

PART III



The Structure of Social Institutions

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In the United States and globally, social institutions exert a powerful influence on everyday life. Social institutions are also important channels for societal penalties and privileges. The type of work you do, the structure of your family, whether your religion will be recognized or suppressed, the kind of education you receive, the images you see of yourself in the media, and how you are treated by the state are all shaped by the social institutions of the society where you live. People rely on institutions to meet their needs, although social institutions treat some groups better than others. When a specific institution (such as the economy) fails them, people often appeal to another institution (such as the state) for redress. In this sense, institutions are both sources of support and sources of repression.

The concept of an institution is abstract because there is no thing or object that one can point to as an institution. *Social institutions* are the established societal patterns of behavior organized around particular purposes. The economy is an institution, as are the family, the media, education, and the state. These important societal institutions are examined here. Each is organized around a specific purpose; in the case of the economy, for example, its purpose is the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. Within a given institution, there may be various patterns, such as different family structures, but as a whole, institutions have general patterns of behavior that emerge because of the specific societal conditions in which groups live. Institutions do change over

time because societal conditions evolve and groups challenge specific institutional structures. Yet institutions are also enduring and persistent, even in the face of active efforts to change them. Institutions confront people from birth and live on after people die.

Across all societies, institutions are patterned by intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, and disability (among others), and, as a result, the effects of these systems of power on social institutions differ from one society to the next. Each society has a distinctive history and institutional configuration of social inequalities. In the United States, race, class, and gender constitute fundamental categories that shape American social institutions that serve as basic conduits for social inequalities. Moreover, social institutions are interconnected. We think the interrelationships among institutions are especially apparent when studied in the context of race, class, and gender. Race, class, and gender oppression rests on a network of interconnected social institutions. Understanding the interconnections among institutions helps us see that we are all part of one historically created system that finds structural form in interrelated social institutions.

Despite their significance, dominant American ideology portrays institutions as neutral in their treatment of different groups; indeed, the liberal framework of the law allegedly makes access to public institutions (such as education and work) gender- and race-blind. Still, institutions differentiate on the basis of race, class, and gender. As the readings included here show, institutions are actually structured on the basis of race, class, and gender relations.

As an example, think of the economy. Economic institutions in American society are founded on capitalism—an economic system based on the pursuit of profit and the principle of private ownership. Such a system creates class inequality because, in simple terms, the profits of some stem from the exploitation of the labor of others. Race and gender further divide the U.S. capitalist economy, resulting in labor and consumer markets that routinely advantage some and disadvantage others. In particular, corporate and government structures create jobs for some while leaving others underemployed or without work.

Those with jobs encounter a dual labor market that includes: (1) a primary labor market characterized by relatively high wages, opportunities for advancement, employee benefits, and rules of due process that protect workers' rights; and, (2) a secondary labor market (where most women and minorities are located) characterized by low wages, little opportunity for advancement, few benefits, and little protection for workers. One result of the dual labor market is the persistent wage gap between men and women (see Figure 1) and between Whites and people of color—even when they have the same level of education. Women tend to be clustered in jobs that employ mostly women workers; such

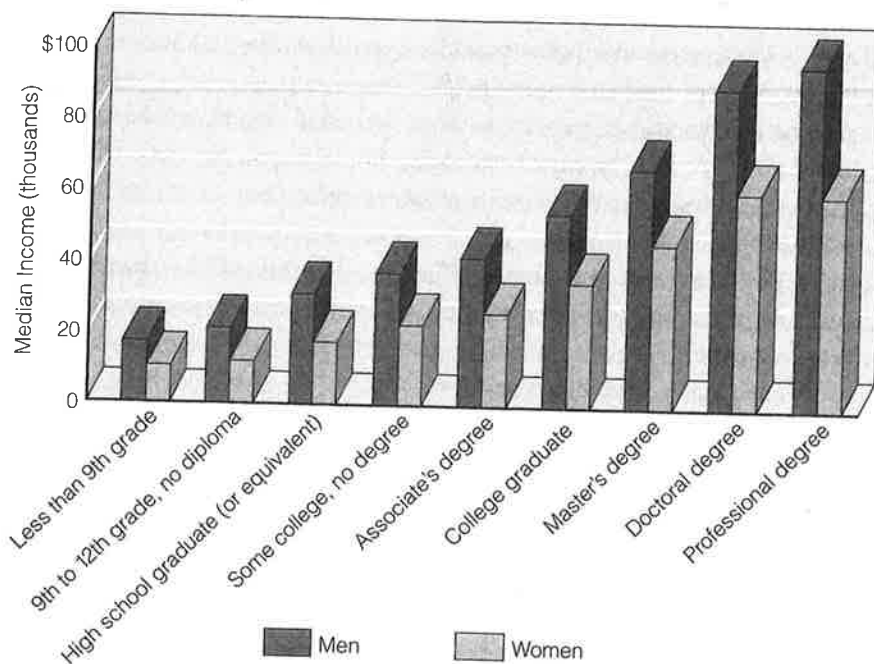


FIGURE 1 Median Income by Educational Attainment

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005, *Historical Income Tables*, www.census.gov.

jobs have been economically devalued as a result. Gender segregation and race segregation intersect in the dual labor market, so women of color are most likely to be working in occupations where most of the other workers are also women of color. At the same time, men of color are also segregated into particular segments of the market. Indeed, there is a direct connection between gender and race segregation and wages because wages are lowest in occupations where women of color predominate (U.S. Department of Labor 2011). This is what it means to say that institutions are structured by intersections of race, class, and gender: institutions are built from and then reflect the historical and contemporary patterns of race, class, and gender relations in society.

As a second example, think of the state. The state refers to the organized system of power and authority in society. This includes the government, the police, the military, and the law (as reflected in both social policy and the civil and criminal justice system). The state is supposed to protect all citizens, regardless of their race, class, and gender (as well as other characteristics, such as disability and age); yet state policies routinely privilege men. This means not only that the majority of powerful people in the state are men (such as elected officials, judges, police, and

the military) but, just as important, that the state works to protect men's interests. Policies about reproductive rights provide a good example. They are largely enacted by men but have an important effect on women. Similarly, welfare policies designed to encourage people to work are based on the model of men's experiences because they presume that staying home to care for one's children is not working. In this sense, the state is a gendered institution.

Most people do not examine the institutional structure of society when thinking about intersections of race, class, and gender. The individualist framework of dominant American culture sees race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and age as attributes of individuals, instead of seeing them as systems of power and inequality that are embedded in institutional structures. People do, of course, have identities of race, class, and gender, and these identities have an enormous impact on individual experience. However, seeing race, class, and gender solely from an individual viewpoint overlooks how profoundly embedded these identities are in the structure of American institutions. Moving historically marginalized groups to the center of analysis clarifies the importance of social institutions as links between individual experience and larger structures of race, class, and gender.

In this section of the book, we examine how social institutions structure systems of power and inequality of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality that, in turn, structure those very same social institutions. We look at five important social institutions: work and the economic system; families; cultural institutions such as the media that reproduce ideas; education; and the state. Each institution can be shown to have a unique impact on different groups (such as the discriminatory treatment of African American men by the criminal justice system). At the same time, each institution and its interrelationship with other institutions can be seen as specifically structured through intersecting dynamics of race, class, and gender.

WORK AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

Structural transformations in the global economy have dramatically changed the conditions under which all people work. But, as Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei ("Race, Class, Gender, and Women's Works") argue, specific social economic forces differentiate work experiences for women and men. Their analysis provides a basic orientation to how jobs in the labor market are arrayed along lines of race, class, and gender. They also identify some of the specific processes that shape the different sectors of work.

We can add to their analysis several major transformations that affect the current character of work. First, the economy is now a global economy; thus, the work experiences in any one nation (the United States included) are deeply linked

to the work experiences of those who may be in remote regions of the world. Among other things, this has meant that employers have often exported jobs as a way of cutting costs of labor and to increase profitability. The jobs remaining are, in many cases, either low-wage jobs or jobs requiring a very high degree of education—thus bifurcating the labor market into two classes: those with a high degree of skill and education and those with little opportunity for job mobility.

Second, the consequences of the global economy are exacerbated by the development of new technologies that have made some jobs obsolete and other jobs require a high degree of technological and/or scientific skills. Race, class, and gender frame how individual workers encounter these dual processes of “deskilling” and job export.

Third, the economy in the United States has shifted from being one primarily based on manufacturing jobs to one based on the broadly-defined “service” industry—a term used to include jobs that not only provide direct service (such as cashiers, food preparation workers, janitors, and so forth), but also jobs that are based on information services, not the actual production of goods. Thus, occupations like teaching, financial services, even professional jobs like physicians, lawyers or scientists, are based more on the production and transmission of information than they are on the actual manufacture of goods.

Altogether, these changes have resulted in a very different workforce than one would have seen forty or fifty years ago. The transformation has been underway for some time, but it is having dramatic effects on the character of work in the United States—and other parts of the world. Someone entering this economy as a young person has to have the skills to adapt to these changes or the person may face a lifetime of dead-end work or no work at all—a fact that has plagued many racial-ethnic minorities, such as young, poor, African American men who simply are not positioned in such an economy to get a foot in the door (Wilson 1997).

The growth of the service sector fuels the dual economy described earlier. The dual economy operates by creating high-paying service work for skilled, college-educated workers (accountants, marketing representatives, etc.) and low-paying service work for everyone else (food service workers, nursing home aides, child care workers, and domestic workers, for example). A young man who years ago might have found a decent-paying job in an automobile assembly plant or a steel mill—perhaps even without a high school education—is unlikely in today’s economy to do any better than a minimum wage job in a fast food workplace—a job that is not likely to lead to a lifetime of steady employment and economic security.

You can see here that these large-scale, seemingly neutral processes have specific consequences for different race, class, and gender groups. And, as Margaret Andersen points out in “Seeing in 3D: A Race, Class, and Gender Lens on

the Economic Downturn,” understanding the intersections of race, class, and gender is critical to understanding the serious economic problems facing our nation, such as the recent economic downturn.

These transformations also explain a lot about how work is organized within particular areas of the economy and how structures deeply built into the economy can affect even the simplest things—such as how the unconscious biases associated with people’s names may shape opportunities in the labor market, a phenomenon cleverly studied by Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan (“Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination”).

The remaining two articles in this section further detail how the move to a service-based society affects people’s experiences at work. Christine L. Williams (“Racism in Toyland”) details how jobs within the retail industry are organized in a division of labor that is very much pinned down by the interaction of race, class, and gender. Likewise, Sandra Weissinger’s study of women workers in Wal-mart (“Gender Matters, So Do Race and Class: Experiences of Gendered Racism on the Wal-mart Shop Floor”) explores how the inequities of race, class, and gender are reflected in the lived experiences of women workers.

FAMILIES

Families are another primary social institution profoundly influenced by intersecting systems of race, class, and gender. Historically, the family has been presumed to be the world of women: the ideology of the family (i.e., dominant belief systems about the family) purports that families are places for nurturing, love, and support—characteristics that have been associated with women. This ideal identifies women with the private world of the family and men with the public sphere of work. Family ideology, of course, only projects an ideal because the large number of working mothers shows that few families actually fit the presumed ideal. Nonetheless, the ideology of the family provides a standard against which all families are judged. Moreover, the ideology of the family is class and race specific; that is, it ignores and distorts the family experiences of African Americans, Latinos, and most Whites.

Bonnie Thornton Dill’s essay, “Our Mothers’ Grief: Racial-Ethnic Women and the Maintenance of Families,” shows that for African American, Chinese American, and Mexican American women, family structure is deeply affected by the relationships of families to the structures of race, class, and gender. Dill’s historical analysis of racial-ethnic women and their families examines

diverse patterns of family organization directly influenced by a group's placement in the larger political economy. Just as the political economy of the nineteenth century affected women's experience in families, the political economy of the late twentieth century shapes family relations for women and men of all races.

The articles in this section illustrate several points that have emerged from feminist studies of families (Thorne and Yalom 1992). First, the family is not monolithic. The now widely acknowledged diversity among families refutes the idea that there is a normative family, which is White, middle-class, with children, organized around a heterosexual married couple (preferably with the wife not employed), and needing little support from relatives or neighbors. As the experiences of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, lesbians, gays, and others reveal, this so-called "normal" family actually represents a minority experience, as Naomi Gerstel shows in "Rethinking Families and Community: The Color, Class, and Centrality of Extended Kin Ties." Many also presume that families are formed around a heterosexual norm. But as Kath Weston points out in "Straight Is to Gay as Family Is to No Family," gays and lesbians also participate in their families of origin and create families of their own. Claiming sexual identities as gay, lesbian, or bisexual does not mean relinquishing family or, worse yet, being defined as anti-family or as being a threat to family. Gay and lesbian partners often form permanent relationships, often including children. Although such partnerships are not uniformly legally recognized, they are part of the diversity among families. Raising children in diverse family environments so that they appreciate not only their own families, but also diverse ways of forming families, is a challenge in a society that devalues gays and lesbians and people of color.

Family diversity is also apparent in the growing number of multiracial families. But, even with this growth, navigating a world where mono-racial families are the presumed norm can be a challenge for those who marry or date across racial borders. Erica Chito Childs explores this in her study of interracial couples ("Navigating Interracial Borders: Black-White Couples and Their Social Worlds").

Finally, family structures are intricately connected to the race, class, gender structure of work. The boundaries separating family, work, and other institutions are more fluid than was previously believed. No institution is isolated from another. By detailing patterns of domestic work done by new immigrant women of color, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo's article ("Families on the Frontier") illustrates the permeable boundaries between work and family. In essence, the belief in the idealized family form achieved by middle-class families is possible only through the domestic work of women of color. Changes in the

economy, for example, affect family structures; moreover, this effect is reciprocal because changes in the family generate changes in the economy. The situation of working mothers challenges this assumption of the separation of work and family. The presumed dichotomy between the public and private spheres is especially seen to be false in light of the experience of women of color. Racial-ethnic families have rarely been provided the protection and privacy that the alleged split between public and private assumes. From welfare policy to reproductive rights, this dichotomy is based on the myth that families are insulated from the society around them.

Recentring one's thinking about the family by understanding the interconnections of race, class, and gender reveals new understandings about families and the myths that have pervaded assumptions about family experience. In particular, ideology that presents families as peaceful, loving, nurturing spaces masks the underlying conflicts that are embedded in family systems. Although we do not examine family violence directly here, we know that violence stems from the race, class, and gender conflicts that are encouraged in a racist, class-based, and sexist society. In addition, we think of family violence not only as that which occurs between family members but also as that which happens to families as they confront the institutional structures of race, class, and gender oppression.

MEDIA AND POPULAR CULTURE

Work, family, and other social institutions are patterned by race, class, and gender, yet many people do not see these patterns and even may claim that they do not exist. The effects of economic restructuring on people of color and women and the differences manifested as Americans try to meet the American family ideal can be difficult to understand. How can race, class, and gender exert such a powerful influence on our everyday lives, yet remain so invisible?

The products of cultural institutions, such as movies, books, television, advertisements in the mass media, the statistics and documents produced by government, and the textbooks, curriculum materials, and teaching methods of schools, explain in part why race, class, and gender relations are obscured. These and other cultural institutions reproduce ideas by identifying which ideas are valuable, which are not, and which should not be heard at all. In this way, the ideas of groups that are privileged within race, class, and gender relations are routinely heard, whereas the ideas of groups who are disadvantaged are silenced. In part, invisibility and silencing result from deeply entrenched ideas about race, class, and gender in the social fabric of the United States. Because beliefs about

race, class, and gender are so ordinary, they often go unnoticed. But even in the now ever-present spaces of social media like Facebook and MySpace, images associated with race, class and gender appear. And, as Danah Boyd shows ("White Flight in Networked Publics? How Race and Class Shaped American Teen Engagement with MySpace and Facebook") even patterns of usage in social media can be understood within an intersectional framework. Typically, images in the media are unquestioned, unless examined with a critical eye. Rachel E. Dubrofsky ("*The Bachelor*: Whiteness in the Harem") does this well in her analysis of the television show *The Bachelor*. She equates the structure of this show with the harem: one man surrounded by highly sexualized, exotic women. Her essay shows not only the gender and sexual stereotypes that are embedded in the show, but also how racialized these images are, involving stereotypes of Middle Eastern women, as well as implicitly denigrating African American women and Latinas who, she shows, are routinely eliminated from this sexualized competition. Perhaps having read her analysis, you will not see so-called "reality TV" as so real after all.

Mass media and similar cultural institutions also have the capacity to harm those stigmatized by them. The articles in this section remind us that the ideas produced by these cultural institutions are far from benign because they uphold social policies and affect individuals. Placing his analysis in a global human rights context, Ward Churchill ("Crimes against Humanity") discusses how American national identity has been constructed against the interests of Native Americans. He suggests that while Native American symbolism and imagery is ubiquitous in the United States, the derogatory use of Native American mascots and the like for sports teams stereotypes and stigmatizes contemporary Native Americans. Ironically, while Native Americans continue to experience what Churchill discusses as genocidal policies, distorted ideas about Native American culture continue to be celebrated at college and professional sporting events. Churchill feels so strongly about the damage done to Native Americans by pervasive negative symbolism that he views this practice as criminal.

Certain cultural institutions have gained greater importance in the context of global economic restructuring. With the emergence of a global mass media that circulates via television, music videos, cable, radio, and the Internet to all parts of the globe, racist and sexist ideas can travel quickly. Thus, those who control mass media are in a position to shape the basic ideas of society that come to be seen as truth. Gregory Mantsios's essay "Media Magic: Making Class Invisible" explores how mass media have been central in shaping ideas about social class. His work identifies the growing significance of mass media in framing how people think about race, class, and gender.

Mass media and other cultural institutions can help reproduce and mask social inequalities of race, class, and gender, but these same cultural institutions can be sites for challenging longstanding oppressions. In this sense, cultural institutions are rarely all good or all bad—more often, they are a little bit of both. Julianne Malveaux (“Gladiators, Gazells, and Groupies: Basketball Love and Loathing”) also tells us how our passions for various forms of popular culture—in her case, basketball—can catch us in contradictions, confronted, let’s say, with the recognition that something we enjoy also involves race, class, and gender inequalities. Confronting and understanding such contradictions in our own engagement with media and popular culture is part of the process of learning about how to challenge the inequities in society.

EDUCATION

American education has recently and frequently been described as an institution in crisis. People worry that children are not learning in school. High school dropout rates, especially among students from poor and working-class families of color, reveal deep problems in the system of education. Schools, in fact, reproduce inequalities of race, class, and gender, at the same time that they reflect the inequalities in the society at-large. Historically, social policies of racial and class segregation have been one important way that schools have fostered inequalities. Yet the elimination of formal segregation does not mean that desegregation as a policy yields educational equity. As Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee point out in “Historic Reversals, Accelerating Resegregation, and the Need for New Integration Strategies,” although actual desegregation policies were generated to attack schooling inequalities more than fifty years ago, racial isolation in schools is actually growing. The promise of school integration, meant not only to provide a good education to all, but also to engage young people in racially integrated relationships, is beginning to seem like a fading dream.

Moreover, segregated schools that are largely schools for poor and minority children are more often than not failing their students. Jeanne Theoharis (“I Hate It When People Treat Me Like a Fxxx-up”) vividly describes this, especially from the perspective of students. Moreover, as she argues, students, not schools or society, get the brunt of the blame for the failing education that pervades so many schools.

Schools also serve as sites of military recruitment. In “How a Scholarship Girl Becomes a Soldier: The Militarization of Latina/o Youth in Chicago Public Schools,” Gina Perez details how working-class Puerto Rican and Latino youth are targets for military recruitment. The recruitment of racial-ethnic youth is not

new, but Perez shows how the practices of military programs such as the Junior Reserve Officer Training Program (JROTC) illustrate intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality. In the past, the army primarily recruited young Latino men who were considered "at risk" of falling into gangs and drug use. Today, the military also targets young Latinas, arguing that as women, they are "at risk" for unwed teenage pregnancy. Because the military seemingly offers more opportunities to escape poverty than does college, Perez shows how the new push to recruit Latina youth reinforces structures of race, class, and gender inequalities.

THE STATE AND VIOLENCE

Violence in the United States is a pressing social issue. School shootings, snipers, and street criminals dominate the news and project the idea that violence is rampant. Usually violence is depicted as the action of crazed individuals who are socially maladjusted, angry, or desperate. Although this may be the case for some, deeper questions about violence are raised when we think about violence in the context of how state power organizes race, class, and gender relations. Who is perceived as violent shifts, as does who we see as victims of violence. How can we apply our knowledge of race, class, and gender to understanding violence?

Violent acts, the threat of violence, and more generalized policies based on the use of force find organizational homes in state institutions of social control—primarily the police, the military, and the criminal justice system. Intersections of race, class, and gender shape all of these institutions. In "Policing the National Body: Sex, Race, and Criminalization," Jael Silliman demonstrates how intersections of race, class, and gender shape state social policy. Silliman links social policies that are often seen as separate and treated as such. For example, the aggressive policing and the increasing incarceration of African American, Latino, and poor White men, the assault on reproductive rights of women of color, and the search of immigrants of color by the Immigration and Naturalization Service under the pretext of national security all may seem to affect different race, class and gender groups, yet they all are part of an overarching system of state-sanctioned, social control.

Middle and upper class people may escape these policies and, as a result, may perceive the police and the criminal justice system as protecting society. Yet for others, the criminal justice system itself is a source of violence. High rates of incarceration, especially in African American poor communities, as shown by Michelle Alexander in "The Color of Justice," mean that huge numbers of

young, African American men experience the state as a form of social control, not an institution of protection.

Moreover, the criminal justice system punishes certain forms of violence while ignoring others. Differential enforcement of state policies, even the presence of policies that define some acts as violent and others, not, mean that state institutions define what counts as violence. For example, race, class, and gender have shaped the very definition of *rape* and the treatment afforded rape survivors and their rapists. In "Rape, Racism, and the Law," Jennifer Wriggins examines how the legal system's treatment of rape has disproportionately targeted Black men for punishment and made Black women especially vulnerable by denying their sexual subordination. Although violence may be experienced individually, it occurs in specific organizational and institutional contexts shaped by race, class, and gender.

Finally, who becomes a target of violence is also shaped by race, class, and gender. Hate crimes are harmful to any group or person experiencing such violence, and those disadvantaged by either race or class or gender are most likely to be victimized by such horrific acts. But, as Doug Meyer shows ("Interpreting and Experiencing Anti-Queer Violence: Race, Class, and Gender Differences among LGBT Hate Crime Victims"), LGBT persons of color find it more difficult than other LGBT victims to have this crime defined as based on their sexuality. Meyer's research illustrates how the intersection of race, class, and gender with sexuality shapes both the definition and handling of this form of violence.

Altogether, the articles in this section show how embracing an intersectional analysis of race, class, gender and sexuality is important to creating an awareness of how society can become more safe, secure, and just.

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