Conceptualizing Race, Class, and Gender

Understanding the intersections between race, class, and gender requires knowing how to conceptualize each. Although we would rather not treat them separately, it is necessary to do so to learn what each means and how each is manifested in different group experiences. In this part, we analyze race, class, and gender, though the readings in this section also examine the connections among them. As we review each in turn, you will also notice several common themes.

First, each is a socially constructed category. That is, their significance stems not from some “natural” state, but from the significance they have taken on as the result of social and historical processes. Second, notice how each tends to construct groups in binary (or polar opposite) terms: “man/woman” or “Black/White” or “rich/poor,” thereby creating the “otherness” that we examined in “Shifting the Center.” Third, each is a category of individual and group identity, but note—and this is important—they are also social structures. That is, they are not just about identity but are about group location in a system of stratification and institutional forms. Thus, in examining race, class, and gender, it is important to study patterns in the labor market, family structures, state institutions (such as the government and the law), mass media, and so forth. This is a key difference, as we have seen, in a model that focuses solely on difference and one that focuses on the matrix of domination. Finally, neither race, class, nor gender is a fixed category. Because they are
social constructions, their form—and their interrelationship—changes over time. This also means that social change is possible.

As you learn about race, class, and gender, you should keep the intersectional model in mind. Although we will be focusing on each one in turn, we continue to emphasize how they are interrelated. To picture this, think of a typical college basketball game. This will probably seem familiar: the players on the court, the cheerleaders moving about on the side, the band playing, fans cheering, boosters watching from the best seats, and—if the team is ranked—perhaps a television crew. Everybody seems to have a place in the game. Everybody seems to be following the rules. But what are the “rules” of this game? What explains the patterns that we see and don’t see?

Race clearly matters. The predominance of young African American men on many college basketball teams is noticeable. Why do so many young Black men play basketball? Some people argue that African Americans are better in areas requiring physical skills such as sports and are less capable of doing intellectual work in fields such as physics, law, and medicine. Others look to Black culture for explanations, suggesting that African Americans would be perfectly happy just playing ball and partying. But these perspectives fail to take into account the continuing effects of racism. Lack of access to decent jobs, inadequate housing, poor-quality education, and insufficient health care are also manifestations of the systematic disadvantage of race—and class. Thus, rates of poverty for African Americans and Hispanics are higher than for other groups. In 2001, 23 percent of African Americans, 21 percent of Hispanics, and 10 percent of Asian Americans were poor, compared with 8 percent of non-Hispanic whites (Proctor and Dalaker 2002). For young Black men growing up in communities with few opportunities, sports are perceived as an attractive mobility route. Perceived promises of high salaries, endorsements, and merchandise can make young people believe sports are a path to success. One study has found that two-thirds of African American boys between ages thirteen and eighteen believe they can earn a living playing professional sports. But, the odds of actually doing so are extremely slim. Of the 40,000 African American boys playing high school basketball, only thirty-five will make it to the NBA (National Basketball Association) and only seven of those will be starters (Eitzen 1999). This makes the odds of success 0.000175!

But, as important as race is, does a racial analysis fully explain the “rules” of college basketball? Not really. Black men are not the only players. White men also play college basketball, raising questions about the significance of
terrelationship—changes over the years.

As you should keep the intersecting on each one in turn, we will see: To picture this, think of a webly seem familiar: the players on the side, the band playing, vast seats, and—if the team is good—it seems to have a place in the rules. But what are the “rules” of sports? See and don’t see?

If young African American men. Why do so many young Black men and women become athletes? Others look to it because African Americans would be better. But these perspectives fail to consider that Black men and women are less likely to graduate from college, and that Hispanic college students are more likely to graduate. In 2002, 21 percent of Hispanic students graduated, compared with 26 percent of African American students.

For young Black athletes, sports are perceived as a path to higher salaries. Some people believe sports are a path to success. Of the African American boys who maintain a living playing professional basketball, only thirty-five

Social class in explaining a basketball game. Who benefits from college basketball? Yes, players get scholarships and are offered a chance to earn college degrees, so players reap the rewards, but this misses the point of who really benefits. College athletics is big business, and the players make far less from it than many people believe. As amateur athletes, they are forbidden to take any payment for their skills. They are offered the hope of an NBA contract when they turn pro, or at least a college degree if they graduate. But, few actually turn pro. Indeed, few even graduate from college. Among Division I Black basketball players, only 35 percent graduate from college, compared with 53 percent of White male basketball players. Interestingly, however, graduation rates among Black college athletes (including all sports) are higher than among nonathletes, most likely because of the scholarship support they receive. (Black basketball players have the same graduation rates as all Black students.) Women student-athletes also have higher graduation rates than nonathletes and higher graduation rates than male student-athletes. This is true regardless of race (National Collegiate Athletic Association 2002).

So who actually benefits from college basketball? The colleges that recruit the athletes certainly benefit. For the university, winning teams garner increased admissions applications, alumni giving, corporate support, and television revenues. Athletics is also a big business. Corporate sponsors want their names and products identified with winning teams and athletes; advertisers want their products promoted by members of winning teams. Even though college athletes are forbidden to promote products, corporations create and market products in conjunction with prevailing excitement about basketball, sustained by the players’ achievements. Products such as athletic shoes, workout clothing, cars, and beer all target the consumer dollars of those who enjoy watching basketball. Also, consider how many full-time jobs are supported by the revenues generated from the enterprise of college basketball. Referees, sports reporters—both at the games and on local media outlets—athletic trainers, coaches, and health personnel all benefit. Unlike the players, these people all get paid for their contributions to college basketball. Thus, class matters. The companies and organizations that profit the most—whether schools, product manufacturers, advertisers—are part of a class system where there are differential benefits depending on your “rank” within that system.

So, do race and class fully explain the “rules” of basketball? Sometimes what we don’t see can be just as revealing as what we do see. One other
feature of the game on the court is so familiar that it may go unquestioned—or even unseen. Where are the women in college basketball (or pro basketball, for that matter)? Only in a few schools does women’s basketball draw as large an audience as men’s. And certainly in the media, men’s basketball is generally the public’s focal point, even though women’s sports are increasingly popular. In college basketball, like the pros, most of the coaches and support personnel are men, as are the camera crew and announcers.

Where are the women? A few are coaches, rarely paid what the men receive—even on the most winning teams. Those closest to the action on the court may be cheerleaders—tumbling, dancing, and being thrown into the air in support of the exploits of the athletes. Others may be in the band. Some women are in the stands, cheering the team—many of them accompanied by their husbands, partners, boyfriends, parents, and children. Many work in the concession stands, fulfilling women’s roles of serving others. Still others are even more invisible, left to clean the restrooms, locker rooms, and stands after the crowd goes home. Women remain on the sidelines in other ways as well. The treatment of women basketball players differs markedly from that of their male counterparts: Women have many fewer opportunities for scholarships and professional careers in athletics. The centrality of men’s activities in basketball mirrors the centrality afforded men’s activities in society as a whole; thus, women’s seeming invisibility in basketball ironically highlights the salience of gender.

Men’s behavior reveals a gendered dimension to basketball, as well. Where else are men able to put their arms around each other, slap one another’s buttocks, hug each other, or cry in public without having their “masculinity” questioned? Sportscasters, too, bring gender into the play of sports, such as when they talk about men’s heroic athletic achievements but talk about women athletes’ looks or their connection to children. For that matter, look at the prominence given to men’s teams in sports pages of the daily newspaper, compared with sports news about women, who are typically relegated to the back pages—if their athletic accomplishments are reported at all.

This discussion of college basketball demonstrates how race, class, and gender each provide an important, yet partial, perspective on the action on the court. If we use an intersectional model, we not only see each of them in turn but also the connections among them. In fact, race, class, and gender are so inextricably intertwined that gaining a comprehensive understanding of a basketball game requires thinking about all of them and how they work
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together—in other words, thinking inclusively. Then you will ask why most
of those serving the food in concession stands are likely to be women and men
of color. How are norms of masculinity played out through sport? What class
and racial ideologies are promoted through assuming that sports are a mobi-
ity route for those who try hard enough? Building from the example of bas-
ketball, you might then ask, "If race, class, and gender relations are embedded
in something as familiar and widespread as college basketball, to what extent
are other social practices, institutions, relations, and social issues similarly
structured?"

Race, gender, and class divisions are deeply embedded in the structure of
social institutions such as work, family, education, and the state. They shape
human relationships, identities, social institutions, and the social issues that
derive from within institutions. Evelyn Nakano Glenn postulates that you
can see the intersections of race, class, and gender in three realms of society:
the representational realm, the realm of social interaction, and the social
structural realm. The representational realm includes the symbols, language,
and images that convey racial meanings in society; social interaction refers to
the norms and behaviors observable in human relationships; the social struc-
tural realm involves the institutional sites where power and resources are
distributed in society (Glenn 2002: 12).

This means that race, class, and gender affect all levels of our experi-
ence—our consciousness and ideas, our interaction with others, and the so-
cial institutions we live within. And, because they are interconnected, no one
can be subsumed under the other. In this section of the book, although we fo-
cus on each one to provide conceptual grounding, keep in mind that they are
connected and overlapping—in all three realms of society: the realm of ideas,
interaction, and institutions.

You might begin by considering a few facts:
• The United States is in the midst of a sizable redistribution of wealth,
with a greater concentration of wealth and income in the hands of a few
than at most previous periods of time. At the same time, a declining share
of income is going to the middle class—a class that finds its position slip-
ning, relative to years past (Krugman 2002; DeNavas-Walt and Cleveland
2002).
• Within class groups, racial group experiences are widely divergent. Thus,
although there has been substantial growth of an African American and
Latino middle class, they have a more tenuous hold on this class status
than groups with more stable footing in the middle class. Furthermore, there is significant class differentiation within different racial groups (Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Massey 1993).

- Women in the top 25 percent of income groups have seen the highest wage growth of any group over the last twenty years; the lowest earning groups of women, like men, have seen wages fall while the middle has remained flat (Mishel, Bernstein, and Schmitt 2001). Class differences within gender are hidden by thinking of women as a monolithic group.

- Women of color, including Latinas, African American women, Native American women, and Asian American women are concentrated in the bottom rungs of the labor market along with recent immigrant women (U.S. Department of Labor 2002).

- Although poverty in the United States had been on the decline since 1993, it is now rising. Poverty is particularly severe among women, especially among women of color and their children (Proctor and Dalaker 2002).

- While the mass media extol the virtues of recent reforms in welfare legislation and herald a “decline in the welfare rolls,” studies show that increases in family income among former welfare recipients are meager, and there has been an increase in the number of such families evicted from housing because of falling behind on rent. Families also report an increase in other material hardships—phones and utilities being cut off, for example (Lewis, Stephens, and Slack 2002; Acker, Morgen, and Gonzales 2002).

- Welfare reform is only one dimension of the shrinkage of social support systems from federal and state assistance. The shrinkage of social support is not only affecting the very poor, however. Job benefits in the form of health insurance, pensions, and so forth for all workers have declined. Following job loss, less than half of U.S. workers are currently eligible for unemployment insurance (Emsellem et al. 2002).

- At both ends of the economic spectrum there is a growth of gated communities: well-guarded, locked neighborhoods for the rich and prisons for the poor—particularly Latinos and African American men. At the same time, growth in the rate of imprisonment is highest among women (Harrison and Beck 2002; Collins and Veskel 2000).

None of these facts can be explained through an analysis that focuses only on class or race or gender. Clearly, class matters. Race matters. Gender matters. And they matter together.
RACE AND RACISM

In this volume we examine race, class, and gender relations from an institutional or structural perspective. Locating racial oppression in the structure of social institutions provides a different frame of analysis from what would be obtained by analyzing individuals only. Individual racism is one person’s belief in the superiority of one race over another. Individual racism is related to prejudice, a hostile attitude toward a person who is presumed to have negative characteristics associated with a group to which he or she belongs. Racism is more systematic than this, however.

Racism is not the same thing as prejudice. Prejudice refers to people’s attitudes. Racism is a system of power and privilege; it can be manifested in people’s attitudes but is rooted in society’s structure and is reflected in the different advantages and disadvantages that groups experience, based on their location in this societal system. Racism is structured into society, not just in people’s minds. As such, it is built into the very fabric of dominant institutions in the United States and has been since the founding of the nation. Joe Feagin refers to this as systemic racism, meaning the “complex array of antiblack practices, the unjustly gained political-economic power of whites, the continuing economic and other resource inequalities along racial lines, and the white racial ideologies and attitudes created to maintain and rationalize white privilege and power” (2000: 6).

In this definition of institutional racism, notice first that racism is part of society’s structure, not just present in individual bigots. Seen in this light, people may not be individually racist but can still benefit from a system that is organized to benefit some at the expense of others. As Gloria Yamato discusses in “Something about the Subject Makes It Hard to Name,” racism can be intentional or unintentional. In a racist system, well-meaning White people benefit from racism even if they have no intention of acting or thinking like a “racist.” Thus, institutional racism creates a built-in system of privilege. As Yamato suggests, different groups internalize it in different forms of consciousness. Peggy McIntosh’s essay, “White Privilege,” describes how the system of racial privilege becomes invisible to those who benefit from it, even though it structures the everyday life of both White people and people of color.

Second, racism shapes everyday social relations. In other words, despite its systematic nature, institutional racism depends on the presence of individual racists acting daily in order to continue. If you are a person of color, even being middle class may not protect you from the everyday realities of racism.
(Pattillo-McCoy 1999). Patricia J. Williams, a noted African American legal scholar, illustrates this in her discussion of persistent discrimination in housing ("Of Race and Risk"). Despite her middle-class status, systemic racism confronts her—and other African Americans—in daily encounters. Practices of everyday racism are part of the edifice of institutional racism; yet we often misread their meaning.

Many people believe that being nonracist means being color-blind—that is, refusing to recognize or treat as significant a person's racial background and identity. But to ignore the significance of race in a society where racial groups have distinct historical and contemporary experiences is to deny the reality of their group experience. Being color-blind in a society structured on racial privilege means assuming that everybody is "White," which is why people of color might be offended by friends who say, for example, "But I never think of you as Black." Such practices of everyday racism are powerful because, instead of seeing them as components of patterns of institutional racism, we experience these interactions as ordinary occurrences.

Discrimination is one of the driving forces of racism. Though perhaps not as overt as, for example, during Jim Crow segregation in the South, discrimination can still be seen in various patterns and practices. Indeed, segregation, though not mandated by law as it was during Jim Crow, is as stark as ever and, in many cities, has actually increased over recent years with huge inequities in schooling and housing as a result. Research studies known as audit studies also show that people continue to discriminate based on race, even though they will not overtly say so. In audit studies, researchers, one White and one Black, are matched in credentials and appearance and they pose—in person—as job or housing applicants. These studies find significant discrimination is an ongoing fact. White job applicants in such studies are offered the job almost half of the time; Black applicants, only 11 percent of the time. White applicants are often told things such as "You are just what we are looking for"—Black applicants, on the other hand, as not having the right attributes for the job. Studies of employers have also found that employers hold considerable stereotypes about Black workers that prevent them from hiring them (see the article by Philip Moss and Chris Tilly in Part III as one example; also, Moss and Tilly 2001).

Another dimension of racism is that its forms change over time. Racial discrimination is no longer legal, but racism nonetheless continues to structure relations between groups and to differentiate the power that different
liams, a noted African American legalist of persistent discrimination in housing; middle-class status, systemic racism— in daily encounters. Practices are of institutional racism; yet we often racists means being color-blind—that is, not a person's racial background and race in a society where racial groups' experiences is to deny the reality of in a society structured on racial is “White,” which is why people of say, for example, “But I never think day racism are powerful because, in patterns of institutional racism, we occurrence.
g forces of racism. Though perhaps Crow segregation in the South, disat terns and practices. Indeed, segre gation was during Jim Crow, as is stark as eased over recent years with huge in ucts. Research studies known as audit to discriminate based on race, even audit studies, researchers, one White's and appearance and they pose—in these studies find significant discriminants in such studies are offered the cants, only 11 percent of the time. h as “You are just what we are looking for, as not having the right attrib uite also found that employers hold ers that prevent them from hiring his Tilly in Part III as one example; its forms change over time. Racial sm nonetheless continues to struc turate the power that different groups have. The changing character of racism is also evident in the fact that specific racial group histories differ, but different racial groups share common experiences of racial oppression. Thus, Chinese Americans were never enslaved, but they experienced forced residential segregation and economic exploitation based on their presumed racial characteristics. Mexican Americans were never placed on federal reservations as Native Americans have been, but in some regards both groups share the experience of colonization by White settlers. Both have experienced having their lands appropriated by White settlers—Native Americans as they were removed from their lands and forced into reservations, if not killed. Chicanos originally held land in what is now the American Southwest, but it was taken following the Mexican-American War; in 1848 Mexico ceded huge parts of what are now California, New Mexico, Nevada, Colorado, Arizona, and Utah to the United States for $15 million. Mexicans living there were one day Mexicans, the next living in the United States, though without all the rights of citizens.

In a racist society, the very meaning of race reflects institutionalized racist practices and beliefs. Most people assume that race is biologically fixed, an assumption that is fueled by arguments about the presumed biological basis for different forms of inequality. But the concept of race is more social than biological; scientists working on the human genome project have even found that there is no “race” gene. But, you should not conclude from this that race is not “real.” It is just that its reality stems from its social significance. That is, the meaning and significance of race stems from specific social, historical, and political contexts. It is these contexts that make race meaningful, not just whatever physical differences may exist between groups.

To understand this, think about how racial categories are created, by whom, and for what purposes. Racial classification systems reflect prevailing views of race, thereby establishing groups that are presumed to be “natural.” These constructed racial categories then serve as the basis for allocating resources; furthermore, once defined, the categories frame political issues and conflicts (Omi and Winant 1994). Omi and Winant define racial formation as “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (1994: 55). In Nazi Germany, Jews were considered to be a race—a social construction that became the basis for the Holocaust. Abby L. Feiber's essay (“What White Supremacists Taught a Jewish Scholar about Identity”) shows the complexities that evolve in the social construction of race. As someone who studies White supremacist groups,
she sees how White racism defines her as Jewish, even while she lives in society as White. Her reflections reveal, too, the interconnections between racism and anti-Semitism (the hatred of Jewish people), reminding us of the interplay between different systems of oppression.

In understanding racial formation, we see that societies construct rules and practices that define groups in racial terms. Moreover, racial meanings constantly change as institutions evolve and as different groups contest prevailing racial definitions. Some groups are “racialized”; others, are not. Where, for example, did the term Caucasian come from? Although many take it to be “real” and don’t think about its racist connotations, the term has quite racist origins. It was developed in the late eighteenth century by a German anthropologist, Johann Blumenbach. He developed a racial classification scheme that put people from the Russian Caucasus at the top of the racial hierarchy because he thought “Caucasians” were the most beautiful and sophisticated people; darker people were put on the bottom of the list: Asians, Africans, Polynesians, and Native Americans (Hannaford 1996). It is amazing when you think about it that this term remains with us, with few questioning its racist connotations.

Consider also the changing definitions of race in the U.S. census. Given the large number of multiracial groups and the increasing diversity brought about by immigration, we can no longer think of race in mutually exclusive terms. In 1860, only three “races” were presumed to exist—Whites, Blacks, and mulattoes. By 1890, however, these original three “races” had been joined by five others—quadroon, octofoon, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian. Ten short years later, this list shrank to five “races”—White, Black, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian—a situation reflecting the growth of strict segregation in the South (O’Hare 1996). Now people of mixed racial heritage present a challenge to census classifications. In the 2000 census, the U.S. government for the first time allowed people to check multiple boxes to identify themselves as more than one race. In addition, you could check “Hispanic” as a separate category. This change in the census reflects the growing number of multiracial people in the United States. The census categories are not just a matter of accurate statistics; they have significant consequences in the apportionment of societal resources. Thus, while some might argue that we should not “count” race at all, doing so is important because data on racial groups are used to enforce voting rights, to regulate equal employment opportunities, and to determine various governmental supports, among other things. Although it may be easy for
Jewish, even while she lives in societies where interconnections between race and class terms are "racialized," reminding us of the instruction to see that societies construct rules. Moreover, racial meanings and as different groups contest terms such as "African American," others, are not. "Where do they come from? Although many take them as scientific, the term has quite a history of being developed in the eighteenth century by a German. Caucasian at the top of the racial hierarchy were the most beautiful and so the bottom of the list: Asians, (Hanna 1996). It is amazing as us with, with few questioning the increasing diversity brought by race in the U.S. census. Given the increasing diversity brought by race in mutually exclusive categories, it is necessary to think of what might exist—Whites, Blacks, and three "races" had been joined Japanese, and Indian. Ten short years, Black, Chinese, Japanese, and other subcategories present a challenge of strict segregation in the racial heritage present a challenge. The U.S. government for the first time identify themselves as more than a separate category. The number of multiracial people not just a matter of accurate the apportionment of societal we should not "count" race at groups are used to enforce voting, and to determine the allocation. Although it may be easy for some people to say, "Race doesn't matter; we should be a color-blind society," Cornel West argues that race clearly matters and it matters a lot. Shifting definitions of race are grounded in shifting relations of power. Recent decades have seen additional revisions to definitions of race. In particular, the experiences of Latino groups in the United States challenge long-standing racial categories of "Black" and "White." Elizabeth Martinez (in "Seeing More than Black and White") notes that White-Black relations have defined racism in the United States for centuries but that a rapidly changing population that includes diverse Latino groups is forcing Americans to reconsider the nature of racism. Color, she argues, has been the marker of race, but she challenges the dualistic thinking that has promoted this racist thinking.

The overarching structure of racial power relations means that placement in this structure leads to differences in outlook regarding the very presence of race and what can be done about it. The reappearances of racial hostilities on college campuses is certainly evidence of the continuation of racist practices and beliefs; yet despite this and other evidence, Whites continue to be optimistic in their assessment of racial progress. They say that they are tired of hearing about race and they have done all they can to eliminate racial discrimination. People of color are less sanguine about racial progress and are more aware of the nuances of racism. Marked differences by race are still evident in employment, political representation, schooling, and other basic measures of group well-being.

Racism does not exist in a vacuum. As we have said, race, gender, and class are intersecting systems—experienced simultaneously, not separately. It is a mistake to think of any one category in the absence of the others. People's experiences with race and racism are framed by their location in this overarching system of race, class, and gender privileges and penalties. Race possesses not only objective dimensions that result from institutional racism; it also has subjective dimensions that relate to how people experience it. For example, some people of color have class privilege; yet this does not eliminate racism, as Williams's experience in getting a mortgage shows us. Although class differentiation has increased within racial groups and such class difference is significant, this does not mean that people are immune from the effects of racism. Class differences within racial groups show how race and class together configure group experiences differently. All people of color encounter institutional racism, but their actual experiences with racism vary, depending on social class, gender, age, sexuality, and other markers of social position.
CLASS

Like race, the social class system is grounded in social institutions and practices. Rather than thinking of social class as a rank held by an individual, think of social class as a series of relations that pervade the entire society and shape our social institutions and relationships with one another. Although class shapes identity and individual well-being, class is a system that differentially structures group access to economic, political, cultural, and social resources. Within the United States, the class system evolves from patterns of capitalist development, and those patterns intersect with race and gender.

To begin with, the class system in the United States is marked by striking differences in income. *Income* is the amount of money brought into a household in one year. Measures of income in the United States are based on annually reported census data drawn from a sample of the population. These data show quite dramatic differences in class standing when taking gender and race into account. *Median income* is the income level above and below which half of the population lies. It is the best measure of group income standing. Thus in 2001, median income for non-Hispanic White households was $46,305 (meaning half of such households earned more than this and half below); this is the “middle.” Black households had a median income of $29,470; Hispanic households, $33,565; Asian and Pacific Islander households, $53,635 (DeNavas-Walt and Cleveland 2002; see also Figure 1).

But this tells only part of the story. Household income is the income of a total household. What about individual earners? This is where you can see the confounding influence of gender. Among workers who were employed full-time and year-round in 2001, White men earned $43,194; Asian/Pacific Islander men, $42,695; Black men, $31,921; White non-Hispanic women, $31,794; Asian/Pacific Islander women, $31,284; Black women, $27,297; Hispanic men, $25,271; Hispanic women, $21,973 (see also Figure 2). Note that this array of income levels does not fall solely along lines of race or gender, because Black men, in the aggregate, earn slightly more than White, non-Hispanic women, but Black women earn more than Hispanic men.

Something to keep in mind is that because household income results from the income of individual workers, some households need more workers than others to reach median levels of income. Also, current data show that the most important source of income growth for all households is the increased number of hours that people are working. Black and Hispanic
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Old income is the income of workers who were employed: $43,194; Asian/Pacific White non-Hispanic women, $27,297; Black women, $27,297; (see also Figure 2). Note along lines of race or genderly more than White, non-Hispanic men.

e household income results households need more worknc. Also, current data show for all households is the working. Black and Hispanic families work more hours than White families; the greatest increase in working hours is among women of all races (Mishel, Bernstein, and Schmitt 2001).

Even more significant than income differences in revealing class are differences in patterns of wealth. *Wealth* is determined by adding all of one's
financial assets and subtracting all debt. Income and wealth are related but are not the same thing. As important as income can be in determining one's class status, wealth is even more significant.

Consider this: Imagine two recent college graduates. They graduate in the same year, from the same college, with the same major and the identical grade point average. Both get jobs with the same salary in the same company. But, one student's parents paid all college expenses and gave her a car upon graduation. The other student worked while in school and has graduated with substantial debt from student loans. This student's family has no money to help support the new worker. Who is better off? Same salary, same credentials, but one person has a clear advantage—one that will be played out many times over as the young worker buys a home, finances her own children's education, and possibly inherits additional assets. This shows you the significance of wealth—not just income—in structuring social class.

Thus, income data indicate quite dramatic differences in class, race, and gender standing. But, furthermore, wealth differences are also startling. The wealthiest 1 percent of the population controls 38 percent of all wealth—the bottom 80 percent, only 17 percent (Mishel, Bernstein, and Schmitt 2001). For most Americans, debt, not wealth, is more common. Furthermore, one-quarter of White households, 61 percent of Black households, and 54 percent of Hispanic households have no financial assets at all (Oliver and Shapiro 1995)—indicative of the vast differences in wealth holdings among different racial groups. In fact, the median net worth of White households is more than ten times that of African American and Latino households.

Wealth is especially significant because it provides a *cumulative* advantage to those who have it. Wealth helps pay for college costs for children and down payments on houses; it can cushion the impact of emergencies, such as unexpected unemployment or sudden health problems, as Dalton Conley explains in “Wealth Matters.” He shows how even small amounts of wealth can provide the cushion that averts economic disaster for families. Buying a home, investing, being free of debt, sending one's children to college, and transferring economic assets to the next generation are all instances of class advantage that add up over time and produce advantage even beyond one's current income level. Sociologists Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro (1995) have found, for example, that even Black and White Americans at the same income level, with the same educational and occupational assets, still have a substantial difference in their financial assets—an average difference of $43,143 per year! This
come and wealth are related but are not always in determining one's class position. In general, graduates. They graduate in the same major and the identical same salary in the same company. expenses and gave her a car upon le in school and has graduated with student's family has no money to her off? Same salary, same cremen— one that will be played out many te, finances her own children's ed- s. This shows you the significa- cating social class. tic differences in class, race, and differences are also startling. The rol 38 percent of all wealth—the el, Bernstein, and Schmitt 2001). ore common. Furthermore, one- Black households, and 54 percent assets at all (Oliver and Shapiro wealth holdings among different White households is more than no households.

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Shapiro (1995) have found, for is at the same income level, with still have a substantial difference ace of $43,143 per year! This means that, even when earning the same income, the two groups are in quite different class situations—although both may be considered “middle class.” Furthermore, wealth produces more wealth, because inheritance allows people to transmit economic status from one generation to the next. This results in “the sedimentation of racial inequality” (Oliver and Shapiro 1995: 5).

Social class is a complex system. There are wide differences in the class status of Whites and people of color, but we should be careful not to see all Whites and Asian Americans as well-off and all African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos as poor. Consider the range of social class experiences just among Whites. Although on average White households possess higher accumulated wealth and have higher incomes than Black, Hispanic, and Native American households, large numbers of White households do not. White people also account for 46 percent of the nation’s poor (Proctor and Dalaker 2002). In addition, class experiences across racial groups can vary widely, as shown by Mary Pattillo-McCoy’s research on the Black middle class in “Black Picket Fences.” She shows that the Black middle class continues to experience racial segregation and, as one result, is more exposed to the risks that the Black poor experience than would be true of the White middle class.

These facts should caution us about conclusions based on aggregate data (that is, data that represent whole groups). Such data give you a broad picture of group differences, but they are not attentive to the more nuanced picture you see when taking into account class, race, and gender (along with other factors, such as age, level of education, occupation, and so forth). Aggregate data on Asian Americans, for example, show them as a group to be relatively well off. But this portrayal, like the stereotypes of the “model minority,” obscures significant differences within Asian American groups and among Asian American groups. So, for example, although Asian American median income is—in the aggregate—higher than for White Americans, this does not mean all Asian American families are better off than White families. If you look at poverty rates, you get a different picture. Ten percent of Asian American/Pacific Islanders are poor, compared with a little less than 8 percent of White, non-Hispanic families (Proctor and Dalaker 2002). The proportion of Asian Americans living in poverty has also increased substantially since the 1980s, particularly among the most recent immigrant groups, including Laotians, Cambodians, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Korean immigrants. Filipino and Asian Indian families had lower rates of poverty (Lee 1995).
Poverty is a problem for many groups (see Figure 3). Women and their children are especially hard hit by poverty. Thirty-seven percent of Hispanic families headed by women are poor, as are 35 percent of Black families, 15 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander families, and 22 percent of White families headed by women. Poverty rates among children are especially disturbing: 16 percent of all children in the United States live below the poverty line ($17,960 in 2001 for a family of four, including two children). When adding race, the figures are even more disturbing: 30 percent of African American children, 28 percent of Hispanic children, 11.5 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander children, and 9.5 percent of White (non-Hispanic) children (those under 18 years of age) are poor—astonishing figures for one of the most affluent nations in the world (Proctor and Dalaker 2002). Simplistic solutions suggested by current welfare policy imply that women would not be poor if they would just get married or get a job. But, as James Jennings and Louis Kushnick argue in “Poverty as Race, Power, and Wealth,” the root causes of poverty lie in the distribution of wealth and capital, coupled with low wages and high unemployment among certain groups—groups whose social location is the result of race, gender, and class stratification. Keep in mind that among the poor, 38 percent were working (11.5 percent worked full-time,
year-round). And these figures count only those whose earnings fell below the official poverty line. If you calculate the income received by someone working full-time (40 hours a week) and year-round (52 weeks, no vacation) at the federal minimum wage ($5.50 per hour), you will see that the dollars earned ($11,440) do not even come close to the federal poverty line for a family of four ($17,960 in 2001).

In the United States, the social class system is also marked by differences in power. Social class is not just a matter of material difference; it is a pattern of domination in which some groups have more power than others. Power is the ability to influence and dominate others. This means not just interpersonal power but refers to the structural power that some groups have because of their position in the class system. Groups with vast amounts of wealth, for example, have the ability to influence systems like the media and the political process in ways that less powerful groups cannot. Privilege in social class thus encompasses both a position of material advantage and the ability to control and influence others.

The class system is currently undergoing some profound changes, as detailed by Collins and Veske ("Economic Apartheid in America"). These changes are intimately linked to patterns of economic transformation in the political economy—changes that are both global and domestic. Jobs are being exported overseas as vast multinational corporations seek to enhance their profits by promoting new markets and cutting the cost of labor. Within the United States, there is a shift from a manufacturing-based economy to a service economy, with corresponding changes in the types of jobs available and the wages attached to these jobs. Fewer skilled, decent-paying manufacturing jobs exist today than in the past. Fewer workers are covered by job benefits and unemployment insurance; only 40 percent of workers are now eligible for unemployment following job loss (Mishel, Bernstein, and Schmitt 2001; Emsellem et al. 2002). Wages are flat for most workers, except those at the very top. Millions of people are left with jobs that do not pay enough, in part-time or temporary work, or without any work at all.

All told, class divisions in the United States are becoming more marked. There is a growing gap between the "haves" and "have-nots." Income growth has been greatest for those at the top end of the population—the upper 20 percent and the upper 5 percent of all income groups, regardless of race. For everyone else, income growth has remained flat. Although in every racial group, the top earners have seen the most growth in income, Black
and Hispanic high-earners still earn less overall than Whites (see Figure 4.) At the same time, in the nation’s cities and towns, homelessness has become increasingly apparent even to casual observers. The number of home-

*In 2000 CPI-adjusted dollars.

1Data not available for Hispanics in 1970; 1972 data used.
less in a given year is estimated to be about two million, with families being the largest segment of the homeless population. Half of the homeless are African American; about 20 percent are children (National Coalition for the Homeless 2002).

If social class is so important in shaping life chances, why don’t more people realize its significance? The answer lies in how dominant groups use ideology to explain the class system and other systems of inequality. Ideology created by dominant groups refers to a system of beliefs that simultaneously distort reality and justify the status quo. As we learn in “Tired of Playing Monopoly?” by Donna Langston, the class system in the United States has been supported through the myth that we live in a classless society. This myth serves the dominant class, making class privilege seem like something that one earns, not something that is deeply embedded in the institutions of society. Langston also suggests that the system of privilege and inequality (by race, class, and gender) is least visible to those who are most privileged and who, in turn, control the resources to define the dominant cultural belief systems. Perhaps this is why the privileged, not the poor, are more likely to believe that one gets ahead through hard work. It may also explain why men more than women deny that patriarchy exists, and why Whites more than Blacks believe racism is disappearing.

Overall, the effects of race, class, and gender manifest themselves in patterns of advantage and disadvantage. For example, in some ways—such as in rates of poverty and the racial gap in earnings in the labor market—women of color share a class position with men of color. In other ways, women of different races share a common class position: They all make less on average than men of their racial group. These trends point to the need for analyzing class, race, and gender together in thinking about inequality.

**GENDER**

Gender, like race, is a social construction, not a biological imperative. Gender is rooted in social institutions and results in patterns within society that structure the relationships between women and men and that give them differing positions of advantage and disadvantage within institutions. As an identity, gender is learned; that is, through gender socialization, people construct definitions of themselves and others that are marked by gender. Like race, however, gender cannot be understood at the individual level alone. Gender is structured in social institutions, including work, families, mass media, and education.
You can see this if you think about the concept of a gendered institution. *Gendered institution* is now used to define the total patterns of gender relations that are "present in the processes, practices, images, and ideologies, and distribution of power in the various sectors of social life" (Acker 1992: 567). This brings a much more structural analysis of gender to the forefront. Rather than seeing gender only as a matter of interpersonal relationships and learned identities, this framework focuses the analysis of gender on relations of power—just as thinking about institutional racism focuses on power relations and economic and political subordination—not just interpersonal relations. Changing gender relations is not just a matter of changing individuals. As with race and class, change requires transformation of institutional structures.

Gender, however, is not a monolithic category. Maxine Baca Zinn, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Michael Messner argue ("Gender through the Prism of Difference") that, although gender is grounded in specific power relations, it is important to understand gender as constructed differently depending on the specific social locations of diverse groups. Thus race, class, nationality, sexual orientation, and other factors produce varying social and economic consequences that cannot be understood by looking at gender differences alone. They ask us to move beyond studying differences and instead to use multiple "prisms" to see and comprehend the complexities of multiple systems of domination—each of which shapes and is shaped by gender. Seen in this way, men appear as a less monolithic and unidimensional group as well.

Gender patterns in society are also supported through the ideology of sexism, just as racial oppression is supported through racism. Sexism is the belief that men are somehow superior to women; though few overtly believe this, it shows in how women are perceived and treated. But, sexism does not exist in a vacuum. It intersects with racism and class—and sexuality—as Yen Le Espiritu argues in "Ideological Racism and Cultural Resistance." Controlling images of Asian American men and women are both racialized and sexualized, perpetuating ideas of "otherness." She locates the construction of these images in the institutions that produce popular culture, showing how such institutions have a stake in perpetuating race, gender, and sexual domination. Espiritu's work shows that gender stereotypes take unique forms for particular groups. Jewish American women, for example, are stereotyped as "JAPs" (Jewish American princesses), as if all were rich and privileged. This stereotype simultaneously promotes anti-Semitism and misogyny (defined as the
concept of a gendered institution. Total patterns of gender relations, images, and ideologies, and dis-social life" (Acker 1992: 567). This order to the forefront. Rather than relationships and learned identifiers gender on relations of power—focuses on power relations and not just interpersonal relations. r of changing individuals. As with on of institutional structures.

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Gender, race, class, and sexuality together construct stereotypes. Each gains meaning in relationship to the others (Glenn 2002). Thus, for Julia Alvarez ("A White Woman of Color") gender identity is intricately part of her status as Dominican, and, to complicate things further, ideals of beauty in her narrative intertwine with ideas about color. You cannot understand her experience as a woman without also locating her in the ethnic, racial, national, and migration experiences that are also part of her life.

Thus, gender oppression is maintained through multiple systems, systems that are reflected in group stereotypes. And, these stereotypes also sexualize groups in different, but particular, ways. African American men are stereotyped as hypermasculine and oversized; African American women as promiscuous, bad mothers, and nurturing "mammies" who care for everyone else, but not their own children. Latinos are stereotyped as "macho" and, like African American men, sexually passionate, but out of control. Latinas are stereotyped as either "hot" or virgin-like. Similarly, White women are sexually stereotyped in dichotomous terms, as "madonnas" or "whores." Class and sexuality intermingle with race and gender in these stereotypes. Working-class women are more likely to be seen as "sluts" and upper-class women as frigid and cold (Andersen and Taylor 2002: 360). Here we can see that controlling images of sexuality are part of the architecture of race, class, and gender oppression (Collins 2000). These stereotypes reveal the interlocking systems of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Michael Messner's essay "Masculinities and Athletic Careers" explores how sport reproduces gender ideology. Messner's study examines how boys from different racial and social class backgrounds learn about masculinity through their involvement in sport. Messner demonstrates that there is no one set of beliefs about masculinity to which all men subscribe; instead, sport shapes understandings of masculinity and men's experiences in sports in race- and class-specific ways.

We also see in the articles here how gender oppression works with another major system of oppression, that of sexuality. Homophobia—the fear and hatred of homosexuality—is part of the system of social control that legitimates and enforces gender oppression. It supports the institutionalized power and privilege accorded to heterosexual behavior and identification. If only heterosexual forms of gender identity are labeled "normal," then gays,
lesbians, and bisexuals become ostracized, oppressed, and defined as "socially deviant." Homophobia affects heterosexuals as well because it is part of the gender ideology used to distinguish "normal" men and women from those deemed deviant. Thus, young boys learn a rigid view of masculinity—one often associated with violence, bullying, and degrading others—to avoid being perceived as a "fag." The oppression of lesbians and gay men is then linked to the structure of gender in everyone's lives.

Throughout Part II, you should keep the concept of social structure in mind. Remembering Marilyn Frye's analogy of the birdcage, be aware that race, class, and gender form a structure of social relations. This structure is supported by ideological beliefs that make it appear "normal" and "acceptable" and that often cloud our awareness of how the structure operates. Thus, many believe that women now have it made, but the facts tell us otherwise. True, the gap between women's and men's income has closed, although most analysts agree that the narrowing of the gap reflects a drop in men's wages more than an increase in women's wages. And, women are more present in professional jobs—those that have become defined as the stereotypical "working woman." Despite this new image, though, most women remain concentrated in gender-segregated occupations with low wages, little opportunity for mobility, and stressful conditions. This is particularly true for women of color, who are more likely to be in occupations that are both race- and gender-segregated. And, as we have seen, among women heading their own households, poverty persists at alarmingly high rates. Income and occupational data, however, do not tell the full story for women. High rates of violence against women—whether in the home, on campus, in the workplace, or on the streets—indicate the continuing devaluation of and danger for women in this society. And, as Loretta Ross, Sarah Brownlee, Dazon Dixon Diallo, and Luz Rodriguez show through their work with the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Network ("Just Choices"), justice for women is incomplete without also addressing the race, gender, and class discrimination that takes place in women's health care—including reproductive health care.

As you read the articles in this section (and others), continue to ask yourself how different groups of women are experiencing the changes in gender relations that have characterized recent history. And, remember that although race, class, and gender are often discussed in terms of cultural difference, they are part of the institutional framework of society. A structural analysis studies
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the concept of social structure alogy of the birdcage, be aware e of social relations. This strucat make it appear "normal" and eness of how the structure operhave it made, but the facts tell n's and men's income has closed, wing of the gap reflects a drop in n's wages. And, women are more ve become defined as the stereoimage, though, most women ococcupations with low wages, little tions. This is particularly true for n occupations that are both racean, among women heading their gly high rates. Income and occup for women. High rates of vi ne, on campus, in the workplace, devaluation and danger for s, Sarah Brownlee, Dazon Dixon, or their work with the SisterSong work ("Just Choices"), justice for g the race, gender, and class dist care—including reproductive nd others), continue to ask youreriencing the changes in gender y. And, remember that although terms of cultural difference, they ciety. A structural analysis studies

the intersections of race, class, and gender within institutions and within individual's experiences in those institutions. Although we have divided the articles into sections on race, class, and gender, many theoretically fit in multiple categories. Thinking inclusively means recognizing that people and practices rarely belong to only one category. A more accurate way of viewing the world is to see race, class, and gender as interconnected.

Further Resources

For additional materials relating to this section, see the features on pages 213–14.

References


