

# Race, Gender, and Class Stereotypes: New Perspectives on Ideology and Inequality

MARGARET L. ANDERSEN\*

## ABSTRACT

Current studies of race, class, and gender inequality in the United States are centered in a paradigm of *intersectionality*. Emerging from feminist studies and racial/ethnic scholarship, this new paradigm analyzes the connections between race, class, and gender as they structure inequality and its supporting ideologies. This paper reviews the major tenets of U.S. race, class, and gender studies and discusses the historically changing conditions in the United States that necessitate this kind of analysis. It then investigates the implications of this model for understanding the “ideology of neutrality” and “ideology of dependency” that currently underlie dominant group beliefs about race, class, and gender. The paper concludes by suggesting the new directions for race, class, and gender studies and discussing the implications of this paradigm for analyses of race and gender stereotypes.

**Key words:** racial stereotypes, racial ideology, gender stereotypes, gender ideology, class stereotypes, class ideology, race, class, gender.

## INTRODUCTION

Studies of inequality in the United States have recently been shaped and enriched by the growth of a new paradigm, referred to as race/class/gender studies. Like other new paradigms, this paradigm raises new questions for analysis and generates new observations and empirical research. Although sociologists have long studied class inequality and racial stratification, and more recently have developed

\* Professor of Sociology, University of Delaware. E-mail: <mla@udel.edu>.

extensive studies of gender, new race/class/gender studies differ from traditional models of stratification and racial inequality by emphasizing the *social structural intersections* between race, class, and gender inequality. In this paper, I discuss the origins and context of this new paradigm, identify its underlying themes, and illustrate its application to understanding the ideologies that buttress public understanding of persistent inequality. By extension, this helps us understand the perpetuation and consequences of stereotypes, the focal point of this conference.

## RACE/CLASS/GENDER STUDIES: SHIFTING THE CENTER

Race/class/gender studies have their origins in the political movements of the last quarter of the twentieth century, namely the civil rights and women's movements. Both of these movements spawned new scholarship in the academy, scholarship that is centered in the experiences of groups who have previously been excluded, ignored, distorted, and stereotyped in mainstream academic work. Numerous assumptions have been challenged by the increased, though still underrepresented, presence of women and people of color, as well as the more visible presence of gay/lesbian scholars in the academy. As three starting examples:

- (1) The assimilation model that dominated the study of race long assumed that to be integrated into society, racial-ethnic groups had to relinquish their own culture and take on the cultural values of the dominant group. Ironically, at the same time that this model prevailed in sociological theory and research, racial groups, especially African Americans, were presumed not to have a unique culture of their own; or, if they did, it was presumed to be pathological and, therefore, a cause for the lack of assimilation. Now, although the assimilation model still pervades much research (and still frames the organization of most texts in the sociology of race and ethnicity), contemporary race theory focuses mainly on how race and racism are embedded in the structure of dominant institutions. The processes of racialization and racial formation—that is, how groups become constructed as a race in the context of historical and social processes—now dominate theory in the sociology of race (Omi and Winant, 1994; Feagin, 2000). Thus, the paradigm for studying race has shifted from a focus on characteristics of racial groups *per se* to the structure of social organization and the role of race in shaping dominant social institutions.
- (2) Likewise, the study of gender has moved away from its early focus on gender as a learned role to understanding how gender is embedded in the struc-

ture of social institutions. *Gendered institution* is the concept 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 processes of economic and political subordination– not just interpersonal relations.

- (3) And, finally, with regard to the study of sexuality –a more recently emerging field of study in sociology– scholars have moved away from studying sexual orientation strictly within a framework of deviance and, instead, now examine heterosexuality as an invisible system of institutional power and privileges. As with race and gender, contemporary scholarship on sexuality is framed by a paradigm that emphasizes both the social construction of sexuality and the existence of sexual privilege within dominant social institutions.

Each of these examples stems from paradigm shifts that have their origins in social and political movements that have had profound consequences for academic work. Race/class/gender studies originate in the movements for racial justice and in the feminist movement, even though these studies have taken on a life of their own within academic scholarship. No doubt, for some race/class/gender scholarship is simply another intellectual trend. Many younger scholars, for example, have embraced the importance of studying race, class, and gender, but coming as many do from contemporary gender studies, they can be embarrassingly unaware of the history of civil rights and the particular histories of diverse racial-ethnic groups. Knowing the origins of race/class/gender studies in social and political movements is an important reminder that race, class, and gender scholarship is not just theory for theory’s sake, but rather is fundamentally rooted in the desire for change on behalf of subordinated groups. Scholarship on race, for example, though long a part of the traditions of sociology, has been fundamentally altered by the increased voice of people of color, who are much less willing to settle for analyses that imagine racial-ethnic groups as passive at best or, at worst, complicit in their own oppression –points of view that continue to mark the perspective of conservative thinkers. I am thinking here of those who attribute the failure of groups to succeed to their presumed cultural inferiority. Such polemics are seldom based on accurate empirical evidence, but rather on stereotypes, stereotypes that we in the academy are not immune from.

As noted above, scholarship on race has changed from paradigms emphasizing the attitudes of whites or the presumed cultural inferiority of minority groups (especially African Americans) to paradigms that are grounded in perspective of social construction and racial formation (the term used to describe the historical and social process by which groups come to be defined as a race) (Omi and Winant, 1994). No longer is race seen as a matter of the hearts and minds of white people or of the presumably poor cultural values of people of color, but rather it is conceptualized as fundamentally rooted in the social structure of society (Feagin, 2000).

Race/class/gender studies have dual roots in the study of race and feminist studies. Within feminist studies women of color have long criticized white feminists for grounding their assumptions exclusively in the experiences of white (and mostly middle-class) women. I cannot review the entire history of the emergence of feminist scholarship here, but it is necessary to point out that, as the women's movement developed and feminist studies emerged in the academy, women of color have consistently stated the need for feminism to be inclusive of *all* women. Yet, through much of its development, the women's movement in the United States remained anchored primarily in the experience of white women. Women of color and their white allies have been at the forefront of creating new work that understands there is no unitary analysis of "woman" as a category. Rather, the inclusion of women of color in feminist work requires understanding the multiple and overlapping forms of oppression that converge in the experiences of women of color—and white women for that matter. Thus, new race, class, gender studies shift the focus from analyses that anchor scholarship in the viewpoints and experiences of dominant groups to understanding the lived experience of those historically defined as "other"—a process that Patricia Hill Collins and I refer to as "shifting the center" (Andersen and Hill Collins, 2001). Why this particular metaphor?

Shifting the center of thinking requires beginning one's study from the experiences and viewpoints of those who have been defined as marginal in society. Indeed, the metaphor of margins and center is reflected in much of the writing on race, class, and gender, such as in titles like *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Hooks, 1984), *Borderlands* (Anzaldúa, 1987), or *Daring to Dissent: Lesbian Culture from Margin to Mainstream* (Gibbs, 1994). This is more than a question of semantics. It reflects a fundamental shift in perspective and analysis. Think of the process of taking a photograph. For years, scholars simply kept women and people of color—and especially women of color—totally outside their frame of vision. But, as the angle of sight moves to the so-called margins of society, new subjects come into sight. This is more than a matter of sharpening one's focus (although that is required for clarity). Instead, it means actually seeing things differently, perhaps even changing the

lens we look through, thereby removing the filters that dominant groups bring to their observations. These filters are rooted in stereotypes, misconceptions, and inaccurate conclusions.

Of course, from the vantage point of those defined as “other,” the margins were always the center. Within systems of domination and subordination, dominant groups see only through the lens of privilege, unless they can see from the experience of the less advantaged. Dominant groups tend to take the existence of subordinated groups for granted. Thus, describing groups in society as “on the margin” or “in the center” is not a statement about how central different groups are to the workings of society, but refers to the power differences that stem from relations of inequality and how these power differences affect the social construction of knowledge. Although women and people of color are described as on the margins because of the exclusion that has been part of their histories, their existence, including their labor, is hardly peripheral. Indeed, the labor of women and people of color, both productive and reproductive, is essential to the maintenance of society. In fact, the experience of white men is only made possible through the labor of women and people of color in society.

We can see then that the power relations that create subordination and domination are reflected in the systems of knowledge that are used to describe and understand society. Shifting the center means that we can *know* through a different lens, that of the experience of the dominated. In shifting the center of knowledge from the center to the margins, new questions are asked: “Who has been excluded from what is known, and how might we see the world differently if we were to acknowledge and value the experiences and thoughts of those traditionally left out, ignored, or distorted?” (Andersen and Hill Collins, 2001: 13). Without doing this, what we know is distorted and incomplete because dominant systems of knowledge have silenced subordinated groups.

These arguments stem from a classic Hegelian view that dominant groups have a unique and partial worldview, both because they hold stereotypes about those defined as “other” and because they take the presence of others for granted, mostly because of their devalued position in the division of labor. Knowledge stems from the position that groups have within a system of power, and only the powerful can really think that race, class, and gender (as examples) do not matter—a point I return to in a later discussion of ideology. As systems of privilege, these social facts are least visible to those who benefit most from race, class, gender relations. This insight can also be used to understand systems of power and knowledge in a global context where the domination of one group or nation leads to distortions about those who are dominated or colonized. In this regard, studies in post-colonial

scholarship share an epistemological framework with some of the work in race/class/gender studies.

Patricia Hill Collins and I have stated the process of shifting the center as follows:

How does the world look different if we put the experiences of those who have been excluded at the center of our thinking? At first, people might be tempted to simply assert the perspective and experience of their own group. Seeing inclusively is more than just seeing the world through the perspective of any one group whose views have been distorted or ignored. Race, class, and gender are social structural categories. This means that they are embedded in the institutional structure of society. Understanding them requires a social structural analysis –by which we mean revealing the race, class, and gender patterns and processes that form the very framework of society (Andersen and Hill Collins, 2001: 16).

Why would we want to do this? Again, Hill Collins and I write, “Knowledge provides an orientation to the world. What you know frames how you behave and how you think about yourself and others” (2001: 15). In the context of this conference, knowledge is the basis for challenging stereotypes. Likewise, stereotypes are false generalizations about the presumed characteristics of some person or group just because the person is presumed to belong to that group. Stereotypes are based on false judgments, incorrect and inaccurate knowledge about others –in other words false knowledge. When knowledge stems from systems of exclusion, it can be used to further oppress and degrade those already misunderstood and misrepresented in dominant group thinking. And, if groups base their knowledge on exclusionary thought, they are likely to act in exclusionary ways, thereby reproducing the racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, class oppression, and homophobia of society. This is not necessarily because those holding stereotypes and other forms of false knowledge are deliberately racist, anti-Semitic, sexist, elitist, or homophobic; it may simply be that people do not know any differently. Thus, challenging oppressive race, class, and gender relations in society requires reconstructing knowledge to have some basis from which to change these damaging and dehumanizing stereotypes and systems of oppression (Andersen and Hill Collins, 2001).

Furthermore, shifting the center of thought illuminates the experiences not only of oppressed groups but also of dominant groups. For example, the development of women’s studies has not only changed what we know and how we think about women; it has also changed what we know and how we think about men. Gender, race, and class have shaped the experiences of both in different but inter-

connected ways. Likewise, the study of racial-ethnic groups begins by learning the diverse histories and experiences of these groups, but in doing so, we transform our understanding of white experiences, too. Race/class/gender studies force us to understand the intersections of race, class, and gender in the experiences of all groups, including those with privilege and power.

At the same time, shifting the center helps us see the multiple ways that race, class, and gender shape the diversity of individual and group experience. A good way to think about this has been articulated by the concept of a “prism of difference,” developed by Maxine Baca Zinn, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Michael Messner, all feminist sociologists. They state:

Imagine a ray of light –which to the naked eye, appears to be only one color– refracted through a prism onto a white wall. To the eye, the result is not an infinite, disorganized scatter of individual colors. Rather, the refracted light displays an order, a structure of relationships among the different colors –a rainbow. Similarly, we propose to use the “prism of difference” [...] to analyze a continuous spectrum of people, in order to show how gender is organized and experienced differently when refracted through the prism of sexual, racial/ethnic, social class, physical abilities, age and national citizenship differences (2000: 1).

## THEMES/ASSUMPTIONS IN RACE/CLASS/GENDER SCHOLARSHIP

The process of shifting the center has been critical to the development of race, class, and gender studies. These studies have been largely centered on the experiences of women of color, although this is not the exclusive focus of such work. Race, class, and gender studies incorporate an analysis of the multiple systems of domination that shape the experiences of Latinas/Latinos, African American, Native American, Asian American and white women and men in the United States. A fundamental idea is the concept of *intersectionality*. Neither race, nor class, nor gender stand alone as organizing principles of society; rather, they intersect, overlap, intertwine, simultaneously structure, and weave the fabric of all people’s experiences. Men and women, whites and blacks, gays and straights, and so forth. While any one of these group characteristics may be more salient at a given moment in the life of one person (for example, gender if a woman is raped; race if an African American man or Latino is profiled by the police), together they shape the total experience of all groups (Andersen, 2003). What, then, are the primary themes in the new race, class, and gender paradigm?

- (1) First is the fact that *neither race, class, nor gender can be subsumed analytically under any one of the others*. To explain further, many have conceptualized class as the major axis of social stratification. This incorrectly assumes that race and gender are somehow secondary or peripheral systems of inequality. Instead, race/class/gender scholars see race, class, and gender as equally primary in shaping social, economic, and political relations. No one is derived from the other; all are equally central in the formation of society (Glenn, 2002). Although this point is somewhat abstract, it points to the importance of understanding race, class and gender as significant in their own right and in relationship to each other. As we will see below, each shapes the other, but they have been equally important as organizing principles of society.
- (2) Second is that race, class, and gender are *interlocking systems* of inequalities, subordination, and domination. To illustrate, women are not just gendered subjects, but are situated within an array of social factors, including class, race, sexual orientation, and other facets of their lived experience. Making any one of these dimensions of life visible within an analysis that recognizes their interlocking character is likely to make the others visible as well (Andersen and Hill Collins, 2001). People –both women and men –experience these interlocking systems *simultaneously*. Thus, women of color experience their race and their gender not as separate categories but as intricately linked in their experience. Although one factor may be more salient at a given moment than another, it is their linkage that shapes the experiences of women of color, not just one or the other added together (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981; Combahee River Collective, 1982; Hill Collins, 1990; 1998; Baca Zinn and Dill, 1996; Andersen and Hill Collins, 2001). Furthermore, each shapes the others. Gender is manifested differently depending on race. Likewise, class and race intertwine, perhaps made apparent in the fact that in many societies, as the saying goes, “Class whitens.” Or, in another example, a Latino (man) may have some privileges associated with his gender, but may be disadvantaged by virtue of his racial-ethnic status and, perhaps, his social class. Race/class/gender studies recognize the complexity of these intersecting hierarchies, and, as we will see below, at all levels of experience (Baca Zinn and Dill, 1996; Andersen and Hill Collins, 2001).

Once you understand that race, class, and gender are simultaneous and intersecting systems of relationship and meaning, you also begin to see how other facts, such as age, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, region, nationality, and ethnicity also intersect and shape systems of privi-



lege and inequality (Andersen and Hill Collins, 2001). This does not mean that these various systems are all the same in how they operate in society. Sexuality, for example, has not been an organizing principle of social, political and economic institutions nor an explicit organizing principle of the division of labor in the same way that race and gender have been. Yet, processes of discrimination, stereotyping, and other exclusionary practices involving sexuality are similar to and interrelated with class, race, and gender. As a result, new questions about sexuality emerge in the context of race/class/gender studies. For one, we can see how the formation of heterosexual married households is part of the gender division of labor that establishes men as the breadwinner and women as their economic dependents. Sexuality also clearly intertwines with the ideologies associated with race, class and gender. Gender relations have been supported through ideologies that define women in sexualized terms; at the same time, heterosexism has been supported through gender ideologies that make heterosexuality seem to be the only "natural" form of gender relations. Sexuality also links with class through the sexualized representations of different class groups. One can make similar linkages between any other number of social characteristics: age, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and so forth.

- (3) Third is the recognition that race, class and gender *operate at multiple levels of social life*. Race, class, and gender are embedded in social institutions, but they are also part of our immediate social interactions, social identities, and social consciousness. Evelyn Nakano Glenn describes this as involving three realms: representation, micro-interaction, and social structure. Representation includes "the deployment of symbols, language, and images to express and convey race/gender meanings"; micro-interaction is "the application of race/gender norms, etiquette and spatial rules to orchestrate interaction within and across race/gender boundaries"; and, social structure refers to the "rules regulating the allocation of power and resources along race/gender lines" (Glenn, 2002: 12).

Thus, race, class, and gender have *both* a material *and* an ideological basis. Studies of race, class, and gender have then required understanding the economic and political facts of people's lives, as well as understanding how these are manifested in representational systems, such as stereotypes and ideology. The important thing is to see that no one of these realms can be studied in isolation from the others. Thus, stereotypes are intricately linked to social interaction and to social structures of power and inequality—a point I will explore later.

- (4) Race, class and gender studies are not just about women and people of color. Indeed, once you see that *invisible systems of privilege* have differential effects in all people's lives, it becomes essential to examine the lives and experiences of privileged groups as well as those disadvantaged by these systems. But, you do so in new ways. Thus, men are understood as gendered subjects, just as women are. White people can be studied through a lens that does not take race for granted (Andersen, 2003). Heterosexuals also come into view as having experiences shaped by their sexual privilege. No longer are gays and lesbians the only subjects in studies of sexuality. So, as scholars have thought more inclusively about race, class, and gender as intersecting systems, they have interpreted the experiences of all groups. Race, class, and gender affect the experience of all groups, not just those who are the most disadvantaged by inequality (Andersen and Hill Collins, 2001).

Once systems of privilege become visible, you also see that they are taken for granted. *Systems of privilege become the unexamined norm* from which all others are judged. Thus, "being white is a particular social position that has been largely unexamined" (Andersen, Bowler and Kimmel, 2004: 5), even while race and racism and racial inequality are structured around white privilege and implicit understandings about what being white means. Furthermore, whiteness becomes culturally hegemonic and maintains its hegemony by seeming natural or just not being questioned, just as heterosexuality becomes normative and is used to judge and devalue others. Likewise, masculinity becomes a hegemonic norm, crafting normative judgments about both men and women, while also being taken for granted. This becomes key to maintaining systems of privilege and domination. As one of the scholars working in what is now referred to as "whiteness studies," Richard Dyer, argues, "White power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything is particular" (1997: 1).

- (5) Fifth, race, class, and gender scholarship increasingly focuses on the *socially constructed basis* of these categories/experiences. Just as gender is a social construction, so is race socially constructed. Although many think of race as a biological category, its significance comes from its development as a socially created category of oppression and domination. Thus, the actual meaning of race changes over time, both as it is contested by oppressed racial groups and as the society changes in how race operates in social institutions and social relationships. Race is both a fluid category and one that has a concrete location in social institutions, such as in laws that define people in racial categories or in the income brackets that differentiate the class status

- of different racial-ethnic groups. Saying that race is socially constructed does not mean that it is not real, only that *it is the social reality of race that makes it meaningful in society* (Andersen and Taylor, 2006).
- (6) A further theme in these studies is that the study of race, class, and gender is not just about *victimization*, though certainly there are victims of this interwoven system of oppression. But, race, class, and gender studies see that people contest and challenge the systems of subordination and representation that oppress them. Race/class/gender scholars understand that there is “interplay of social structure and [...] agency” (Baca Zinn and Dill, 1996: 328). This means that even the most oppressed groups of women are not merely passive recipients of the abstract forces of social structure. *Human agency* refers to the active and creative ways that human beings give meaning to their experience and act on their own behalf. People are not just empty vessels into whom social forces are poured. Even under oppressive conditions, people have a consciousness that they use to define their experience; they act in ways that construct a meaningful social existence. This may take the form of accommodating oneself to oppressive social forces, but it also takes the form of resisting oppression –or at the very least, adapting to the conditions one faces. The focus on human agency in race/class/gender studies has highlighted the active and creative ways that groups resist oppression even at times when oppression seems overwhelming (Baca Zinn and Dill, 1996).
- (7) Race, class, and gender studies *challenge various forms of dichotomous thinking*. First, racism, sexism, and homophobia –and to some extent class– construct groups in binary opposition to each other. This means both that they are defined as opposites and that they are constructed in relationship to each other. Dehumanizing traits are used to identify the subordinated group, and they become defined as “other.” At the same time, the assumption that groups are posited in oppositional terms mystifies the complex relationship of groups to systems of power. Think about men and power as an example. Collectively, men hold power over women, but when you introduce a race/class/gender perspective into the picture, you see that power does not accrue equally to all men, as if a group is either powerful or not. As Michael Kimmel has stated, “aggregate power in the world does not translate to individual men feeling powerful” (Andersen, Bowler and Kimmel, 2004). Race/class/gender studies reveal the multiple dimensions of structural power, explaining how some groups of men can feel and be powerless (or at least less powerful) because of their class, race, or even sexual status, even when there is overwhelming gender inequality at the structural level.

- (8) Analyzing race, class, and gender simultaneously *discovers the parallels in diverse group experiences*. Understanding, for example, how stereotyping influences white perceptions of Black and Latino people also helps us understand how homophobic stereotypes operate. Or, analyzing the historic exploitation of Black women's labor as domestic workers helps us see similar processes at work in the segregation of immigrant Latinas and Asian American women in contemporary domestic labor—what is also being called now “care work.” Seeing the similarities in the experiences of diverse groups does not mean however that the groups' experiences are the same. Race, class, gender studies call attention to similar and interrelated processes in history and social structure, but also reveal the unique experiences of different groups. The interplay between common experiences and differences is important in analyzing the race, class, and gender dimensions of group life. Race, class, gender studies are *both* about untangling the race, class, and gender dimensions within the experiences of a given group *and* untangling the racialized, gendered, and class processes that shape structures of domination across groups. As we will see in the conclusion, this point is increasingly an issue in contemporary work linking sexuality to race/class/gender studies.
- (9) Finally, race, class and gender studies are *more than just recognizing diversity* within society. Throughout this paper I have emphasized the social structural basis of race, class, gender relations. Many have come to see and understand this, as in the United States the population has become more obviously diverse. But noticing diversity alone is not the same as analyzing the underlying systems of structured inequality. You can think about this in two ways: First is the *additive model* of diversity studies. This model recognizes that groups have been excluded from academic work and adds them into pre-existing ways of thinking. It defines groups as the sum of various social characteristics, using terms like “double jeopardy” to describe groups disadvantaged by more than one social status. Women of color, for instance, are seen as in double jeopardy because of the additive effects of their race and their gender.

An alternative model grounded in the concept of intersectionality is that of the *matrix of domination* (Hill Collins, 1990). Different from the additive model, this model emphasizes the structural linkages between race, class, and gender, not just their cumulative effects. The matrix of domination sees race, class, and gender as structurally connected and manifested in the social relations, opportunities, con-

sciousness of groups, and ideologies of society. Race, class, and gender do not operate as separate systems of social relations; they are integrally linked into the entire framework of domination. While diverse groups experience them in different ways, the interlocking character of race, class, and gender is a fundamental part of social structure.

## THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT OF RACE/CLASS/GENDER STUDIES

Why is the study of race, class, and gender so important now? Although I cannot possibly review the many empirical dimensions of race, class, gender inequality in the United States in this limited space, a few key points indicate the need for analyses that are centered in this intersectional framework.

- 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 slipping, relative to years past (Krugman, 2002; Mishel, Bernstein and Allegretto, 2005).
- Wealth is an even more significant fact of class differentiation than traditional measures of income inequality have revealed. Furthermore, race differences in wealth holdings are enormous. As one example, comparing middle-class families, for every dollar of wealth owned by whites, Black Americans have fifteen cents. Since the benefits of wealth cumulate over time, racial differences in wealth result in what sociologists Oliver and Shapiro have termed the “sedimentation of racial inequality” (1995: 5).
- Within class groups, racial group experiences are widely divergent. Thus, although there has been substantial growth of an African American middle class, the Black middle class has a tenuous hold on this class status and, because of continuing racial segregation is far more exposed to various risks than is the case for the white middle class (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). And, although there is less research on the Latino middle class, we know that there is significant class differentiation among Latino groups and significant class differences within particular groups (Massey, 1993).
- Few groups have seen any real income growth in recent years; men’s wages, except at the top, are flat or declining. Women in the top 25 percent of income groups have seen the highest wage growth over the last 20 years; the lowest earning groups of women, like men, have seen wages fall while the middle

has remained flat (Mishel, Bernstein and Allegretto, 2005). These data point to the need for analyzing race, class, and gender simultaneously without subsuming any one under any other. Class differences within gender, for example, are also hidden by treating women as a monolithic group.

- The most important source of income growth is the increased hours that people are 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 Allegretto, 2005).
- 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. Furthermore, the growth of paid labor among white, middle-class women has created increased reliance on domestic workers who come largely from recent Latina immigrant groups and whose labor is indispensable, largely unregulated, and severely underpaid (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001).
- Although poverty in the United States has been on the decline since 1993, it is now rising again. Poverty is particularly severe among women, especially among women of color and their children. For Latinas who are heading their own households, 38 percent are officially counted as poor. Among African Americans, 39 percent; Asian Americans, 14.8 percent, compared to 19.9 percent of white, non-Hispanic female-headed households. Experts agree that the official rates of poverty are an underestimation of the actual extent of poverty in the United States (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor and Mills, 2004).
- 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 are meager, and there has been an increase in the number of 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, Bush and Shook, 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, only one-third of U.S. workers are currently eligible for unemployment insurance (U.S. Department of Labor, 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 (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. As *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman recently wrote in a telling piece on the rise of a new plutocracy in the United States, "You can't understand what's happening in America today without understanding the extent, causes and consequences of the vast increase in inequality that has taken place over the last three decades" (2002: 63-64). I would add, you can't understand the vast inequality in society without understanding the entangled realities of race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of domination. Krugman goes on, "Denial of the evidence for inequality is a sizable, well-financed industry" (2002: 64). He is referring here to the ideological apparatus that continues to explain inequality as the failure of individuals not the failure of a whole system.

## UNDERSTANDING STEREOTYPES IN THE CONTEXT OF NEW IDEOLOGY

This said, how do we understand the stereotypes and ideology that fortify these systems of oppression? Two themes emerge: (1) the fact that race, class, and gender inequality is so persistent; and, (2) that members of the dominant group so firmly assert that race no longer matters, that the gender revolution is no longer needed, and that the United States is an open class system. Despite the overwhelming evidence of growing inequality along all three dimensions of race, class, and gender, there is an ever-present belief system in the United States that keeps many blind to the continuing differences in power and privilege that characterize U.S. society. In other words, an *ideology of neutrality* has been created that assumes that color- and gender-blindness are ideal. This ideology masks the continuing inequality of race, class, and gender (Andersen, 2001, 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's research provides ample empirical evidence of this point.

Sociologists analyze how "structural location influences how visible or invisible structural inequality is. Among white privileged groups, isolation from racial and ethnic groups, exacerbated by patterns of segregation in housing, magnifies the tendency for them not to see the sources of differential life chances that clearly distinguish different group outcomes. Those who never or seldom encounter structural obstacles based on race or gender—obstacles that go beyond individual blame or overt discrimination—are unlikely to see the influence of such structural conditions" (Andersen, 2001).

This structural location is the context for how stereotypes develop and are maintained and understood. First, let us think about stereotypes theoretically.

Stereotypes are usually understood as individually-held beliefs about groups and individuals within those groups. Like prejudice, stereotypes are based on false generalizations about the presumed negative characteristics of particular groups and their perceived members. Stereotypes are based on the human tendency to categorize groups based on a small range of perceived social characteristics. Though imagined, they have real consequences. There are reams of research showing their negative effects.

But stereotypes are often discussed and studied within a largely individualistic perspective as if they were free-floating ideas originating in people's heads, rather than being deeply embedded in the structure of institutions. Instead, we can conceptualize stereotypes as deeply rooted in ideology which is, in turn, anchored in the structure of social institutions. This is especially visible when you think about stereotypes from a race/class/gender perspective. Why, for example, do we focus so often on stereotypes when thinking about race and gender, but not class? Although there certainly are stereotypes associated with social class, seldom do social scientists use the concept of stereotypes to analyze class relations. I contend that this is because we have a more firm understanding of class as a material structure of opportunity, whereas we still tend to think of race and gender in terms of interpersonal relationships and individually-held beliefs, rather than as rooted in social structures of opportunity, power, and systems of economic, social, and political advantage and disadvantage.

Once you understand race and gender as we do class in structural terms, concepts of stereotypes change. Thus, Patricia Hill Collins has introduced the concept of *controlling images* to refer to the symbols that are instruments of power. As Hill Collins writes, these symbols (or stereotypes) disguise and mystify social relations. They are "designed to make racism, sexism, and poverty appear to be natural, normal, and an inevitable part of everyday life" (1990: 68). Such an analysis connects stereotypes to systems of power and race/class/gender inequality, instead of seeing them only as interpersonal perceptions.

So how can we think about stereotypes, utilizing the assumptions of race/class/gender studies? First, we see that, race, class, and gender—and sexuality—together construct stereotypes. Each gains meaning in relationship to the others (Glenn, 2002). Thus, racism is maintained through stereotypes that sexualize groups in different but particular ways. African American men are stereotyped as hypermasculine and oversexed; 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 “maddonnas” 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. Here we can see that controlling images of sexuality are part of the architecture of the stereotypes of race, class, and gender oppression. These stereotypes reveal the interlocking systems of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Second, stereotypes that are created in systems of domination construct race, class, and gender groups as “opposites.” Men and women, whites and blacks, gays and straights are all defined in dichotomous terms. Men are perceived as rational and detached; women, as emotional and dependent. Whites are stereotyped as intelligent, people of color as stupid and foolish. These dichotomous constructions reflect ways of thinking where subordinated groups are always characterized as the “other;” dominant groups as the norm.

Third, race, class, and gender are perceived as irrelevant to the status of dominant groups. Dominant groups are considered superior because of their individual characteristics, not the group-based characteristics that structure social order and support the higher status of those in power. Thus, seldom do people examine whiteness; instead, whites are assumed to be “raceless,” and only people of color are “raced.” Likewise, men are presumed to be without gender; only women are perceived as gendered subjects. Heterosexuals are presumed to be “normal,” gays and lesbians, “deviant.” Such stereotypes are embedded in ideologies that support the continued domination of powerful groups, groups who are perceived as having no race, sex, or gender and who, in turn, then deny that race, class and gender matter.

Thus, we can see stereotypes as institutionally rooted, even though manifested in the ideas that individual people hold in their minds. Our understanding of stereotypes should then flow from the linkage we establish between the representational realm and material reality. Thus, the process of racialization produces stereotypes that justify the stratification of labor that has characterized race relations (Glenn, 2002: 197). Rather than taking an exclusively structural approach, this analysis links representational realms to material realities, but locates stereotypes within the matrix of domination of race, class, and gender relations.

To illustrate this theoretical analysis of stereotypes, think about the stereotype of *dependency*. The ideology of dependency is critical to understanding the various issues that have surrounded public policy about inequality and welfare in the United States. Who has been defined as dependent? First, women, largely because of the traditional household structures that made women economically dependent on male breadwinners. But, if you start from a race/class/gender perspective, you will ask immediately if this is a false generalization because only some women

were in actuality accorded such a household arrangement, namely, white middle-class women (and only some of them, at that). Women of color, poor and working class women (and many middle-class women) have never been able to be economically dependent on men, given both the low status of poor, working class and minority men in the labor market and the reality of female-headed and female-supported families. Nonetheless, the presumed normative mode of women as economically dependent on men produced a stereotype of women as also psychologically dependent on men, thereby perpetuating images of women as weak, helpless, and needing men to be fulfilled.

Stereotypes of dependency have also been used in a different way as controlling images of people of color, especially women of color. Women of color are stereotyped as lazy welfare queens, dependent on federal and state handouts, and unwilling to work for a living. This gross stereotype is now the foundation for welfare policy in the United States. Although it takes different forms at various points in time, this stereotype has been central to the formulation of public policies and currently undergirds the elimination of crucial governmental social services in the United States.

But, if we look beyond the controlling images of race, class, and gender stereotypes, how do we see dependency differently? First, you see that the labor of women and people of color supports the lifestyle of other groups. White men are in fact highly dependent on this labor, both in the form of paid and unpaid work by women and people of color in the formal labor market and in the household. Who does the work that sustains human life? Women provide the unpaid (and paid) labor of numerous support services (child care, elder care, cooking, cleaning, shopping, and so forth). Moreover, the work that sustains human life is done disproportionately by women of color, working class women, poor women, and immigrant women who do it for meager wages. Working class men and men of color also provide much of the underpaid, undervalued "care work" of society, that is, if you define care work as all work that sustains human life, thereby including the numerous service occupations in which men of color and white, working-class men predominate.

Current data on men's work in the United States also raises new and interesting questions about dependency. Data clearly show that men's labor force participation has been steadily declining; women's, increasing, a long-term trend that is predicted to continue in the future. Two-earner families are now the norm in middle-class, heterosexual households. In other households, female-headed families predominate. Current data also indicate that many men who in the past would have been family breadwinners are now structurally unemployed, a result of the economic restructuring of the U.S. and global economy. Compared to the past when

unemployment for men tended to be temporary or seasonal, unemployment for men now is usually the result of permanent job loss. Data show a huge increase in the number of men now reliant on federal disability insurance, a government Social Security program that does not carry the same restrictions that characterize welfare programs. Thus, the number of people –mostly men– receiving disability pay has doubled since 1990 and the government spends far more on this program than it does for food stamps or unemployment insurance (Leonhardt, 2002). Three-fifths of those receiving disability insurance are men; three-quarters are white, non-Hispanic (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002). Yet, stereotypes of women of color as dependent and “on the dole” prevail. Dependence is viewed as incompatible with white masculinity (Glenn, 2002), even though white men’s independence is built on the subordination of women and people of color.

In sum, concepts of dependence provide an example of how stereotypes are linked to material reality and its buttressing ideologies. By viewing subordinated groups as dependent, women and people of color remain as “other,” perceived as flawed and failures. The point is not to replace one stereotype with another, but to show how stereotypes operate to produce a vision of reality that prevents people from seeing the underlying structural causes of race, class, and gender inequality.

## CONCLUSION: NEW QUESTIONS FOR RACE/CLASS/GENDER SCHOLARSHIP

There are many other issues that could be analyzed using the new framework of race/class/gender studies. I will briefly mention two that I hope we can explore in the future. First is to consider the implications of this paradigm for studies in an international setting. The meanings of race, gender, and class evolve within specific social and cultural contexts. How race and gender are socially constructed in different international settings is one area where there is potential for more work. How is race constructed in the context of different class-based societies? How does “color” map onto class-based systems, and how is it then related to group privilege? In a different vein, we can also link the race/class/gender processes of a given society to that of others within a framework of globalization. Thus, high rates of immigration in the United States link the domestic race/class/gender system within the United States to that within other nations. Such patterns as the domestic labor of immigrant women in the United States can only be understood in this context (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000).

A second important area of new investigation in race/class/gender studies is the study of sexuality. This paper has briefly shown how sexuality intermingles

with race, class, and gender in the formation and perpetuation of stereotypes. But other questions about sexuality also emerge. The gender, race, and class divisions of labor have, for example, been maintained through a family system of heterosexual households. But family patterns are changing with the decline of the male breadwinner as the dominant family form. How has sexuality supported the family/work nexus, and how will that change in the future? Unlike, race, gender, and class, however, sexuality does not organize the system of production. One could possibly find some correlation between sexual status and occupational distribution, were such data available, but sexuality has not been an explicit organizing structure of the division of labor in the same way that race, gender and class have been. There has not been, for example, a system of forced labor organized by sexuality in the same way that race was used to support a system of slavery. Thus, sexuality may not be an underlying structural basis of stratification in the same exact way as race, gender, and class, but it certainly has been part of the organization of dominant and subordinate group relations. How we conceptualize sexuality within the framework of race/class/gender studies is an area ripe for further examination.

In conclusion, we have seen that race/class/gender studies raise numerous new questions and new facts for social science investigations. As we further analyze stereotypes as manifestations of the ideologies of oppression, we will add to a rich and growing body of scholarship that has reframed our understanding of inequality.

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