave feminism, and it would be politically problematic and historically inaccurate to argue that feminist movements were spearheaded solely by white women. As historian Becky Thompson (2002) argues, in the mid and late 1960s Latina women, African American women, and Asian American women were developing multiracial feminist organizations that would become important players within the U.S. second wave feminist movement.

In many ways, the second wave feminist movement was influenced and made possible by the activist tools provided by the civil rights movement. Drawing on the stories of women who participated in the civil rights movement, historians Ellen Debois and Lynn Dumenil (2005) argue that women’s participation in the civil rights movement allowed them to challenge gender norms that held that women belonged in the private sphere, and not in politics or activism. Not only did many women who were involved in the civil rights movement become activists in the second wave feminist movement, but they also employed tactics that the civil rights movement

had used, including marches and non-violent direct action. Additionally, the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**—a major legal victory for the civil rights movement—not only prohibited employment discrimination based on race, but **Title VII** of the Act also prohibited sex discrimination. When the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)**—the federal agency created to enforce Title VII—largely ignored women’s complaints of employment discrimination, 15 women and one man organized to form the **National Organization of Women (NOW)**, which was modeled after the NAACP. NOW focused its attention and organizing on passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), fighting sex discrimination in education, and defending *Roe v. Wade*—the Supreme Court decision of 1973 that struck down state laws that prohibited abortion within the first three months of pregnancy.

Although the second wave feminist movement challenged gendered inequalities and brought women’s issues to the forefront of national politics in the late 1960s and 1970s, the movement also reproduced race and sex inequalities. Women of color writers and activists such as Alice Walker, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins articulated **Black feminist thought** as a critique of the ways in which second wave feminists often ignored racism, homophobia, and class oppression and how they impact different women and men of color, GLBTQ people, and working-class people. One of the first formal Black feminist organizations was the **Combahee River Collective**, formed in 1974. Black feminist bell hooks (1984) argued that feminism cannot just be a fight to make women equal with men, because such a fight does not acknowledge that all men are not equal in a capitalist, racist, and homophobic society. Thus, hooks and other Black feminists argued that sexism cannot be separated from racism, classism and homophobia, and that these systems of domination overlap and reinforce each other. Therefore, she argued, you cannot fight sexism without fighting racism, classism, and

homophobia. Importantly, black feminism argues that an intersectional perspective that makes visible and critiques multiple sources of oppression and inequality also inspires coalitional activism that brings people together across race, class, gender, and sexual identity lines.

D. Third Wave and Queer Feminist Movements

We are living in a world for which old forms of activism are not enough and today's activism is about creating coalitions between communities.

--Angela Davis quoted in Colonize This! by Hernandez and Rehman (2002)

Contemporary **Third wave feminism** is, in many ways, a hybrid creature. It is influenced by second wave feminism, Black feminism, transnational and Third World feminism, and queer activism. This hybridity of third wave activism comes directly out of the experiences of feminists in the late 20th and early 21st centuries who have grown up in a world that supposedly does not need social movements because “equal rights” for racial minorities, sexual minorities, and women have been guaranteed by law in most countries. The gap between law and reality—between the abstract proclamations of states and concrete lived experience—however, reveals the necessity of both old and new forms of activism. In a country where women are still paid only 77% of what men are paid for the same labor, where transgendered people are systematically brutalized by both plain-clothed citizens and police officers, where homeless youth are disproportionately gay, lesbian, queer, or transgendered, where people of color—on average—make less income and have considerably lower amounts of wealth than white people, and where the military is the most funded institution by the government, feminists have increasingly realized that a **coalitional politics** that organizes with other groups based on their shared (but differing) experiences of oppression, rather than their specific identity, is

absolutely necessary. Thus, Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake (1997) argue that a crucial goal for the third wave is “the development of modes of thinking that can come to terms with the multiple, constantly shifting bases of oppression in relation to the multiple, interpenetrating axes of identity, and the creation of a coalitional politics based on these understandings” (Heywood and Drake 1997: 3).

In the 1980s and 1990s, third wave feminists took up activism in a number of forms. Beginning in the mid 1980s, the **AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP)** began organizing to press an unwilling US government and medical establishment to develop affordable drugs for people with HIV/AIDS. In the latter part of the 1980s, a more militant wing of ACT UP began to identify as “queer.” They were not only explicitly reclaiming a derogatory term often used against gays and lesbians, but they were also distancing themselves from the more mainstream gay and lesbian rights movement which they felt mainly reflected the interests of white, middle-class gays and lesbians. The move to identify as “queer” purposefully sought to make the movement less centered around the standpoint of white gay men, and opened the movement up to transgendered and gender non-conforming people and people of color. This was motivated by a critique of the ways in which identity politics often splinter social movements. **Identity politics** refers to political movements organized around the experiences and needs of people who share a particular identity. The move from political association with others who share a particular identity to political association with those who have differing identities, but share similar, but differing experiences of oppression (coalitional politics), can be said to be a defining characteristic of the third wave.

Another defining characteristic of the third wave is the development of new tactics to politicize feminist issues and demands. For instance, ACT UP began to use powerful street

theater that brought the death and suffering of people with HIV/AIDS to the streets and to the politicians and pharmaceutical companies that did not seem to care that thousands and thousands of people were dying. They staged die-ins, inflated massive condoms, and occupied politicians' and pharmaceutical executives' offices. Their confrontational tactics would be emulated and picked up by anti-globalization activists and the radical Left throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. **Queer Nation** was formed in 1990 by ACT UP activists, and used the tactics developed by ACT UP in order to challenge homophobic violence and heterosexism in mainstream US society.

Around the same time as ACT UP was getting started in the mid-1980s, **sex-positive feminism** came into currency among feminist activists and theorists. Amidst what is known now as the “Feminist Sex Wars” of the 1980s, sex-positive feminists argued that sexual liberation, within a sex-positive culture that values consent between partners, would liberate not only women, but also men. Drawing from a social constructionist perspective, sex-positive feminists such as cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1984) argued that no sexual act has an inherent meaning, and that not all sex, or all representations of sex, were inherently degrading to women. In fact, they argued, sexual politics and sexual liberation are key sites of struggle for white women, women of color, gays, lesbians, queers, and transgendered people—groups of people who have historically been stigmatized for their sexual identities or sexual practices. Therefore, a key aspect of **queer and feminist subcultures** is to create sex-positive spaces and communities that not only valorize sexualities that are often stigmatized in the broader culture, but also place sexual consent at the center of sex-positive spaces and communities. Part of this project of creating sex-positive, feminist and queer spaces is creating media messaging that

attempts to both consolidate feminist communities and create knowledge from and for oppressed groups.

In a media-savvy generation, it is not surprising that cultural production is a main avenue of activism taken by third wave activists. Although some commentators have deemed the third wave to be “postfeminist” or “not feminist”¹² because it often does not utilize the activist forms (i.e. marches and vigils, policy change) of the second wave movement, the creation of alternative forms of culture in the face of a massive corporate media industry can be understood as quite political. For example, **the Riot Grrrl movement**, based in the Pacific Northwest of the US in the early 1990s, consisted of do-it-yourself bands predominantly composed of women, the creation of independent record labels, feminist ‘zines, and art. Their lyrics often addressed gendered sexual violence, sexual liberationism, heteronormativity, gender normativity, police brutality, and war. Feminist news websites and magazines have also become important sources of feminist analysis on current events and issues. Magazines such as *Bitch* and *Ms.*, as well as online blog collectives such as *Feministing* function as alternative sources of feminist knowledge production. If we consider the creation of lives on our own terms and the struggle for autonomy as fundamental feminist acts of resistance, then creating alternative culture on our own terms should be considered a feminist act of resistance as well.

As we have mentioned earlier, feminist activism and theorizing by people outside the US context has broadened the feminist frameworks for analysis and action. In a world characterized by global capitalism, transnational immigration, and a history of colonialism that has still has effects today, **transnational feminism** is a body of theory and activism that highlights the connections between sexism, racism, classism, and imperialism. In “Under Western Eyes”, an

¹² See Christina Hoff Summer’s *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women*. New York: Doubleday.

article by transnational feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991), Mohanty critiques the way in which much feminist activism and theory has been created from a white, North American standpoint that has often exoticized “3rd world” women or ignored the needs and political situations of women in the Global South. Transnational feminists argue that feminists should be wary of any Western project to “save” women in another region—especially if that project is accompanied by Western military intervention. For instance, in the war on Afghanistan, begun shortly after 9/11 in 2001, U.S. military leaders and George Bush often claimed to be waging the war to “save” Afghani women from their patriarchal and domineering men. This crucially ignores the role of the West—and the US in particular—in supporting Islamic fundamentalist regimes in the 1980s. Furthermore, it positions women in Afghanistan as passive victims in need of Western intervention—in a way strikingly similar to the victimizing rhetoric often used to talk about “victims” of gendered violence (discussed in an earlier section). Therefore, transnational feminists challenge the notion—held by many feminists in the West—that any area of the world is inherently more patriarchal or sexist than the West because of its culture or religion through arguing that we need to understand how Western imperialism, global capitalism, militarism, sexism, and racism have created conditions of inequality for women around the world.

In conclusion, third wave feminism is a vibrant mix of differing activist and theoretical traditions. Perhaps it is because of this hard-to-put-our-thumb-on-it aspect of third wave feminism that many commentators have claimed third wave feminism to be “apolitical”, “postfeminist” or “not activism.” However, third wave feminism’s insistence on grappling with multiple points-of-view, as well as its persistent refusal to be pinned down as representing just one group of people or one perspective, may be its greatest strongpoint. In a way similar to how

queer activists and theorists have insisted that ‘queer’ is and should be open-ended and never fixed to mean one thing, “third wave feminism’s” flexibility and adaptability becomes an asset in a world that is marked by complexity, rapidly shifting political situations, and multiple inequalities. Finally, the third wave’s insistence on coalitional politics as an alternative to identity-based politics is a crucial project in a world that is marked by fluid, multiple, overlapping inequalities.

E. Conclusion

In conclusion, this section has applied a relational analysis of feminist social movements, beginning with the first wave movement and running through the second and third wave feminist movements, while understanding the limitations of categorizing multiple movements under this oversimplified framework of three distinct “waves.” With such a relational lens, we are better situated to understand how the tactics and activities of one social movement can influence others. Furthermore, we can begin to see and understand how racialized, gendered, and classed exclusions and privileges lead to the splintering of social movements and social movement organizations. This type of intersectional analysis is at the heart not only of feminist activism but of feminist scholarship. The vibrancy and longevity of feminist movements might even be attributed to this intersectional reflexivity—or, the self-critique of race, class, and gender dynamics in feminist movements. The emphasis on coalitional politics and making connections between several movements is another crucial contribution of feminist activism and scholarship. Going into the 21st century, feminist movements confront an impressive array of structures of power: global capitalism, the prison system, war, racism, heteronormativity, and transphobia, among others. What kind of world do we wish to create and live in? What alliances and coalitions will be necessary to challenge these structures of

power? *How* do feminists, queers, people of color, trans people, and working-class people go about challenging these structures of power? These are among some of the questions that feminist activists are grappling with in the current period, and their responses point toward a deepening commitment to an intersectional politics of social justice and praxis.

References

Barkley Brown, E. 1997. "What has happened here': The Politics of Difference in Women's History and Feminist Politics", Pp. 272-287 in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, edited by Linda Nocholson. New York, NY: Routledge.

Cott, N. 2000. *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Davis, Angela. 1983. *Women, Race, Class*. New York, NY: Random House.

----- 1981. "Working Women, Black Women and the History of the Suffrage Movement", Pp. 73-78 in *A Transdisciplinary Introduction to Women's Studies*, edited by Avakian, A. and A. Deschamps. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.

Debois, E. and L. Dumenil. 2005. *Through Women's Eyes: An American History With Documents*. St. Martin Press.

Hayden, C. and M. King. 1965. "Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo". Available at: <http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/sexcaste.html>. Viewed 5/3/2011.

Hernandez, D. and B. Rehman. 2002. *Colonize This! Young Women of Color on Today's Feminism*. New York, NY: Seal Press.

Heywood, L. and J. Drake. 1997. *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

hooks, bell. 1984. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, second ed. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 1991. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial

Discourses". In *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Painter, Nell. 1996. *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Rubin, G. 1984. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality", in Carole Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Thompson, Becky. 2002. "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism", *Feminist Studies* 28(2): 337-360.

Truth, S. 1851. "Ain't I a Woman?" Available at:
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/sojtruth-woman.html>. Viewed 5/3/2011.

Zinn, H. 2003. *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.