INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY STUDIES



Emily Pain
Grand Rapids Community College

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About This Book

Introduction to Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (GRCC Edition) revised by Emily Pain (2024) is an edited version of the original text *Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies* by Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, Laura Heston, and Sonny Nordmarken (2017). The original copyright follows:

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Acknowledgements

My commitment to social justice for my students led me to adopt, and revise, this Open Educational Resource (OER) textbook for GST 200 Introduction to Gender Studies at Grand Rapids Community College.

I am grateful to Dr. Lauren Woolsey and the college at large for their support in utilizing OER resources and revising this textbook, and to GRCC student Seaira Mikaya who contributed to chapter revisions.

I also deeply appreciate the time and energy spent by Kang and colleagues in constructing the original version of this highly accessible textbook.

Finally, I am thankful to my students – it has been such a joy to teach and learn with you.

–Dr. Emily Pain

Acknowledgements of the original text *Introduction to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies* follows:

Thanks to the Open Education Initiative Grant at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, for providing the funds and support to develop this on-line textbook. It was originally produced for the course, Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies 187: Gender, Sexuality, and Culture, an introductory-level, general education, large-lecture course which has reached upwards of 600 students per academic year. Co-authored by Associate Professor Miliann Kang and graduate teaching assistants Donovan Lessard, Laura Heston and Sonny Nordmarken, this text draws on the collaborative teaching efforts over many years in the department of Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies. Many faculty, staff, teaching assistants and students have developed the course and generously shared teaching materials.

In the past, we have assigned textbooks which cost approximately $75 per book. Many students, including the many non-traditional and working-class students this course attracts, experienced financial hardship in purchasing required texts. In addition, the intersectional and interdisciplinary content of this class is unique and we felt could not be found in any single existing textbook currently on the market. In recent years, we have attempted to utilize e-reserves for assigned course readings. While more accessible, students and faculty agree that this approach tends to lack the structure found in a textbook, as it is difficult for students to complete all assigned readings and they are missing an anchoring reference text. This situation prompted us to begin drafting this text that we would combine with other assigned readings and make available as an open source textbook.

While this textbook draws from and engages with the interdisciplinary field of WGSS, it reflects the disciplinary expertise of the four authors, who are all sociologists. We recognize this as both a strength and weakness of the text, as it provides a strong sociological approach but does not cover the entire range of work in the field.

We would like to continue the practice of having our students access online content available in the University Learning Commons free of charge and hope this resource will be useful to anyone interested in learning more about the rich, vibrant and important field of Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies.

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1: Introduction to the Field

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

Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGSS) is an interdisciplinary field that challenges the androcentric production of knowledge. **Androcentrism** is the privileging of man- or masculine-centered ways of understanding the world.

> Alison Bechdel, a lesbian feminist artist, described in a comic strip what has come to be known as "the Bechdel Test," which demonstrates the androcentric perspective of a majority of feature-length films. Films pass the Bechdel Test only if they feature two (or more) women characters who talk to each other about something other than a man. You might be surprised to learn that a majority of films do not pass this test!
>
> This demonstrates how *androcentrism* is pervasive in the film industry. In a 2023 interview for The Guardian, Bechdel expressed continued disappointment in the film industry: "What's really dismaying now is the way so many movies cynically try to take shortcuts and feature strong female characters – but they just have a veneer of strength and they're still not fully developed characters" (Anderson 2023).



Feminist Frequency. 2009.*The Bechdel Test for Women in Movies*. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLF6sAAMb4s on August 20, 2024.

Feminist scholars argue that the common assumption that knowledge is produced by rational, impartial (men) scientists often obscures the ways that scientists create knowledge through gendered, raced, classed, and sexualized cultural perspectives (e.g., Scott 1991). The Women's Liberation Movement and Civil Rights Movement of the mid-20th century called attention to these conditions and aimed to address these absences in knowledge. Beginning in the 1970s, universities across the United States instituted Women's and Ethnic Studies departments (e.g., African American Studies, Asian American Studies, Latin American Studies, Native American Studies) in response to student protests and larger social movements. These departments reclaimed buried histories and centered the knowledge production of marginalized groups. As white, middle-class, heterosexual women had the greatest access to education and participation in Women's Studies, early incarnations of the field stressed their experiences and perspectives. In subsequent decades, contributions of women of color, immigrant women, women from the global south, poor and working class women, and lesbian and queer women became integral to Women's Studies. More recently, analyses of gender diversity, sexualities, disabilities, masculinities, religion, science, incarceration, indigeneity, and settler colonialism have become centered in the field. As a result of this opening of the field to incorporate a wider range of experiences and objects of analysis, many Women's Studies departments have renamed themselves "Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies" departments.

Feminist scholars recognize the inextricable connection between the notions of gender and sexuality in U.S. society, not only for women but for people of all genders, across a broad expanse of topics. In an introductory course, you can expect to learn about the impact of stringent beauty standards produced in media and advertising, why childrearing by women may not be as natural as we think, the history of the gendered division of labor and its continuing impact on the economic lives of men and women, the unique health issues addressed by advocates of reproductive justice, the connections between women working in factories in the global

south and women consuming goods in the United States, how sexual double-standards harm us all, the historical context for feminist movements and where they are today, and much more.

More than a series of topics, Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies offers a way of seeing the world differently. Scholars in this field make connections across institutional contexts (e.g., work, family, media, law, the state), value the knowledge that comes from lived experiences, and attend to, rather than ignore, marginalized identities and groups. Thanks to the important critiques of transnational, post-colonial, queer, trans and feminists of color, most contemporary WGSS scholars strive to see the world through the lens of *intersectionality*. That is, they see systems of oppression working in concert rather than separately. For instance, the way sexism is experienced depends not only on a person's gender but also on how the person experiences racism, classism, ageism, and other forms of marginalization within particular historical and cultural contexts.

By recognizing the complexity of the social world, Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies advocates for social change and provides insight into how this can be accomplished. WGSS is interdisciplinary – involving multiple academic disciplines – as feminist scholars include biologists, anthropologists, sociologists, historians, chemists, engineers, economists and researchers from just about any identifiable department at a university. Disciplinary diversity among scholars in this field facilitates communication across the disciplinary boundaries within the academy to more fully understand the social world. This text offers a general introduction to the field of WGSS. As all authors of this textbook are trained both as sociologists and interdisciplinary feminist scholars, we situate our framework, which is heavily shaped by a sociological lens, within larger interdisciplinary feminist debates. We highlight some of the key areas in the field rather than comprehensively covering every topic.

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2: Identities and Other Terms

Language is political, hotly contested, and always evolving, and can be deeply personal to each person who chooses the terms with which to identify themselves. To demonstrate respect and awareness of these complexities, it is important to be attentive to language and to honor and use individuals' self-referential terms (Farinas and Farinas 2015). Below are some common identity terms and their meanings. This discussion is not meant to be definitive or prescriptive but rather aims to highlight the stakes of language and the debates and context surrounding these terms, and to assist in understanding terms that frequently arise in classroom discussions. While there are no strict rules about language, these terms reflect much more than personal preferences. They reflect individual and collective histories, ongoing scholarly debates, and current politics.

Gender

Transgender (or *trans*) generally refers to individuals who identify as a gender other than the one that they were assigned at birth. The term is used as an adjective (e.g., "a transgender woman" rather than "a transgender"); however, some individuals may describe themselves by using transgender as a noun. The term *transgendered* is not used because it emphasizes ascription and undermines self-definition. The term *transsexual* is also not preferred as it has been medicalized and emphasizes biological sex rather than gender. *Transition* – the process of revealing one's true gender – can be internal, social, legal, and/or medical. *Trans** is an umbrella term that encompasses all gender-diverse identities (Tompkins 2014), and thus is intended to be inclusive and denote that trans includes nonbinary identities rather than only the binary identities of trans woman and trans man. **Nonbinary** and **genderqueer** refer to gender identities beyond binary of woman or man. The term genderqueer became popularized within queer and trans communities in the 1990s and 2000s, and the term nonbinary became popularized in the 2010s (Roxie 2011). **Agender**, meaning without gender, can describe people who do not have a gender identity, have an undefinable identity, are gender-neutral, or feel indifferent about gender (Brooks 2014). **Genderfluid** people experience shifts between gender identities and/or expressions.

Cisgender (or *cis*) refers to individuals who identify with the gender assigned to them at birth. Additional gender identity terms exist; these are just a few basic and commonly used terms. Again, the emphasis of these terms is on viewing individuals as they view themselves and using their self-designated names and pronouns.

Sexuality

Queer as an identity term refers to a non-categorical sexual identity in which people prefer not to be boxed into a specific category. It is also used as a synonym for all *LGBTQ+* individuals: (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer, plus other identities such as two-spirit, asexual, pansexual, and so on). The term was historically used in a derogatory way, but was reclaimed as an affirmative and self-referential term in the 1990s United States. **Lesbian** and **gay** typically refer to women and men who are primarily or exclusively attracted to other women and men (respectively), though these terms have also recently been used synonymously with LGBTQ+ and nonbinary or genderqueer people may identify as lesbian or gay despite not having a binary gender. **Bisexual** (or *bi*) was historically defined as someone attracted to both women and men, though this conceptualization has been problematized as a binary approach to sexuality that excludes individuals who do not identify as men or women. Some bisexual-identified people prefer to describe it as an attraction to more than one gender. **Pansexual** (or *pan*) is an identity marked by sexual attraction to people of any gender, or attraction regardless of gender. **Asexual** (or *ace*) is an identity marked by a general lack of sexual attraction (Decker 2014), or attraction that develops after a meaningful connection (demisexual) or that varies (graysexual). People who identify on the asexual spectrum distinguish between sexual and romantic attraction, highlighting that romance and sex are not necessarily tightly linked and that asexual people can have romantic relationships.

Polyamorous (or *poly* or *polyam*) or **ethically nonmonogamous** (or *ENM*) identities refer to people who have relationships that are open or non-exclusive. Poly and ENM individuals may have multiple consensual and individually-negotiated sexual and/or romantic relationships at once (Klesse 2006).

Race and Ethnicity

People of color (or *POC*) is a contemporary term used mainly in the United States to refer to all individuals who are non-white (Safire 1988). It is a political, coalitional term, as it encompasses common experiences of racism. *Colored people* is an antiquated term used before the Civil Rights movement in the United States and the United Kingdom to refer pejoratively to individuals of African descent. The term now may be taken as a slur in the US, as it represents a time when many forms of institutional anti-Black racism during the Jim Crow era were legal.

Black or **African American** are commonly preferred terms for individuals of African descent today in the U.S. today. These are widely used terms, though sometimes they obscure the specificity of individuals' histories. Examples of other preferred terms are *African diasporic* or *African descent*, to refer to people who trace their lineage to Africa but migrated through Latin America and the Caribbean. **Asian** or **Asian-American** are identities for people of Asian descent in the U.S. As with other racial groups, Asian cultures are diverse and numerous, and some people prefer to use identity terms such as Korean-American or Laotian as these terms connect the individual to their specific ancestral culture and help combat generalizations about 'Asians.' In fact, the diversity and complexity that exists within the common categories of 'race' in the U.S. (Black, Latinx/Hispanic, Asian, Indian/Native, and white) highlight how racial categories gloss over nuances in experience and identity of individuals that fall into one racial group. For instance, the racial category 'Asian' includes the ethnicities Korean, Laotian, Japanese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Chinese, and more and the racial category 'Black' includes the ethnicities Nigerian, Jamaican, Barbadians or Bajans, Egyptian, Ghanaian, Haitian, and more and include both people whose ancestors were enslaved in the U.S. and those whose were not. While experiences and outcomes vary widely among these groups, they are often overlooked or generalized under the category 'Asian' or 'Black.'

> A recent Pew Research Center study found that "about half of Asian Americans describe themselves most often by their ethnicity," though identification varies by factors such as immigrant status and ancestral origin. What does the prevalence of identification with an ethnic group rather than (or in combination with) a racial group suggest about the use of racial categories in the US? Do you feel that racial categories are useful? What are the pros and cons of racial categories?
>
> See the chart image describing Asian American identity here <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2023/05/RE_2023.05.08_Asian-American-Identity_1-01.png>.
>
> See the report *Asian Identity in the U.S.* here <https://www.pewresearch.org/2023/05/08/asian-identity-in-the-us/>.
>
> Ruiz, Neil G., Luis Noe-Bustamante, and Sono Shah. 2023. "Asian Identity in the U.S." *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/2023/05/08/asian-identity-in-the-us/ on August 15, 2024.

Latino is a term commonly used to describe people of Latin American origin or descent in the United States, while *Latin American* describes people in Latin America. *Latino* can refer specifically to a man of Latin American origin or descent whereas *Latina* refers specifically to a woman of Latin American origin or descent. The terms *Latino/a* and *Latin@* include both the –o and –a endings to avoid the sexist use of the masculine word 'Latino' to refer to all individuals (recall our discussion of *androcentrism*). Some people prefer *Latinx* or *Latine* to avoid either the –a or the –o gendered endings to explicitly include individuals of all genders (Ramirez and Blay 2017). *Chicano*, *Chicano/a*, *Chican@*, and *Chicanx* similarly describe people of Mexican origin or descent in the United States, and may be used interchangeably with *Mexican American*, *Xicano*, or *Xicano/a*. However, as *Chicano* has the connotation of being politically active in working to end oppression of Mexican Americans, and is associated with the Chicano literary and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, people may prefer the use of either *Chicano* or *Mexican American*, depending on their political orientation. *Xicano* is a shortened form of Mexicano, from the Nahuatl name for the indigenous Mexica Aztec Empire. Some individuals prefer the *Xicano* spelling to emphasize their indigenous ancestry (Revilla 2004). **Hispanic** refers to the people and nations with a historical link to Spain and to people of country heritage who speak the Spanish language. Although many people can be considered both Latinx and Hispanic, Brazilians, for example, are Latin American but neither Hispanic nor Latino, while Spaniards are Hispanic but not Latino. Preferred terms vary regionally and politically; these terms came into use in the context of the Anglophone-dominated United States.

Indigenous refers to descendants of the original inhabitants of an area, in contrast to those that have settled, occupied or colonized the area (Turner 2006). Terms vary by specificity; for example, in Australia, individuals are *Aboriginal*, while those in Canada are *First Nations*. Aboriginal is sometimes used in the Canadian context, too, though more commonly in settler-government documents, not so much as a term of self-definition. In the United States, individuals may refer to themselves as *Indian*, *American Indian*, *Native*, *Native American*, or perhaps more commonly they may refer to their specific tribes or nations. Because of the history of the term, 'Indian,' like other reclaimed terms, outsiders should be careful in using it.

Not all individuals may identify with or be categorized under one racial category. **Mixed-race**, *biracial*, and *multiracial* individuals identify or fall into multiple identity categories. Some people prefer to denote the combination of their identities such as the identity *Blasian* which points to both Black and Asian descent or *Afro-Latin* which points to both African and Latin descent.

Social Class

Social class categories and identities vary and rely on multiple factors including income, wealth, education, and occupational prestige. Generally, those who may identify with or be categorized in the **upper-class** have much wealth and high incomes, and often have high levels of education or job prestige (e.g., CEOs, celebrities, heirs to fortunes). Those who are **middle-class** typically have a comfortable income and some wealth, college or graduate-level educations, and highly or somewhat prestigious occupations (e.g., attorneys, doctors, higher-level managers, real estate agents), though there is much variation and some people distinguish between 'upper-middle' and 'lower-middle' classes. Those who are **working-class** may or may not have a comfortable income, and typically have little wealth, some college education or less, and lower job prestige (e.g., workers in construction, manufacturing, or shipping, lower-level managers, truck drivers). Those who identify or can be categorized as **poor** or **low-income** have little income, wealth, education, and job prestige (e.g., workers in retail or fast-food and other part-time or minimum-wage positions).

Social class identity is not static as there is the potential for *social mobility* (moving upward or downward on the social class hierarchy), though this is rare. Though an individual's current social class status can dictate their identity, their upbringing matters and should not be discounted. For instance, someone who was raised middle-class has social class benefits and privileges even if they are currently low-income or working-class. In future chapters we will return to this and other issues related to both race and social class.

Disability

Some people prefer person-first phrasing, while others prefer identity-first phrasing. **People-first language** linguistically puts the person before their physical, sensory, or mental impairment, such as "a *woman with* vision loss." This terminology is humanizing as it encourages nondisabled people to think of those with disabilities as people (Logsdon 2016). The acronym PWD stands for "people with disabilities." Although it aims to humanize, people-first language has been critiqued for aiming to create distance from the impairment, which can be understood as devaluing the impairment. Those who prefer **identity-first language** often emphasize embracing their impairment as an integral, important, valued aspect of themselves, which they do not want to distance themselves from. They may prefer language of "a *disabled person*," which points to how society disables individuals (Liebowitz 2015). Many terms in common use have ableist meanings or histories, such as evaluative expressions like "lame," "crippled," or "crazy," and some terms are now considered slurs and should be avoided in conversation. However, as with the term 'queer,' some ableist terms have been reclaimed in U.S. academia and social justice movements, such as with the term 'crip.'

Global

Multiple terms refer to global-level socioeconomic and political divides. Areas of the **Global South**, which are typically socioeconomically and politically disadvantaged, include Africa, Latin America, parts of Asia, and the Middle East. Generally, **Global North** areas, including the United States, Canada, Western Europe and parts of East Asia, are typically socioeconomically and politically advantaged. Terms like *Third World*, *First World*, *developing country*, and *developed country* have been problematized for their hierarchical meanings, in which areas with more resources and political power are valued over those with less resources and less power (Silver 2015). Although the terms Global South and Global North carry the same problematic connotations, these tend to be the preferred terms today. In addition, although the term **Third World** has been problematized, some people do not see it as a negative term and use it self-referentially, such as with Third World Feminists. Also, Third World was historically used as an oppositional and coalitional term for nations and groups who were non-aligned with either the capitalist First World and communist Second World especially during the Cold War. For example, those who participated in the Third World Liberation Strike at San Francisco State University from 1968 to 1969 used the term to express solidarity and to establish Black Studies and the Ethnic Studies College (Springer 2008). We use certain terms like Global North and Global South throughout the book, with the understanding that there are problematic aspects of these usages.

Transnational has been variously defined. **Transnational** describes migration and the transcendence of borders, signals the diminishing relevance of the nation-state in the current iteration of globalization, is used interchangeably with *diasporic* (any reference to materials from a region outside its current location including people who have dispersed or been dislocated from their culture of origin), designates a form of *neocolonialism* (new forms of colonialism such as transnational capital), and signals the *NGOization* (increasing development of national governmental organizations) of social movements. For Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (2001), the terms "transnational women's movements" or "global women's movements" are used to refer to U.N. conferences on women, global feminism as a policy and activist arena, and human rights initiatives that enact new forms of governmentality. Chandra Mohanty (2003) has argued that transnational feminist scholarship and social movements critique and mobilize against globalization, capitalism, neoliberalism, neocolonialism, and non-national institutions like the World Trade Organization. In this sense, transnational refers to "cross-national solidarity" in feminist organizing. Grewal and Caplan (2001)

have observed that transnational feminist inquiry also examines how these movements have been tied to colonial processes and imperialism, as national and international histories shape transnational social movements. In feminist politics and studies, the term transnational is used much more than “international,” which has been critiqued because it centers the nation-state. Whereas transnational can also take seriously the role of the state it does not assume that the state is the most relevant actor in global processes. Although all of these are technically global processes, the term “global” is oftentimes seen as abstract. It appeals to the notion of “global sisterhood,” which is often suspect because of the assumption of commonalities among women that often times do not exist.

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3: Variation in Sex, Gender, and Sexuality

This chapter takes a deeper look into cultural constructions of sex, gender, and sexuality in contemporary US culture. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but an introduction to the cultural meanings and complexities of sex, gender, and sexuality.

Sex

The existence of sex variations fundamentally challenges the notion of a binary biological sex – that sex is either "female" or "male." **Intersex** describes individuals with sex characteristics that do not fit cultural definitions of what is considered "male" or "female," or variation in sex characteristics such as chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, or genitals. The bodies of "intersex" people, like those of "female" and "male" people, is a socially constructed category that humans have created to label bodies that they view as different from those they would classify as distinctly "female" or "male." The term is slightly misleading because it may suggest that people have complete sets of what would be called "male" and "female" reproductive systems, but those kinds of human bodies do not actually exist; "intersex" really refers to biological variation. The dated and derogatory term "hermaphrodite" is inappropriate for referring to intersex people, and should be avoided.

There are a number of specific biological sex variations. For example, having one Y and more than one X chromosome is called Kleinfelter Syndrome. Does the presence of more than one X mean that the XXY person is female? Does the presence of a Y mean that the XXY person is male? These individuals are neither clearly chromosomally male or female; they are chromosomally intersex. Some people have genitalia that others consider ambiguous. This is not as uncommon as you might think, though accurately estimating the intersex population is complicated due to the varied measurements and definitions of "intersex" and lack of tracking requirements. Intersex advocacy organization InterACT explains, based on the work of Dr. Anne Fausto-Sterling, that approximately 1.7% of individuals are born intersex and that 0.05% of individuals (1 in 2,000) are born with ambiguous genitalia of which the doctor may suggest unnecessary surgeries to correct (InterACT 2021). So, why is this knowledge not commonly known? Many individuals born with genitalia not easily classified as "male" or "female" are subject to genital surgeries during infancy, childhood, and/or adulthood which aim to change this visible ambiguity. Surgeons alter the size of the genitals of infants they want to make look more typically "female" or "male." For instance, in infants with genital appendages smaller than 2.5 centimeters doctors reduce the size and assign them as "female" (Dreger 1998). In each instance, surgeons literally construct and reconstruct individuals' bodies to fit into the dominant, binary sex system. While parents and doctors justify this practice as in "the best interest of the child," many people experience these surgeries and their social treatment as traumatic, as they are typically performed without patients' knowledge of their sex variation or their consent. Individuals often discover their chromosomal makeup, surgical records, and/or intersex status in their medical records as adults, after years of physicians hiding this information from them. The surgeries do not necessarily make bodies appear "natural," due to scar tissue and at times, disfigurement, and/or medical problems and chronic infection. The surgeries can also result in psychological distress. In addition, many of these surgeries involve sterilization, which can be understood as part of eugenics projects, which aim to eliminate intersex people. Therefore, there has been a degree of shame, secrecy, and betrayal surround the surgeries.

Intersex activists began organizing in North America in the 1990s to stop these nonconsensual surgical practices and to fight for patient-centered intersex health care. Broader international efforts emerged next, and Europe has seen more success than the first wave of mobilizations. In 2008, Christiane Völling of Germany was the first person in the world to successfully sue the surgeon who removed her internal reproductive organs without her knowledge or consent (International Commission of Jurists, 2008). In 2015, Malta became the first country to implement a law to make these kinds of surgeries illegal and protect people with sex variations as well as gender variations (Cabral & Eisfeld, 2015). Accord Alliance is the most prominent intersex focused organization in the U.S.; they offer information and recommendations to physicians and families, but they focus primarily on improving standards of care rather than advocating for legal change. Due to the efforts of intersex activists, the practice of performing surgeries on children is becoming less common in favor of waiting and allowing children to make their own decisions about their bodies. However, there is little research on how regularly nonconsensual surgeries are still performed in the U.S., and as Accord Alliance's standards of care have yet to be fully implemented by a single institution, we can expect that the surgeries are still being performed.

Scholars have identified how sex is not static or unchanging, as we might expect. For instance, Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) proposed *dynamic systems theory*, which conceptualizes sex as potentially fluid, as bodies, organs, and sex characteristics can be influenced by physical and social environments. **Fluidity** in this sense refers to the capacity for change, such as changes in sex

characteristics, gender identity or expression, and sexual identity or attraction. As with the existence of intersex people, fluidity in bodily and sex characteristics challenges binary notions of sex as strictly "female" or "male."

Gender

A binary gender perspective assumes that only women and men exist, obscuring gender diversity and erasing the existence of people who do not identify as men or women. A gendered assumption in our culture is that someone assigned female at birth will identify as a woman and that all women were assigned female at birth. While this is true for **cisgender** (or *cis*) individuals—people who identify in accordance with their gender assignment—it is not the case for everyone. Some people assigned male at birth identify as women, some people assigned female identify as men, and some people identify as neither women nor men. This illustrates the difference between, **sex assignment**, which doctors place on infants (and fetuses) based on the appearance of genitalia and other biological markers, and **gender identity,** which one discerns about oneself. The existence of **transgender** (or *trans*) people, individuals who do not identify with the gender assigned at birth, challenges the very idea of a single sex/gender identity. For example, trans women, those who were assigned male and are women, show us that not all women are born with female-assigned bodies. The fact that trans people exist contests the *biological determinist* argument that biological sex predicts gender identity. Transgender people may or may not have surgeries or hormone therapies to change their physical bodies, but in many cases they experience a change in their social gender identities. **Nonbinary** people – an umbrella term for those who do not identify within the binary of woman or man – may use specific identities such as nonbinary, **genderfluid**, or **genderqueer**. Genderfluid is a specific identity which denotes the capacity for fluidity in gender identity and/or expression, though individuals who experience gender fluidity may not identify specifically with that term and instead select the identity that best suits them at the time. Some nonbinary individuals may use gender-neutral pronouns, such as they/them or ze/hir, rather than the gendered pronouns she/her or he/his. As pronouns and gender identities are not visible on the body, trans communities have created procedures for communicating gender pronouns, which consists of verbally asking and stating one's pronouns (Nordmarken, 2013). Though estimates vary, a recent Pew study suggests that 1.6% of the U.S. population and over five percent of U.S. young adults identify as transgender or nonbinary (Brown 2022).

The concepts of *transgender* and *intersex* are easy to confuse, but these terms refer to very different identities. To review, transgender people are those who identify with a gender other than that assigned at birth, while intersex people are those who have biological characteristics that do not fit neatly within the dominant sex/gender system. One term refers to gender (trans*gender*) and one term refers to biological sex (inter*sex*); however, some people may also use intersex as a social or gender identity. While transgender people challenge our binary ideas of gender (woman/man), intersex people challenge our binary ideas of biological sex (female/male). Gender theorists, such as Judith Butler and Gayle Rubin, have challenged the very notion that there is an underlying "sex" to a person, arguing that sex, like gender, is socially constructed. This is revealed in different definitions of "sex" throughout history in law and medicine. For instance: Is sex composed of genitalia? Is it simply genetic make-up? A combination of the two? Various social institutions, including courts, have not come to a consistent or conclusive way to define sex, and the term "sex" has been differentially defined throughout the history of law in the United States. In this way, we can understand the biological designations of "male" and "female" as social constructions that reinforce the binary construction of men and women.

Sexuality

Sexuality, too, was socially constructed as a binary of "gay" and "straight," though those are contemporary terms. Since the invention of the concepts "heterosexuality" and "homosexuality" in the 1800s, and subsequent adoption of heterosexual and homosexual as sexual identities, sexual categories have proliferated to include bisexual, pansexual, asexual, queer, fluid, and more. This variation has created challenges for researchers attempting to count the LGBTQ+ population. For instance, studies that ask whether or not people identify as "lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender" exclude all the other sexual identities, and lump gender identity (transgender) in with sexual identities (lesbian, gay, and bisexual). Additionally, survey respondents may not publicly or openly identify as such even if they have attractions or internal identities that may classify them as LGBTQ+. Thus, survey data may underreport the proportion of LGBTQ+ populations. A recent Gallup poll suggests that that 7.6% of the U.S. adult population identifies as LGBTQ+, with most of those individuals identifying as bisexual (Jones 2024).

> A recent Gallup poll indicates that 7.6% of U.S. adults identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or some other sexual orientation besides heterosexual, an increase from prior years. The poll also found that more than one in five adults in the Gen Z generation identify as LGBTQ+.

See a chart showing the percent increase from 2012 to 2023 and the news report *LGBTQ+ Identification in U.S. Now at 7.6%* here <https://news.gallup.com/poll/611864/lgbtq-identification.aspx>.

Jones, Jeffrey. 2024. "LGBTQ+ Identification in U.S. Now at 7.6%." Gallup. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/2023/05/08/asian-identity-in-the-us/ on August 20, 2024.

Finally, studies can fail to differentiate between gender and sexuality in measuring the LGBTQ+ population. Transgender and nonbinary people can be queer by way of both gender or sexuality, or by only gender if they identify sexually as straight. A common misconception is that all trans people identify as sexually queer. Though the sexuality of trans people may be considered 'queer' as it falls outside of culturally-normative or -acceptable sexualities, some trans people identify as straight. The assumption that all trans people identify with a queer sexuality may stem from the "LGBTQ+" acronym that lists trans (T) people along with lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and other queer people (LGBQ). A trans man who previously identified as a lesbian may still be attracted to women and thus may identify as straight, or may identify as queer. Another trans man may be attracted to other men and thus identify as gay or queer. This multiplicity suggests that the culturally dominant binary model fails to accurately encapsulate the wide variety of sexual and gender lived experiences.

The identity **queer** also complicates our understanding of sexuality. Whereas other identities point to specific attractions (e.g., lesbian refers to attraction to women, pansexual refers to attraction to any gender), queer is ambiguous and inclusive of the possibility of fluidity (see below). Those who identify as queer may do so for a variety of reasons such as to be intentionally vague, to avoid being boxed into specific attractions, or to be inclusive of trans and nonbinary individuals. Cultural understandings of sexuality as determined biologically, inherently static, and tied to romance are also challenged by **flexible** and **romantic identities**. For instance, people may use "homoflexible," "lesbiflexble," and "heteroflexible" to denote that they have a primary sexual attraction but are open to other experiences or sometimes have other attractions, and the identities "aromantic," "panromantic," or "heteroromantic," point specifically to romance or relationships and are used to differentiate sexual attraction and romantic attraction.

Sexuality cannot be simply reduced to whether people are straight, gay, lesbian, pan, queer, and so on. Sexuality also includes other identities, desires, and behaviors including how we have sexual encounters, negotiations around sexual encounters, power dynamics with sexual partners, and much more.

Online sex educators at Scarleteen highlight several components or 'circles' of sexuality:

- Sensuality
- Intimacy
- Sexual orientation and gender identity
- Sexual and reproductive health
- Sexual behaviors and practices
- Power and agency

See the image "Circles of Sexuality" and the article *Sexuality: WTF Is It, Anyway?* here <https://www.scarleteen.com/read/sexuality-wtf-it-anyway>.

Corinna, Heather. 2024. *Sexuality: WTF Is It, Anyway?*. Scarleteen: Queer Sex Ed for All. Retrieved from https://www.scarleteen.com/read/sexuality-wtf-it-anyway on August 20, 2024.

Other sexual communities include kink/BDSM (bondage/discipline, dominance/submission, sadism/masochism), lifestyle or swinging, and polyamorous communities, and many individuals are part of multiple sexual communities. As with sex and gender, sexuality can involve any degree of *fluidity*. For instance, a person's sexual attractions might change over their life course such that they may identify first as straight, then lesbian, then pansexual, or a person's sexual interests could develop after being introduced to a particular sexual community or after thinking critically about their own needs and desires.

As you can see, sex, gender, and sexuality are not as clear cut as the culture teaches many of us to believe. There is enormous variation in sex characteristics and bodies, gender identities and expressions, and sexual identities and attractions. None can be reduced to a simple binary, as they were socially constructed. We will revisit the concepts of *binary systems* and *social construction* in future chapters.

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4: Theorizing Lived Experience

You may have heard the phrase “the personal is political” at some point in your life. This phrase, popularized by feminists in the 1960s, highlights the ways in which our personal experiences are shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces within the context of history, institutions, and culture. **Socially-lived theorizing** means creating feminist theory and knowledge from the actual day-to-day experiences of groups of people who have traditionally been excluded from the production of academic knowledge. A key element to feminist analysis is a commitment to the creation of knowledge grounded in the experiences of people belonging to marginalized groups such as women, people of color, indigenous people, immigrants, people in the Global South, LGBTQ+ people, poor and working-class people, and disabled people.

Feminist theorists and activists argue for theorizing beginning from the experiences of the marginalized because people with less power and resources often experience the effects of oppressive social systems in ways that members of dominant groups do not. From the “bottom” of a social system, participants have knowledge of the power holders of that system as well as their own experiences, while the reverse is rarely true. Therefore, their experiences allow for a more complete knowledge of the workings of *systems of power* – social systems of domination and subordination (see chapter 9). For example, a story of the development of industry in the 19th century told from the perspective of the owners of factories would emphasize capital accumulation and industrial progress. However, the development of industry in the 19th century for immigrant workers meant working 16-hour days to feed themselves and their families and fighting for employer recognition of trade unions so that they could secure decent wages and the eight-hour work day. Depending on which point-of-view you begin with, you will have very different theories of how industrial capitalism developed, and how it works today.

A common thread of feminist theorizing is the belief that knowledge is shaped by the political and social context in which it is made (Scott 1991). Acknowledging that all knowledge is constructed by individuals inhabiting particular social identities, feminist theorists argue that **reflexivity** – understanding how one’s social position influences the ways that they understand the world – is of utmost necessity when creating theory and knowledge. As people occupy particular social locations in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, age, and ability, these multiple identities in combination simultaneously shape their social experiences. At certain times, specific dimensions of their identities may be more salient than at others, but at no time is anyone without multiple identities. Thus, categories of identity are *intersectional* (see chapter 12), influencing the experiences that individuals have and the ways they see and understand the world around them.

Feminist theorizing also challenges *androcentric* perspectives (see chapter 1) that center men and masculinity in the production of knowledge. It is inherently political as it seeks to expose, explain, and eliminate social injustices along the basis of gender, sexuality, race, class, disability, nationality, and other areas. In fact, **feminism** is both a political belief system in gender equality and social justice, and an academic perspective. Feminism as an academic perspective is a **paradigm**: A broad lens through which we seek to understand the world. A paradigm is an umbrella perspective because it is an overarching approach to frame or analyze phenomena that may include a variety of specific **theories**: Focused explanations that seek to explain specific phenomena. For instance, under the broad paradigm *social constructionism* (see chapter 5) there are a variety of specific constructionist theories to explain gender or sexuality such as Gagnon and Simon's sexual script theory, and under the paradigm *queer theory* falls Butler's theory of gender performativity and Foucault's theory of sexual discourse. (Note that some broad paradigms include the word 'theory' such as queer theory or conflict theory, despite that they are not narrow theories that seek to explain specific phenomena but rather are an overarching lens through which to frame those phenomena.)

As an academic perspective, feminism is not a single school of thought but encompasses diverse theories and analytical perspectives such as socialist feminist theories, radical sex feminist theories, Black feminist theories, queer feminist theories, trans feminist theories, feminist disability theories, and intersectional feminist theories.

> In the video below, “Barbie explains feminist theories,” Cristen defines feminisms generally as a project that works for the “political, social, and economic equality of the sexes,” and suggests that different types of feminists propose different sources of gender inequality and solutions. Cristen (with Barbie’s help) identifies and defines 11 different types of feminism and the solutions they propose:
>
> - Liberal feminism
> - Marxist feminism
> - Radical feminism
> - Anti-porn feminism
> - Sex positive feminism

- Separatist feminism
- Cultural feminism
- Womanism (intersectional feminism)
- Postcolonial feminism
- Ecofeminism
- Girlie feminism

Which issues across these feminisms do you think are most important? What types of feminism do you think that Cristen and Barbie leave out of this list? Do you agree with how they characterize these types of feminism?



Stuff Mom Never Told You. 2016. "Barbie Explains Feminist Theories." Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3D_C-Nes60 on August 20, 2024.

In the United States, we are often taught to think that people are self-activating, self-actualizing individuals. We repeatedly hear that everyone is unique and that everyone has an equal chance to make something of themselves. While feminists do believe that people have **agency** – the ability to influence the direction of their lives – they also argue that an individual's agency is limited or enhanced by their social position. A powerful way to understand oneself and one's multiple identities is to situate one's experiences within multiple **levels of analysis**: different analytical approaches to understanding a social phenomenon including *micro*, *meso*, *macro*, and *global levels*. Connecting personal experiences (the micro perspective) to larger groups and structural forces of race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and ability (the meso, macro, and global perspectives) allows for a more powerful understanding of how our own lives are shaped by forces greater than ourselves, and how we might work to change these larger forces of inequality. Like a microscope that is initially set on a view of the most minute parts of a cell, moving back to see the whole of the cell, and then pulling one's eye away from the microscope to see the whole of the organism, these levels of analysis allow us to situate day-to-day experiences and phenomena within broader, structural processes that shape whole populations.

The **micro level** is that which we, as individuals, live everyday – interacting with other people on the street, in the classroom, or while we are at a party or a social gathering. Therefore, the micro-level is the level of analysis focused on individuals' experiences and small group interactions. The **meso level** of analysis moves the microscope back, seeing how larger groups, communities, and organizations structure social life. A meso level analysis might look at how individual churches shape gender expectations for women, how elementary schools teach students to become girls and boys, or how workplace policies facilitate or inhibit gender transition for trans and nonbinary workers. The **macro level** consists of social institutions and institutional policies, as well as ideologies and categories of identity. In this way, the macro level involves national power structures as well as cultural ideas about different groups of people according to race, class, gender, and sexuality spread through various social institutions, such as media, education and policy. Instead of examining individual organizations, a macro level analysis might investigate how the institution of religion perpetuates sexist gender ideologies, how the institution of education perpetuates a gender binary, or how the institution of work marginalized trans and nonbinary workers. Finally, the **global level** of analysis includes global capitalism, transnational production, trade, and migration, and transnational organizations – larger transnational forces that bear upon our personal lives but that we often ignore or fail to see – such as the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, and the World Trade Organization.

How Macro Structures Impact People: *Maquiladoras*

Applying multiple levels of analysis, let's look at the experiences of a Latina working in a *maquiladora* – a factory on the border of the U.S. and Mexico. These factories were built to take advantage of the difference in the price of labor in these two countries. At the micro level, we can see the worker's daily struggles to feed herself and her family. We can see how exhausted she is from working every day for more than eight hours and then coming home to care for herself and her family. Perhaps we could examine how she has developed a persistent cough or skin problems from working with the chemicals in the factory and using water contaminated with run-off from the factory she lives near. On the meso level, we can see how the community that she lives within has been transformed by the *maquiladora* and how other women in her community face similar financial, health, and environmental problems. We may also see how these women are organizing together to attempt to form a union that can press for higher wages and benefits. Moving to the macro and global levels, we can situate these experiences within the Mexican government's participation within global and regional trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) and the Central American Free Trade Act (CAFTA) and their negative effects on environmental regulations and labor laws, as well as the effects of global capitalist restructuring that has shifted production from North America and Europe to Central and South America and Asia.

Through looking at labor in a *maquiladora* through multiple levels of analysis we are able to connect what are experienced personal problems to economic, cultural, and social problems. Recognizing how forces greater than ourselves operate in shaping the successes and failures we typically attribute to individual decisions allows us see how inequalities are patterned by race, class, gender, and sexuality, not just by individual decisions. Approaching these issues through multiple levels of analysis – at the micro, meso, macro, and global levels – gives a more integrative and complete understanding of both personal experience and the ways in which social structures affect the people who live within them. This not only gives us the ability to develop *socially-lived theory*, but also allows us to organize with other people who feel similar effects from the same economic, cultural, and social problems in order to challenge and change these problems.

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5: Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a theoretical perspective that holds that characteristics typically thought to be immutable and solely biological such as gender, sexuality, race, and ability are products of human definition and interpretation shaped by cultural and historical contexts (Subramaniam 2010). As such, social constructionism highlights the ways in which cultural categories such as "men" and "women" or "Black" and "white" are concepts created, changed, and reproduced through historical processes within institutions and culture. We do not mean to say that bodily variation among individuals does not exist, but that we construct categories based on certain bodily features, we attach meanings to these categories, and then we place people into the categories by considering their bodies or bodily aspects. For example, by the *one-drop rule* (see chapter 10) individuals with any African ancestor are considered Black regardless of their appearance. In contrast, racial conceptualization and thus racial categories are different in Brazil, where many individuals with African ancestry are considered to be white. This shows how identity categories are not based on strict biological characteristics, but on the social perceptions and meanings that are assumed. Categories are neither natural nor fixed and the boundaries around them are always shifting—they are contested and redefined in different historical periods and across different societies. Therefore, the social constructionist perspective is concerned with the *meaning* created through defining and categorizing groups of people, experience, and reality in cultural contexts.

Essentialism and Constructionism

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

Essentialism typically relies on a biological determinist theory of identity. **Biological determinism** can be defined as a general theory, which holds that a group's biological or genetic makeup shapes its social, political, and economic destiny (Subramaniam 2014). For example, "sex" is typically thought to be a biological "fact," where bodies are classified into two categories, male and female. Bodies in these categories are assumed to have "sex"-distinct chromosomes, reproductive systems, hormones, and sex characteristics. However, "sex" has been defined in many different ways, depending on the context within which it is defined. For example, feminist law professor Julie Greenberg (2002) writes that in the late 19th century and early 20th century, "when reproductive function was considered one of a woman's essential characteristics, the medical community decided that the presence or absence of ovaries was the ultimate criterion of sex" (Greenberg 2002: 113). Thus, sexual difference was produced through the *heteronormative* assumption (see chapter 8) that women are defined by their ability to have children. Instead of assigning sex based on the presence or absence of ovaries, medical practitioners today assign sex based on on differing factors such as the appearance of genitalia or chromosomal testing, highlighting how "sex" can be defined differentially.

Differential definitions of sex point to two other primary aspects of the social construction of reality. First, it makes apparent how even the things commonly thought to be "natural" or "essential" in the world are socially constructed. Understandings of "nature" change through history and across place according to systems of human knowledge. Second, the social construction of difference occurs within relations of power and privilege. Sociologist Abby Ferber (2009) argues that these two aspects of the social construction of difference cannot be separated, but must be understood together. Discussing the construction of racial difference, she argues that inequality and oppression actually produce ideas of essential racial difference. Therefore, racial categories that are thought to be "natural" or "essential" are created within the context of racialized power relations—in the case of African-Americans, that includes slavery, laws regulating interracial sexual relationships, lynching, and white supremacist discourse. Social constructionist analyses seek to better understand the processes through which racialized, gendered, or sexualized differentiations occur, in order to untangle the power relations within them.

Notions of disability are similarly socially constructed within the context of ableist power relations. The **medical model of disability** frames body and mind differences and perceived challenges as flaws that need fixing at the individual level. In contrast, feminist scholars use a *critical disability perspective*, which critiques the idea that nondisability is natural and normal, which frames the person rather than the society as the problem. The **social model of disability** shifts the focus to the disabling aspects of society for individuals with physical, sensory, or mental differences or "impairments," where the society disables those with

impairments (Shakespeare 2006). In *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013), scholar Alison Kafer prefers the term **political/relational model of disability**, contrasting it to the medical model: Whereas the medical model "frames atypical bodies and minds as deviant, pathological, and defective, best understood and addressed in medical terms," in the political/relational model, "the problem of disability no longer resides in the minds or bodies of individuals but in built environments and social patterns that exclude or stigmatize particular kinds of bodies, minds, and ways of being" (Kafer 2013: 6). *Ableism* (see chapter 9) then refers to a form of oppression where individuals understood as having impairments are imagined to be inferior to those without impairments, and impairments are devalued and unwanted. This perspective manifests in structural arrangements that limit access for disabled individuals or individuals with disabilities.

Historical and Cultural Variation

What does it mean to be "heterosexual" in contemporary US society? Did it mean the same thing in the late 19th century? As historian of human sexuality Jonathon Ned Katz shows in *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (1999), the word "heterosexual" was used in medical writing by Dr. James Kiernan in 1892, but its meaning and usage differed drastically from contemporary understandings of the term. Kiernan thought of "hetero-sexuals" as not defined by their attraction to the opposite sex, but by their "inclinations to both sexes." Furthermore, Kiernan thought of the heterosexual as someone who "betrayed inclinations to 'abnormal methods of gratification'" (Katz 1995). In other words, heterosexuals were those who were attracted to both sexes and engaged in sex for pleasure, not for reproduction. Katz further points out that this definition of the heterosexual lasted within middle-class cultures in the United States until the 1920s, and then went through various radical reformulations up to the current usage.

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

Homosexuality also changed over time. Katz, in *Gay American History*, also documented that its meaning changed from a behavior (sodomy, which included many other nonprocreative forms of sex) to a type of gender deviance (people attracted to the same sex were gender 'inverts') to an abnormal personality (people became a 'homosexual' which was considered psychologically abnormal) to an affirmative identity (people proudly identified as gay). Similarly, George Chauncey's work in *Gay New York* explores how working-class men in the early 1900s weren't categorized as 'gay' if they had sex with another man, but as either 'fairies' if they were in the passive role of receiver or as typical men if they were the active role of penetrator (Seidman 2015). Who we would consider 'gay' or 'queer' now were not characterized then by sexuality but by gender – as masculine or feminine. As Weisner-Hanks (2011: 195) explains, "In some cultures, sexuality may be understood primarily as a gendered orientation – as desiring and having sexual relations with individuals who are regarded as one's own or the opposite sex – while in others it may be thought of primarily in terms of the number or age of one's sexual partners, or the role one takes in intercourse."

The social construction of sex, gender, and sexuality are also evident when we take a cross-cultural perspective. *Feminist anthropology* examines how gender and sexuality are socially constructed in relation to power dynamics in different cultures across the world. Beauty standards or what's considered 'sexy' or even what counts as 'sexual' are all based on culture. The way Western societies (such as the US, Brittain, France, and so on, predominantly white and rich nations) constructed sex, gender, and sexuality is with a *binary system* (see chapter 6), meaning that there are only two categories imagined as opposite and complementary. For instance, the culture created female or male for sex and women or man and feminine or masculine for gender, which fail to represent the reality of bodies, identities, and other social realities. Other binary systems include Black/white, rich/poor,

gay/straight, young/old, and so on, none of which express the variation and complexity of the world. There are spectrums or gradations, but binaries are rare.

Western culture also constructed biological sex and gender to be nearly identical, which WGSS has challenged for half a century. There are other cultures where sex and gender are not tightly linked. For instance, *Lhamana* among Zuni indigenous peoples describes a two-spirit person, typically someone who Westerners would characterize as 'male' but dresses and works in accordance with feminine cultural expectations, though may still engage in some traditionally masculine activities such as dance or war rituals. This role was revered by the culture rather than disparaged. Further, sex and gender are so unlinked that children may not be addressed in gendered ways, such as with gendered pronouns, until they could express their own gender. In other words, sex did does dictate one's gender.

Thus, Western culture socially constructed sex, gender, and sexuality to be closely linked. Gayle Rubin is a feminist anthropologist who was one of the first to make these arguments academically. Rubin coined the concept *sex/gender/sexuality system* (see chapter 7) to describe how the tight links between sex, gender, and sexuality are products of the culture. For instance, Rubin argues that societies construct gender based on sex (e.g., seemingly biological sex differences are used to justify culturally-created gender expectations), assign gendered divisions of labor in social institutions (e.g., we expect women and men to take on different but complementary roles in heterosexual families), and regulate and assume sexuality in gendered ways (e.g., gender expression leads to assumptions about sexual identity such as for butch women or feminine men). According to Rubin, the tight linkages between sex, gender, and sexuality are not natural as we assume but rather are taught and culturally constructed.

Learning about Gender and Sexuality

Socialization describes the processes by which we learn cultural norms and expectations. Part of what we learn is how we are supposed to abide by gender and sexuality norms and expectations. For instance, people in our lives such as parents/guardians, teachers, and religious leaders, as well as social institutions such as media and education teach us how to act in gendered ways deemed appropriate by the culture. Socialization occurs in process via social sanctions (praise or punishment), observations, and encounters with gendered toys, books, media, and so on (Millett 1971). Social sanctions are often negative, such as a parent telling a child that "girls aren't supposed to get dirty" or that "boys aren't supposed to cry." However, we must recognize the power of positive social sanctioning such as telling a girl that she's "so well-mannered" when she's sitting quietly cross-legged or a boy that he's "so strong" when he lifts something heavy.

In addition to being socialized into gender, we learn about sexuality through social interactions. Theorists Gagnon and Simon (1973) proposed **sexual script theory** to describe how culturally produced and reinforced norms serve as a blueprint to guide our sexual behavior. Scripts are directives, judgments, or skills acquired through the social environment, including the culture at large, social institutions, and individuals. *Sexual scripts*, then, are messages that teach us what to do with and how to think about sex and sexuality. In other words, sexual scripts tell us how to have sex and what it means (Seidman 2015). This is a theatrical metaphor – theater includes a scene, props, actors, and actions based on a script, and so does sex. We follow sexual scripts when we find people attractive who the culture valorizes, when we bring someone home for a sexual encounter after a date, and when we wear certain clothing to look 'sexy' for others. Sexual scripts are similar to *dating scripts*. List the expectations of dating in a heterosexual context, and you might find that people follow many unwritten rules of dating such as the man paying for her dinner, the woman laughing at his every comment, and a lack of communication around sexual desires and boundaries. Feminist scholar Srinivasan (2021) discusses the prevalence of *porn scripts*, which teaches about sex in ways desired by the *male gaze* – what straight white men desire (see chapter 16). Traditional porn scripts are neither accurate nor healthy as they perpetuate misogyny, sexism, and other harmful systems.

Another example of theorizing about how we learn sexuality is Ken Plummer's application of **labeling theory** to sexuality, which argues that internalized messages about stigmatized sexualities guide our understandings of sexuality and potentially our identities as well. *Labels* are terms used to classify identities and behaviors. We learn through social interaction that some identities are acceptable and others are not. We then may distance ourselves from stigmatized sexual identities or behaviors and are coerced into normative ones (Seidman 2015). This perspective can be applied to gender as well, in that we learn which gender identities are deemed 'normal' or are stigmatized, and may distance ourselves from that stigma.

Social Constructionism and Social Inequalities

Because social constructionist analyses examine categories of difference as fluid, dynamic, and changing according to historical and geographical context, a social constructionist perspective suggests that existing inequalities are neither inevitable nor immutable. This perspective is especially useful for the activist and emancipatory aims of feminist movements and theories. By

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

GRCC student Seaira Mikaya contributed to the revision of this chapter.

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6: Binary Systems

Black and white. Masculine and feminine. Rich and poor. Straight and gay. Able-bodied and disabled. *Binaries* are social constructs composed of two parts that are framed as absolute and unchanging opposites. **Binary systems** reflect the integration of these oppositional ideas into our culture. This results in an exaggeration of differences between social groups until they seem to have nothing in common. An example of this is the phrase “men are from Mars, women are from Venus.” Ideas of men and women being complete opposites invite simplistic comparisons that rely on stereotypes: Men are practical, women are emotional; men are strong, women are weak; men lead, women support. Binary notions mask the complicated realities and variety in the realm of social identity. They also erase the existence of individuals, such as multiracial or mixed-race people and nonbinary people, who may identify with neither of the assumed categories or with multiple categories. We know very well that men have emotions and that women have physical strength, but a binary perspective of gender prefigures men and women to have nothing in common. *Oppositional binary thinking* works strategically such that the dominant groups in society are associated with more valued traits, while the subordinate groups, defined as their opposites, are always associated with less valued traits. Thus, the poles in a binary system define each other and only make sense in the presence of their opposites. In other words, they are defined against each other: Men are defined in part as “not women” and women as “not men.” Thus, our understandings of men are influenced by our understandings of women, and masculinity only has meaning as the opposite of femininity. Similarly, straight people are defined as “not gay,” white people are defined as “not Black,” and middle-class people are defined as “not poor.” Rather than seeing aspects of identity like race, gender, class, ability, and sexuality as containing only two dichotomous, opposing categories, conceptualizing multiple various identities allows us to examine how men and women, Black and white, and so on, may not be so completely different after all, and how varied and complex identities and lives can be.

Through the examples provided in this textbook, we hope to show that binary ways of understanding human differences are insufficient for understanding the complexities of human culture. Binary ways of thinking assume that there are only two categories of gender, race, disability, or class identities among others, and that these two categories are complete opposites. In reality, identities and lives are complex and multifaceted. For one, all categories of identity are more richly expressed and understood as matrices of difference. More than that, all of us have multiple aspects of identity that we experience simultaneously and that are mutually constitutive. Our experience of gender is always shaped by our race, class, and other identities. Our experience of race is particular to our gender, class, and other identities as well. This is why taking an *intersectional* approach to understanding identity gives us a more complex understanding of social reality. The social world is complex, and rather than reducing human difference to simple binaries, we must embrace the world as it is and acknowledge the complexity.

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7: The Sex/Gender/Sexuality System

The concept **sex/gender/sexuality system** was coined by Gayle Rubin (1984) to describe, "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity." That is, Rubin proposed that the links between biological sex, social gender, and sexual attraction are products of culture. Gender is "the social product" that we attach to notions of biological sex – gender and sex were constructed to have strict ties in Western culture. Additionally, in our *heteronormative* culture (see chapter 8), everyone is assumed to be heterosexual (attracted to men if you are a woman; attracted to women if you are a man) until stated otherwise. People make heteronormative assumptions about how others should act in social life and to whom they should be attracted, based on their perceptions of outward bodily appearance, which is assumed to represent biological sex characteristics (e.g., chromosomes, hormones, genitalia).

Rubin questioned the *biological determinist* argument which suggested that all people assigned female at birth will identify as women and be attracted to men. According to a biological determinist view, where "biology is destiny," this is the way nature intended. However, this view fails to account for human intervention and variation. As human beings, we have an impact on the social arrangements of society. *Social constructionists* believe that many things we typically leave unquestioned as conventional ways of life actually reflect historically- and culturally-rooted power relationships between groups of people. These power relations are reproduced in part through *socialization* processes, where we learn conventional ways of thinking and behaving from our communities, social institutions such as family and media, and the culture at large. **Gender socialization** involves subtle and overt processes of learning about how we are expected to behave in gendered ways, including the roles we should engage in, how we should dress, what we should be interested in, and how we should interact with others. We receive positive social sanctions when we behave in accordance with gendered expectations and negative social sanctions when we do not (e.g., "you look so pretty and proper in that dress!" stated with a smile vs. "girls aren't supposed to get dirty like that" stated with a frown), then we internalize those messages and our gendered behavior becomes taken for granted as "natural."



"Kid Girl Doll Child Expression Cute Face Baby" by Max Pixel is in the Public Domain, CC0

For instance, the arrangement of women caring for children has a historical legacy, though just because female-assigned people bear children does not necessarily mean that they are always by definition the best caretakers of those children or that they have "natural instincts" that male-assigned people lack. We see not only mothers but other women too caring for children: Daycare workers, nannies, elementary school teachers, and babysitters. What these jobs have in common is that they are all very female-dominated occupations and that this work is economically undervalued – these workers do not get paid very well. One study found that, in New York City, parking lot attendants make more money on average than childcare workers (Clawson and Gerstel 2002). Because "mothering" is not seen as work, but as a woman's "natural" behavior, she is not compensated in a way that reflects how difficult the work is. If you have not raised children but have ever babysat for a full day, go ahead and multiply that by eighteen years and then try to make the argument that it is not work. Men can do this work just as well as women, but there are no similar cultural dictates that say they should. On top of that, some suggest that if paid caretakers were mostly men, then they would make much more money. In fact, men working in female-dominated occupations (particularly white men) earn more and gain promotions faster than women in those occupations, a phenomenon referred to as the *glass escalator*. This example illustrates how, as social constructionist Abby Ferber (2009) argues, social systems produce differences between men and women, and not the reverse.

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8: Sexualities

As discussed in the section on *social construction*, heterosexuality is no more and no less natural than gay sexuality or bisexuality, for instance. As was shown, individuals – particularly sexologists and medical doctors – defined heterosexuality and its boundaries. This definition of the parameters of heterosexuality is an expression of power that constructs what types of sexuality are considered "normal" and which types of sexuality are considered "deviant." Situated cultural norms define what is considered "natural." Defining sexual desire and relations between women and men as "natural" and "normal" means defining all sexual desire and expression outside that parameter as "deviant." However, even within sexual relations between men and women, gendered cultural norms associated with heterosexuality dictate what is "normal" or "deviant." As a quick thought exercise, think of some words for women who have many sexual partners and then do the same for men who have many sexual partners; the results will be quite different. So, within the field of sexuality we can see power in relations along lines of gender and sexual orientation, as well as race, class, age, ability, and so on.

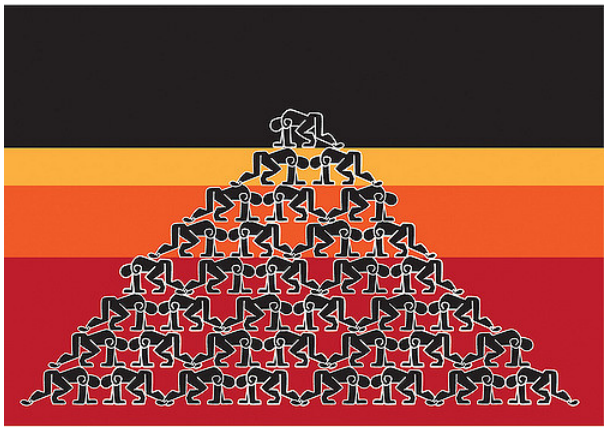
Proposing a concept commonly referred to as **compulsory heterosexuality**, Adrienne Rich (1980) argued that heterosexuality is "compulsory," meaning that in our culture all people are assumed to be heterosexual and society is full of both formal and informal enforcements that encourage heterosexuality and penalize other sexualities. Compulsory heterosexuality coerces individuals into identifying as straight despite their sexual attractions or behaviors, and discourages individuals from reflecting upon their potential for non-heterosexual desire. Additionally, **heteronormativity** – the assumption that all people are straight and the ways in which heterosexuality is privileged and normalized – structures the lives of all people, queer or otherwise (Warner 1991). For instance, sociologist Karen Martin studied what parents say to their children about sexuality and reproduction, and found that with children as young as three and five years old, parents routinely assumed their children were heterosexual, told them they would get (heterosexually) married, and interpreted cross-gender interactions between children as "signs" of heterosexuality (Martin 2009). In this kind of socialization is an additional element of normative sexuality: The idea of **compulsory monogamy**, where monogamous romantic and sexual relationships and marriage are expected and valued over other kinds of relationships (Willey 2016). Therefore, heteronormativity surrounds us at a very young age, teaching us that there are only two genders and that we are or should desire and partner with one person of the opposite gender, who we should marry.

Compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity play a significant role in reproducing inequality in the lives of queer people. For instance, in several states, queer people lack nondiscrimination protections in the process of adoption, meaning that they can be discriminated against for being queer with no legal recourse (Movement Advancement Project 2024). Additionally, heteronormative relationships are dominant in media whereas depictions of queer people have been limited or negatively stereotyped, several religious groups openly exclude and discriminate against queer people and demand the formation of heteronormative families, legal documents typically require a binary gender declaration and trans people often face financial or bureaucratic challenges in updating their documents, sex ed programs teach about binary sexed bodies and heterosexual sex and exclude trans or intersex bodies and queer sex, and there are few openly-queer athletes in the top three men's professional sports – basketball, baseball, and football – despite the fact that statistically there are very likely to be many (Zirin 2010).

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9: Systems of Power

A *social structure* (see chapter 14) is a set of long-lasting social relationships, practices, and institutions that can be difficult to see at work in our daily lives. They are intangible social relations, but work much in the same way as structures we can see: Buildings and skeletal systems are two examples. The human body is structured by bones; that is to say that the rest of our bodies' organs and vessels are where they are because bones provide the structure upon which these other things can reside. Structures limit possibility, but they are not fundamentally unchangeable. For instance, our bones may deteriorate over time, suffer acute injuries, or be affected by disease, but they never spontaneously change location or disappear into thin air. Such is the way with social structures. The elements of a social structure, the parts of social life that direct possible actions, are *social institutions* such as family, media, medicine, work, education, religion, and the state. To say that these institutions direct, or structure, possible social action means that within the confines of these spaces there are rules, norms, and procedures that limit what actions are possible. For instance, there is much variation in the formation of families in the U.S.; however, one specific family form – the nuclear heterosexual family – has been privileged and exalted as the ideal for all and promoted or coerced within other institutions such as media and the state (Smith 1993).



"Social Structure" by Shane is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

Overlaying social structures and institutions are power relations. By *power* we mean two things: 1) access to and through the various social institutions mentioned above and 2) processes of privileging, normalizing, and valuing certain identities over others. This definition of power highlights the structural and institutional nature of power, while also highlighting the ways in which culture works in the creation and privileging of certain categories of people. Power in U.S. society is organized along the axes of gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, age, nation, and religion, which all have social hierarchies of identity. Some identities are normalized and more highly valued than others, and are contrasted to identities thought to be less valuable or less "normal." Thus, identities are not only descriptors of individuals, but grant a certain amount of collective access to the institutions of social life. In other words, our gender, race, class, sexual, and other identities position us with a **social location**, our location in the social structure.

At the higher level of social structure, we can see that some people have greater access to resources and institutionalized power across the board than do others. Each area of social location involves a *dominant group* that has power and privilege and *marginalized groups* that lack power and privilege. **Privilege** refers to unearned, automatic power and benefits that people receive simply for being in the dominant group. Conversely, people in marginalized groups may experience **oppression**, systemic institutionalized obstacles that individuals in the marginalized group face, commonly referred to as the "–isms." **Sexism** is the term we use to describe the discrimination and blocked access that women face. Building on this term, **heterosexism** and **cissexism** describe discrimination and blocked access that queer/LGBQ and transgender people face, respectively. Other *–isms* include **racism** for people of color, **classism** for working-class and low-income people, and **ableism** for disabled people or people with disabilities.



"Privilege is when you think something is not a problem because it is not a problem to you personally – SURJ MN" by Tony Webster is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

Together, privilege and oppression comprise **systems of power**, social systems of domination and subordination (Hill Collins 2000). For each area of social location, there is a system of privilege and a system of oppression such as white privilege and racism, male privilege and sexism, or straight privilege and heterosexism. As Black feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2009) explains, one cannot exist without the other – power/privilege for the dominant group does not exist without the oppression of those in marginalized groups. These systems of power reflect dominant cultural notions that women, trans people, queer people, people of color, poor people, and disabled people are inferior to men, cis people, straight people, white people, middle- and upper-class people, and able-bodied or neurotypical people. Yet, these systems are greater than individuals' prejudice against those in marginalized groups. For instance, in the founding of the United States the institutions of social life, including work, law, education, and the like, were built to benefit wealthy white men since at the time these were, by law, the only real "citizens" of the country. Although these institutions have significantly changed over time in response to social movements and more progressive cultural shifts, their sexist, racist, classist structures continue to persist in different forms today.

This is not to say, for instance, that all white people are alike and wield the same amount of power over all people of color. It does mean that white middle-class women as a group tend to hold more social power than middle-class women of color. This is where the concept of *intersectionality* is key. All individuals have multiple aspects of identity, and most individuals simultaneously experience some privileges due to their socially-valued identity statuses and disadvantages due to their devalued identity statuses. Thus, a white middle-class heterosexual woman may be disadvantaged compared to a white middle-class heterosexual man, but she may experience advantages in different contexts in relation to a Black middle-class heterosexual woman, a white working-class heterosexual man, or a white upper-class lesbian woman. However, as we will see, intersectionality as about more than how individuals with different identities have different lived experiences.

Just like the human body's skeletal structure, social structures are not immutable, or completely resistant to change. Social movements have fought for increased equality and against systems of oppression, and have changed the structures of society over time, in the US and abroad. However, these struggles do not change society overnight; some struggles last decades, centuries, or remain ever-unfinished. The structures and institutions of social life change slowly, but they can and do change based on the concerted efforts of individuals, social movements, and social institutions.

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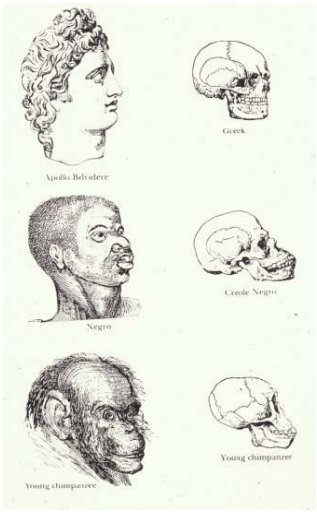
- **1.4: Conceptualizing Structures of Power** by Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, Laura Heston, and Sonny Nordmarken is licensed CC BY 4.0.

10: Race

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

In the context of the United States, there is a binary understanding of race as either Black[1] or white. This is not to say that only two races are recognized, just to say that these are the constructed "oppositional poles" of race. What do we mean by *race*? What does Abby Ferber in the quote above mean by race? More than just descriptive of skin color or physical attributes, in biologized constructions, race determines intelligence, sexuality, strength, motivation, and culture. These ideas are not only held by self-proclaimed racists, but are woven into the fabric of American society in social institutions. For instance, prior to the 20th century, people were considered to be legally "Black" if they had any African ancestors. This was known as the *one-drop rule*, which held that if you had even one drop of African blood, you would have been considered Black. The same did not apply to white blood – rather, whiteness was defined by its "purity." Even today, these ideas continue to exist. People with one Black and one white parent (for instance, President Barack Obama) are considered Black, and people with one Asian parent and one white parent are usually considered Asian.

Many cultural ideas of racial difference were justified by the use of science. White scientists of the early 19th century set out to "prove" Black racial inferiority by studying biological difference. Most notable were studies that suggested African American skulls had a smaller cranial capacity, contained smaller brains, and, thus, less intelligence. Later studies revealed both biased methodological practices by scientists and findings that brain size did not actually predict intelligence. The practice of using science in an attempt to support ideas of racial superiority and inferiority is known as **scientific racism**.



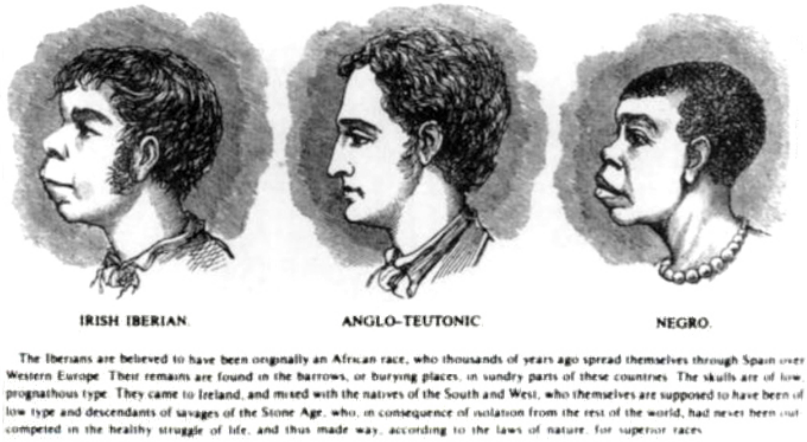
"Indigenous Races of the Earth (1857)" by Josiah Clark Nott and George Robins Gliddon is in the Public Domain, CC0

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

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

Of course, there are other racial groups recognized within the United States, but the Black/white binary is the predominant racial binary system at play in the American context. We can see that this Black/white binary exists and is socially constructed if we consider the case of the 19th century Irish immigrant. When they first arrived, Irish immigrants were “blackened” in the popular press and the white, Anglo-Saxon imagination (Roediger 1991). *Racialization* is a concept used to highlight the formation or processes by which forms of difference have been given meaning and power (Omi and Winant 1986). Cartoon depictions of Irish immigrants gave them dark skin and exaggerated facial features like big lips and pronounced brows. They were depicted and thought to be lazy, ignorant, and alcoholic nonwhite “others” for decades.

> An illustration from the H. Strickland Constable’s *Ireland from One or Two Neglected Points of View* shows an alleged similarity between “Irish Iberian” and “Negro” features in contrast to the higher “Anglo-Teutonic.” The accompanying caption reads:
>
> “The Iberians are believed to have been originally an African race, who thousands of years ago spread themselves through Spain over Western Europe. Their remains are found in the barrows, or burying places, in sundry parts of these countries. The skulls are of low prognathous type. They came to Ireland and mixed with the natives of the South and West, who themselves are supposed to have been of low type and descendants of savages of the Stone Age, who, in consequence of isolation from the rest of the world, had never been out-competed in the healthy struggle of life, and thus made way, according to the laws of nature, for superior races.”



“Ireland from One or Two Neglected Points of View (1899)” by H. Strickland Constable is in the Public Domain, CC0

Over time, Irish immigrants and their children and grandchildren assimilated into the category of “white” by strategically distancing themselves from Black Americans and other non-whites in labor disputes and participating in white supremacist racial practices and ideologies. In this way, the Irish in America *became* white. A similar process took place for Italian-Americans, and later, Jewish American immigrants from multiple European countries after the Second World War. Similar to Irish Americans, both groups *became* white after first being seen as non-white. These cases show how socially constructed race is and how this labeling process still operates today. For instance, are Asian-Americans, racially stereotyped as the *model minority*, the next group to be integrated into the “white” category, or will they continue to be regarded as foreign threats? Only time will tell.

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1. Here, we capitalize Black in recognition of Black as a reclaimed and empowering identity. ↵

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11: Class

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

Though rich/poor may be the binary associated with class, most people in the US context (no matter how much wealth they have) consider themselves middle-class (Pew Research Center 2010). The label "middle-class" represents more than what people have in their bank accounts – it reflects a political ideology. When politicians run for election or argue over legislation they often employ the term "middle-class" to stand in for "average," "tax-paying," "morally upstanding" constituents and argue for their collective voice and prosperity. Rhetorically, the "middle class" is not compared to the super rich (since one can never be too rich), but rather to the poor. So, when people talk about the middle-class they are also often implying that they are *not* those "deviant," "tax-swindling," "immoral," poor people. This may seem harsh, but this is truly how the poor are represented in news media (Mantsios 2007). If this still seems far-fetched, just replace with phrase "the poor" with "welfare recipients." Welfare recipients are often faceless but framed as undeserving of assistance since they are assumed to be cheating the system, addicted to alcohol or drugs, and have only themselves to blame for their poverty (Mantsios 2007). Welfare recipients are the implied counterparts to the middle-class citizen that populate political speeches and radio rants. Thus, in the United States, socioeconomic class has been constructed as a binary between the middle-class and the poor.

Furthermore, from an intersectional perspective, these class-based categories also carry racial and sexual meanings. For instance, the "welfare queen" stereotype – a contemporary *controlling image* (Hill Collins 2004) conjures images of poor, Black, sexually-promiscuous women, contrary to the fact that white women as a group are the largest recipients of welfare. Fred Block and colleagues (2006) discuss how these stereotypes about the poor are written into American poverty policies. For instance, in 1996, President Bill Clinton passed the Personal Responsibility/Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which fundamentally rewrote prior US welfare policy. This act limits lifetime receipt of welfare to a maximum of 60 months, or 5 years, and requires that able-bodied recipients work or job-train for low-skill jobs while receiving checks. Under PRWORA, recent immigrants cannot receive welfare for their first five years of legal residence, and undocumented immigrants can never receive welfare benefits (Block et al. 2006). These restrictions are based on the assumption that welfare recipients are ultimately cheating the American taxpayer and looking for a free ride. In spite of these changes, most people still believe that being on government assistance means a lifetime of free money. Media contempt for welfare recipients is accomplished by not humanizing the experience of poverty. People experiencing poverty can face tough choices; for instance, working more hours or getting a slightly better paying job can cause one to fail the "means test" (an income level above which people are ineligible for welfare benefits) for food stamps or Medicaid. The poor are increasingly forced to decide between paying for rent versus food and other bills, as the cost of living has risen dramatically in the past few decades while working-class wages have not risen comparably. Women disproportionately number among those in poverty, particularly single mothers of color. The term **feminization of poverty** describes the trend in the US and across the globe in which more and more women live in impoverished conditions, despite the fact that many are working. Women's unequal access to resources and the disproportionate responsibility for unpaid work placed on them set up a situation in which women can either be supported by a breadwinner or struggle to make ends meet.

> The SPENT game captures and humanizes the process of making tough decisions on a tight budget.
>
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In contrast, middle-class and upper-class people benefit not only from *economic capital* (income, wealth, and property) but also from *social capital* (friends and networks) and *cultural capital* (knowledge, communication styles, and other skills that are valued by social institutions). **Cultural capital** is a term coined by the late sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) to address non-monetary class differences such as language use, negotiation skills, tastes in food and music, or knowledge of high culture. Bourdieu explained that even when a formerly poor individual experiences upward *social mobility* (moving into a higher social class), there are still markers of her former status in the way she carries herself and the things she knows. We see many examples of this in

popular films. When someone goes from rags to riches, they often use the wrong utensils at a dinner party, call something by the wrong name, cannot tell the difference between a Chardonnay and a Merlot (wines), or spend their money in a showy way.



“Pouring wine into a decanter” by Agne27 is licensed under CC BY 2.0

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

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12: Intersectionality

Articulated by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), the concept of **intersectionality** identifies a mode of analysis integral to Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies. Within intersectional frameworks, race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, and other aspects of identity are considered mutually constitutive; that is, people experience these multiple aspects of identity simultaneously and the meanings of different aspects of identity are shaped by one another. In other words, notions of gender and the way a person's gender is interpreted by others are always impacted by notions of race and the way that person's race is interpreted. For example, a person is never received as just a woman, but how that person is racialized impacts how the person is received as a woman. So, notions of blackness, brownness, and whiteness always influence gendered experience, and there is no experience of gender that is outside of an experience of race. In addition to race, gendered experience is also shaped by age, sexuality, class, and ability; likewise, the experience of race is impacted by gender, age, class, sexuality, and ability.

This video provides a basic introduction to the framework of intersectionality.



Peter Hopkins, Newcastle University. 2018. *What is Intersectionality?*. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1islM0ytkE on August 20, 2024. Used with permission.

Understanding intersectionality requires a particular way of thinking. It is different than how many people imagine identities operate. An intersectional analysis of identity is distinct from single-determinant identity models and additive models of identity. A **single determinant model of identity** presumes that one aspect of identity, say, gender, dictates one's access to or disenfranchisement from power. An example of this idea is the concept of "global sisterhood," or the idea that all women across the globe share some basic common political interests, concerns, and needs (Morgan 1996). If women in different locations did share common interests, it would make sense for them to unite on the basis of gender to fight for social changes on a global scale. Unfortunately, if the analysis of social problems stops at gender, what is missed is an attention to how various cultural contexts shaped by race, religion, and access to resources may actually place some women's needs in conflict with other women's needs. Therefore, this approach obscures the fact that women in different social and geographic locations face different problems. Although many white middle-class women activists of the mid-20th century US fought for freedom to work and legal parity with men, this was not the major problem for women of color or working-class white women who had already been actively participating in the US labor market as domestic workers, factory workers, or enslaved laborers since early US colonial settlement. Campaigns for women's equal legal rights and access to the labor market at the international level are shaped by the experience and concerns of white American women, while women of the *global south*, in particular, may have more pressing concerns: Access to clean water, access to adequate health care, and safety from the physical and psychological harms of living in tyrannical, war-torn, or economically impoverished nations.

In contrast to the single-determinant identity model, the **additive model of identity** simply adds together privileged and disadvantaged identities for a slightly more complex picture. For instance, a Black man may experience some advantages based on his gender, but has limited access to power based on his race. This kind of analysis is exemplified in how race and gender wage gaps are portrayed in statistical studies and popular news reports. Below, you can see a median wage gap table from the Institute for Women's Policy Research compiled for the year 2022 for full-time workers in the US. Overall, we can see that women earned 84% of what men did. The table breaks down the information further to show that earnings varied not only by gender but by race.

Hispanic or Latina women earned only 57.5% of what white men did and Black women made 69.1% of what white men did. This is certainly more descriptive than a single gender wage gap figure or a single race wage gap figure.

Table 1. Median Annual Earnings and Gender Earnings Ratio for Year-Round Full-Time Year-Round Workers, by Race and Ethnicity, 2022

Racial/Ethnic Background*	Women's Earnings	Men's Earnings	Women's Earnings as % of White Men's Earnings
All Races/Ethnicities	$52,360	$62,350	84.0%
Hispanic or Latina	$41,140	$47,420	57.5%
Black	$49,470	$51,640	69.1%
White	$57,250	$71,590	80.0%
Asian*	$70,580	$87,410	98.6%

Notes: Workers ages 15 years and older. Hispanic/Latina/o workers may be of any race; White alone, not Hispanic; Black alone; and Asian alone. *Data for Asian American, Hawaiian Natives, and Pacific Islanders (AAHNPI) are not yet available for 2022; in 2021 the gender earnings ratio for AANHPI women compared to White men was 80.0 percent; the ratio for full-time year-round workers was in 2021 was 92.3 percent.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey. 2023. "Historical Income Tables: Table P-41. Work Experience—Workers by Median Earnings and Sex." Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/data/tables/t...me-people.html on August 20, 2024. AAHNPI data are IWPR analysis of CPS-ASEC 2021 microdata.

The additive model does not take into account how our shared cultural ideas of gender are racialized and our ideas of race are gendered, and that these ideas structure access to resources and power—material, political, and interpersonal. Feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2005) has developed a strong intersectional framework through her discussion of race, gender, and sexuality in her historical analysis of representations of Black sexuality in the US. Hill Collins shows how contemporary white American culture exoticizes Black men and women and she points to a history of enslavement as the origin and motivator for the use of these images. In order to justify slavery, African-Americans were thought of and treated as less than human. Sexual reproduction was often forced among slaves for the financial benefit of plantation owners, but owners reframed this coercion and rape as evidence of the "natural" and uncontrollable sexuality of people from the African continent. Images of Black men and women were not completely the same, as Black men were constructed as hypersexual "Bucks" or "Brutes" with little interest in continued relationships whereas Black women were framed as hypersexual "Jezebels." Again, it is important to note how the context, where enslaved families were often forcefully dismantled, is often left unacknowledged and contemporary racialized constructions are assumed and framed as individual choices or traits. It is shockingly easy to see how these images are still present in contemporary media, culture, and politics, for instance, in discussions of American welfare programs. This analysis reveals how race, gender, and sexuality intersect. We cannot simply pull these identities apart because they are interconnected and mutually enforcing.

Although the framework of intersectionality has contributed important insights to feminist analyses, there are critiques. WGSS and Ethnic Studies scholar Jasbir Puar (2012) highlights how in practice the term intersectionality was typically used to signify the specific difference of "women of color," which effectively produces women of color (and in particular, Black women) as "Other" and again centers white women. In addition, the use of the framework reproduces the United States as the dominant site of feminist inquiry and the Euro-American bias of WGSS. Another failing of intersectionality is its premise of fixed categories of identity, where descriptors like race, gender, class, and sexuality are assumed to be stable. In contrast, Puar proposes the notion of **assemblage**, which considers categories events, actions, and encounters between bodies rather than simply attributes. Assemblage refers to a collage or collection of things, or the act of assembling. An assemblage perspective emphasizes how relations, patterns, and connections between concepts give concepts meaning (Puar 2012). Although assemblage has been framed against intersectionality, identity categories' mutual co-constitution is accounted for in both intersectionality and assemblage.

"Gender" is too often used simply and erroneously to mean "white women," while "race" too often connotes "Black men." An intersectional perspective examines how identities are related to each other in our own experiences and how the social structures of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and ability intersect for everyone. As opposed to single-determinant and additive models of identity, an intersectional approach develops a more sophisticated understanding of the world and how individuals in differently

situated social groups experience differential access to both material and symbolic resources. It emphasizes that multiple aspects of identity and *systems of power* are mutually constitutive and reinforcing.

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13: Masculinities and Femininities

Raewyn Connell (1995, 2005) suggests that there is more than one kind of masculinity and what is considered "masculine" differs by race, class, sexuality, and gender, which Connell refers to as **multiple masculinities**. For example, being knowledgeable about computers might be understood as masculine because it can help a person accumulate income and wealth, and we consider wealth to be masculine. However, computer knowledge only translates into "masculinity" for certain men. While an Asian-American, middle-class man might get a boost in "masculinity points" (as it were) for his high-paying job with computers, the same might not be true for a working-class white man whose white-collar desk job may be seen as a weakness to his masculinity by other working-class men. Expectations for masculinity also differ by age, for instance: What it means to be a man at 19 years old is very different than what it means to be a man at 70. Therefore, masculinity intersects with other identities and expectations change accordingly.

Hegemonic masculinity refers to the most valued and praised form of masculinity in US culture (Connell 1995), which emphasizes dominance, strength, aggression, sexual prowess, and patriarchal gender dynamics. Central to this concept is that masculinity is constructed not only in relation to women, but also to other men deemed less masculine or inferior. Connell (1987) argues that there is no 'hegemonic' femininity comparable to hegemonic masculinity, as all femininities involve the subordination of women to men. Rather, Connell proposes the concept of **emphasized femininity** to describe the form of femininity that complies with male dominance and accommodates the interests of men. Other scholars have critiqued this conceptualization, offering the term **hegemonic femininity** to refer to the femininity of white women, who are dominant among women (Pyke and Johnson 2003), or "the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Schippers 2007: 94).

Connell (1995) identifies two nonhegemonic masculinities: **Marginalized masculinity**, which refers to that of men deemed masculine but inferior or 'othered' by way of their marginalized identities such as working-class or Black men, and **subordinated masculinities**, which refers to that of men deemed insufficiently masculine and inferior such as gay men. Likewise, femininities vary by identity, and can challenge hegemonic masculinity. For instance, Pyke and Johnson (2003) illustrate **subordinated femininities** in their discussion of how Asian femininity is subordinate to white femininity via *controlling images*, and Schippers (2007) offers **pariah femininities** to describe femininity that is not necessarily deemed inferior but instead challenges hegemonic masculinity such as that of the 'badass,' 'bitch,' or lesbian. Thus, masculinities and femininities are hierarchical and vary by other areas of social location such as race, class, and sexuality.

Jack Halberstam (1998, 2005) uses the concept of **female masculinity** to describe the ways that women and female-assigned people may accomplish masculinity. Halberstam defines *masculinity* as the connection between maleness and power, which women and female-assigned people access through "cross-identifications" such as drag-king performances, butch performativity, or trans identity. Separating masculinity from male-assigned bodies highlights that it is performative, such that masculinity is accomplished in interactions and not ordained by nature. Moreover, this conceptualization detaches power from maleness and provides women and female-assigned people access to power. Halberstam sought to ignite a "discussion on masculinity for women in such a way that masculine girls and women do not have to wear their masculinity as a stigma but can infuse it with a sense of pride and indeed power" (1998: xxiii).

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14: Institutions, Culture, and Structures

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

To answer these questions we need to look at the institutions within which we spend a large part of our lives interacting with others. A **social institution** is a "social order or pattern that has attained a certain state or property" which persists through "relatively self-activating social processes" (Jepperson 1991: 145). In other words, institutions are enduring, historical facets of social life that shape our behavior. Examples of institutions include the family, marriage, media, medicine, education, the state, and work. These institutions can be said to structure thought and behavior, in that they prescribe rules for interaction and norms for behavior, parcel out resources between groups, and often rely on formal regulations (including laws, policies, and contracts). In almost every facet of our day-to-day experience we operate within institutions – often within multiple institutions at once – without noticing their influence on our lives. As a result, we can conceive of institutions as primary *agents of socialization* (Kimmel 2007). These are primary agents of socialization in that we are born into them, shaped by their expectations, norms, and rules, and as we grow older we often operate in the same institutions and teach these expectations, norms, and rules to younger generations.



"Law Image" by Succo is in the Public Domain, CC0

Institutions are chief sites for the reproduction of gendered, classed, racialized, ableized, and sexualized inequalities. Everyone does not have equal access to institutions because often these institutions differentiate between and differentially reward people based on categories of gender, class, race, ability, and sexuality. For example, think of the city or town you grew up in. There may have been different schools located in different areas of the city, in neighborhoods that differed in the class and race composition of the people living in those neighborhoods. Perhaps there was a school located in a predominantly white middle-class neighborhood and another school located in a neighborhood of predominantly working-class people of color. Perhaps there were also private schools that required high tuition rates. Due to the fact that schools in most states are funded based on the tax base of the school district they are in, schools located in different neighborhoods will have different amounts of resources such as books, computers, counselors, the ability to pay teachers and staff, and so on. Those students who live in the middle-class school district will benefit from a well-funded public school, while students who live in the working-class school district will be disadvantaged from the lower amount of funding of their school district. Meanwhile, students who attend the prestigious private school will most likely already be economically privileged and will further benefit from a well-funded school that surrounds them with students with similar class backgrounds and expectations. These students will most likely benefit from a curriculum of college preparatory classes, while students in public schools are less likely to be enrolled in college prep classes, limiting their ability to get into college. Therefore, the same race and class inequalities that limited access to the middle-class predominantly-white neighborhood school will give those privileged students greater chances to enter college and maintain their privileged status. In this way, race and class privileges and disadvantages get reproduced through social institutions.



"Ontonagon School in Ontonagon, Michigan" by Bobak Ha'Eri is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

Institutions shape, and are shaped by, culture. **Culture** is a system of symbols, values, practices, and interests of a group of people (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 2004; Sewell 1992).[1] **Ideologies**, the ideas, attitudes, and values of the *dominant culture* that serve to reproduce the power of dominant groups, are pervasive within the broader culture. It is important to note that "dominant" here does not describe the most numerous group within society, but the social group that has a disproportionate amount of power, which can be relatively small. An example of a dominant culture would be the numerically small white minority in South Africa during apartheid. More recently, the Occupy Movement has critiqued the ways in which the "1%" (the richest 1% of people) exerts a disproportionate amount of control and power as the dominant culture in the United States.



"Day 3 Occupy Wall Street 2011 Shankbone 5" by David Shankbone is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Mainstream institutions often privilege and reward the dominant culture. The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) argues that institutions value certain types of culture and reward people who have those types of culture. Different social classes have different types of *cultural capital* – assets that are not necessarily economic, but promote social mobility. For example, students who attend public schools in middle-class districts or private schools often have access to more language courses, arts courses, and extracurricular activities in which they develop the skills, knowledges, and experiences that colleges value greatly in their admission decisions. Schools in less economically privileged districts often have fewer of these options. In this way, culture is not an even playing field, and not everyone has equal access to defining what types of symbols, meanings, values, and practices are valued by institutions. Those groups of people with greater access to mainstream

institutions – those who are wealthy, white, men, able-bodied, and heterosexual – have a greater ability to define what types of culture will be valued by institutions, and often have access to the cultural capital that mainstream institutions value.

The interaction between culture and institutions creates social structures**. Social structures** are composed of socially constructed ideas, principles, and categories and social institutions that distribute material resources to stratified groups based on those ideas, principles, and categories. Additionally, they shape – or structure – experience, identity, and practice. Social structures are relational, in that they function to stratify groups based on the categories that underlie those groups, allocating both symbolic and material benefits and resources unequally among those groups. *Symbolic resources* are the nonmaterial rewards that accrue to privileged groups. An example would be the way in which employers often assume that employees who are fathers are more responsible, mature, and hardworking, and deserve more pay as opposed to their childless or childfree peers or to working mothers (Hodges and Budig 2010). In this example, the *sex/gender/sexuality system* is a structure through which employers – as gatekeepers of advancement through institutions of work – privilege heterosexual fatherhood. The effect of this is the reproduction of the symbolic privileging of heterosexual masculinity, and the unequal allocation of material resources (salary and wage raises, advancement opportunities) to married men with children. Unmarried men without children do not receive the same symbolic and material rewards nor do married women with children. In this sense, structures limit access to opportunities: educational opportunities, employment opportunities, and opportunities to move up in social class standing.



"Civil rights march on Washington, DC" by Warren K. Leffler, Library of Congress is in the Public Domain, CC0

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

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

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15: Family

There is a multiplicity of family forms in the United States and throughout the world. When we try to define the word "family" we realize just how slippery of a concept it is. Does family mean those who are blood related? This definition of family excludes stepparents and adopted children. It also denies the existence of *fictive kin*, or non-blood related people that one considers to be part of one's family. Does family mean a *nuclear family* – composed of legally-married parents and their children – as it so often is thought to in the contemporary United States? This excludes both *extended kin* such as aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, nephews, and nieces and *family of origin* including parents/guardians and siblings. It also excludes single parents, cohabiting partners, and those couples who do not have children. Or does family denote a common household characterized by economic cooperation? This definition would exclude those who consider each other family but cannot or do not live in the same household, often times for economic reasons. For example, South or Central American parents may leave their country of origin to make wages in the United States and send them back to their families. Additionally, many families are separated by mass incarceration:

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

All of these definitions would also deny the importance and existence of what Kath Weston (1991) has labeled *chosen families*, the families comprised of close friends and others formed by queer people who were ostracized from their families of origin. The diversity of family formations across time and place suggests that the definition of a universal 'family' hides historical change as it sets in place or reproduces an ideology of 'the family' that obscures the diversity and reality of family experience in any place and time" (Gerstel 2003: 231). What is the dominant ideology of 'family' in the United States? How did the family formation that this dominant ideology rests upon come to be the normative model of 'family?'



"Family Ideal" by bykst is in the Public Domain, CC0

The dominant ideology of what constitutes a "family" in the United States recognizes a very class- and race-specific type of gendered family formation. Dorothy Smith (1993) labels this family formation as the **Standard North American Family (SNAF)**, which is defined as:

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

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

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

Middle-class families who had inherited property and wealth, the vast majority of whom were white, did not need all the members of their families to work. They were able to pay for their homes, hire house servants, tutors, and maids (who were primarily African American working-class women), and send their children to private educational institutions with the salary of the breadwinning father. The **breadwinner/homemaker model** became dominant, wherein women perform unpaid domestic work and care work within the home and men are salaried or wage-earning breadwinners. Thus, the continuing **gendered division of labor** – in which women and men spend disparate time in domestic work and care work – that is often assumed to be a natural way of family life originated due to relatively recent economic changes that privileged white middle-class families.



This work by ArtsyBee is in the Public Domain, CC0

This false split between the publicly-oriented working father and the privately-oriented domestic mother produced the *ideologies* of **separate spheres** and the **cult of domesticity**. The ideology of separate spheres held that women and men were distinctly different creatures, with different natures and therefore suited for different activities. Masculinity was equated with the public sphere of politics and work, and femininity was equated with the private sphere of the home. Correspondingly, the cult of domesticity was an ideology about womanhood which held that (white middle-class) women were asexual, pure, moral beings properly located in the private sphere of the household. Importantly, this ideology was applied to *all* women as a measure of womanhood. The effects of this ideology were to systematically deny working-class white women and women of color access to the category of 'women,' because these women had to work and earn wages to support their families.

Furthermore, during this period, **coverture** laws defined white women who were married to be legally defined as the property of their husband. Upon marriage, women's legal personhood was dissolved into that of the husband. They could not own property, sign or make legal documents, and any wages they made had to be turned over to their husbands. Thus, even though they did not have to work in factories or the fields of plantations, white middle-class women were systematically denied rights and personhood under coverture. In this way, white middle-class women had a degree of material wealth and symbolic status as pure, moral beings, but at the cost of submission to their husbands and lack of legal personhood. White working-class women and women of color had access to the public sphere in ways white middle-class women did not, but they also had to work in poorly paid jobs and were thought to be less than 'true women' because of this.

The historical dominant ideology of the SNAF is reinforced by present day law and social policy. For example, when lesbians, gay men, and other queer partners have children they often rely on adoption or assisted reproductive technologies, including in vitro fertilization and surrogacy (where someone is contracted to carry a child to term for someone else), among other methods. Since laws in most states assume that blood-ties between mother and child supersede non-biological family relations, queer people who seek to have children in these ways face barriers. The conventional assumptions of the SNAF are embodied in law, and in this case, do not match the realities of groups of people who depart from the ideology of the SNAF.

Social policies often assume that the SNAF is not only a superior family structure, but that its promotion is a substitute for policies that would seek to reduce poverty. For instance, both the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama have promoted marriage and the nuclear family as poverty reduction policy. These programs have targeted poor families of color, in particular. In The Healthy Marriages Initiative of 2004, President Bush pledged $1.5 billion to programs aimed at:

> "Marriage education, marriage skills training, public advertising campaigns, high school education on the value of marriage and marriage mentoring programs … activities promoting fatherhood, such as counseling, mentoring, marriage education, enhancing relationship skills, parenting, and activities to foster economic stability" (US Department of Health and Human Services 2009).

Such policies ignore the historical, structural sources of racialized poverty and blame the victims of systemic classism and racism.

As the history of the SNAF shows, the normative family model is based on a white middle-class model – one that a majority of families in the US do not fit or necessarily want to fit.

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16: Media

Take a minute to think about how much media you are exposed to in one day – scrolling social media, watching television and movies, cruising the Internet, reading newspapers, books, and magazines, listening to music or watching music videos, and playing video games. A recent Gallup Poll found that the average U.S. teenager spends nearly 5 hours per day (4.8 hours) on social media alone (Rothwell 2023). The majority of media is produced by corporations, and infused with advertisements. The pervasiveness of media in culture begs a number of questions: What are the effects of such an overwhelming amount of exposure to media that is often saturated with advertisements? How do media construct or perpetuate gendered, sexualized, classed, ableized, and racialized differences and inequalities? What is the relationship between media and consumers, and how do consumers interact with media?

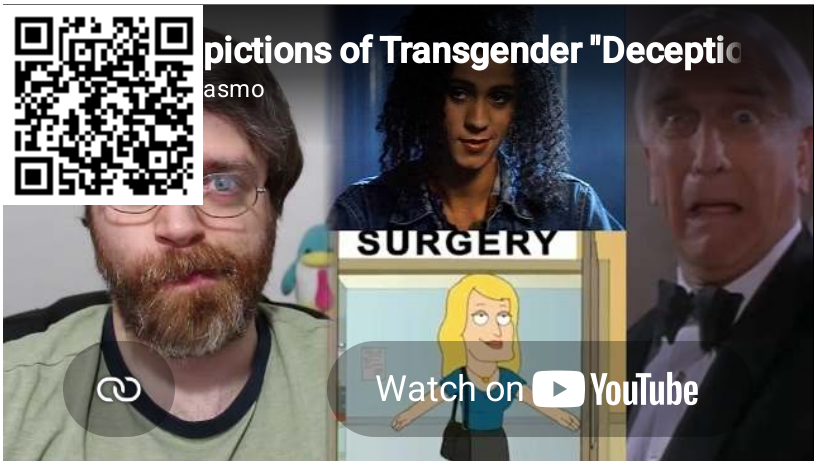
Media expert and sociologist Michael Kimmel (2003) argues that the institution of media is a primary *agent of socialization* that not only reflects, but creates culture. Media representation is a key domain for identity formation and the creation of gendered and sexualized difference. For example, think back to Disney movies you were probably shown as a child. The plots of these movies typically feature a dominant young man – a prince, a colonial ship captain, a soldier – who is romantically interested in a young woman who at first resists the advances of the young man, but eventually falls in love with him and marries him – both characters are assumed to be heterosexual. These Disney movies teach children a great deal about gender and sexuality; specifically, they teach children to value *hegemonic masculinity* and *emphasized femininity*. Hegemonic masculinity refers to a specific type of culturally-valued masculinity tied to marriage and heterosexuality and patriarchal authority in the family and workplace, and maintains its privileged position through subordinating women and other less dominant forms of masculinity (i.e., dominance over men of lower socioeconomic classes or gay men). Emphasized femininity, meanwhile, refers to a compliance with the normative ideal of femininity, as it is oriented to serving the interests of men (Connell 1987).

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

The institution of media also reproduces racialized and gendered normative standards in the form of *beauty ideals* for both women and men. As Jean Kilbourne's video series *Killing Us Softly* illustrates, representations of women in advertising, film, and magazines often rely on the *objectification* and *dismemberment* of women – cutting apart their bodies with the camera frame and recrafting their bodies through digital manipulation in order to create feminized bodies with characteristics that are largely unattainable by the majority of the population. Kilbourne also shows how advertising often values the body types and features of white women – having petite figures and European facial features – while often exoticizing women of color by putting them in nature scenes and animal-print clothing that are intended to recall a pre-civilizational past. The effect of this is to cast women of color as animalistic or savage creatures, a *controlling image* that has historically been used in political cartoons and depictions of people of color to legitimate their subjugation as less than human. In addition, media depict the world from a masculine point of view, representing women as sex objects. This kind of framing, what Laura Mulvey (1973) called the **male gaze,** encourages men viewers to see women as objects and encourages women to see themselves as objects of men's desire; the male gaze is thus a heterosexual male gaze. These are just a couple of examples of how media simultaneously reflect and construct differences in power between social groups in society through representing those groups.

Another way in which media reflect and simultaneously produce power differences between social groups is through **symbolic annihilation**. Symbolic annihilation refers to how social groups that lack power in society are rendered absent, condemned, or trivialized through mass media representations that simultaneously reinforce dominant ideologies and the privilege of dominant groups. For example, queer and disabled characters in mass media are often few and when they are present they are typically stereotyped and misrepresented. Trans women characters portrayed through the cisgender heterosexual male gaze are often used as plot twists or objects of ridicule for comedic effect, and are often represented as "actually men" who deceive men in order to "trap" them into having sex with them. These representations then function to justify and normalize portrayals of disgust in response to them and violence against them. These kinds of portrayals of trans women as "evil deceivers" and "pretenders" have been used in court cases to pardon perpetrators who have murdered trans women (Bettcher 2007).

This video portrays dehumanizing representations of trans women in media.



Rantasmo. 2014. "Depictions of Transgender 'Deception' in Media." Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q78qaT8JZ_A on August 20, 2024.

While Jean Kilbourne's insights illustrate how beauty ideals produce damaging effects on women and girls, her model of how consumers relate to media constructs media consumers as passively accepting everything they see in advertising and electronic and print media. As Michael Kimmel (2003) argues, "The question is never whether or not the media do such and such, but rather *how* the media and its consumers interact to create the varying meanings that derive from our interactions with those media" (Kimmel 2003: 238). No advertisement, movie, or any form of media has an inherent, intended meaning that passes directly from the producer of that media to the consumer of it, but consumers interact with, critique, and sometimes reject the intended messages of media. In this way, the meanings of media develop through the interaction between the media product and the consumers who are interacting with it. Furthermore, media consumers can blur the distinction between producer and consumer through creating their own media in the form of videos, music, pamphlets, zines, and other forms of *cultural production*. Therefore, while media certainly often reproduce dominant ideologies and normative standards, media consumers from different standpoints can and do modify and reject the intended meanings of media.

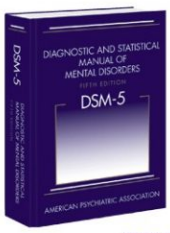
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17: Medicine

We often think of the institution of medicine and medical knowledge as objective, neutral, and vitally important to the well-being of ourselves and society. There is no doubt that medicine has produced life-saving technologies, treatments, and vaccines. However, medicine is not a neutral field that exists independent of the cultures and societies within which it is created. Medicine relies on the **medical model**, which assumes that the body is governed by laws and processes independent of culture, social life, and institutions, and that physicians are those qualified to evaluate and define the body's health or pathology and treat it as they see necessary. In sum, the medical model is a medical-biological understanding of the body, which constructs the systems, pathologies, or indicators of health of the body as independent of culture, ideology, economy, and the state. Feminist and critical theorists have critiqued this understanding of the body, showing both how doctors and medicine *medicalize* bodies in particular ways according to gender *ideologies*. Furthermore, feminists have argued that we need to pay attention to how race, gender, and class inequalities shape the health outcomes of differently situated groups in society.

Medical sociologist Peter Conrad (2007) defines **medicalization** as the process whereby human problems "become defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of illness and disorders" which are then managed and treated by health professionals. Medicalization constructs medical problems, which are codified in policy by governing bodies, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the US, that recommend treatment. For example, two different diagnostic categories for the experience of low sexual desire – one for men (Male Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder) and one for women (Female Sexual Interest/Arousal Disorder) – newly appeared in one edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the *DSM-5* (American Psychiatric Association 2013). Low sexual desire does not threaten a person's health, but these categories treat low sexual desire as a problem and construct the experience as essentially distinct for women than for men. A number of the members of the work groups that created diagnostic categories in the *DSM-5* had conflicting interests, such as ties to pharmaceutical companies (Welch et al. 2013). This diagnostic category followed the development and marketing of EROS, the first product to treat "female sexual dysfunction" by the pharmaceutical company Urometrics. The Food and Drug Administration defines "female sexual dysfunction" as "decreased sexual desire, decreased sexual arousal, pain during intercourse, or inability to climax" (Shah 2003). This pathologization of decreased sexual arousal emerged in a specific social context in which Pfizer's $1.3 billion profit windfall from Viagra in 2000 spurred pharmaceutical companies to develop an equivalent product to market to women, and a diagnostic category emerged next to encourage prescriptions and sales of the drug.



DSM-5
2013

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In this example, heterosexual women's sexuality becomes medicalized to serve various interests other than their own health and pleasure. Feminists have been critiquing the ways in which women's sexual needs and desires are often subordinated to men's sexual needs and desires for decades – diagnosing the problem as stemming from exhaustion from both paid work and unpaid housework, as well as inattentive male partners. Urometrics and the doctors who developed EROS, in contrast, diagnose the problem as stemming from female bodily dysfunction. Instead of addressing the deeper social and cultural reasons for why heterosexual women may not be fulfilled sexually, EROS offers a commodified, FDA-approved, medically indicated treatment for a medically-defined "bodily dysfunction." Relatedly, gender nonconformity and transgender identity have been medicalized for the past several decades. For instance, trans identity was initially characterized as a "disorder" referred to as "Gender Identity Disorder." The current diagnostic category in the DSM-5 is called "Gender Dysphoria."

Medicalization is an aspect of **bio-power**. Bio-power, according to philosopher Michel Foucault (1979) refers to the practices of modern states to regulate their subjects through technologies of power. Foucault argued that in complex modern societies populations will not tolerate totalitarian uses of state power. Therefore, modern states must find less overt ways to control their populations, such as collecting data on the health, reproductive capacities, and sexual behaviors of their populations for the purpose

of state regulation and intervention. For example, historian Laura Briggs (2002) shows how in the United States' colonial occupation of Puerto Rico in the early 20th century, public health officials treated the problem of venereal disease as a problem of overpopulation and sexual immorality, and sought to institute eugenics policies (discussed below) to limit Puerto Rican women's ability to reproduce. Importantly, Foucault argued that medical knowledge, combined with modern states' collection of data on their populations, created new norms of health which populations internalize. Thus, the intended effect of bio-power is that people regulate themselves according to norms proliferated by medical knowledge and the state.

Not all women's health and sexuality has been medicalized in the same ways, or with the same effects. Class and race differences and inequalities have made poor or working-class white women and women of color, along with people with disabilities, the targets of public health campaigns to regulate their sexuality and reproduction. Such was the case with the example of the United States' use of bio-power in Puerto Rico above. In that example, working-class and poor Puerto Rican women's sexuality and reproduction became medicalized in ways that wealthy Puerto Ricans' and white women's sexuality and reproduction were not.

The eugenics movement began in the late 19th century, but has had far-reaching impacts around the world. **Eugenics** is a medical/scientific *ideology* and social movement that takes the root of social and psychological problems such as poverty or mental illness to be the genetic make-up or heredity of specific groups within the population, and as a result, seeks to eliminate those groups through sterilization or genocide. Eugenics takes biological determinism and bio-power to their furthest logical conclusions. Eugenicists believe that selective breeding of those groups that they construct as "inherently superior" – nondisabled, heterosexual, white, middle-class, Northern and Western Europeans – is a rational-scientific answer to "solve" social problems. The most obvious and well-known example of eugenics in practice is the Holocaust in Nazi Germany, but what many people do not know is that eugenics-based sterilization was enforced by law in the United States for much of the 20th century. In 1907, the world's first eugenics-based compulsory sterilization law was passed in Indiana, followed by 30 states soon after (Lombardo 2011). The Nazi government widely cited a report that praised the results of sterilization in California as evidence that extensive sterilization programs are feasible and humane (Miller 2009). Between 1907 and 1963, over 64,000 individuals were forcibly sterilized under eugenic legislation in the United States (Lombardo 2011). The eugenics movement also took shape in immigration policies in the United States into the first half of the 20th century (Allen 1996). Eugenics projects are still in effect today. Sterilization is still coerced or forced on women and girls, and especially disabled women and girls, in a number of countries (Guterman 2011). Women in California prisons have continued to be forcibly sterilized, as recently as 2010 (Campos 2013). In addition, as of 2023, 12 countries in Europe require sterilization in order for trans people to obtain legal gender recognition (Transgender Europe 2023).

In addition to overt genocidal projects, social relations within conditions of inequality increasingly expose marginalized and stigmatized groups to environmental and health hazards at rates higher than privileged groups, affecting birth and health outcomes. For example, according to the National Association of City and County Health Officials, in the United States, the wealthier a person is the lower their risk of disease, cancer, infant death, and diabetes (NACCHO 2008). However, Richard David and James Collins, physicians who study premature birth, found that African Americans who were middle-class or upper-class did *not* experience the same lower risks for premature birth as their white peers. They attempted to find out if there was a "premature birth gene" specific to African Americans, through comparing newborns among African American women, African women, and white American women. They found that African women and white American women had similar pregnancy outcomes, but *African American* women were still three times more likely to have premature births than both these groups, suggesting that there is no genetic basis for difference between pregnancy outcomes for white and Black women in the US. Therefore, David and Collins explain the *pregnancy gap* by arguing that African Americans, regardless of social class, experience significant amounts of stress due to their daily experiences with racism in the US. For middle-class or upper-class African Americans, particularly who are women, the necessity of being on the ball constantly and performing at the highest caliber at all times – in order to refute racist stereotypes – results in a continuous, accumulating amount of stress which translates into higher risk for negative health outcomes (*Unnatural Causes* 2008). Such findings suggest that intersecting race, class, and gender inequalities have real impacts on the health outcomes of differently situated groups in society.

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

individualizing way of talking about reproductive politics that overlooks the ways that poverty, race, laws, and medical authorities impose control over many women's reproductive lives.

Following the passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 which legalized abortion (until it was overturned by the Supreme Court's 2022 decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*), the burgeoning conservative movement of the mid to late 1970s succeeded in getting the *Hyde Amendment* passed. The Hyde Amendment prohibits federal funds, specifically Medicaid, from being used to fund abortions. This Amendment disproportionately affects poor women, who are disproportionately women of color. One would think that the feminist organization National Organization of Women (NOW) would have rallied to block or reverse the Hyde Amendment, but they did not. This led women of color activists to critique the reproductive rights framework, arguing that this framework reflects the interests and experiences of white middle-class feminists and ignores the broader racial and class inequalities that limit the abilities of women to actually make choices about reproduction and family.

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

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- **3.4: Medicine, Health, and Reproductive Justice** by Miliann Kang, Donovan Lessard, Laura Heston, and Sonny Nordmarken is licensed CC BY 4.0.

18: The State

In high school civics and social science classes, students are often taught that the United States is a democratic nation-state because the government is composed of three separate branches –the Executive, the Judicial, and Legislative branches – that work to check and balance each other. Students are told that anyone can run for office and that people's votes determine the direction of the nation. However, as economist Joseph Stiglitz (2011) points out, the fact that the majority of US senators, representatives in the House of Representatives, and Executive-branch policy makers originate from the wealthiest 1% of society should give one pause to rethink this conventional narrative.

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

The state plays a significant role in reinforcing *systems of power* through legislation and policies that influence other institutions such as education, medicine, and family. For instance, the state has engaged in **social regulation** – the process of controlling populations through formal and informal measures – by dictating which decisions people can make about their own bodies, who can marry, and who is eligible to vote for candidates they wish to represent them in government. Through *nondiscrimination law*, the state also can prohibit or allow discrimination against marginalized groups. For instance, approximately half of all US states lack discrimination protections in the process of adoption for queer people (MAP 2024), meaning that queer people have no legal recourse in those states if they experience *heterosexist* or *cissexist* discrimination by adoption agencies. As Foucault (1977) discussed, the state engages in social regulation not only via law and policy, but by a process of *normalization* – positioning certain behaviors and lifestyles as "normal" and desirable, which promotes conformity, such as through the *Standard North American Family (SNAF)* ideology.

Another primary example of how the state reinforces systems of power is the prison system and the "War on Drugs" begun in the 1980s by the Reagan Administration. According to Bureau of Justice Statistics, there were over 2.1 million people incarcerated in the United States at the end of 2015 (Kaeble and Glaze 2016). Furthermore, over 6.7 million were either on probation, on parole, or in jail or prison. This means that roughly 2.7% of the adult population of the United States was somehow under surveillance by the US criminal justice system. Indeed, the United States had the highest number of people incarcerated than any other country on the face of the globe. These rates of incarceration are largely the result of the *War on Drugs*, which criminalized drug use and distribution. A significant aspect of the War on Drugs was the establishment of mandatory minimum sentencing laws that send non-violent drug offenders to prison rather than enrolling them in treatment programs. The War on Drugs has disproportionately targeted people of color. Although the prison population has recently declined substantially, in part due to changes in sentencing, racial disparities persist. The Prison Policy Initiative states that:

> "It's no surprise that people of color – who face much greater rates of poverty – are dramatically overrepresented in the nation's prisons and jails. These racial disparities are particularly stark for Black Americans, who make up 35% of the prison and jail populations but only 14% of all U.S residents. The same is true for women, whose incarceration rates have for decades risen faster than men's, and who are often behind bars because of financial obstacles such as an inability to pay bail" (Sawyer and Wagner 2024).

While the incarceration of women, in general, for drug-related offenses skyrocketed 888% between 1986 and 1999, women of color have been arrested at rates far higher than white women, even though they use drugs at a rate equal to or lower than white women (ACLU 2004). Furthermore, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics' most recent Survey of Prison Inmates, most incarcerated women (58%) have minor children (Maruschak, Bronson, and Alper 2021). Before incarceration these women often were the primary caregivers to their children and other family members. Thus, the impact on children, families, and communities is substantial when women are imprisoned. Finally, inmates often engage in prison labor for less than minimum wage. Corporations contract prison labor that produces millions of dollars in profit. Therefore, the incarceration of millions of people artificially deflates the unemployment rate (something politicians benefit from) and creates a cheap labor force that generates millions of dollars in profit for private corporations. How do we make sense of this? What does this say about the state of democracy in the United States?



"Convict workers at Parchman Prison, 1911" by The New York Times is in the Public Domain, CC0

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

In light of the prison-industrial system and its racialized and gendered effects, how far has the US really come in terms of racial and gender equality? Here, we point to the difference between **de jure** laws and **de facto** realities. De jure ('by law') refers to existing laws and de facto ('by fact') refers to on-the-ground realities, no matter the law. While the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* legally required an end to de jure segregation, or segregation enforceable by law, in education, voting, and the workplace, de facto racial inequality still exists. We can see clearly, just looking at incarceration statistics, that even though explicit racial discrimination is illegal, state policies such as the War on Drugs still have the effect of disproportionately imprisoning people of color.

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19: The Welfare State

There are many ways that nations and national policies are gendered. In this chapter we will focus on the US welfare state, providing examples and clarifying debates rather than covering everything pertaining to the welfare state. Welfare does not only come in its most recognized form – monthly income assistance – but also includes subsidized health insurance (Medicare and Medicaid) and childcare, social security, and food subsidies like food stamps. In addition, the US government pays subsidies to corporations, which is called **corporate welfare**. Most individuals who receive welfare are stigmatized and construed as undeserving, while the corporations that receive subsidies are seen as entitled to these. The distribution of welfare in the US is a gendered process in which women, especially mothers, are much more likely to receive assistance than men. Since, at the national level, women earn less money than men do and often take time away from the labor force, it is more difficult to maintain a single-parent household on one woman's income than on one man's income. This is even more difficult for women who are working-class or poor whose work may not even pay enough to stay well fed and cared for without additional support from family, friends, or the state.

The Personal Responsibility/Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 effectively dismantled US welfare policy. The act limits lifetime receipt of welfare to a maximum of 60 months and includes some gender-specific clauses to address the political issue of mothers on welfare. Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich infamously suggested that children of welfare mothers should be put into orphanages rather than be raised by the women who birthed them. An incarnation of this sentiment made its way into PRWORA through an optional state-level clause that would bar mothers who were already on welfare rolls from getting additional money to support any new children (Hays 2001). This clause, also known as the "family cap provision," effectively punishes children for being born and plays into the demeaning and erroneous stereotype that women on welfare have children in order to get more money from the state. Feminist political scientist Gwendolyn Mink (2009) argues that welfare reform targets poor single mothers and families of color and contributes to the devaluing of unpaid caregiving work. According to Mink, through welfare reform, poor single mothers became:

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

This example illustrates how state policies devalue the traditionally gendered care work that women disproportionately perform, target poor women of color as subjects to be regulated, and reinforce heteronormative breadwinner-homemaker gender roles.

In addition, welfare is linked to state policies governing marriage and family life. For example, the Bush Administration's *Healthy Marriages Initiative*, which promoted marriage by providing government funding, assumed that marriage reduces poverty. It is true that two incomes are often better than one. However, not all mothers are heterosexual, or want to be married to the father of their children, or even married at all. More than that, marriage is no guarantee of financial security, especially people living in impoverished communities where they would likely marry other impoverished people. Most people marry within their current economic class (Gerstel and Sarkisian 2006). Gingrich and others especially hoped that women would marry the fathers of their children without recognizing that many women are victims of intimate partner violence. Finally, we are also living in a period in which most marriages end in divorce. It is clear that this initiative was more about promoting a political ideology than actually attempting to remedy the social problem of poverty.

Discourses about welfare mothers invoke images that are gendered, classed, racialized, and sexualized. The notions that women on welfare breed children uncontrollably, never marry, and do not know who fathered their children are contemporary incarnations of the Jezebel *controlling image* of Black women as sexually promiscuous that originated during American slavery (Collins 2005). This image obscures the fact that during slavery and after emancipation, white men systematically raped Black women. Although most people receiving welfare supports are white, and, in particular, most single mothers receiving welfare are also white, welfare receipt is racialized such that the only images of welfare we seem to see are single mothers of color. Additionally, "the poor" are often framed as amoral, unfamiliar, and un-American. For instance, the mother of one of the authors of this text receives social security checks for disability, yet is staunchly anti-welfare. This contradiction is sustained by the idea that members of the white middle class do not receive welfare even when they do receive various forms of government support. If instead the receipt of welfare was not stigmatized, but was recognized as something that families, friends, and neighbors received in various phases of their lives, these stereotypes would lose traction.

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20: Work

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

Now, more than ever, women in the US are participating in the labor force in full-time, year-round positions.[1] This was not always the case. Changes in the economy (namely, the decline of men's wages), an increase in single-mothers, and education and job opportunities and cultural shifts created by feminist movement politics from the 1960s and 1970s have fueled the increase in women's labor force participation. Dual-earner homes are much more common than the *breadwinner-homemaker model* re-popularized in the 1950s, in which women stayed home and did unpaid labor (e.g., laundry, cooking, childcare, cleaning, planning) while men participated in the paid labor force in jobs that would earn them enough money to support a spouse and children. It turns out this popular American fantasy, often spoken of in political "family values" rhetoric, was only ever a reality for some white middle-class people, and for most contemporary households is now completely out of reach.

Though men and women are participating in the labor force, higher education, and paid work in near-equal numbers, a **gender wage gap** between men and women workers remains. On average, women workers made 84% of what men made in 2023 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2024), or 84 cents for every dollar made by men. As discussed in a prior chapter, it is important to note the intersection of gender and race here, in which Latina, Native American or Indian, and Black women earn even less. This gap persists even when controlling for educational differences, full-time work versus part-time work, and year-round versus seasonal occupational statuses. Thus, women with similar educational backgrounds who work the same number of hours per year as their male counterparts are making 16% less than similarly situated men. So, how can this gap be explained? Researchers put forth four possible explanations of the gender wage gap: 1) discrimination, 2) occupational segregation, 3) devalued work, and 4) inherent work-family conflicts.

Most people believe discrimination and sexism in the workplace are of the past. Since the 1964 Civil Rights Act passed it has been illegal to discriminate in hiring based on race or gender. However, although companies can no longer say "men only" in their hiring advertisements, they can make efforts to recruit men, such as circulating job ads in men's social networks and choosing men to interview from the applicant pool. The same companies can also have non-accommodating family-leave provisions that may discourage women, who they assume are disproportionately more likely to be primary caregivers, from applying. In addition, discrimination cases are very difficult to prosecute legally since no government agency monitors general trends and practices, and so individuals must complain about and prove specific instances of discrimination in specific job settings. Hiring discrimination in particular is extremely difficult to prove in a courtroom, and can thus persist largely unchecked. In addition, even when they are hired, women working in male-dominated fields often run into a **glass ceiling**, in that they face obstacles in being promoted to higher-level positions in the organization.

Gender Discrimination at Walmart

One example of the glass ceiling and gender discrimination is the class action lawsuit between Walmart and its women managerial staff. Although Walmart has hired some women in managerial positions across the country, they also have informal policies at the national level of promoting men faster and paying them at a different wage scale. While only six women at Walmart initiated the suit, the number of women that would be affected in this case numbered over 1.5 million. Walmart fought this legal battle over the course of ten years (2001-2011). The case was finally decided in June 2011 when the US Supreme Court sided with the defendant, Walmart, citing the difficulty of considering all women workers in Walmart's retail empire as a coherent "class." They agreed that discrimination against individuals was present, but the fact that it could not be proven that women, as a class, were discriminated against by the Wal-Mart corporation kept them from being found guilty (*Walmart Stores Inc. v. Dukes, et al.* 2011). Although Walmart did nothing to curb its male managers who were clearly and consistently hiring and promoting men over women, this

neglect was not enough to convict Walmart of class-action discrimination. In this example, it becomes apparent that while gender discrimination is illegal it can still happen in patterned and widespread ways. Additionally, there are a series of factors that make it hard to prosecute gender discrimination.



"Walmart mall entrance in Pincourt, Quebec, Canada" by Bull-Doser is in the Public Domain, CC0

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



"An Austrian Airlines flight attendant serving refreshments to passengers" by Austrian Airlines is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

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

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



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Finally, the fourth explanation for the gender wage gap has to do with **work-life conflict**, the tensions between work and family that women are more likely to have to negotiate than men. For instance, women are much more likely to interrupt their career trajectories to take time off to care for children. This is not an inherent consequence of childbearing. Many countries offer women (and sometimes men) workers paid leave time and the ability to return to their jobs with the same salaries and benefits as when they left them. In contrast, the strongest legal policy protecting people's jobs in the case of extended leave to care for the sick or elderly, or take personal time for pregnancy and childcare in the US is the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1996. Under this act, most employers are obligated to allow their workers to take up to twelve weeks of *unpaid* leave. Unfortunately, few people can afford to be away from their jobs for so long without a paycheck and this policy remains underutilized. Additionally, only about half of the US work force is eligible for leave under FMLA, because the act only applies to workers who are employed by companies that have more than 50 employees. On top of that, many employers are unaware of this act or do not inform their workers that they can take this time off. Thus, women are more likely to quit full-time jobs and take on part-time jobs while their children are young. Quitting and rejoining the labor force typically means starting at the bottom in terms of pay and status at a new company, and this negatively impacts women's overall earnings even when they return to full-time work.

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1. Much of the material in this chapter was adapted from a classroom guest lecture by Dale Melcher, given on October 26, 2009. ↵

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21: The Global Economy

Globalization is an oft-cited term that can usefully serve as shorthand. However, this shorthand runs the risk of lumping together a broad range of complex economic, political, and cultural phenomena. **Globalization** as its basic refers to the increasing interconnection of nations across the globe. It describes both the benefits and costs of living in a globally connected world. The Internet was once heralded as the great equalizer in global communications. Certainly, we are now accustomed to getting news from across the globe from a variety of perspectives. Activists in other countries, like Egypt and Iran, have famously used social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter (now X) to report what is happening from the ground, in the absence of formal news sources. Egyptian activists also utilized these social networking websites to coordinate demonstrations and marches, leading to the Egyptian government to shut down the Internet for several days during the "Arab Spring" uprisings in early 2011. Globalization makes it possible for social change activists in different countries to communicate with each other, and for people, information, and products to cross borders, with benefits for some and costs to others. It allows for Massachusetts residents to have fresh fruit in winter, but lowers the wages of agricultural workers who gather the fruit in tropical countries, supports repressive government policies in those countries, and increases the carbon footprint of producing and distributing food. Globalization has led to unequal economic relationships between the **Global North** – a term that refers to the world's wealthier countries – and the **Global South** – a term that refers to the world's poorer countries. Globalized contexts can lead social movements and state, development, and conservation agencies to influence each other. For example, Colombian activists' use of *neoliberal* (discussed below) development discourses both legitimized the presence of state, development and conservation agencies and influenced these agencies' visions and plans (Asher 2009). As such, globalization is not uniformly good or bad, but has costs and benefits that are experienced differently depending on one's social location.

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



"Lindintracuay" by marissaorton is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

Rather than a nation's workers producing goods, selling those goods back to its people, and keeping profits within the nation's borders, multinational corporations participate in **global commodity chains.** As Cynthia Enloe's (2008) article "The Globetrotting Sneaker" makes clear, globalization makes it possible for a shoe corporation based in Country A to extract resources from Country B, produce goods in Country C, sell those goods in Countries D, E, and F, and deposit waste in the landfills of Country G. Meanwhile, the profits from this production and sales of goods return largely to the corporation, while little goes into the

economies of the participating nations (Enloe 2008). Companies like Nike, Adidas, and Reebok were initially attracted by military regimes in South Korea in the 1980s that quashed labor unions. Once the workers in South Korea organized successfully, factories moved to Indonesia (Enloe 2008). This process of moving to remaining areas of cheap labor before workers organize is known as the *race to the bottom* logic of global factory production.

With the increasing globalization of the economy international institutions have been created. The purpose of these international institutions is, ostensibly, to monitor abuses and assist in the development of less developed nations through loans from more developed nations. The World Bank provides monetary support for large, capital-intensive projects such as the construction of roads and dams. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) provides loans and facilitates international trade relationships particularly through structural adjustment programs (SAP). Essentially, in a SAP, a country of the Global North lends money to another country in the Global South in exchange for resources. For instance, the US may lend money to Chile to assist with the growth and harvesting of grapes and production of wine. In exchange, the US would acquire grapes and wine from Chile at a discounted rate, and have control in how Chile spends the money, while Chile repays the initial loan. The problem with this is that, in many cases, the lending process is circular such that the country accepting the loan remains constantly indebted to the initial lending nation. For example, a nation may produce most of its crop to export elsewhere and be unable to feed its own people and therefore require additional loans. Consequences of SAPs are devalued currency, privatized industries, cut social programs and government subsidies, and increasing taxes to fund the development of infrastructure.

Free trade describes a set of institutions, policies, and ideologies, in which the governmental restrictions and regulations are minimal, allowing corporate bodies to engage in cross-border enterprises to maximize profit. One institution that was created to foster free trade is the World Trade Organization (WTO), an international unelected body whose mission is to challenge restraints on free trade. Some countries limit pollution levels in industry; the WTO considers any limits on production as barriers to free trade. They operate on the theory that unfettered, free market capitalism is the best way to generate profits. It may be more profitable to pay people minimally and circumvent environmental regulations, but proponents of free trade do not factor in the human costs to health, safety, and happiness—costs that cannot be put into dollars and cents. One such free trade agreement is the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) of 1994. NAFTA is an agreement between Canada, the US, and Mexico to promote the unregulated movement of jobs and products. The biggest result of this legislation is the mass relocation of factories from the US to Mexico in the form of *maquiladoras* that supply goods at low prices back to US consumers, resulting in a loss of around 500,000 union jobs in North America (Zinn 2003). The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) of 2002 expands NAFTA to include the entire Western hemisphere—except Cuba, due to trade sanctions against its communist government. At the time of this writing, the impact of these free trade agreements is a hotly contested political issue. Some people have argued that it resulted in unionized, higher paying jobs, while others have argued that even with many negative impacts, overall access to jobs, products, and resources has yielded many improvements. In the face of moves to promote free trade, *fair trade* movements that support safe working conditions and sustainable wages have also cropped up, especially in the coffee and chocolate industries.

The current global economic system is guided by an ideology of *neoliberalism*. In the contemporary US context, the term **liberalism** in political theory (not to be confused with "liberal" that is identified with the Democratic Party) refers to restrictions on state power to prevent government infringement on individual rights (Grewal and Kaplan 1994), which transcend party affiliations. *Economic liberalism* – the belief that markets work best without any governmental regulation or interference – describes the free trade economic policies we discussed above. **Neoliberalism** (a 'new' liberalism) is a market-driven approach to economic and social policy, where capitalism's profit motive is applied to social policies and programs like welfare and taxation, cutting them to increase profits. A crucial project of neoliberalism is the downsizing of the public sphere and social welfare programs that unions and racial justice activists have fought for since the early 20th century. Feminist historian Lisa Duggan (2003) argues that neoliberalism is more than just the privatization of the economy, but is an *ideology* that holds that once marginalized groups (e.g., queer people, people of color, the working-class) have access to mainstream institutions (e.g., marriage, military) and consumption in the free market, they have reached "equality" with their privileged peers. Neoliberal ideology therefore assumes that our society has reached a post-civil rights period where social movements that seek to fundamentally alter mainstream institutions and build up social welfare programs are obsolete. However, as this textbook has shown, mainstream institutions and structures of power often reproduce inequalities.

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

North – historical colonizers – and people of color of the Global South – the historically colonized. **Postcolonial theory** emerged out of critiques of colonialism, empire, enslavement, and neocolonial racist-economic oppression more generally, which were advanced by scholars in the Asian and Middle Eastern diasporas. Postcolonial scholars primarily unpack and critique colonial discourses, depictions of colonized Others, and European scholars' biased representations of those they colonized, which they figure as knowledge (for example, see Said 1995 and Spivak 1988). **Decoloniality** theoretical approaches, emerging chiefly in Latin America, illuminated how colonization invented the concepts of "the colonized," "modernity," and "coloniality," and disrupted the lives, social arrangements, gender relations, and understandings it invaded, imposing on the colonized European racialized conceptualizations of male and female (Lugones 2007; Quijano 2007).

Women of color of the Global South are disproportionately impacted by global economic policies. Not only are women in Asian and Latin American countries much more likely to work in low-wage factory jobs than men, women are also much more mobile in terms of immigration (Pessar 2005). Women have more labor-based mobility for low-income factory work in other countries as well as in domestic and sex work markets. When women immigrate to other nations they often sacrifice care of and contact with their own children in order to earn money caring for wealthier people's children as domestic workers, a situation known as **transnational motherhood** (Parreñas 2001). Domestic work and sex work are two sectors of the service economy in which women immigrants participate. Immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, have few options in terms of earning money, and economic circumstances are such that undocumented immigrants can make more money within illegal and unregulated markets in nations of the Global North, rather than regulated markets of the formal economy. Thus, it is not uncommon for women immigrants to participate in informal economies such as domestic work or sex work that employers and clients do not report in their taxes.

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

Not only do gendered, racialized, and sexualized differences exist in the US domestic labor market, leading to differences in work and pay, these differences also characterize the globalized labor market. Trade relationships between countries and the ideology of neoliberalism that governs them have profound effects on the quality of life of people all over the world. Women bear the brunt of changes to the global marketplace as factory workers in some countries and domestic, sex, and beauty service workers in others. Fortunately, fair trade and anti-sweatshop movements as well as indigenous, decolonial, feminist and labor movements are fighting to change these conditions for the better in the face of well-funded and powerful multinational corporations and global trade organizations.

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22: Gender and Sexual Violence

We have illustrated several ways in which social institutions overlap with and reinforce one another. In this chapter, we use the case of violence against women and gender and sexual violence as another example of the ways in which the institutions of media, family, the state (law and the prison system), and medicine facilitate violence. The term **gendered violence** highlights not only the manner in which transgender people, gay men, and women often experience violence, but also how violence takes place more broadly within the context of a society that is characterized by a *sex/gender/sexuality system* that disparages femininity, sexual minorities, and gender minorities. Hussein Balhan's definition of *violence* emphasizes its structural and systematic nature:

> "Violence is not an isolated physical act or a discrete random event. It is a relation, process, and condition determining, exploiting, and curtailing the well-being of the survivor … Violence occurs not only between individuals, but also between groups and societies … Any relation, process, or condition imposed by someone that injures the health and well-being of others is by definition violent" (Balhan 1985).

As Kirk and Okazawa-Rey (2004) point out, this definition not only includes sexual assault and domestic violence between individuals, but also includes macro-level processes of inequality and violence, such as "colonization, poverty, racism, lack of access to education, health care, and negative media representations" (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 2004: 258). Importantly, Bulhan (1985) refers to people who have experienced violence as "survivors" rather than "victims." The difference between the two words is significant, in that the construction of people who have experienced violence as "victims" maintains and reinforces their subordinate position, while "survivors" emphasizes the agency and self-determination of people who have experienced violence. We wish to underscore not only that sexual and intimate partner violence is systematic, but that people of all genders have organized to combat sexual and domestic violence, and that survivors of sexual and domestic violence have agency and exercise that agency.

Whereas our culture figures the home and family as a "haven in a heartless world," the family and home are common contexts for emotional and physical violence. The notion of the normative family – with the concomitant gender roles we connote with the *SNAF* – as a privatized sphere, is an ideological construction that often hides inequalities that exist within families. **Intimate partner violence** refers to emotional and physical violence by one intimate or romantic partner against another. Intimate partner violence occurs in queer as well as heterosexual relationships, but this violence is quite clearly gendered in heterosexual relationships. The US Department of Justice reported that 37% of women who visited emergency rooms for injuries from others were injured by male intimate partners. Additionally, researchers of sexual violence have found that one in five high school girls surveyed reported that she had been physically or sexually abused. The majority of these incidents occurred at home and happened more than once (Commonwealth Fund 1997). It is important to note that these statistics only include those who actually sought medical care (in the case of the first statistic) and/or reported an injury from a male intimate partner. As a result, this number may grossly under-represent the actual number of women injured by intimate partners. Until the 1970s in the US, most states did not consider rape between spouses – **marital rape** – a crime. This was a legacy of *coverture* laws that existed until the 19th century, wherein women were thought to be the property of their husbands, lacking any legal rights to personhood. Thus, the legal history of marriage has played a part in constructing marital rape as somehow less damaging and violent than stranger or date rape. Additionally, the de-valuation of women's labor, and the fact that women are, on average, paid 84% of what men receive for the same work, reinforce heterosexual women's dependence on partners for survival, even if these partners are abusive.

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

Psychologists, psychiatrists, and other medical professionals have crafted several "syndromes" used to describe the effects of violence against women. While they have brought attention to the problem and the need for treatment programs, these approaches to violence against women tend to individualize, depoliticize, and *medicalize* gendered violence and often pathologize the survivor, rather than identify the cultural conditions that compel abusers to abuse others. *Battered Women's Syndrome (BTS),* put forward by psychologist Lenore Walker, describes a woman who "learns helplessness" and returns to her abuser because he (in this theory, only men are abusers and only women are survivors) lures her back with promises not to harm her again, yet continues to abuse

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

Our chapters on *social institutions* have attempted to show how institutions are not merely benign, apolitical facets of our lives, but active agents in our socialization, laden with ideology and power. They produce and reproduce inequalities and often overlap and reinforce one another. This is because institutions are deeply social entities – even though we may think of them as unaffected by society and culture. They exist in the same cultural-historical periods and are created through the same structures of thought of that period. However, due to the inordinate power of institutions and those at their heads – doctors, scientists, policy makers, experts, and so on – the ideas of those in power within institutions are often the reigning ideas of an era. In this way, institutions have an *ideological facet* – they are not only shaped by a particular cultural-historical period, but also society is shaped and impacted by their interests, as well.

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23: Social Movements, Part I

Introduction

> "As historians we try to isolate one conversation and to explore it, but the trick is then how to put that conversation in a context which makes evident its dialogue with so many others—how to make this one lyric stand alone and at the same time be in connection with all the other lyrics being sung."
>
> —Elsa Barkley Brown, "'What Has Happened Here,'" pp. 297-298.

Feminist historian Elsa Barkley Brown reminds us that social movements and identities are not separate from each other, as we often imagine they are in contemporary society. She argues that we must have a relational understanding of social movements and identities within and between social movements – an understanding of the ways in which privilege and oppression are linked and how the stories of people of color and feminists fighting for justice have been historically linked through overlapping and sometimes conflicting social movements. In the following, we use a relational lens to discuss and make sense of feminist and queer movements, beginning in the 19th century up to the present time. Although we use the terms "first wave," "second wave," and "third wave" to describe feminist movements, characterizing resistance in these "waves" is problematic, as it figures distinct "waves" of activism as prioritizing distinct issues in each time period, obscuring histories of feminist organizing in locations and around issues not discussed in the dominant "waves" narratives. Indeed, these "waves" are not mutually exclusive or totally separate from each other. In fact, they inform each other, not only in the way that contemporary feminist work has in many ways been made possible by earlier feminist activism, but also in the way that contemporary feminist activism informs the way we think of past feminist activism and feminisms. Nonetheless, we use "wave" language, understanding that it has historical meaning. Relatedly, although a focus on prominent leaders and events can obscure the many people and actions involved in everyday resistance and community organizing, we focus on the most well-known figures, political events, and social movements, understanding that doing so advances one particular lens of history.

Additionally, feminist movements have generated, made possible, and nurtured feminist theories and feminist academic knowledge. In this way, feminist movements are fantastic examples of **praxis** – they use critical reflection about the world to change it. It is because of the activism involved in various social movements such as feminist, labor, and civil rights activism that "feminist history" is a viable field of study today. Feminist history is part of a larger historical project that draws on the experiences of traditionally neglected and disempowered groups (e.g., factory workers, immigrants, people of color, lesbians) to re-think and challenge the histories that have been traditionally written from the experiences and points of view of the powerful (e.g., colonizers, representatives of the state, the wealthy) – the histories we typically learn in high school textbooks.

Mid 19th to Early 20th Century Movements

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



Image of women marching in London in 1908 with signs advocating for women's right to vote.

"Votes for Women' Sellers, 1908" of The Library of the London School of Economics and Political Science is in the Public Domain

Demanding women's enfranchisement, the abolition of coverture, and access to employment and education were quite radical demands at the time. These demands confronted the *ideology* of the **cult of true womanhood**, summarized in four key tenets – piety, purity, submission and domesticity – which held that white middle-class women were rightfully and naturally located in the private sphere of the household and not fit for public, political participation or labor in the waged economy. However, this emphasis on confronting the ideology of the cult of true womanhood was shaped by the white middle-class standpoint of the leaders of the movement. The cult of true womanhood was an ideology of white middle-class womanhood that systematically denied women of color and working-class women access to the category of "women," because working-class and black women, by necessity, had to labor outside of the home.

The white middle-class leadership of the first wave movement shaped the priorities of the movement, often excluding the concerns and participation of working-class women and women of color. For example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony formed the National Women Suffrage Association (NWSA) in order to break from other suffragists who supported the passage of the 15th Amendment, which would give African American men the right to vote before women. Stanton and Anthony privileged white women's rights instead of creating solidarities across race and class groups. Accordingly, they saw women's suffrage as the central goal of the women's rights movement. For example, in the first issue of her newspaper, *The Revolution*, Susan B. Anthony wrote, "We shall show that the ballot will secure for woman equal place and equal wages in the world of work; that it will open to her the schools, colleges, professions, and all the opportunities and advantages of life; that in her hand it will be a moral power to stay the tide of crime and misery on every side" (cited by Davis 1981: 73). Meanwhile, working-class women and women of color *knew* that mere access to voting did not overturn class and race inequalities. As feminist activist and scholar Angela Davis (1981) writes, working-class women "were seldom moved by the suffragists' promise that the vote would permit them to become equal to their men—their exploited, suffering men" (Davis 1981: 74-5). Furthermore, the largest suffrage organization, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) – a descendent of the National Women Suffrage Association – barred the participation of Black women suffragists in its organization.

Although the first wave movement was largely defined and led by middle class white women, there was significant overlap between it and the abolitionist movement – which sought to end slavery – and the racial justice movement following the end of the Civil War. Historian Nancy Cott (2000) argues that, in some ways, both movements were largely about having self-ownership and control over one's body. For enslaved people, that meant the freedom from lifelong, unpaid, forced labor, as well as freedom from the sexual assault that many enslaved Black women suffered from white male land owners. For married white women, it meant recognition as people in the face of the law and the ability to refuse their husbands' sexual advances. White middle-class abolitionists often made analogies between slavery and marriage, as abolitionist Antoinette Brown wrote in 1853 that, "The wife owes service and labor to her husband as much and as absolutely as the slave does to his master" (Brown, cited. in Cott 2000: 64). This analogy between marriage and slavery had historical resonance at the time, but it problematically conflated the unique experience of the racialized oppression of slavery that African American women faced with a very different type of oppression that

white women faced under coverture. This illustrates quite well Angela Davis' (1983) argument that while white women abolitionists and feminists of the time made important contributions to anti-slavery campaigns, they often failed to understand the uniqueness and severity of enslaved women's lives and the complex system of chattel slavery.

Black activists, writers, newspaper publishers, and academics moved between the racial justice and feminist movements, arguing for inclusion in the first wave feminist movement and condemning slavery and Jim Crow laws that maintained racial segregation. Sojourner Truth's famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech, which has been attributed to the Akron Women's Convention in 1851, captured this contentious linkage between the first wave women's movement and the abolitionist movement well. In her speech, she critiqued the exclusion of Black women from the women's movement while simultaneously condemning the injustices of slavery:

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

Feminist historian Nell Painter (1996) has questioned the validity of this representation of the speech, arguing that white suffragists dramatically changed its content and title. This illustrates that certain social actors with power can construct the story and possibly misrepresent actors with less power and social movements.



Photographic portrait of Ida B. Wells-Barnett.

"Ida B. Wells-Barnett" by Mary Garrity, restored by Adam Cuerden, Google Cultural Institute is in the Public Domain, CC0

Despite their marginalization, Black women emerged as passionate and powerful leaders. Ida B. Wells, a particularly influential activist who participated in the movement for women's suffrage, was a founding member of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a journalist, and the author of numerous pamphlets and articles exposing the violent lynching of thousands of African Americans in the Reconstruction period (the period following the Civil War). Wells argued that lynching in the Reconstruction Period was a systematic attempt to maintain racial inequality, despite the passage of the 14th Amendment in 1868, which held that African Americans were citizens and could not be discriminated against based on their race (Wells 1893). Additionally, thousands of African American women were members of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, which was pro-suffrage, but did not receive recognition from the predominantly white middle-class National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).

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

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24: Social Movements, Part II

Mid 20th Century Movements

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

These organizations, however, did not necessarily agree on what equality looked like and how that would be achieved. For example, the BPW supported the *Equal Rights Amendment* (ERA), which they argued would effectively end employment discrimination against women. Meanwhile, the Women's Bureau and the YWCA opposed the ERA, arguing that it would damage the gains that organized labor had made already. The disagreement clearly brought into relief the competing agendas of defining working women first and foremost as *women* (who are also workers), versus defining working women first and foremost as *workers* (who are also women). Over a century later, the ERA hangs in the balance as it has yet to be ratified.

While millions of women were already working in the United States at the beginning of World War II, labor shortages during the war allowed millions of women to move into higher-paying factory jobs that had previously been occupied by men. Simultaneously, nearly 125,000 African American men fought in segregated units in World War II, often being sent on the front guard of the most dangerous missions (Zinn 2003). Japanese Americans whose families were interned also fought in the segregated units that had the war's highest casualty rates (Odo 2017; Takaki 2001). Following the end of the war, both the women who had worked in high-paying jobs in factories and the African American men who had fought in the war returned to a society that was still deeply segregated, and they were expected to return to their previous subordinate positions. Despite the conservative political climate of the 1950s, civil rights organizers began to challenge both the *de jure* segregation of Jim Crow laws and the *de facto* segregation experienced by African Americans on a daily basis. The landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling of 1954, which made "separate but equal" educational facilities illegal, provided an essential legal basis for activism against the institutionalized racism of Jim Crow laws. Eventually, the Black Freedom movement**,** also known now as the Civil Rights movement would fundamentally change US society and inspire the *second wave feminist movement* and the radical political movements of the New Left (e.g., gay liberationism, black nationalism, socialist and anarchist activism, the environmentalist movement) in the late 1960s.

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



Black and white photo of a young Rosa Parks smiling, with Martin Luther King Jr. talking in the background.

"Photograph of Rosa Parks with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (ca. 1955)" by National Archives and Records Administration Records of the U.S. Information Agency Record Group 306 is in the Public Domain, CC0

Additionally, sit-in activism was sparked by the Greensboro sit-ins, when four African American students in Greensboro, North Carolina, sat at and refused to leave a segregated lunch counter at a Woolworth's store in February of 1960. The number of students participating in the sit-ins increased as the days and weeks went on, and the sit-ins began to receive national media attention. Networks of student activists began sharing the successes of the tactic of the nonviolent sit-in, and began doing sit-ins in their own cities and towns around the country throughout the early 1960s.



Black and white photo of Ella Baker speaking passionately into a microphone with her fist raised.

"Ella Baker" by The Ella Baker Center for Human Rights is licensed under CC BY 3.0

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



Black and white photo of white men surrounding and attacking Freedom Riders in a crowded hallway.

"Freedom Riders Attacked" by Unknown, The Magazine of the National Endowment for the Humanities is in the Public Domain

SNCC's non-hierarchical structure gave women chances to participate in the civil rights movement in ways previously blocked to them. However, the deeply embedded sexism of the surrounding culture still seeped into civil rights organizations, including SNCC. Although women played pivotal roles as organizers and activists throughout the civil rights movement, men occupied the majority of formal leadership roles in the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC), the NAACP, and CORE. Working with SNCC, Black women activists such as Fannie Lou Hamer and Diane Nash became noted activists and leaders within the civil rights movement in the early 1960s. Despite this, women within SNCC were often expected to do "women's work" (i.e., housework and secretarial work). White women SNCC activists Casey Hayden and Mary King critiqued this reproduction of gendered roles within the movement and called for dialogue about sexism within the civil rights movement in a memo that circulated through SNCC in 1965, titled "Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo." The memo became an influential document for the birth of the **second wave feminist movement**, a movement focused generally on fighting patriarchal structures of power, and specifically on combating occupational sex segregation in employment and fighting for reproductive rights for women. However, this was not the only source of second wave feminism, and white women were not the only women spearheading feminist movements. As historian Becky Thompson (2002) argues, in the mid and late 1960s, Latina women, African American women, and Asian American women were developing multiracial feminist organizations that would become important players within the U.S. second wave feminist movement.

In many ways, the second wave feminist movement was influenced and facilitated by the activist tools provided by the civil rights movement. Drawing on the stories of women who participated in the civil rights movement, historians Ellen Debois and Lynn Dumenil (2005) argue that women's participation in the civil rights movement allowed them to challenge gender norms that held that women belonged in the private sphere, and not in politics or activism. Not only did many women who were involved in the civil rights movement become activists in the second wave feminist movement, they also employed tactics that the civil rights movement had used, including marches and non-violent direct action. Additionally, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a major legal victory for the civil rights movement, not only prohibited employment discrimination based on race, but Title VII of the Act also prohibited sex discrimination. When the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) – the federal agency created to enforce Title VII –largely ignored women's complaints of employment discrimination, 15 women and one man organized to form the National Organization of Women (NOW), which was modeled after the NAACP. NOW focused its attention and organizing on passage of the *Equal Rights Amendment* (ERA), fighting sex discrimination in education, and defending *Roe v. Wade* – the Supreme Court decision of 1973 that struck down state laws that prohibited abortion within the first three months of pregnancy.



Color photo of bell hooks in an auditorium speaking into a microphone and gesturing.

"bell hooks" by Cmongirl is in the Public Domain, CC0

Although the second wave feminist movement challenged gender inequalities and brought women's issues to the forefront of national politics in the late 1960s and 1970s, the movement also reproduced other inequalities. Black women writers and activists such as Alice Walker, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins developed **Black feminist thought** as a critique of the ways in which second wave feminists often ignored racism and classism and how they uniquely impact people of color and working-class or poor people. One of the first formal Black feminist organizations was the Combahee River Collective, formed in 1974. Black feminist bell hooks (1984) argued that feminism cannot just be a fight to make women equal with men, because such a fight does not acknowledge that all men are not equal in a capitalist, racist, and heterosexist society. Thus, hooks and other Black feminists argued that sexism cannot be separated from racism, classism, and heterosexism, and that these systems of power overlap and reinforce each other. In other words, she argued, you cannot fight sexism without fighting racism, classism, and heterosexism. Importantly, Black feminism argues that an *intersectional* perspective that makes visible and critiques multiple sources of oppression and inequality also inspires coalitional activism that brings people together across race, class, gender, and sexual identity lines.

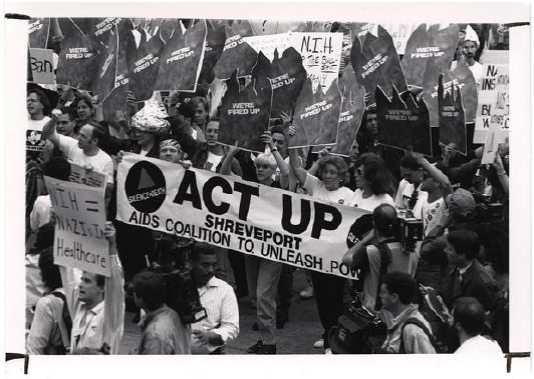
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25: Social Movements, Part III

Late 20th to Early 21st Movements

> "We are living in a world for which old forms of activism are not enough and today's activism is about creating coalitions between communities."
>
> —Angela Davis, cited by Hernandez and Rehman in *Colonize This!*

The **third wave feminist movement** is in many ways a hybrid creature. It is influenced by second wave feminism, Black feminisms, transnational feminisms, Global South feminisms, and queer feminism. This hybridity of third wave activism comes directly out of the experiences of feminists in the late 20th and early 21st centuries who have grown up in a world that supposedly does not need social movements because "equal rights" for people of color, queer people, and women have been guaranteed by law in most countries. The gap between law and reality – between the abstract proclamations of states and concrete lived experience – however, reveals the necessity of both old and new forms of activism. In a country where women are paid only 84% of what men are paid for the same labor (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2024), where Black people are killed by police at disproportionate rates despite being more likely to be unarmed (Sinyangway et al. 2023), where queer people continue to experience high levels of harassment and mistreatment by the police, particularly those who are trans or Black (Grasso et al. 2024), where 28% of queer youth experience homelessness and housing instability, which increase their risk of mental health challenges (DeChants et al. 2021), where Black and Brown families have considerably lower amounts of wealth than white families (Kent and Ricketts 2024), and where the military is the most funded institution by the government, feminists have increasingly realized that a **coalitional politics** that organizes with other groups based on their shared (but differing) experiences of oppression, rather than their specific identity, is absolutely necessary. Thus, Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake (1997) argue that a crucial goal for the third wave is "the development of modes of thinking that can come to terms with the multiple, constantly shifting bases of oppression in relation to the multiple, interpenetrating axes of identity, and the creation of a coalitional politics based on these understandings" (Heywood and Drake 1997: 3).

> The ACT UP demonstrations at NIH included various groups from different parts of the United States. This photograph shows the Shreveport, Louisiana ACT UP group at the NIH.
>
> 
>
>
> Black and white photo of ACT UP protestors marching and holding signs at the NIH.
>
> "ACT UP Demonstration at NIH" by NIH History Office is in the Public Domain, CC0

In the 1980s and 1990s, feminist and queer activists took action in a number of forms. Beginning in the mid 1980s, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) began organizing to press the unwilling institutions of the state (US government) and medicine to develop affordable drugs for people with HIV/AIDS. In the latter part of the 1980s, a subset of individuals began to articulate a **queer politics**, which sought to develop more radical political perspectives and more inclusive sexual cultures and communities, explicitly reclaimed a derogatory term often used against gay men and lesbians, and aimed to center people of marginalized groups such as transgender and gender-diverse people, people of color, and working-class or poor people. This movement distanced themselves from the gay rights movement or the *identity politics movement*, which they felt mainly reflected the interests of white middle-class cisgender gay men and lesbians. **Identity politics** refers to organizing politically around the experiences and needs of people who share a particular identity, such as the identity gay or lesbian. The move from political association with others who share a particular identity to political association with those who have differing identities and share

similar but differing experiences of oppression (*coalitional politics*), can be said to be a defining characteristic of the third wave. This involved an *intersectional* critique of the existing hierarchies within sexual liberation movements, which marginalized individuals within already marginalized groups. In this vein, Lisa Duggan (2002) coined the term **homonormativity**, which describes the normalization and depoliticization of gay men and lesbians through their assimilation into capitalist economic systems and domesticity –individuals who were previously constructed as "other." These individuals thus gained entrance into social life at the expense and continued marginalization of queer people who were of color, disabled, trans, single or non-monogamous, working-class, or non-western. Critiques of homonormativity were also critiques of gay identity politics, which left out concerns of many gay individuals who were marginalized within gay groups. Akin to homonormativity, Jasbir Puar (2007) coined the term **homonationalism,** which describes the white nationalism taken up by queer people that sustains racist and xenophobic discourses by constructing immigrants, especially Muslims, as homophobic.

Another defining characteristic of the third wave is the development of new tactics to politicize feminist issues and demands. For instance, ACT UP began to use powerful street theater that brought the death and suffering of people with HIV/AIDS to the streets and to the politicians and pharmaceutical companies that did not seem to care that thousands and thousands of people were dying. They staged die-ins, inflated massive condoms, and occupied politicians' and pharmaceutical executives' offices. Their confrontational tactics would be emulated and picked up by anti-globalization activists and the radical Left throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Queer Nation was formed in 1990 by ACT UP activists, and used the tactics developed by ACT UP in order to challenge homophobic violence and heterosexism in mainstream US society.

This photo depicts a mass "die-in" on the lawn of of the NIH, which closed the demonstration as ranks of uniformed officers, some on horseback, protected NIH headquarters during the "Storm the NIH" demonstration on May 21, 1990.



Black and white photo of people lying on the ground at a mass die-in protest on the lawn of the NIH.

"ACT UP Demonstration on the Lawn of Building 1" by NIH History Office is in the Public Domain, CC0

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

Part of this project of creating sex-positive feminist and queer spaces is creating media messaging that attempts to both consolidate feminist communities and create knowledge from and for oppressed groups. In a media-savvy generation, it is not surprising that *cultural production* is a main avenue of activism taken by contemporary activists. Although some commentators have deemed the third wave to be "post-feminist" or "not feminist" because it often does not utilize the activist forms (e.g., marches, vigils, and policy change) of the *second wave movement* (Sommers, 1994), the creation of alternative forms of culture in the face of a massive corporate media industry can be understood as quite political. For example, the Riot Grrrl movement, based in the Pacific Northwest of the US in the early 1990s, consisted of do-it-yourself bands predominantly composed of women, the creation of independent record labels, feminist zines, and art. Their lyrics often addressed gendered sexual violence, sexual liberationism, heteronormativity, gender normativity, police brutality, and war. Feminist news websites and magazines have also become important sources of feminist analysis on current events and issues. Magazines such as *Bitch* and *Ms.* as well as online blog collectives such as *Feministing* and the *Feminist Wire* function as alternative sources of feminist knowledge production. If we consider the creation of lives on our own terms and the struggle for autonomy as fundamental feminist acts of resistance, then creating alternative culture on our own terms should be considered a feminist act of resistance as well.

Feminist activism and theorizing by people outside the US context has broadened the feminist frameworks for analysis and action. In a world characterized by global capitalism, transnational immigration, and a history of colonialism that has still has effects today, **transnational feminism** is a body of theory and activism that highlights the connections between sexism, racism, classism, and imperialism. In "Under Western Eyes," an article by transnational feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991), Mohanty critiques the way in which much feminist activism and theory has been created from a white North American standpoint that has often exoticized "3rd world" women or ignored the needs and political situations of women in the *Global South*. Transnational feminists argue that Western feminist projects to "save" women in another region do not actually liberate these women, since this approach constructs the women as passive victims devoid of agency to save themselves. These "saving" projects are especially problematic when they are accompanied by Western military intervention. For instance, in the war on Afghanistan that began shortly after 9/11 in 2001, US military leaders and George Bush often claimed to be waging the war to "save" Afghani women from their *patriarchal* and domineering men. This crucially ignores the role of the West—and the US in particular—in supporting Islamic fundamentalist regimes in the 1980s. Furthermore, it positions women in Afghanistan as passive victims in need of Western intervention, in a way strikingly similar to the victimizing rhetoric often used to talk about "victims" of gendered violence. Therefore, transnational feminists challenge the notion held by many feminists in the West that any area of the world is inherently more patriarchal or sexist than the West because of its culture or religion through arguing that we need to understand how Western imperialism, global capitalism, militarism, sexism, and racism have created conditions of inequality for women around the world.

Third wave feminism is a vibrant mix of differing activist and theoretical traditions. Third wave feminism's insistence on grappling with multiple points-of-view, as well as its persistent refusal to be pinned down as representing just one group of people or one perspective, may be its greatest strength. Similar to how queer activists and theorists have insisted that "queer" is and should be open-ended and never set to mean one thing, third wave feminism's complexity, nuance, and adaptability become assets in a world marked by rapidly shifting political situations. The third wave's insistence on *coalitional politics* as an alternative to identity-based politics is a crucial project in a world that is marked by multiple, fluid, overlapping inequalities.

Conclusion

These final chapters have developed a relational analysis of feminist and queer social movements while understanding the limitations of categorizing feminist resistance efforts within an oversimplified framework of three distinct "waves." With such a relational lens, we are better situated to understand how the tactics and activities of one social movement can influence others. This lens also facilitates an understanding of how racialized, gendered, and classed exclusions and privileges lead to the splintering of social movements and social movement organizations. This type of intersectional analysis is at the heart not only of feminist activism but of feminist scholarship. The vibrancy and longevity of feminist movements might even be attributed to this *intersectional* reflexivity – the critique of race, class, gender, and sexual dynamics in feminist movements. The emphasis on coalitional politics and making connections between several movements is another crucial contribution of feminist activism and scholarship.

In the 21st century, feminist movements confront an array of *structures of power*: global capitalism, the prison system, war, racism, ableism, heterosexism, and cissexism, among others. What kind of world do we wish to create and live in? What alliances and coalitions will be necessary to challenge these *systems of oppression*? How do feminists, queer and trans people, people of color, disabled people, and working-class people go about challenging these systems? These are among some of the questions that

feminist activists are grappling with now, and their actions point toward a deepening commitment to an intersectional politics of social justice and praxis.

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