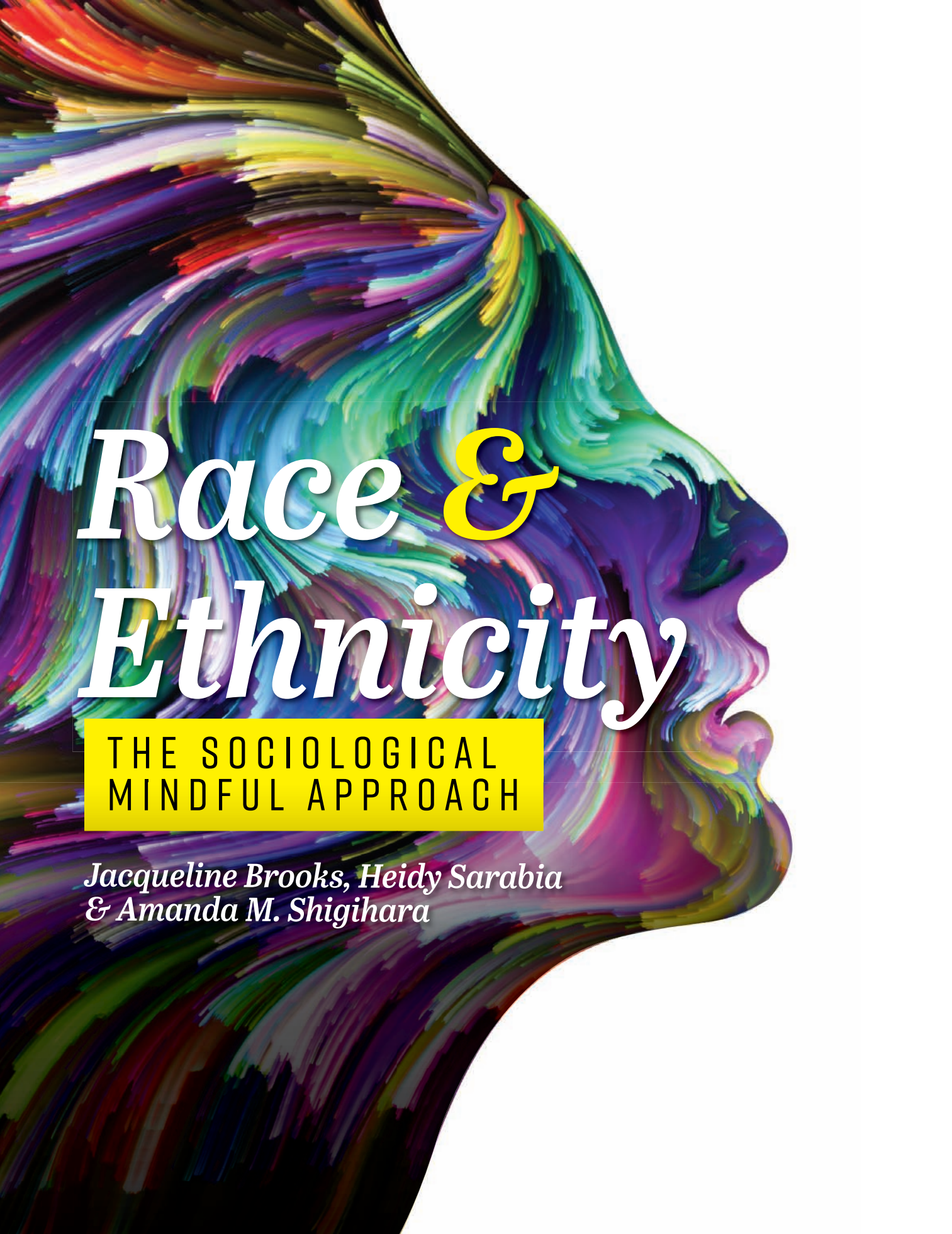




Race & Ethnicity

THE SOCIOLOGICAL
MINDFUL APPROACH

*Jacqueline Brooks, Heidy Sarabia
& Amanda M. Shigihara*

Race and Ethnicity

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The Sociological Mindful Approach

Second Edition

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Contents

Acknowledgments	xi
Foreword	xiii
Introduction	xxi

Section I Connecting Race and Ethnic Inequalities to Sociological Theory 1

Reading 1.1	The Sandra Bland Case: Dissecting Intersectionality and Institutional Segregation in Post-Racial America	13
	<i>Jacqueline Brooks and Heidy Sarabia</i>	
Reading 1.2	Solidarity Thwarted: The Racialization of African Americans and Asian Americans in California	25
	<i>Jeanette K. Hope</i>	
Reading 1.3	More Than Just Fear of Islam: Muslims in the United States Experience Anti-Muslim Racism	35
	<i>Bradley J. Zopf</i>	
Reading 1.4	Race, Ethnicity, and Migration in the Context of Care Work	45
	<i>Tina Wu</i>	
Discussion Questions		55

Section II Race, Identity, and Wellbeing 57

Reading 2.1	Implicit Bias	65
	<i>Lisa A. Harrison</i>	
Reading 2.2	Parents, Peers, and Pressure: The Dynamics of Interracial Relationships	73
	<i>Xing Zhang and Sharon Sassler</i>	

Reading 2.3	Do I Belong? Why Do I Feel Uncomfortable?: Black Women's Experience with Men on a College Campus and its Impact on Their Sense of Identity	83
	<i>Christopher Rogers, Alessandra Milagros Early, and Christopher Chambers</i>	
Reading 2.4	Future Catastrophizing: Identity Work Among Childfree Women of Color	93
	<i>Amanda Michiko Shigihara</i>	
Discussion Questions		103

Section III Race, Identity, and Transnational Spaces 105

Reading 3.1	Brown Like Us: Reflections from South Asian Americans on Race, Ethnicity, and Skin Color	113
	<i>Radha Modi</i>	
Reading 3.2	Trauma, Exile, and the Loss of Home: Iranian Baha'is' Experiences of Identity Formation and Reformation in Iran and the United States	123
	<i>Naghme Naseri Morlock</i>	
Reading 3.3	Negotiating Ritual Identity in Transnational Spaces	135
	<i>Nitika Sharma</i>	
Discussion Questions		145

Section IV Race and Ethnic Inequalities in Housing 147

Reading 4.1	Squeezed out of the Housing Market: Sheltering in America's Hotels	155
	<i>Jacqueline Brooks</i>	
Reading 4.2	Death by Residential Segregation and the Post-Racial Myth	165
	<i>Lori Latrice Martin, Kenneth J. Fasching-Varner, and Tifanie W. Pulley</i>	
Discussion Questions		177

Section V Education 179

- Reading 5.1 Raising a Child in a “Foreign” Country: Barriers and Resources for Japanese Parents in the United States 187
Aya Kimura Ida, Naoko Oyabu-Mathis, Thais Forneret, and Daphne Kennelly
- Reading 5.2 Discrepancies Between Designation and Implementation: Chicanx/Latinx Faculty and Staff Experiences at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) 197
Heidy Sarabia, Sonia Tinoco, Diana C. Rangel, Jasmine Owens, Susana Barraza, and Guadalupe Rivera
- Reading 5.3 I Know My Place: How Whiteness, White Culture, and White Educators Permeate and Shape Universities 205
Demerris R. Brooks-Immel and Susan B. Murray
- Reading 5.4 Inequality in the Graduate School Admissions Process: The Chicanx/Latinx Experience 217
Elvia Ramirez
- Discussion Questions 227

Section VI Popular Culture and the Media 229

- Reading 6.1 Not Just Child’s Play: Race and Ethnicity in Children’s Toys 237
Elizabeth V. Sweet
- Reading 6.2 Erasing Narratives of Racism at an American Amusement Park: The Absence of African American Lived Experience in the Depiction of 19th-Century Convict Leasing 245
Patricia Morris and Tammi Arford
- Reading 6.3 Black Gazing in Digital Communities as a Form of Collective Activism 255
Andrea L. Moore
- Reading 6.4 Cannibals and Chainsaws and Cousins, oh my!: Whiteness, ‘White Trash’, and Pollution in Resident Evil 7 267
Michael S. Branch

Section VII Racialized Immigration Policies 279

- Reading 7.1 **Operation Streamline: Producing Legal Violence, Racialized Illegality, and Perpetual Exclusion 285**

Heidy Sarabia and Maria Perales Sanchez

- Reading 7.2 **Crimmigration: Understanding the Effects of Immigrant Status on the U.S. Court System 295**

Mercedes Valadez

- Reading 7.3 **DREAMers, DACA, and Neoliberalism: Undocumented Resistance to Neoliberal Cooptation of the Dreamer Narrative 309**

Edwin Elias

Section VIII Coloniality in the Twenty-First Century 321

- Reading 8.1 **Race and Ethnicity in Guatemala 327**

Maria Vargas

- Reading 8.2 **The Differential Impacts of Nation-State Borders and Bordering Practices 335**

Julie E. E. Young

- Reading 8.3 **Race, Space, and Displacement: An Overview of Ethno-Racial Dynamics in Colombia 343**

Shantee Rosado

- Reading 8.4 **Racial Hierarchy and Colonialism: How the World Understands Race Today as a Result of the Colonial Conquests 355**

Thais Forneret and Thien-Huong T. Ninh

Section IX Mobilizing for Social Change 365

Reading 9.1 Targeted but Not Shut Down: Latino Undocumented Immigrant Activists Fighting for Social Change 371

Joanna Perez

Reading 9.2 Immigrants and Their Activism: A Differential Racialization Approach 379

Kevin Escudero

Reading 9.3 Journey to Standing Rock: Environmental Justice on the Frontlines 387

Anne Luna

Reading 9.4 #SayHerName: The Impact of Gendered Racism and Misogynoir on the Lives of Black Women 401

Jioni A. Lewis

Discussion Questions 411

Contributor Biographies 413

Index 419

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Foreword

Cultivating Sociological Mindfulness

Michael Schwalbe

In the 1860s, my great-great grandparents emigrated from Germany to the United States. They didn't have college degrees or much money, and they didn't speak English, but they worked hard as farmers (my mother's side) and as builders (my father's side) and created prosperous lives for themselves. Their descendants worked hard, too, and became professors, lawyers, teachers, business owners, and university administrators. My siblings and I are these people. It's a true story of success in America. But you shouldn't believe it.

All stories are selective retellings of events, but the story I've just told—as a story about success—is so incomplete as to be misleading. My great-great grandparents came to places in Wisconsin populated by previous generations of German-speaking immigrants, so speaking German actually helped them integrate. There were established Lutheran and Catholic churches they could join. And from the 1840s to World War I (1914–1918), Germans were the dominant ethnic group in Wisconsin. All this made Wisconsin a hospitable place for my immigrant ancestors.

The story should also begin earlier. Before there was a state of Wisconsin to move to, before European immigrants could build farms, houses, or towns, the indigenous people had to be removed and their legal claims to the land nullified. If Wisconsin was hospitable to my great-great grandparents, it was in part because the Menominee, Ojibwe, Dakota, Potawatomi, Sauk, and Ho-Chunk people who had lived in the place called “Meskonsing” had been driven off, or put on reservations, by U.S. armies. The success of my ancestors came in part at the expense of the native people who were forcibly displaced.

I should add that my immigrant ancestors got to choose where they settled. Travel from Europe to the Upper Midwest in the mid-19th century might have been arduous, but it was undertaken voluntarily. As far as we know, no one was forced to emigrate to the United States, forced to live in Wisconsin, or indentured to anyone to pay for the trip. My ancestors might not have arrived with much money, but, once here, they were able to enjoy the fruits of their labors. And they could choose to do the kind of work they knew best and was most rewarding. This wasn't true for everyone.

The “hard work” part of the story needs qualifying, too. No doubt a lot of hard work was done along the way. Farming, building, raising families, running businesses, even studying, all take effort. On the other hand, as I know from my own life and observations, there were plenty of second and third chances; there was no systematic persecution or exclusion (except, at times, based on social class); and many open doors when it

came to education and employment. Again, not everyone can say this. Lots of people worked just as hard or harder, but didn't get to benefit as much from their work.

When I say that my predecessors got to enjoy the fruits of their labors, did not face systematic persecution or exclusion, and had a wide field of economic opportunities, I am alluding to their status as “white.” This was the social category to which most north-central European immigrants readily assimilated, regardless of ethnicity. Being defined as “white” meant that they were not disparaged as an inferior stock of people, and enjoyed full civic and political rights. Though I don't know for sure, this fact of their lives was probably so taken for granted as to be invisible; my great-great grandparents probably never thought to compare themselves to Native Americans or people of African ancestry, but only to other European immigrants. Nonetheless, being defined as “white” mattered a great deal, whether it was thought about or not.

Often when I've heard others with backgrounds similar to mine tell their immigrant ancestor stories, the stories are mainly of the first kind: leaving home with few resources, struggling to adapt to a new world, and achieving success through hard work. I could tell that kind of story, but it would be mostly myth. It would ignore the social and historical conditions that made success possible. It would also imply that others who did less well lacked the wherewithal to succeed, when in fact their progress might have been blocked by exclusion, discrimination, and fewer economic opportunities—all matters beyond their control.

The point of telling my story in two different ways is not to tell about me, but to suggest how we can all be more mindful when looking at how our lives are rooted in social and historical conditions. If we fail to consider these conditions, we end up with an incomplete and misleading picture. We might also end up misunderstanding the current state of the world, because we haven't considered how that current state came about. I want to suggest how we can do better—how we can more fully and accurately understand the social world and our place in it—by practicing sociological mindfulness.

Sociological Mindfulness

In a book called *The Sociologically Examined Life: Pieces of the Conversation* (Oxford, 2018, fifth edition)¹, I explain in detail what it means to look at the world in a sociologically mindful way. There isn't space here to go over all that ground, but I can describe several ways of being sociologically mindful that are especially important for understanding race and ethnicity. It might help to start with a walk in the woods.

Imagine three people on that walk. One person is a botanist, another is an entomologist, and the third is a photographer. By virtue of training and mental habit, each perceives something different. The botanist sees varieties of trees and plants arrayed in typical patterns. The entomologist sees diverse insect life and how the forest sustains it. The photographer, perhaps barely aware of types of trees, plants, or insects, sees colors, forms, light, and shadows. In one sense it is the same forest, yet it is experienced differently by each person, because each practices a different kind of mindfulness.

To be mindful, then, is to pay attention to the world in a particular kind of way, using concepts that heighten our awareness of certain aspects of reality. Mindfulness also implies non-judgmental

1. Portions of this section are adapted from *Making a Difference: Using Sociology to Create a Better World* (Oxford University Press, 2020), by Michael Schwalbe.

awareness—being attuned to the present moment, and accepting the evidence provided by our senses without immediately labeling it good or bad. The purpose of postponing judgment (which might come later) is to minimize its potential for biasing perception. Being mindful doesn't guarantee that we will see the truth, but it does help us see more of what we need to see to form a truer picture of the world.

Just as we can become mindful of the natural world—in the ways of botanists, entomologists, photographers, and other trained observers—we can become sociologically mindful of the social world. Below I describe how to be mindful of the social world in ways that can help us gain insight into race and ethnicity. In each case, what I urge is paying attention to matters that we might otherwise take for granted, or not see at all, as is often the case before we have learned what there is to see.

Mindfulness of the Social World as Humanly Made

The first step in being sociologically mindful is learning to see the social world as humanly made. Because we are all born into pre-existing groups—families, communities, societies, nations—with established cultures and ways of doing things, it can seem like the social world is a reality as hard as a mountain range or as independent of human will as the weather. But this is not really so. All parts of the social world—all the groups, organizations, institutions, political, and economic systems; all our beliefs, values, symbols, and practices; all the social categories to which we belong—were created, once upon a time, by people.

It might seem obvious that the social world is created by people. Where else would it come from? Yet we often experience it as apart from us, or over and above us. This experience is reflected in how we talk about the social world. We say that the *market* did this or that, or that the *economy* did this or that, or that *technology* drives change, or that *globalization* is transforming society. And so on. When we think about and talk about the social world in this way—as if it were made of things and forces that are independent of human action—we subtly reinforce the idea that it is unchangeable and that what we do doesn't matter.

Being sociologically mindful means, in part, recognizing that the social world is humanly made and paying attention to how this occurs. When people invent new concepts and ideas; when they share new ideas with others; when they create new groups and organizations; when they build new tools and technologies; when they come up with new ways of doing things together; when they devise new laws and policies; when they reject old ways of thinking—they are changing the social world. So while it might seem that the social world is as solid and steady as a mountain range, in fact it's changing all the time, and we participate in this process, to some degree, every day.

Mindfulness of Interdependence and Connections

In Western societies, especially the United States, we tend to think of ourselves as making our way through life as individuals. We are of course individuals in the sense that each of us is a discrete organism in which a single mind has emerged. Yet this singularity can be exaggerated to the point of obscuring our interdependence with others. Were it not for this interdependence, we could not even become self-conscious creatures. Recognizing this interdependence is another part of being sociologically mindful.

Our ability to think in human ways—to name and understand the things of the world, including ourselves—depends on learning to use the language spoken by those around us. We also learn from others how to behave in proper ways so that we can avoid trouble and get along in the world. Unlike other animals, little adaptive behavior is hardwired into us; we need to learn, from the examples and instruction of others,

how to participate competently in social life. This includes learning that we are members of groups and social categories, and that these forms of belonging are a source of the meanings we attach to ourselves and others.

To see the interdependence through which we become human is to see one set of connections in social life. Another set of connections concerns organizations and institutions. Consider, for example, education.

The way education is organized in the United States is connected to how the economy is organized. Just think of how schools and education are made to serve the interests of business and employers. The economy, in turn, is connected to how government is organized and operates. Connections can run in the other direction as well. Education can affect government and the economy by shaping people's values, desires, and abilities to participate. To be sociologically mindful is to recognize the need to look at the whole—to understand any one part of society by looking at how it is connected to other parts, and how the parts work together.

Here is one more connection, perhaps especially relevant to understanding race and ethnicity: how government operates—the way it distributes power and orchestrates its exercise—matters for the creation of social categories. *Who belongs to which racial or ethnic group? Who is a citizen? Who is an adult?* Often it is the most powerful groups, using the levers of government, who set criteria for category membership, to serve their political or economic interests. This implies that our sense of identity is linked to the distribution of power in society. To understand who we are requires mindfulness of these connections.

Mindfulness of Differences, Commonalities, and Inequalities

In social life, differences are often readily observable. We see that people come in various shapes, sizes, ages, skin tones, and so on; they dress, talk, gesture, and decorate themselves differently. We might also see that they eat different foods, listen to different music, and play different sports. Some of these differences are ones we associate with ethnic cultures (or subcultures). Some are associated with social class, gender, or membership in other social categories. Most of us are already highly attuned to such differences.

Heightened awareness of difference can, however, lead us to overlook what we have in common. When we see difference, we often forget that all people have similar needs and desires for love and respect, for meaning and purpose, for fair treatment, for opportunity to develop their potentials, and for happiness. Being mindful of these human commonalities is crucial for understanding others and resolving conflict, especially when what we see on the surface makes us seem, at first, more different than we really are.

This doesn't mean that all differences are benign. We must be mindful, too, of inequalities. When one group claims more wealth, status, or power for itself, or hoards opportunities, this is not a harmless difference. It is not like an interesting variation in style of speech, clothing, music, or food; rather, it's something that we might want to consider changing or abolishing, presuming that we value fairness and equality. In any case, being sociologically mindful about the distinction between differences and inequalities can help us figure out which arrangements we want to preserve and which we want to change.

Mindfulness of Process and Change

Suppose we study the social world and discover harmful and unjustifiable inequalities among groups defined by race or ethnicity. Suppose, too, that we want to change these arrangements to create a more just and equal society. Is this possible? Sometimes the task seems so daunting that people throw up their hands in frustration and say, "Nothing can be done! The world is too big to change!" This is a misperception.

Understanding prospects for social change depends on mindfulness of the social world as made up of processes. For ease of expression, we often talk about organizations—universities, banks, armies, hospitals, corporations—and institutions—higher education, government, the family, the market—as *things*, but these “things” are really just people interacting in patterned ways on a regular basis. One kind of pattern we call a university, another kind we call a bank, another kind we call a corporation, another kind we call a sports team, and so on. This way of looking at organizations and institutions reminds us that changing the social world does not mean trying to take down a mountain range or fill in the ocean with a shovel. It means changing the patterned ways in which we do things together, and this is a much more doable kind of project.

Being mindful of process helps us see that inequality is not the result of mysterious forces. We can look at how resources are transmitted in families, how skills and self-confidence are nurtured (or not) in schools, how people gain access to (or are excluded from) the networks through which information and opportunities are obtained, how gatekeepers and bosses make decisions about employees, how changes in the economy expand or diminish opportunities, how rules of the game are made, interpreted, and enforced. Behind every unequal outcome there is a process that can be analyzed by answering *How?* questions. If we understand these processes, we’re in a better position to try to change them.

Several times I’ve used the image of a mountain range to suggest something big and solid—the opposite of a squishy process. But as any geologist will tell you, mountains are part of processes, too. They rise when tectonic plates collide, and decline as wind and snow and rain wear them down. We don’t normally see this happen because it takes millions of years, and human lives are relatively short. The same principle applies to the social world. As with mountains, the social world, though it appears stable from day to day, is changing all the time. This happens because we are always jointly engaged in learning, problem solving, inventing, and figuring out better ways to do things together. If we are mindful of these processes, we realize that what’s constant in human social life is not fixity but change.

Being sociologically mindful helps us see that making a difference is possible. Because the social world is always being made and remade through our actions and through the ideas we share with others, what we do—how we participate in this process—matters. Of course we can’t change the social world by ourselves overnight. But anything we choose to do differently changes our immediate social environment and has the potential to ripple outward and lead to wider changes. Although being sociologically mindful helps us understand how this is possible, it doesn’t tell us precisely what to do. That is something we must continually figure out, given the problems and changing circumstances we face.

Sociological Self-Awareness

The social world is not just a reality that exists outside of us. We are also part of that reality. What’s more, the social world gets *inside* us in a variety of ways. The language and symbols with which we think; the values we use to tell right from wrong; the beliefs and concepts that enable us to make sense of the world; the standards by which we judge ourselves and others; the social categories in which we anchor our identities—all these come from the communities in which we’re raised. This is why sociologists say that humans are thoroughly social creatures.

It is one thing, however, to acknowledge that we are social creatures, shaped by our environments, and another to reflect on how this is true for us as individuals. The latter requires looking at ourselves in a sociologically mindful way. *Where did our values and beliefs come from? How did we learn to interpret and*

evaluate things in the ways we do? How are our identities products of the groups and categories to which we belong? How have our priorities been shaped by the reward systems we've faced? What has our suffering allowed us to see? What has our privilege kept us from seeing? These are just some of the questions we might ask if we reflect on ourselves in a sociological way.

Sometimes people resist this kind of self-reflection because it seems to threaten their sense of individuality. I think this comes from a narrow idea of what individuality means. It cannot mean that we are unlike everyone else in every way; that's not possible—we all fit into society by sharing values and beliefs with other members of a community, and by having experiences in common. So a better way to think of individuality might be as exercising the capacity to reflect on our thoughts and feelings, and on how our thoughts and feelings are rooted in social life. When we do this, we diminish the power of inherited, unexamined ideas to steer our thoughts and behaviors, while gaining power to think for ourselves. Our agency as individuals is thereby enhanced.

Developing sociological self-awareness can change us in other ways. One thing it can do is reduce feelings of defensiveness or guilt that often arise when studying inequality. For example, people in a group that has historically enjoyed economic and political dominance might reject an analysis that highlights their advantages—not because the analysis is wrong, but because it evokes guilt. Being sociologically self-aware reduces this tendency because it helps us see that we did not invent the oppressive beliefs and practices that still cause problems today. If we can look at ourselves in this analytic, non-judgmental way—seeing ourselves as products of history, culture, and social organization—we can perhaps see more clearly what is going on in the social world, how we fit into it, and what we might like to change.

At the same time that being sociologically self-aware can reduce guilt and help us overcome blind spots, it helps us see where our responsibilities lie. If we recognize that we are the inheritors of oppressive arrangements, and that we have internalized beliefs that justify these arrangements, it becomes clear that making change is up to us. When we become aware that the beliefs and practices we've inherited cause unnecessary suffering, we have a choice: to continue to perpetuate these beliefs and practices, or to try changing them. Once we become sociologically self-aware, we become responsible for making this choice.

Being sociologically self-aware also means recognizing that we are products not only of the past but of the present as well. This is an important insight for pursuing social change. It brings the realization that our ability and willingness to pursue change depend a great deal on our relationships to others and our membership in groups and communities. The failure to appreciate this fact is itself a product of a culture that discourages sociological self-awareness, especially when it comes to thinking about how we can help make change happen.

Often we are led to believe that change happens because of the actions of moral heroes, such as Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Nelson Mandela, Cesar Chavez, or Mohandas Gandhi. What is thus obscured is the need for organizing, for collective action, and for mutual support among people who challenge the status quo. If we are sociologically mindful, we recognize the importance of organizing and collective action; if we are sociologically self-aware, we recognize that our participation in, and contribution to, social change likewise depends on connections to others. It is through these relationships that we come to see what needs to be changed and why. Others also support us—and we them—when change requires struggle, as it often does. The truth is, no one, no matter how heroic, makes change alone.

There is another reason we need others to make change. If we are sociologically self-aware, we know that our view of the social world is limited; no matter how much we learn, we always see the world from the standpoint of our experiences as members of particular groups and categories. This means there are some

things we will see well and clearly, and other things only dimly, if at all. It is other people who can help us overcome these blind spots. That is why I say that it is through relationships with *different* others—by listening to and empathizing with them—that we come to see what needs changing. This includes changes in the social world and in ourselves.

Because of how our lives are organized, because of the paths of least resistance that are laid down for us, it can be hard to encounter others, especially different others, in ways that encourage honest listening and empathizing. Still, we can try; it's not impossible to choose to seek out others, other perspectives, and new understandings. In fact, that's much of what education is about, and it's what this book makes possible: encountering new perspectives and ways of understanding social life. Here, in your hands, is a way to become more sociologically mindful and sociologically self-aware. I hope you will engage with it, allowing it to help you see more of the world that has made you and how you can participate in remaking that world.

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

Why revise and update this book? Since 2020 many profound social issues have impacted our lives in meaningful ways. We were forced into lockdown and quarantine due to a threatening global pandemic, tightened our budgets in response to inflation, bore witness to police brutality, then took to the streets in protest. We elected a new president, were confronted, sometimes violently, by “the lie” about voter fraud, and watched a mob tear through the halls of Congress. We cringed with each new mass shooting. And Trumpism endured—fueling white supremacy, white nationalism, and an alt-right conservative push to “take the country back.” At the time of this writing, four separate criminal cases complicate former President Trump’s run for re-election (Associated Press 2024). In addition, he has been ordered to pay over \$400 million in two separate civil cases (Associated Press 2024). In fall 2024, race, ethnicity, gender, and identity will take center stage in the US Presidential election where voters will decide between former President Trump and incumbent Vice President Kamala Harris, a Black and South Asian Indian woman.

To say the least, we have been through a lot. For better or for worse, we have gained new insight into how we feel about one another. It is with this historical backdrop that we present a second edition of the text, integrating some of these challenges given their notable influence on race and ethnic inequalities. Again, we employ sociological mindfulness as we address race and ethnic inequalities, understanding the tremendous emotional and psychological toll of the past few years. At times, we may have felt it necessary to suspend our commitment to mindfulness and steep our reactions in rage and anger. Yes, anger can be useful. It has provided many social movements with essential fuel. In recent years, the alt-right community has stigmatized the concept of “wokeness,” using their own sense of “enlightenment” to stereotype social justice work, especially racial justice work, as meaningless and unnecessary. Yet, we implore a return to sociological mindfulness, or at least offer a refresher.

In recent years, we have been saturated with political and social commentators utilizing a range of mediums from 24-hour news outlets to podcasts to blast their messages. What is true? Who do you trust? In the first edition, we included the following photo, and asked whether it is a fair representation of race and ethnic relations in the United States. We stated that nine years before the photo was taken, then presidential candidate Barack Obama delivered a speech on race and politics at the National Constitutional Center addressing one of the most salient and complex issues that agitates American debate. During his eight-year term, Obama commented on many racially motivated incidents that affected communities of color and faith. These same issues plague us today. And, like then, today defenders of white supremacy and nationalism continue to gain a significant foothold on influencing racial discourse. Recall in the following photo, members of the alt-right clash with counter-protestors at Emancipation Park in Charlottesville, Virginia, during the

August 2017 Unite the Right Rally (Figure 0.1). Tensions flared over the planned removal of the statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee. During the conflict, Heather Heyer, a 32-year-old civil rights activist, was killed by an alt-right motorist, who drove into a group of counter-protestors. In a tepid response to the violent rally, then President Trump blamed both sides of the confrontation, inflaming an already volatile situation. Although public backlash to Trump's comments were swift, they did little to fan the flames of racial hatred.



Figure 0.1 Charlottesville's Unite the Right Rally.

In subsequent years, the nation experienced an uptick in hate crimes targeting Asian, Jewish, Muslim, and LGBTQIA+ communities. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, 11,634 single-incident hate crimes were reported in the United States in 2022 (2024). Most hate crimes victimized people based on race/ethnicity/ancestry bias followed by similar percentages of religion bias and sexual orientation bias offenses. One of the highest profiled hate crimes occurred on May 14, 2022, when a white 19-year-old shooter opened fire at a Tops Friendly Market, situated within a Black neighborhood in Buffalo, NY. At the end of his rampage, ten Black people were murdered, and three people were seriously wounded. In February 2023, he was sentenced to life without parole by New York State (Whitehurst 2024). In July 2022, the federal government indicted the shooter on 13 hate crimes. In early 2024, they announced plans to pursue the death penalty (Whitehurst 2024). His federal trial will begin in 2025.

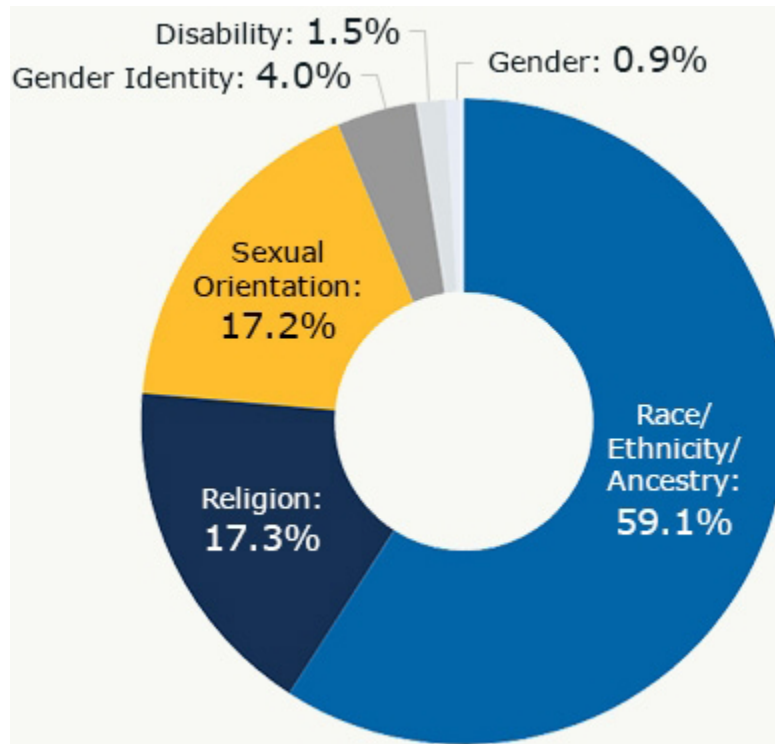


Figure 0.2 Bias Motivation Categories for Victims of Single-Bias Incidents in 2022*

*Figure contains statistics collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigations from 14,361 law enforcement agencies. Retrieved March 12, 2024, from (<https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/hate-crime-statistics#piechart-description>)

On November 19, 2022, a white, self-identified non-binary, shooter entered Club Q, a popular nightclub in Colorado Springs frequented by LGBTQIA+ members. The shooter murdered five people and inflicted severe injury on an additional 19 people. In June 2022, the state of Colorado sentenced the shooter to life in prison (Slevin 2024). At the time of this writing, the shooter was expected to plead guilty to 50 federal hate crime charges to avoid the death penalty (Slevin 2024). The plea deal would result in multiple life sentences in addition to a 190-year sentence (Slevin 2024).

It is difficult to restrict our discussion to just two heinous acts of violence. Unfortunately, there are many more deserving of note and discourse. Let us return to the photo taken of protestors at the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville. Which nation are we? The one that serves up violence to protect an alt-right agenda? Or the one that works for positive social change and engages in anti-racist praxis? Or are both options extreme representations of race relations that do little to define who we are as a nation? Regardless of how you respond to these questions, it is hard to deny that the American collective consciousness seems aggrieved from mixed messages that either espouse racial hatred or demonstrate racial unity. It is amid this uncertainty that we chose to update this book. Undergraduate students walk into courses on race and ethnic inequalities with the same ambiguity, often using their own firsthand experiences to decide which version of the United States makes most sense to them. The works reflected in this text elucidate the complexity of racial and ethnic inequalities, referring to America's long, troubled history with race, emphasizing the role of

social institutions in perpetuating race inequalities, and exposing the intersection of race, class, gender, and other social inequalities. We encourage students to take an active role in the educational process, using each work as a source of individual and collective reflection.

The Sociological Mindfulness Approach

Students bring various experiences and assumptions into the classroom that can foster anxieties about offending someone or being offended themselves. As a result, students may become passive learners, making it difficult to comprehend complex issues and subsequently detaching from the course material. To grasp the breadth of racial discourse and ease tensions that arise when engaging in such discussions, we frame our approach using sociological mindfulness. As articulated by Schwalbe, sociological mindfulness encourages us to see the world for what it is, reinforcing “how our lives are intertwined and how our words and deeds help or harm others in nonobvious ways” (Schwalbe 2005, 4). Employing sociological mindfulness allows students and instructors to remain actively conscious of the ideas, events, and interactions that shape our lives, even when these factors seem separate from our own experiences. The sociological mindfulness framework allows the reader to remain engaged and holds each student accountable for the development of their own sociological consciousness. We encourage students to become problem solvers in the arena of race discourse, rather than passive observers or casual critics of social events.

Organization of the Book

We invite students to reflect on their own observations and experiences by providing a range of scholarly works that apply sociological and social psychological theories and employ a range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Overall, we highlight four main goals: (1) introduce students to fresh narratives about current issues of race and ethnic inequalities; (2) relate larger macro-level explanations of race and ethnic inequalities to micro-level experiences; (3) connect theory to data collection and data analysis; and (4) fuel critical discussion by confronting the perspectives students hold about contemporary race discourse.

We organize the book into nine sections. Each section begins with an engaging student narrative, followed by an editor’s introduction. The subsequent readings presented in each section offer discussion questions and resources to support knowledge building. Three new sections are included in this edition. We included two sections that address identity development in marginalized communities and communities of color: Section II: Race, Identity, and Wellbeing, and Section III: Race, Identity, and Transnational Spaces. Furthermore, we include a new section that addresses housing: Section IV: Race and Ethnic Inequalities in Housing.

Section I: Connecting Race and Ethnic Inequalities to Sociological Theory: This section introduces students to how race, class, gender, and other social oppressions, such as age, nation, and ability function as outcomes of structural processes, and how communities experience multiple oppressions simultaneously. The readings in this section discuss Sandra Bland, the experiences of American Muslims, how racialized jobs and workplaces inform the experiences of care workers, and the influence of systemic racism on the relationships and interactions forged between African Americans and Asian Americans.

Section II: Race, Identity, and Wellbeing: This section addresses the complex relationship between the social construction of race, ethnicity, and identity development. We focus on the present-day challenges that

individuals face in negotiating their identities in a society that maintains racial stereotypes yet desires to be “race neutral.” The readings in this section address the social psychological development of implicit bias, the complexities of navigating interracial relationships, identity construction among Black college women, and decision making among childfree women of color.

Section III: Race, Identity, and Transnational Spaces: This section reveals the complexities of identity and belonging among immigrant groups in response to the dominant social norms and expectations that characterize U.S. culture. This section addresses the experiences of South Asian Americans in building collective race and ethnic identities, the impact of trauma and loss of home on Iranian Baha’is women in Iran and the United States, and how identity becomes a negotiated practice for Nepalese women practicing cultural rituals in their new home countries.

Section IV: Race and Ethnic Inequalities in Housing: This section addresses the burgeoning housing crisis in the United States, introducing students to the racialization of housing practices and how the consequences of such practices are compounded by other social oppressions such as class and gender inequalities. The readings cover the experiences of low-income women forced to live in hotels during a bout of homelessness, the impact of eviction on physical and mental wellbeing, and how the history of residential segregation and its negative impact in low-income communities of color.

Section V: Education: In this section we challenge students to reflect on supports and obstacles experienced in their educational journeys. The readings in this section address challenges faced by Japanese Americans when participating in U.S. social institutions such as healthcare and education; questions the extent to which Hispanic Serving Institutions create inclusive spaces for Chicanx/Latinx faculty and staff; examines how white faculty at minority-minority institutions navigate racial incidents and discourse, and highlights the obstacles presented by graduate school admission processes for Chicanx/Latinx students.

Section VI: Popular Culture and the Media: This section explores the social terrain of popular culture and its impact on reinforcing race and ethnic hierarchies. The sociological mindfulness approach will encourage students to reflect on their own actions as consumers and creators of popular culture. The readings in this section elucidate the commodification of race in children’s toys, the whitewashing of African American history in an amusement park ride, the purposing of social media to create spaces of protest and healing among African Americans, and the representation of poor, white people in video game characters.

Section VII: Racialized Immigration Policies: In this section, we seek to engage students in classroom dialogue that provokes them to think about who they are as public individuals. What does it mean to have a “voice” in American politics? What does it mean to be marginalized in American politics? Students will use the sociological mindfulness approach to evaluate where they stand in the milieu of political discourse, especially given that race shapes much of the dialogue. The readings address violence at the U.S.-Mexico border, the criminalization of immigrant status, and the influence of public policy on educational attainment for immigrant populations.

Section VIII: Coloniality in the Twenty-First Century: Moving students beyond a discussion of domestic ethnic and race relations allows them to see the universality of racial prejudice and discrimination. It is important for students to understand that race inequalities are not solely a “U.S. problem,” but exist as destructive forces throughout the world. The sociological mindfulness approach will allow students to see commonalities with different social groups. The readings address race and ethnic discourse in Guatemala, the politics of nation-state borders, racial dynamics in Colombia, and the enduring consequences of colonialism.

Section IX: Mobilizing for Social Change: In this section, we will round out each student’s journey by addressing the active ways that we can reimagine race and ethnic relations and support anti-racist praxis.

The readings in this section address the activism of immigrant groups, community activism, and the struggles of African Americans, Asian Americans, and indigenous groups to gain ground against systemic racism. We encourage students to critically assess how we can create meaningful and sustainable social change.

—Jacqueline Brooks, Heidy Sarabia, and Amanda M. Shigihara

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- Fig. 0.2: FBI, <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/hate-crime-statistics#piechart-description>, 2024.

Section I

Connecting Race and Ethnic Inequalities to Sociological Theory

Student Narratives

Abel's Narrative

It all started with a significant memory. I was about five years old, playing in the living room of my mother's home in Compton, California—a community, composed of predominantly African American and Hispanic people, where race riots have ensued, and gang numbers and infiltrations are high. My mother was in the kitchen washing dishes and talking to my aunt who lived in the home behind ours. All of a sudden, I looked up, and I saw three African American armed men running into our yard and approaching our front door. Since then, the memory has dissipated, but it has remained with me.

Speak of a life of trauma! This is just one experience that has haunted me for years. Others include domestic violence, physical altercations, drug and alcohol abuse, deaths, maternal depression and self-sabotage, lack of security, and an upbringing that fueled my misbehavior and delinquency—all things, in part, resulting from my social environment. The area I was from and the people in it saw chaos and dysfunction regularly, a lack of resources and uplifting opportunities, racial profiling, and police intimidation. From which, we felt hopelessness, prejudice, and the notion that we were all “born criminals.”

I was arrested for the first time at 11 years old for possession to sell; I was trying to earn money to buy the things—things that my mother could not afford. Though I was doing what I believed to be right for me at the time, my criminality was a product of loose morality and immaturity from how I grew up. I was taken

to a police station, released to my mother, but my delinquency continued. The juvenile justice system did not assign me a program, a mentor, or anything of substance that could have helped a lost, misguided boy. Instead, the system took its usual punitive approach and placed me on probation, expelled me from school, and neglected any attempt to determine why this kid was misbehaving. I didn't know it at the time, but I was screaming for help. The punishments were all too familiar; it was life as usual. Now, that I look back, I realize that the system had failed me. I ponder how things might have been different if the system had assigned me a counselor, a mentor, a therapist, or any services that could have helped guide me in a direction that did not land me back in the system. Yet, this was not the case, and I was, time and time again, back to square one: a lost, misguided youth with nothing but trouble, trauma, and hardship. Our lives were different than those in the suburbs; we had no one to talk to about our dilemmas; we had no male role models to look up to who could inspire us to go to school, study, and get legitimate jobs. The men in our lives exuded "machismo" in the sense of dominion and strength in the streets, drug-dealing and fighting, and the courage to never back down. If you didn't, you were an outcast and weren't accepted.

Five years later, I regret to say, I was arrested again, except this time, there was no going home to mama. The police booked me into the local juvenile detention and informed me that I would be having a court appearance soon. I was 16 years old. This was a huge turning point for me that I understand not every juvenile delinquent comes to have. It was a point where I knew I had to grow up and change or there might not be any getting out of a life of crime. I also realized how my actions were causing harm to myself, my family, and my community. At the same time, I became self-aware of how unhealthy and dysfunctional my upbringing had been. My whole life consisted of toxic exposure to trauma, trials, tribulations, and stressors that were unmanageable for an adolescent boy. These were toxic situations that my young mind could not fathom and unconsciously affected my emotional and psychological development. I am not justifying my actions, but I now have a better understanding that you are not born committing juvenile acts. It has a lot to do with your social surroundings, including socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity.

I spent six years in the justice system before I was released. I was in different adult and juvenile institutions. In those six years, I became cognizant of my actions and how they affected people in my life. I was able to heal from my trauma and learn to deal with it in a healthy manner. However, my time was not all positive. Additional psychological effects affected me in the system as we were locked in for long periods of time, exposed to violence, as we felt unsupported and judged for our behaviors. I felt like I'd never be able to redeem myself because of the way I was treated. We were constantly oppressed and put down physically and verbally. We were made to feel as if we were irredeemable and inferior to everyone else. Alternatively, I have heard many testimonies of men and women who have been able to come out of their past afflictions and atrocities while giving back to their communities and make up for their past. Like me, they may have just needed a supportive and humanizing environment.

Howard's Narrative

In my job as a Crisis Intervention Specialist/Crisis Responder, I work with adults and youth who need help navigating criminal and family courts, domestic violence and violent crime, parole and probation, and third-party homicide and gun violence involving youth. Recently, a homeless young Black man, newly released from prison with full custody of his son, was referred to me for housing assistance. The man and his son had been living on the street and sleeping in abandoned houses, parks, or anywhere they could find shelter at night. After several communications with the man's parole officer, I came to realize that the parole officer was

very biased against him because he was an African American man with a criminal record. The parole officer continually mentioned the man had no rights and would have preferred to immediately send him back to prison while sending the man's son to Child Protective Services for foster care placement. It was clear to me that the parole officer did not believe in second chances for, or the rehabilitation of, people—especially Black men—who have spent time in prison. Nevertheless, I helped the young Black man and his son get into a motel as a temporary arrangement until a permanent solution was found. Some weeks later, a shooting occurred at the motel that required law enforcement intervention, and I was called on scene for support. Once there, I was briefed on the situation, and among the many people detained, unbeknownst to me, included the young Black man who was in my case load. This area has a heavy police presence; there were numerous gang units and officers from probation and parole there. As I was working at the scene to assist law enforcement and the affected community members, I was approached by an officer who informed me that one of the detained individuals wanted to speak with me. When I went over, I immediately recognize the young Black man, and he explained to me that he was not involved and didn't know what was going on. It was at this moment that his parole officer showed up telling me that the man is going back to prison and there is no way out of this. I intervened and told the parole officer who I was and why I was there. Suffice it to say, he and another Sheriff's officer were not listening and had already made the decision that the man was guilty because of his criminal record and status as a Black parolee. I promised the man that I would deal with the misunderstanding. After I had a couple of conversations with detectives on scene, they assured me that the young man would not be arrested and would be released as he was a potential witness. The next day, I made a few phone calls and was able to get the young man assigned to a different parole officer. Had I not intervened, the young man would have been sent to jail that night simply for being a *witness while Black* with a criminal record. As a Black man who engages with law enforcement while working in crisis intervention, I have become highly aware of the overt and implicit racial bias within the criminal justice system and have seen it quite often. Thus, as I navigate through everyday situations, I am mindful of and aim to reduce systemic and institutional racism wherever possible.

Learning Objectives

1. Explain why sociologists view race and ethnicity as social constructions.
2. Define race and ethnicity.
3. Define sociological theory.
4. Give examples of racial ideologies and racial projects.
5. Distinguish among sociological theories that address race and ethnic inequalities.
6. Apply intersectionality to social experiences beyond race, class, and gender to include social characteristics such as disability, religion, and citizenship status.
7. Identify how intersecting forms of social inequalities influence your own standpoint.

Editor's Introduction

Jacqueline Brooks, PhD

In his seminal work that served as a rallying cry to African Americans, W.E.B. Du Bois asks, “how does it feel to be a problem?” (2007:7). In response to this question, Du Bois, quipped that he “seldom answers a word” as

the retort is profound, deeply personal, complex, and requires a nuanced discussion of America's racial past (1903:7). Both Abel and Howard illustrate the negative impact of the larger society labeling social groups as “problems”—as burdens that continuously plague an otherwise “good and decent” society. For Abel, the impact and internalization of this labeling began as a child, growing up in a community where along with his relatives and friends, he lived under the oppressive weight of poverty, limited access to the opportunity structure, and racialized policing. Introduced to criminal justice at 11 years old, Abel's pathway led to long-term incarceration at the age of 16. In Howard's narrative, we learn of the obstacles a young, Black, father, with a criminal record, encounters as he struggles to find housing for himself and his son. Without Howard serving as intermediary between the father and the police, the father may have served additional time incarcerated, and his son remanded to state custody. Du Bois's query in *The Souls of Black Folk* is more than just a sociological examination of the plight of African Americans, it's a light exposing the systemic racism that cruelly disenfranchises people of color, in particular African Americans. Both narratives present examples that illustrate the real, lived consequences of unequal power relations. In recent years we have become more aware of how participating in everyday tasks such as jogging, driving to work, or mowing one's lawn can be dangerous—or even fatal—for people of color when confronted by the police or “concerned citizens.” For white Americans—even poor white Americans—it is rare that someone challenges their right to take a nap on a university campus where they are matriculated, sell lemonade in front of their own homes, or hold an event in a public park. Although these incidences of racial bias play out at the micro level, they reflect structural racism. Both student narratives reveal how lack of privilege equates to lack of social protection. As low-income, young, Black men with criminal records, our protagonists endured a barrage of hardships reserved for those who could not “cash in” on the privileges afforded those at the top of the class, age, and race hierarchies. To further understand the student narratives, we need to examine the social construction of race and ethnicity and how sociologists explain race and ethnic inequalities.

Race and Ethnicity as Social Constructions

The sociological approach to race and ethnic inequalities bases its understanding on the premise that race and ethnicity reflect distinct **social constructions**, meaning race and ethnicity are created by human social beings, and do not reflect biological differences between social groups. We rely on sociological knowledge and knowledge gleaned in other academic disciplines such as psychology and biology to make this assertion. Historically, scholars have not always supported this idea. In fact, just as people used to believe the earth was flat, scholars believed that race groups differed by real, essential, and discernable biological traits, even suggesting that African Americans, for example, were sub-human. Some of these ideas still exist today. I am guessing you have heard people discuss the athletic superiority of African American athletes. This may sound like a compliment, but this notion relates to a time when we connected perceived physical traits to specific race groups. Yet, when we compare human beings at the genetic level, we learn that we share nearly 99.9 percent of the same genes, and that there is more genetic variation within racial groups than between them (about 8.6 times more) (Graves 2005). Therefore, along with many other scholars across the academy we conclude that racial difference does not exist on the genetic level. So, how does it exist? We ask people to self-identify based on race and ethnic classifications. What knowledge are we asking people to use to make that determination?

In the United States, we classify people into race groups based on perceived physical traits, ancestry and lineage. The physical traits we use to make distinctions among race groups are arbitrary characteristics such

as hair texture, size and shape of nose, eye color, and skin color. If we were to line up the world's population, we would see that our physical characteristics exist across the spectrum of humankind. No one race group gets to claim ownership of curly hair, for example. Ancestry and lineage can relate to one's familial line, and the geographic origin of one's family.

We define **ethnicity** as the shared culture of a social group, such as religion, history, language, dress, and food. For example, you may identify your race group as Asian American, but self-identify with Korean, Japanese, Chinese, or Cambodian culture. Or you may identify your race group as White, but self-identify with Italian, German, Irish, or English culture. Some people can immediately, and easily self-identify with an ethnic group, while others have difficulty. This could occur for several reasons. First, as European immigrant groups blended into an over-arching "American culture," ethnic distinctions began to dissipate. Some European immigrant groups, over time, were accepted as White. They were no longer treated as "Italian," for example, but were treated as members of the White dominant group. Second, historical records lack information that allows groups such as African Americans to readily identify with a specific ethnic group. Recall that enslaved Africans were treated as property, thus record-keeping was limited to basic demographic information relevant to sales and purchases. Third, information about a family's ancestry or lineage may not have been shared throughout generations. When I ask students to identify their race and ethnicity, some need to "phone home" before answering the question.

Finally, we define **racial ideologies** as perspectives that fortify or challenge the **racial structure**. For example, perspectives that utilize **ethnocentrism** (the view that the United States is superior to other nations), and/or **xenophobia** (fear of immigrant populations), reflect racial ideologies that buttress the existing racial structure, where "acceptable" Whites occupy the highest position on the racial hierarchy, and receive the privileges and protection afforded to those at the top. We have seen these racial ideologies weaponized against immigrant populations such as migrant workers from Mexico. We will learn more about how we racialize immigration in Sections VII (Racialized Immigration Policies) and VIII (Coloniality in the Twenty-First Century). Conversely, anti-racist praxis, such as the #Black Lives Matter movement, that seeks to dismantle racial structures function as racial ideologies as well.

Now that we have a basic understanding of some important terms and concepts, let's discuss several sociological theories.

Sociological Theory

Throughout this text, we will encourage you to be *mindful* of how you critically assess the book's content filtering the information through your own experiences and sets of knowledge. As Schwalbe explains in the foreword, mindfulness challenges us to consider where we exist in the race hierarchy, the patterns that contribute to our social identities, how we benefit from our social location, how we are disadvantaged, and how we disadvantage others. These are weighty, yet necessary tasks if we hope to make strides in affecting positive social change.

We tend to think of racism as a character flaw rather than a destructive force that embeds itself within the fabric of social life. Several years ago, I attended a conference where I was asked to complete an exercise from an "able-centered" perspective. The facilitator of the exercise sought to "snap us out" of our perceived notions of what ability means and recognize our "able-bodied privilege." I found this difficult, as I felt compelled to contextualize the exercise based on my social location as an African American and a

woman. I struggled to be mindful of my “able-ness,” as I sought to understand the experiences of people in the disability community. I consider myself well versed in theories of intersectionality, yet I floundered when asked to imagine how ableism exists as an intersecting form of oppression. Like ableism, racism transcends personal likes and preferences; it is a social phenomenon so enmeshed within the norms of our everyday lives and social structures that we fail to recognize its existence. I am guessing that you, too, will struggle to be mindful of your individual dislikes and preferences, as we ask you to review the works in this text from a “race-centered” or “ethnic-centered” perspective. As you move through the text, remind yourself that mindfulness is a process, not a solitary, one-time act. This means that although you may have experienced racism or ethnocentrism yourself, it is still necessary to be mindful of your own assumptions. What better place to start than with theory—the process of explaining how and why we do what we do?

In sociology, pondering why our social behavior takes certain forms is equally important as gathering empirical evidence. Most of the book’s readings rely on quantitative and qualitative data to illustrate the effect of structural racism, the daily struggle of negotiating race and ethnic identities, or the economic, health, or financial effect of racism. You will find that many readings connect their arguments to sociological theories that attempt to explain human social behavior—which may include explanations and descriptions of the structural patterns that organize our lives, and explanations and descriptions of our patterned social interaction. We rely on theory to help us understand our social world. For example, after watching a disturbing event unfold on the news such as a school shooting, we may ask ourselves, “how did this happen?” Although we are interested in the facts, we are also interested in understanding what social factors contributed to the event occurring. From a sociological perspective, we may try to connect theories about cultural patterns of violence or social psychology to help us make sense of such events. Sociological theory helps us to move beyond our own individualized understanding of the social world, which can be riddled with preconceived notions and assumptions. Yet, as Sears and Cairn argue “[f]ormal theories guide and inform the process of study and observation, helping to define what the problems are in the first place and how they might be addressed” (2016: 45). Thus, theory is a tool of social investigation, not a hindrance to it.

So, how do we make sense of race and ethnic inequalities, especially when the idea of “race” is socially constructed, rendering it fluid and vulnerable to change? The story of race in the United States is complex and tenuous—its discourse has been shaped by history, religion, politics, law, economics, and geography. The social constructions of race and ethnicity have become so embedded in the American psyche that we have lost much of our creative power to rethink how they exist within our lives and social institutions, through a process of **reification**. W.I. and Dorothy Thomas noted that “if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (1928). Thus, the race and ethnic categories that we socially construct become interpreted as fixed, discrete social psychological spaces that do not offer much room for change. This is the power of social constructions. Yet, we must be mindful of not engaging in the fallacy of believing that we lack the power to alter our social constructions. The theories that appear in this text attempt to break the social construction of race and ethnicity from this constraint.

We will discuss two camps of sociological theory: **structural theories of inequality** and **theories of interaction**. Structural theories emphasize the historical shaping of racial hierarchies through the power of social institutions. Theories of interaction emphasize relational spaces, how our interpretations of race and ethnicity influence our identities (i.e., relationship to oneself based on collective meaning) and how these interpretations influence our interactions with others (i.e., interpersonal relationships). We will discuss two structural theories: critical race theory and race formation theory, and two theories of interaction: color-blind

racism and intersectionality, keeping in mind each theory does not occupy a discrete, static location within one camp or the other.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) stems from the theorizing of Karl Marx, who placed great emphasis on the role of the economic order in structuring (mostly) class inequalities (e.g., as corporate profit increases, the value of the worker decreases). CRT reinvigorates Marxist ideas by addressing inherent inequalities in many of our social institutions, such as law, politics, education, and religion, that affect the lives of marginalized groups, especially race and ethnic minorities. Furthermore, it emphasizes the inherent inequities in social institutions that advantage the privileged and disadvantage marginalized social groups. For example, during the global pandemic, people of color were hardest hit by the ravaging effects of COVID-19. Indigenous groups had the highest death rate from COVID-19 as reported by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (2023). Already marginalized and often disenfranchised by the healthcare system, Indigenous communities struggled to gain a foothold on the swift and disastrous effects of the pandemic. Applying a critical lens, sociologists evaluate how social institutions such as the nation's system of healthcare create holes and gaps that easily allow members of poor, communities of color to fall through the cracks. CRT's emphasis on social institutions challenges the inequitable power dynamics that legitimize and perpetuate racial hierarchies and their subsequent harmful effects on individuals and groups. Furthermore, CRT critiques the perpetuation of racial and ethnic stereotypes within social institutions and its impact on communities of color. For example, within the criminal justice system, consciously or unconsciously, labeling Black and Brown people as "thugs" or "aggressive" may influence interactions between law enforcement and marginalized communities, as Abel and Howard described in their student narratives. Similarly, constructing negative perceptions of students of color as "emotionally disturbed" or "unteachable," can influence the treatment of underrepresented groups within the education system.

Race Formation Theory

As mentioned above, Marxist theorizing touted class as the paramount force creating social inequalities. Simultaneously, it marginalized the power and influence of other forms of social inequalities, such as race and gender. Omi and Winant responded to this problem in *Racial Formation in the United States*, walking us through the historical changes that have shaped racial ideologies (2015). Omi and Winant reiterate that race is not reducible to class, illustrating how race functions separately from class, deserving of its own sociological inquiries. Furthermore, they describe the *racialization process*—revealing how race becomes contextualized within social arenas, such as politics, education, and the criminal justice system. More specifically, they describe how racial projects contribute to the birth and perpetuation of racial ideologies. They state:

A racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines. Racial projects connect what race means in a particular discursive or ideological practice, and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized, based upon that meaning. Racial projects

are attempts both to shape the ways in which social structures are racially signified and the ways that racial meanings are embedded in social structures. (Omi and Winant 2015, 125)

Specifically, what is a *racial project*? For Omi and Winant (2015), racial projects control racial discourse, coaching us to interpret, respond, and identify in specific ways. Let us use the Black Lives Matter (#BLM) movement as an example. In response to ongoing police brutality, especially against Black men, #BLM challenges us to consider how racial stereotypes, racial prejudice, and racial hatred shape interactions between African Americans and the police. Regardless of whether you actively participate in #BLM or not, you, most likely, have an opinion about its objectives and actions. Thus, you become drawn into the discourse, debating the relevance of the movement, its connection to your personal life, and its overall objectives. Similarly, we can classify the White nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, which protested the removal of Confederate statues a racial project as well. Shielding their protest under the banner of “Unite the Right,” White nationalist protestors referenced President Donald Trump’s 2016 campaign promises, stating their goals were in line with Trump’s efforts to “take back the country.” This coded language, used widely in American politics, masks underlining racial prejudice and bigotry. Again, whether we were present at the rally or not, we interpret, respond, and identify with its actions in ways that draw us into the larger, national, race discourse. As noted earlier, racial ideologies refer to the motivations, thinking, and intentions of our behavior.

Color-Blind Racism

You may have heard someone state the following: “I’m not a racist! I have a Black friend,” or “I get along with everyone. I don’t see color!” For Bonilla-Silva (2013), these retorts exemplify color-blind racism, a perspective that ignores the existence of a racial hierarchy, overlooking the multiple inequities served upon people of color. The stories that we tell about racism, our experiences or others’, illustrates the structure of racial grammar—the rules, semantics, and logics that justify, legitimize, and present the racial order as normal (Bonilla-Silva 2012). We communicate the existence and power of the racial order through storytelling (racial grammar) that “normalizes” White privilege and demonizes the powerless (Bonilla-Silva 2012). For example, rather than cite historical, structural racism as a contributor to residential segregation, a color-blind perspective argues that people self-segregate, so they can live next to people “just like them.” Bonilla-Silva (2013) identifies four central frames used to mask racist views and perceptions: **abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and the minimization of racism**. Each frame reduces or erases the existence of a racial hierarchy and its harmful effects on communities of color.

Abstract liberalism refers to the use of “equal opportunity” and “meritocracy” arguments to eschew racism (e.g., “There are plenty of jobs out there, why can’t you find one?”). This perspective implies that an “equal playing field” exists and that, if you are willing, opportunities will come your way. However, demand-side practices that reserve jobs for the most-preferred workers push people to the margins of the labor market, and sometimes out of the labor market. The next time you are at a casual dining restaurant notice the race and gender of the workers at the front of the restaurant (e.g., hostess, wait staff, and managers) as opposed to the workers at the back of the restaurant (e.g., cooks, dishwashers, and bussers). This is sociological theory in action! Race segregation in occupations and jobs connects with the perpetuation of racial ideologies and racial structures. Naturalization anecdotes identify personal motives or reference the status quo as factors in social phenomena such as residential segregation (e.g., “People choose to interact

with people just like themselves,” or “This is how it’s always been”). For example, this perspective explains residential segregation as a patterned behavior created by mass self-segregation. It does not recognize how practices such as redlining force people of color into segregated neighborhoods. A descendant of biological racism, cultural racism shoves blame onto communities of color (e.g., “They’re lazy,” or “It’s just part of their culture to have large families.”). This perspective relies on the apathy that stereotypes provide. It is much easier to form stereotypes about people than getting to know them. It is easier to point the finger at perceived self-segregation behavior, than identify how social institutions perpetuate poverty. Minimization tactics draw attention away from historical, structural inequities (e.g., “Slavery is in the past.” or “People are just people. No one intentionally tries to be racist”). This perspective whitewashes history and implies that we are “good people.” To understand our present-day struggles with race and ethnic inequalities we need to apply transparency, mindfulness and honesty to our study of history. We can reveal the harshness and brutality of our racial past without labeling one another as “bad” or “good”.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality challenges us to consider how people *experience* their multiple social identities—simultaneously, as they intermingle in one social body. Thus, my race, ethnicity, class, sex, gender, age, and ability shape the social collective that continuously evolves into what becomes “me.” I filter my social understanding through these social identities, and I am impacted by power differentials within social institutions based on my social identities. Defining intersectionality is not an easy task (Collins 2015). At the most basic level, “intersectionality focuses awareness on people and experiences—hence on social forces and dynamics—that, in monocular vision, are overlooked” (MacKinnon 2013, 1020). Since the coining of the term in the late 1990s, intersectionality as a theory, field of study, and analytical framework has spread across and within multiple academic disciplines (e.g., psychology, anthropology, economics, and history) (Collins 2015). This diffusion renders it vulnerable to change or alternate conceptions that may render it too general or specific (Collins 2015). Intersectionality “references the critical insight that race, class, and gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities” (2015: 3).

Intersectionality views social inequalities as multiplicative, often simultaneous experiences, which do not outrank one another. Thus, race, class, and gender nest within one another as multiplicative social inequalities (Collins 2015). This perspective does not dismiss the social categories of race, class, and gender as distinct, separate social experiences. We are, of course, at times much more impacted by one than the other. Yet, it recognizes that our experiences are racialized as they are classed and gendered. To ignore the influence of one diminishes the value of one’s social experiences. I am guessing that you have selected a **master status** for yourself, meaning one of your social identities influences your sense of self more than another. For example, my race tends to be my master status. For someone else it could be their role as a parent, or for another person it could be their occupation. Yet, we are far more than just that one social identity. Working as an attorney may have different consequences for a Latinx man than a White woman. For some of us, our social identities bring privileges, or protection, within social institutions. In spring 2020, the United States along with the rest of the world, faced the dire impact of COVID-19. As states across the nation implemented “stay-at-home” orders, businesses shuttered their doors, workers lost their jobs, and first responders risked their lives serving the public. Although the long-lasting effects of the pandemic remain to be seen, we know that economic disruption affects communities of color the quickest and does the

most damage (Massey and Denton 1998). The intersectionality of race and class renders these communities particularly vulnerable to major structural economic upheavals.

Many trace the origins of intersectionality to Crenshaw's 1991 article in the *Stanford Law Review* in which she skillfully explains how race and gender social inequalities particularly disadvantage women of color. More specifically, Crenshaw details how intersecting race and gender inequalities create different experiences of sexual assault and domestic violence for women of color than white women. Even when seeking help, women of color experience different treatment. Crenshaw notes, "Where systems of race, gender, and class domination converge, as they do in the experiences of battered women of color, intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles" (1246). In describing the experiences of immigrant women, Crenshaw (1991) draws attention to an amendment in the marriage fraud provision of the 1990 Immigration and Nationality Act, requiring any person who married a U.S. citizen or permanent resident to remain espoused for at least two years. This left immigrant women who were victims of domestic violence and sexual assault at the mercy of their U.S. citizen or permanent resident spouses, without a means of escape. A further amendment stipulated those marital partners, trapped in abusive relationships, could leave their marriages, but only with an explicit waiver. Immigrant women often lacked the resources to gain access to these waivers, and feared that deportation would be a consequence of ending their marital unions (Crenshaw 1991). In 1994, Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act creating a pathway for immigrant women in abusive relationships to receive help without involving their partners.

Although Crenshaw's use of the term *intersectionality* sparked a new direction in racial discourse, analyses that blended race and class existed for quite some time. The scholarship of Black women intellectuals, such as Anna Julia Cooper and Ida Wells Barnett, drew linkages between race and class as they discussed the social positioning of Black Americans within politics, law, and education (Collins 2015). W.E.B. Du Bois, centered his sociological theorizing on the intersection of race and class. As Du Bois stated, "to be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in the land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships" (2007:56). Here, Du Bois intertwines the racial structure with the class hierarchy. Although these contributions to sociology drew connections among social inequities, they were initially not accepted into White, male-dominated, mainstream academic discourse. Decades would pass before the voices of marginalized groups—in particular women of color—would break through the vehement resistance of White, male, privileged scholarship.

A final note on intersectionality, as it gains prominence throughout academia. Its academic evolution reveals movement beyond traditional analyses of the overlap among race, class, and gender inequalities. For example, feminist approaches to gender and sexuality have incorporated nationality as a fluid, shifting dynamic into their scholarship, arguing that the social construction of states, nations, and nationalities intersect with other social inequalities such as race, gender, and sexuality (Kim-Puri 2005). In addition, extensions of intersectionality have embraced ability, religion, and age as intersecting social inequalities which shape social experiences. Since social constructions reflect dynamic, shifting social phenomena, leaving the door open to extensions of theoretical approaches and analyses is prudent. How people are situated within systems of inequalities changes over time and thusly alters their experiences, meaning intersectional scholarship should respond in ways that reflect these new directions. Let's return to our student narratives for an example. The plight of young African Americans, especially men, speaks to ongoing social inequities which exclude young people of color from social opportunities and equitable treatment. In section IV, you will learn how stereotypes disadvantage young, African American boys in the K–12 educational

system. Not only do African American and Latinx boys receive more disciplinary action within the K–12 system, they are retained more often, forcing them to repeat the same grade (National Center for Education Statistics 2017; Morgan 1991; McFadden 1992; Mikel Brown 1991; Cokley 2002).

Mindfulness

Theoretical perspectives do not offer definitive, concrete conclusions to racial discourse. It is important for theory to remain flexible, open to change and reinterpretation. This means that theory, like individuals, must be self-reflective. None of the theoretical approaches we have discussed could survive academic scrutiny without, at times, analyzing their own arguments, suppositions, and assumptions. Often, when teaching, I communicate to students that beliefs—what we hold to be true—are difficult for humans to change. Think about your journey through higher education. Have you ever encountered an idea or a fact that you found difficult to *believe*? One of the hardest things to do as an undergraduate is confront the many ideas, values, and norms that we learned from our families and peers. In fact, this may be the first time that you have been asked to reconsider what you learned in the past. To engage the educational process, you will need to develop the ability to be self-reflective. This does not mean you should tear down everything that went into your upbringing. It means asking, is there another way to look at this? I grew up in a charismatic, fundamentalist church. My family members were preachers, evangelists, deacons, and Sunday school teachers. When I was older, I joined an even stricter church. I was not allowed to wear pants, cosmetics, or jewelry, or date. In many ways the church was an extension of what I learned as a youth. In other ways it challenged me to question what I truly believed. For a long time, I thought my belief was revealed in my actions. However, as I grew more disgruntled with the behavior of the church, I realized what I believe is separate from what I was being asked to do. Aha! A moment of self-reflection. I am not sure if you will experience such a dramatic shift in your educational journey; however, I encourage you to remain open to it. Just like the theoretical perspectives we discussed, a moment of self-reflection can help strengthen your worldview.

Section Readings

In Reading 1.1, “The Sandra Bland Case: Dissecting Intersectionality and Institutional Segregation in Post-Racial America,” Brooks and Sarabia discuss the events surrounding the death of Sandra Bland, a young, African American woman who dies while incarcerated. We situate our analysis in intersectionality, highlighting the influence of racist and gendered authority structures on the treatment of communities of color in the criminal justice system.

In Reading 1.2, “Solidarity Thwarted: The Racialization of African Americans and Asian Americans in California,” Hope presents a nuanced discussion of the relationship between African Americans and Asian Americans comparing and contrasting each group’s racial past. Hope highlights moments when racial oppression presents opportunities for both groups to merge their interests for the sake of allyship.

In Reading 1.3, “More Than Just Fear of Islam: Muslims in the United States Experience Anti-Muslim Racism,” Zopf explains how anti-Muslim sentiment and behavior extend beyond religion and encapsulate race as well. In addition to enduring prejudice and hatred based on stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam, Muslim Americans also face racial prejudice and hatred. These intersecting social oppressions create unique obstacles and issues for Muslim Americans.

In Reading 1.4, “Race, Ethnicity, and Migration in the Context of Care Work,” Wu examines the gendered and racialized world of domestic work. Sex segregation and race segregation characterizes most domestic work performed in the United States. Wu assesses the experiences of immigrant women of color and White women employed as nannies in the northeastern United States. She finds that gendered and racialized occupational structures make workers of color more susceptible to discrimination and abuse than their White peers.

The Sandra Bland Case

Dissecting Intersectionality and Institutional Segregation in Post-Racial America

Jacqueline Brooks and Heidi Sarabia

Keywords: intersectionality, criminal justice, oppression, and suspicious body

Reading Objectives

In this reading students will create connections between structural racism and inequitable treatment of marginalized groups with the criminal justice system. While many works address racial inequities within the criminal justice system, this reading focuses on the intersection of race, class, and gender. Students will address and evaluate how the intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender create different material realities and experiences for women of color. Furthermore, students will analyze how the criminal justice system perpetuates social inequities.

Introduction

In July 2016, social media exploded when the video of Breiaion King's traffic stop in Austin, Texas, went viral. It showed Officer Bryan Richter, a White police officer, throwing King, a Black school teacher, to the ground during an arrest. Dismayed by her brutal treatment, King engaged in a conversation with a different arresting officer about race as she sat, handcuffed, in the back of a police cruiser.

Officer Spradlin asks King, "Let me ask you this. Why are so many people afraid of black people?" King responds, "That's what I want to figure out, because I'm not a bad black person." Then, Officer Spradlin offers his own

explanation, “I can give you a really good, a really good idea why it might be that way. Violent tendencies. I want you to think about that. I’m not saying anything, I’m not saying it’s true, I’m not saying I agree with it or nothing, but 99 percent of the time, when you hear about stuff like that, it is the black community that is being violent. That’s why a lot of white people are afraid. And I don’t blame them.” (Miller 2016)

In the exchange, Officer Spradlin suggested that the perceived aggressiveness of Black Americans creates public fear, thus justifying King’s violent arrest. Later, Austin’s police chief, Art Acevedo, issued an apology to King, stating, “Police officers have a sworn duty to try to calm things down, approach incidents, approach people in a manner that enhances the probability that everyone will get to go on with their day, especially over a speeding ticket” (Miller 2016).¹ Yet, this is not an isolated incident. The treatment of people of color, especially women, in the custody of law enforcement officials has garnered much media attention recently due to new technological means to record and disperse interactions between law enforcement and people of color—making it an undeniable issue in need of urgent attention.

In the context of violent encounters between law enforcement officers and people of color, the experiences of women of color have often been largely ignored, in part due to the number of men of color targeted and affected by these violent interactions.² Thus, this reading focuses on the case of Sandra Bland, emphasizing how women’s experiences with law enforcement are uniquely shaped by their intersectional experiences of race, gender, class, and mental health.

Sandra Bland

In the summer of 2015, the dash cam video of an incident between a young Black woman and a police officer became fodder for social media. The video shows the violent arrest of Sandra Bland by Brian Encinia, a White police officer—an incident that yielded irreparable consequences. Within three days of her arrest, Bland was found dead in her jail cell. Immediately after, the public questioned how a traffic stop for a minor violation (failure to signal a lane change) led to such a contentious interaction between a Black motorist and a White law enforcement officer, which culminated in her reported suicide.

In this reading, we analyze the case of Sandra Bland, utilizing the reports of law enforcement in communities of color and newspaper accounts to argue two points. First, we root our analysis in intersectionality, arguing that racist and gendered authority structures rely on the construction of *suspicious* bodies to determine the type of treatment people receive. The *suspicious* label emerges from dangerous perceptions (e.g., “angry Black woman,” “thug,” or “illegal”) marring the experiences of minority groups. As in Bland’s case, everyday minor infractions become potentially fatal situations when committed by individuals who lack intersectional social privileges (e.g., race, class, gender, and ability), since these privileges offer certain groups assurances that guard against maltreatment. Second, we argue that we must

1. Officer Richter received counseling and training, while Officer Spradlin received no punishment. Since the incident occurred more than six months before the video went viral, Police Chief Art Acevedo claimed he could not punish the officers more. However, the Travis County district attorney moved forward with a special investigation into King’s arrest (Miller, July 22, 2016).

2. In 2015, of the 258 Blacks killed by the police, 96.1 percent (248) were Black men (WP 2016).

always take into account the institutions that treat bodies differently to understand how intersectional systems of oppression operate.

Intersectionality: Racist and Gendered Structures

Emerging in the late 1980s, intersectionality theory sought to expose the relational feature of social inequalities, attaching these linkages to power structures. Moving inequality discourse away from singularly themed explanations, intersectionality highlighted the multiplicative power of social inequalities, exposing the simultaneous interaction of different forms of oppression (Crenshaw 1992; Crenshaw 1991). Since its inception, intersectionality has spread throughout academia, inspiring theoretical works, research that assesses structural arrangements, analyses of identity construction, and applied work, especially in the realm of social justice (Collins 2015).

In *Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas*, Collins (2015) lays out the guiding assumptions of intersectionality. Here, she argues that relational bonds exist among various forms of social inequality (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, nation, age, ethnicity, and ability), and these relational bonds are situated within systems of power. In order to understand inequality, then, we must pay close attention to the systems of power meshed within relational bonds that create unequal access to societal rewards. It is important to underscore that inequality is not fixed, as these inequalities vary across time and space. Subsequently, different groups develop perspectives based on their own particular experiences. Ultimately, Collins argues, we must acknowledge that social inequalities emerging from intersecting systems of power “are fundamentally unjust” (Collins 2015, 14).

The intersectional approach constructs an interpretive understanding that challenges the positioning of Black women who experience mental distress and financial hardship in the larger social structure. This interpretive, or reflexive understanding, is shaped by the application of intersectionality, which can “excavate and expose multilayered structures of power and domination by adopting a grounded praxis approach” (Sumi, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 804). We connect relational social inequalities to intersecting systems of power, mainly the racialized and gendered authority of the state via the criminal justice system. We argue that overarching patriarchy renders women, especially those in the hands of the state, powerless. We acknowledge that systemic class inequality disenfranchises people of color, making them targets of police harassment. As these systems of power intersect, justification for maltreatment becomes nurtured and emboldened.

Arresting the Suspicious Body

Michelle Alexander (2012) argues that the criminal justice system is not only one more institution where inequality exists or a single institution that exemplifies racialized unequal treatment. She argues that the criminal justice system is the very systematic process by which inequality is not only created and perpetuated, it is also the ideological tool used to justify such inequality. In other words, not only does the criminal justice system create a system of racial injustice, but it also produces the justification that supports and perpetuates racial inequality.

The criminal justice system perpetuates racial inequality by labeling people of color as “criminals.” Once labeled a criminal, hegemonic ideology justifies the removal of rights (Wacquant 2005). The criminal

is constructed as undeserving, even though this criminality is explicitly racially differentiated, affecting nonWhites in disproportionate ways. Thus, by paying close attention to the way in which bodies are read—explicitly or implicitly—as suspicious, we can better approach the way in which race and racism operate to criminalize non-White bodies in the United States. In other words, while race is a socially constructed “template for the subordination and oppression of different social groups” (Omi and Winant 1994, 108), it also signifies difference in particular ways; that is, in ways that make certain bodies suspect.

When Sandra Bland was pulled over and arrested after attempting to make way for the police cruiser quickly approaching behind her on July 10, 2015, it was not Bland’s first incarceration. In 2010, she served thirty days for marijuana possession in Harris County Jail, a facility cited for numerous civil rights violations (Nathan 2016). At the time, her lawyer claimed that Bland admitted to smoking marijuana daily, thinking that she was possibly self-medicating. He represented her on a previous marijuana charge and worked to have a DUI charge dropped. In the years following her graduation from Prairie View A&M University, Bland racked up a dizzying amount of fines and fees largely related to traffic stops. She eventually spent a night in jail for not appearing in court related to several traffic citations. A subsequent DUI charge indicates that emotional stress was apparent in Bland’s life.

Bland’s experiences with law enforcement reflect a pattern of racial targeting that occurs widely across the United States. In fact, the practice of generating substantial revenue through tickets, fees, and fines is not specific to Texas; nor is targeting people of color with this practice. For example, in an investigation of the Ferguson Police Department in Ferguson, Missouri, the U.S. Justice Department concluded that the city relies heavily on court fees and fines as a source of revenue, a practice that is in concert with the racist treatment of African Americans (U.S. Department of Justice 2015). In a city where they comprise 67 percent of the population, African Americans make up 85 percent of vehicle stops, 90 percent of citations, and 93 percent of arrests (U.S. Department of Justice 2015). Furthermore, African Americans are “more likely to be cited and arrested following a stop regardless of why the stop was initiated and more likely to receive multiple citations during a single incident” (U.S. Department of Justice 2015, 4). In fact, the report goes as far as to state that the Ferguson Police Department “appears to bring certain offenses almost exclusively against African Americans ... 95% of Manner of Walking in Roadway charges, and 94% of Failure to Comply charges” (U.S. Department of Justice 2015, 4). Invariably, poverty becomes criminalized as municipalities levy heavy fines and fees against individuals, mostly people of color, for minor violations. Each year, the amount of revenue Ferguson collects from the courts increases. In 2011, they generated \$1.41 million from fines and fees, and in 2015 they expected the court’s revenue share to balloon to \$3.09 million (U.S. Department of Justice 2015).

Bland’s actions contributed to her criminal record, yet we cannot discount the racist authority structure that squashes people of color under the weight of arrests, fines, and fees. After graduating college, Bland returned to Illinois several times seeking gainful employment (Nathan 2016). Here, she resided in an area where “black drivers ... are up to four and a half times more likely than White drivers to be searched” (Nathan 2016, 14). Sporadic employment, a reported miscarriage, a ton of debt related to traffic fines and fees, and the death of her grandmother seemed to factor into Bland’s reported battle with depression (Nathan 2016). Bland’s file of misdemeanors kept permanent employment out of her reach, consistent with research that finds criminal records disadvantage Blacks in the labor market far greater than they disadvantage Whites (Pager 2003). Thus, even though Bland moved around, she could not escape the system of racial inequality, perpetuated through the criminal justice system. She was continuously caught in the web of *illegality*—that is, the state production of individuals outside of the law (DeGenova 2002).

When Trooper Encinia stopped Bland for a minor traffic infraction in 2015, he might have been engaging in racial profiling—as numerous studies have exposed the racialized perception of law enforcement and its negative consequences on Blacks and Latinos (Weitzer and Tuch 2002, 2005; Wilson, Dunham, and Alpert 2004). For example, New York City discarded its notorious Stop and Frisk policy after its own report revealed that the majority of New Yorkers who were stopped and frisked were innocent (NYCLU 2016). Between 2002 and 2015, approximately 4 million New Yorkers, mostly Black and Latino, were “subjected to police stops and street interrogations” (NYCLU 2016). In fact, in 2013, a federal judge ruled the practice unconstitutional for violating Fourth Amendment rights (CCR 2013).

Bland had changed lanes to allow the police car to pass her, so she was dismayed by the officer’s actions. Bland appeared frustrated and repeatedly challenged the officer’s directives (her right to do so), attempted to record her encounter (her right to do so), and consistently proclaimed her astonishment with the officer’s behavior (her right to do so). The crucial turning point in the police encounter occurred when the trooper asked Bland to extinguish her cigarette in her private vehicle. When Bland curtly refuses, this becomes one challenge too many. Threatening Bland with a stun gun, stating, “*I will light you up*,” Trooper Encinia forces Bland to exit her vehicle. Later, he handcuffs Bland and throws her to the ground, claiming that she was being combative. In a recorded conversation with his superior, he is heard struggling to find a reason to arrest her.³ Both officers settled on using assault of a public servant as the reason for the arrest. After being seen by paramedics, Bland is transferred to Waller County Jail in Hempstead, Texas.

It is in the context of intersectional experiences that “suspected” bodies are treated differently; and gender is a paramount structure that significantly shapes these treatments. The following chart reflects data compiled by the *Washington Post*, in efforts to track the number of fatal police shootings that occur annually in the United States. As reported, men and Whites reflect the majority of victims shot by law enforcement. The *Washington Post* database also reveals that in each reported year, Blacks make up approximately one fourth of fatal police shootings. Combined, Hispanics and Blacks make up nearly 40 percent of fatal police shootings across each year. Although women make up a small percentage of individuals shot and killed by law enforcement, their consistent representation across each year is troubling.

Yet, women are victimized by law enforcement in many ways that are gender specific and that do not always result in death, but with grave consequences nonetheless. In an investigation of the Baltimore Police Department, for example, the U.S. Department of Justice found many examples of sexual misconduct by police officers (USDJ 2016). In one case, a woman filed an official complaint after two Baltimore Police Department (BPD) officers “fondled her when conducting a search and called her a ‘junkie, whore bitch’” (143). Not only was inquiry into the complaint long and inadequate, by the time they reached out to the victim, she had passed away. In another case, a woman reported to BPD investigators “she met with a certain officer and engaged in sexual activities in the officer’s patrol car once every other week ‘in exchange for U.S. currency or immunity from arrest’” (149). But the case was administratively closed. Ten months later, an anonymous tip revealed that the same officer was “‘having sex in his patrol vehicle’ with a different person involved in the sex trade” (150); however, the state attorney’s office declined to prosecute. Then, a third tip came from another police department “that the same officer was engaging in sexual activities with the same woman

3. Video of Sandra Bland’s traffic stop was published on YouTube by the Texas Department of Public Safety on July 22, 2015 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CaW09Ymr2BA>).

involved in the sex trade” (150). This time, when a “BPD detective attempted to interview the woman; [she] postponed the interview because she was in ill health. Two days later, the woman passed away” (150).

Table 11.1: Fatal Police Shootings in the United States by Gender, Race, Mental Illness, and Age

	2015	2016	2017
Gender			
Men	953	923	940
Women	42	40	45
Race			
White	497	466	457
Black	259	234	223
Hispanic	179	160	179
Other/Unknown	67	103	128
Mental Illness			
Sign of Mental Illness	257	242	236
No Sign of Mental Illness	738	721	751
Age			
Under 18 Years Old	18	16	28
18 Years Old and Older*	966	922	926
Total	995	963	987

This table was compiled from data reported by the Washington Post. Data was collected from news reports, police records, Internet databases, and journalistic accounts. www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/police-shootings/

**Individuals listed as “age unknown” were not included in the table.*

In light of the findings that BPD officers were found to be “deeply dismissive of sexual assault victims and hostile toward prostitutes and transgender people,” the *New York Times* accurately published an article titled “Some Women Won’t ‘Ever Again’ Report a Rape in Baltimore” (Stolberg and Bidgood 2016). In the article, Jacqueline Robarge, the director and founder of Power Inside, reported knowing a female sex-industry worker who “said a police officer had ordered her into his car and coerced her to have sex” (Stolberg and Bidgood 2016). These examples reinforce the finding that sexual misconduct is the second most reported form of police misconduct (AAPF 2016). Thus, violence against women often takes place in the form of sexual violence.

In light of this evidence of explicit sexual violence, the framing of intersectionality highlights how race and racism operate in the United States simultaneously with gender and patriarchal oppression. Thus, we must pay close attention to the ways in which racialized and gendered bodies are systematically treated—not in an abstract sense—but in concrete everyday experiences within institutions. These treatments, although

sometimes explicitly discriminatory, do not have to be explicitly differentiated to be racist or sexist (Van Cleve 2016), as differential treatments ultimately result in outcomes that perpetuate the oppression of people of color in general, and women of color in particular.

Convicting the Suspicious Body

Institutions are the building blocks of social life; they structure our daily routines, provide meaning to our social world, and determine practices that become normalized in society. They reflect the persistent social relationships that endure over time. For example, in addition to the criminal justice system, religion, education, family, and the economy reflect patterned behavior that has become entrenched within the social fabric of our lives. Patricia Fernandez-Kelly (2016) argues that state institutions have two purposes: they can either be mainstream or liminal. Mainstream state institutions deal with citizenship affairs (e.g., issuing marriage certificates, collecting taxes, or providing official identification) and treat individuals as citizens and consumers; while liminal institutions (e.g., welfare offices, correctional facilities, and public schools) treat individuals as “burdens on the society, perennial outsiders, and sources of pollution” (Fernandez-Kelly 2016, xii). These liminal institutions deal with individuals mostly through surveillance and policing, such as mass incarceration, militarized spaces, or criminal courts.

Yet, from our previous discussion of intersectionality, we can see that whether institutions serve their “mainstream” ideal or the “liminal” purpose depends largely on the individual—and their intersectional positionality within the system. For example, Princeton professor Imani Perry was arrested over a three-year-old unpaid ticket. She complained that she was mistreated by not being allowed to make a phone call, being patted down by a male police officer, and being handcuffed to a table (Knapp 2016). She further explained on social media:

This was my first time in handcuffs. They were very cold on my arthritic wrists. I have been thinking about how vulnerable they make you feel. And how some people, often my people, from childhood on experience that naked vulnerability over and over again because they happen to live in places deemed “bad.” (Perry 2016)

Although the police department immediately responded that the officers had followed standard procedure, Janice Fine, a White woman and a professor just like Perry, explained how in a similar circumstance her treatment was significantly different.

I am a Rutgers prof[essor] who lives in Princeton. A few years ago I did a u turn w[ith] my son in the car on Nassau street. I was pulled over. The police took a very long time to come back w[ith] my license. As it turned out, I too had an old parking ticket that I had forgotten about and it had apparently morphed into a warrant for my arrest. Maybe b[e]c[ause] my 6th grade son was in the car and maybe also b[e]c[ause] I am a white woman who was driving a minivan the woman cop was very nice to me. She had me park the van, drove my son and I to the middle school, let me walk him in and then took me to the station. She said I know this is ridiculous and i am supposed to cuff you but I won't unless my chief sees me. So they put me in a room, fingerprinted and processed me but were really nice

about it. They took away my license and I had to drive to Trenton without one to get a new one! Sounds like disparate treatment for sure. (Fine 2016)

Perry's and Fine's disparate treatment clearly show how the very same institution, the police, operates differently depending on how bodies are read: as legitimate citizens in need of protection and guidance or as suspicious bodies requiring surveillance and policing. These examples suggest the very same institution—the police—acts as mainstream with White bodies and as liminal with Black bodies. Thus, even in mainstream institutions (e.g., schools), non-White bodies are read as suspicious and therefore experience oppression. These differential practices within institutions, ideologically couched as neutral, reveal the extent to which explicit racism is no longer acceptable, but disparate treatment and outcomes are largely tolerated and are not seen as discriminatory (Bonilla-Silva 2006).

Sandra Bland, much like Imani Perry, was treated not like a citizen who was rightfully upset in her circumstances. She was stopped by a police officer for a minor traffic violation—failure to signal a lane change—and then was ordered to put out a cigarette: an order meant to reinforce who was in control, who had the authority, and who had the power to command. The arrest was not necessary, but unlike Perry—a Princeton professor with a stable job—Bland was in a more tenuous economic situation. Although she had just landed her first permanent position in a long time, she needed to borrow money to post bail. For Bland, a minor traffic stop yielded harsh consequences because her body was read as suspect and treated as *illegal*—that is as outside of the law. The case of Sandra Bland highlights the extent to which intersectionality operates to produce different effects in the same liminal circumstances. Namely, Perry had the resources to avoid the further escalation of her precarious legal situation, while for Bland, a series of minor infractions escalated to the point where she reportedly committed suicide.

The most troubling part of Bland's story is speculating over what happened after she was incarcerated. The numerous civil rights violations levied against the guardians of suspicious bodies (e.g., police departments, jails, and prisons) suggest that the extension of civil and human rights does not reach many prisoners. The violation of an inmate's rights becomes more urgent when they suffer from physical and mental health issues. The question—asked by Bland's family in a civil lawsuit—becomes where was her protection, if she was battling suicidal ideations? Since 2000, suicide has remained the leading cause of unnatural death in county jails (U.S. Department of Justice 2015). In 2013, the rate of inmate suicides in county jails reached 46 per 100,000, outpacing the prison system by far, which reached 15 per 100,000 (US Department of Justice 2015). Distinct differences between the jail and prison experience may contribute to this gap (Konrad et al. 2007; Blaauw, Kerkhof, and Hayes 2005). County jails often work with little information about inmates, maintain looser checks and balances regarding the physical and mental health of inmates, and do not have the institutional structure to provide inmates with quality care. After Bland's death, state authorities cited the Waller County Jail for not adequately supervising inmates with mental health risks and not providing documentation that jailers had received proper training in dealing with inmates with suicidal ideations (*Chicago Sun-Times* 2015). In addition to poor supervision, jails nurture powerlessness and hopelessness as inmates await decisions about their futures, often falling into despair as they experience the *shock of confinement* (Cox and Morchauser 1997; Goss et al. 2002; Konrad et al. 2007; Kaste 2015; Chammah and Meagher 2015). Behind bars, fears of lost job opportunities, financial destruction, and public humiliation and embarrassment can rattle even the strongest of wills. One can speculate that perhaps Bland thought her days of financial upheaval and bouts with the law were in the past, only to find that the fears she expressed about police brutality had become her reality. Without proper care, negotiating these fears can be disastrous.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Sandra Bland was not arrested by a police officer concerned for her safety, working to protect her, or determined to seek out her best interests. Instead, the police officer that arrested her read her citizenship entitlement as dangerous, her defiance as aggressive, and her resistance as threatening. “She found out her bond was \$5,000, and no one—she was calling and calling—and no one was answering, and then after that she just broke down. She was crying and crying,” her lawyer said (quoted in Sanchez 2015). The system broke Sandra Bland, not because of this one incident, but because this one incident was the culmination of a series of events that are emblematic of inequality in this society. She felt like she did not have the money, the resources, the network, or the means to post bail. She saw her whole life derailed in front of her—her new job was now out of reach, her time in that jail cell now felt eternal, and her voice had been effectively silenced.

Yet, Sandra Bland was not the only Black woman in this precarious situation. Her own mother reminded Congress that

... other six [women] died in jail. We're not talking about that year, we're talking about the month of July. 18–50 [years old]. Kindra Chapman allegedly stole a cell phone; 20 hours later she hung herself. Alexis McGovern downstairs in the infirmary dead, her family upstairs paying the bond. Nobody has spoken these names. And as I go around the country speaking, the fact that no pen is raised in a room, where six other women, aside from my daughter, have died. And nobody knows their names. That's a problem. (Reed-Veal 2016)

The case of Sandra Bland and others reminds us of the fragility of citizenship rights for people of color in the United States. U.S. citizens have certain rights, but when confronted by the police, people of color have mostly despair—there is not much you can do or say to avoid going down the rabbit hole of social injustice. In a second, your whole life can derail into chaos and despair because throughout the whole process, your body will not be read as a citizen body entitled to certain rights and privileges, but as a suspect body that rather than prove its guilt will have to prove its deservedness of rights.

Sandra Bland was never passive, as she drew on a strong and large network, her interpretive community, to voice her perspective and created kinship with victims of police brutality; entangling her own experiences of inequality with the experiences of others. In April 2015 she had said in a video posted on social media, “Being a black person in America is very, very hard. ... At the moment black lives matter. They matter” (quoted in Sanchez 2015). By exposing police brutality via social media, Bland and others have created opportunities for strangers within and across communities to build commonality through shared experiences. For example, immediately following the news of Kindra Chapman’s suicide in a jail cell, hashtag “If I Die in Police Custody” trended, showcasing the visceral effect of her death on communities of color.⁴ Bland, in response to police killings of unarmed Black men (e.g., Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Walter Scott) posted numerous Facebook videos exhibiting dismay with the criminal justice system and reinforcing camaraderie with her larger community. Her interpretive community was and continues to be broad and specific, racialized and gendered, ostracized by wealth and mental wellbeing, known and unknown, vocal and silent.

4. Kindra Chapman, a black teenager, reportedly committed suicide in the Homewood City Jail. She was arrested for first-degree robbery of a person of a cell phone.

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Solidarity Thwarted

The Racialization of African Americans and Asian Americans in California

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Keywords: racialization, orientalism, model minority, solidarity, racial hierarchy, assimilation, racial intelligence, activism, social movements, diaspora, systemic change, radicalism, coalition building.

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the history of racial stratification/hierarchies in a U.S. context and its implications on marginalized communities, in particular Blacks and Asian Americans.
2. Understand Black and Asian relations, or Afro-Asian relations, as historically changing and imbricated with race, class, nationality, and other relations of difference.
3. Understand the potential of radical solidarity and coalitional politics.

Introduction

SOMArts, one of the leading art galleries in San Francisco, curated a contemporary art exhibit in the summer of 2017 dedicated to providing space for Black women—"The Black Woman is God: Divine Revolution." The exhibit featured a piece of a smiling Black girl holding a bottle of orange juice (see Figure 1.2.1). The canvas was adorned with gold medallions featuring images of Catholic saints and their Yoruba names. The center image of the young girl lay surrounded by the words "Say Her Name," a rallying cry and popular social media hashtag created by the

Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) to call attention to state-sanctioned violence faced by women of color.¹



Figure 1.2.1 Portrait of Latasha Harlins, by Lili Bernard. Latasha Harlins en El Cielo con Las 7 Potencias Africanas, 2017. Oil Paint, Acrylic Paint, Metal Chain, Glitter, Plastic Eyeballs, Styrofoam, Plastic Angel, Faux Jewels and Digital Print on Canvas, 20" x 20"

The painting was of Latasha Harlins, a 15-year-old Black girl who has often been at the center of discussions on the 1992 Los Angeles riots. On March 16, 1991, Harlins went into a liquor store owned by Soon Ja Du, a Korean American, and her husband, Billy Heung Ki Du, in South Central Los Angeles. Harlins intended on purchasing a bottle of orange juice, later placing the bottle in her backpack. Before she could pay for the item, Soon Ja Du determined that Harlins was stealing, and she began grabbing the young girl. Harlins attempted to defend herself but was shot in the head by Du during the scuffle. Harlins died with the money she planned on using to pay for the juice in her hand. The murder of Latasha Harlins catapulted an intense discussion on Black and Asian relations, as the mainstream media characterized the event as a “black-Korean conflict,” and rappers, such as Tupac Shakur and Ice Cube, would later write songs honoring Harlins and vilifying Korean storeowners (Ice Cube 1991; Shakur 1993).

Harlins was killed just 13 days after the infamous beating of Rodney King by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD).² These two

events—compounded by years of swelling racial tensions, an inequitable distribution of wealth throughout Los Angeles that created gross living conditions for those in South Central Los Angeles, and a police force that was being investigated for its racist actions toward Black and Latinx citizens—served as a catalyst for the 1992 LA uprising. The uprising—labeled as riots by the media—was a significant moment in U.S. urban history as it highlighted the layered racial tensions within the country in the post-civil rights era. But these racial tensions were not just a Black and White problem, but also a Black and yellow issue, a Brown and White issue, a Black and Brown issue, and so on.

Works such as this propagate *community healing*. Walkington (2020) addresses how artistic works can assist “The ways in which community members identify the locus of community pain, and how this pain is associated with structural oppression, [which] can lead to social change through practical community-level resistance via transformative justice models.” The portrait focuses on Harlins, yet determines to connect the viewer to the tragedy of her passing, harkening to her new place among a sisterhood of unarmed Black and

1. <http://lilibernard.com/site/artwork/mixed-media/>.

2. On March 31, 1991, Rodney King, an African American man and taxi driver, was pulled over by officers of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). Videotape footage showed four officers repeatedly beating King until much of his face was disfigured. All four officers were charged but later acquitted. The acquittal helped spark the 1992 Los Angeles uprising.

Brown women killed because of the color of their skin. Furthermore, this work highlights the intersection of age, race, and gender, as young Black and brown women typically escape the national discourse regarding killings of unarmed individuals. We generate rage toward the offenders who take our Black and Brown young men from us, but reserve silence for the young women who meet with similar circumstances.

This reading (1) examines how African Americans and Asian Americans are racialized within the United States, in particular throughout California. It (2) delves into how these groups have systematically been racialized against each other in an effort to suppress their attempts at racial cohesion or solidarity; and (3) this work argues for the necessity of Afro-Asian solidarity as a means to seek systemic social change by highlighting past and current moments of solidarity and recognizing their connection to broader social movements.³

Creating a Third-World Liberation Front

Both African Americans and Asians began arriving to the Golden State during the 19th century. African Americans were being brought by their enslavers to mine gold or were fleeing the conditions of the antebellum South. Chinese immigrants began entering the state in search of employment—primarily working on the construction of the transcontinental railroad—following the first Opium War of 1839–1842, which devastated China. While California presented great opportunities for both groups, they were met with great anti-immigrant sentiment and staunch anti-blackness. This discrimination manifested in the form of anti-immigration legislation, racially restrictive housing covenants, racially motivated taxation, and other forms of de jure and de facto segregation. Because of this marginalization, the growing Asian and Black populations were often relegated to similar communities away from White neighborhoods. Marginalized communities throughout Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, and Sacramento served as sites of this interracial comingling (Shizue 2016).⁴

These conditions persisted well into the twentieth century, and by the 1960s, California urban cities such as Oakland and San Francisco were rocked by deindustrialization, leaving many of those who relied on the once plentiful factory work jobless. City governments divested from their urban cores, leaving whole neighborhoods economically disadvantaged. Instead, city officials put public dollars behind “White flight,” funding sprawling suburban communities (Santangelo 2001; Self 2003). Persistent inequitable living conditions, coupled with a heightened national awareness of police brutality, transformed the social movements of that era as a new generation of young activists grew disillusioned with nonviolent tactics and respectability politics, opting for a more militant stance to seeking justice. By 1966, the Black Power, Asian American, and other movements, including the Disability Rights, Anti-War, Feminist, and Chicano

3. Drawing on Fred Ho and Bill Mullen's work, I define Afro-Asian as the range of historical, political, and cultural connections between Asian/Asian Americans and African/African Americans. I focus on Black and Asian relations as opposed to Black and Latinx, or Black and Native American relations to highlight the shared struggle, migration patterns into California, and how these two groups, unlike the others, have been racialized against each other. Moreover, I focus on Black and Asian relations in an effort to grow scholarship within the budding field.

4. By the late 19th century, Chinese were no longer the only Asian immigrants looking for opportunity in California. Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos, and other East and South Asians also began immigrating to California. During World War II, African Americans migrated from the Jim Crow South to California, in particular Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Francisco in search of wartime jobs.

movements were materializing. Collectively, these movements called for civil rights for marginalized people both domestically and globally. The Black Power and Asian American movement activists were making similar demands at the time: fair housing, the end of systemic racism and discrimination, greater access to education, jobs, and the creation of Ethnic Studies departments at colleges and universities, to name a few.

Additionally, much of this organizing fervor emanated out of high school and college campuses around the San Francisco Bay Area, such as the University of California–Berkeley, Merritt College, San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University), and McClymonds High School. This student activism spread into surrounding communities due to close proximity, overlapping issues, and the push for solidarity (Murch 2010). In 1968, solidarity was actualized at San Francisco State College when student leaders formed the Third-World Liberation Front (TWLF), a coalition of student activists from Black, Latinx/Chicanx, Native American, and Asian American student political groups.

The TWLF drew their ideas from third-world leaders and philosophers such as Malcolm X, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, and Kwame Nkrumah, developing a global consciousness that was steeped in revolutionary internationalism and socialism. Moreover, the TWLF took its lead from the Bandung Conference—the 1955 convening of African and Asian countries in an effort to combat Western imperialism and capitalism. This conference is often heralded as one of the first moments of Afro-Asian solidarity on the global stage, and was seen as a source of inspiration for many Asian American and Black Power groups during the late 1960s.⁵

Beyond the TWLF, Afro-Asian solidarity was actualized around the Bay Area. During the Black Panther Party's (BPP) infancy, leaders Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton were greatly influenced by Maoism, with Mao Zedong's *Red Book Quotations from Brother Mao Tse Tung* being recommended reading for new members. Mao, the founding leader of the People's Republic of China, was a supporter of Black liberation, calling for third-world solidarity within the United States. His work helped transform the Black Power movement, as it provided a framework that was more inclusive and dynamic, highlighting the need for a Marxist model that stressed the global class struggle (Kelley 2008, 99). Furthermore, Newton and Seale received support early on from one of their childhood friends, Richard Aoki. Aoki was Japanese American and grew up near Newton in West Oakland. Having recently returned from serving in the military, Aoki had access to guns and other weapons, which he donated to the Party, becoming the first Asian American member of the organization.

The BPP would go on to work with groups like the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) and Red Guards, two radical Asian American organizations in the Bay Area that also emerged during the Black Power era. The BPP and aforementioned Asian American groups collaborated on political education classes, rallies, and survival programs, like free breakfast for children and the elderly and the Free Huey campaign (Ibid).

Within these movements and organizations African Americans and Asian Americans raised similar concerns with regards to their material conditions in the United States as well as in contesting Western imperialism and capitalism. However, there were key distinctions in what motivated them. For African Americans, it was the ubiquity of anti-Blackness and legacy of enslavement that left generations of African Americans at a deficit. For Asian Americans, it was the need to rebuild their communities following internment, strict immigration laws, and language barriers, to name a few. While both groups drew criticism

5. Many scholars trace the infancy of Afro-Asian solidarity back to the Bandung Conference in 1955. While this event is central to understanding the non-aligned movement and Pan African collaboration, it does not necessarily mark the beginning of Afro-Asian solidarity or encounters. Moreover, much of the scholarship on this event has been romanticized. Tamara Nooper argues that the event was more symbolic (Fraser 1945; Jones 2005).

for their militancy and radicalism during the period, the media simultaneously deemed Asian Americans the “model minority,” even though many were living in poor conditions, lacked access to higher education, and were underemployed. This shift would not only impact the United States racial hierarchy, but also re-charter the future of Black-Asian relations.

The Model Minority: Juxtaposing Blacks and Asian Americans

First used in a January 1966 *New York Times* article entitled, “Success Story Japanese-American Style,” by sociologist William Petersen, “model minority” was used to describe Asian Americans, mostly Japanese and Chinese Americans, who were able to attain middle-class status in the United States (Petersen 1966). Their success was highlighted as proof that Asian Americans were no longer impacted by racial and economic discrimination and largely accepted by Whites because they were able to assimilate into the dominant culture because they valued entrepreneurship, education, and authority (Petersen 1966). The work also sought to theorize why non-Asian minorities had yet to achieve the level of success as their peers.

In creating the “model minority-problem minority dichotomy,” Petersen juxtaposes and pits Asian Americans and African Americans against each other, challenging the very grounds of Afro-Asian solidarity by focusing on their differences rather than their commonalities, setting the stage for a tumultuous future for Black-Asian relations. Moreover, this portrayal of Asian Americans was a shift from their prior depiction in mainstream media. Since their arrival to the United States, Asians had overwhelmingly been portrayed negatively in the media—early political and editorial cartoons often depicted Asians as barbaric, dangerous, and villainous, instilling a fear of people from “the East.” White-led media stoked anxieties about the “Yellow Peril,” the belief that those of the East sought to overthrow the Western world. With no looming threat from the East, yellow peril can only be surmised as a myth born out of xenophobia and racism.

Edward Said’s framework of orientalism best captures American anti-Asian xenophobia. Said contends that the Orient, or the East (the Middle East, Asia, and Africa), was integral to the development of the Occident, or the West (Europe and European-colonized Americas). Slavery, colonialism, and imperialism provided the material means for the development of Western capitalism primarily via the control of the Orient’s natural resources and people (Said 1978, 9). Orientalism is an extension of yellow peril in that it describes how Western artists, writers, and even early political leaders viewed the East as monolithic and static, without recognizing their own role in the underdevelopment of many countries in the Orient. Orientalism argues that the West not only views the Orient as less civilized and developed, but also uses that very belief as a justification to further exploit the Orient.

Orientalism and notions of yellow peril are still pervasive in contemporary mainstream media. While depictions of Asians are not as brazen as the Fu Manchu character of the 1930s, mainstream news outlets, for example, often characterize China as this monolithic illusive force constantly challenging the United States for global supremacy. There is certainly some validity to those claims, as China has become a key fixture within global markets; however, the portrayal of China often harkens back to a history of fear and xenophobia. This history of anti-Asian rhetoric is why Petersen’s portrayal of Japanese Americans was so stark, even though it was no more than a refashioning of orientalist ideas to stereotype Asians because of their perceived assimilation and likeness to whiteness.

Ultimately, Petersen’s analysis lacked a serious discussion of global anti-Blackness and the legacy of enslavement and colonialism, which would have exposed Petersen’s simplistic arguments. Moreover, he

places the burden of success on individual African Americans and Asian Americans without accounting for how policies and systems steeped in White supremacy continuously work to oppress both groups. The model minority myth validated Asian American identity (arguably a particular type), stratifying them closer to whiteness and what it meant to be “American.” This stratification inherently created tension and animosity, as Asian Americans were now seen as “greater than” and in some cases afforded certain social and economic privileges that other communities of color were not. Moreover, this stratification becomes internalized, as witnessed with the Latasha Harlins case. Soon Ja Du operated out of a place of anti-blackness when she shot Harlins, and the lax sentencing she received, similar to that of the White officers who brutalized Rodney King, only highlighted for African Americans that Asian Americans were privy to certain aspects of whiteness. Because of these beliefs, anti-Asian sentiment within the African American community became prevalent.

Eroding Model Minority and Rebuilding Afro-Asian Solidarity

For decades, activists and scholars have been refuting Petersen’s “model minority” myth, as it often reflected the experiences of a few—mostly affluent East Asians—while the narratives of South, Southeast, and other Asian and Pacific Islander groups were largely erased (Wu 2015; Hsu 2017; Lee 2015; Ancheta 2010). The “model minority” myth was also devoid of any gender or class analysis. For example, Vietnamese, Hmong, and Cambodians refugees immigrated to the United States largely for political reasons and have remained relatively disadvantaged. But moving into the 1980s and 1990s, the idea of Asian Americans as the “model minority” shifted from a problematic argument to a widely believed stereotype that oversimplified, distorted, and rendered the experiences of Asian Americans monolithic (Lee 2015).

Claire Jean-Kim, an Asian American studies scholar, offers a counter to the “model minority” myth with her theory of racial triangulation. She posits that Asian Americans, being neither Black nor White, have been valorized in comparison to Blacks, but both Asians and Blacks remain culturally and racially subordinate to Whites (Kim 1999). Refuting Petersen’s claims, Jean-Kim asserts that Asian Americans occupy an angle between Blacks and Whites. This triangle illustrates how Asian Americans are situated between the two racial groups and navigate between blackness and whiteness. Racial triangulation also details just how connected African Americans and Asian Americans are due to a shared struggle against White supremacy and imperialism. Conversely, Kim’s work is not without its own limitations. Racial triangulation, similar to “model minority,” does not account for the nuances around race or gender and class (Figure 1.2.2).

Still, Kim’s work pushes us to move beyond racial scapegoating, toward understanding racial power that largely upholds White supremacy and the racial status quo. Kim’s work also leaves room for the creation of coalitional politics and solidarities that seek to obliterate existing racial hierarchies. Beyond the era of Afro-Asian solidarity that emerged following Bandung and during the Black Power and Asian American movements, there have been contemporary periods of improved Black-Asian relations and even solidarity building.

caption=Racial Triangulation]

Today, Asian American millennials are speaking out against the model minority myth and how it is used to pit Asian Americans against other people of color, especially within higher education.⁶ When an anti-Affirmative Action lawsuit was brought against Harvard University by a conservative organization using a young Asian American as the plaintiff, Harvard students rebuffed attempts to be used as “tools” to further suppress minority enrollment. Christina Qiu, a Harvard University student, responded to the case by stating that “model minority status was granted as a counter to black activism” (Qiu 2017). She highlights that the “model minority” is grossly flawed and has been weaponized to divide communities of color and reinforce White supremacy. Qiu warns that these efforts by anti-Affirmative Action organizations only facilitate the resegregation of institutions using Asian bodies as disposable tools. To her point, White college students across the nation have also expressed with great dissatisfaction the swelling Asian and Pacific Islander populations on college campuses.⁷ Qiu’s article in *the Harvard Crimson* is a call for solidarity, one that was echoed in the 2016 “A Letter for Black Lives.”

In a post-Ferguson era, following the case of Peter Liang and Akai Gurley, a collective of Asian American millennials, led by ethnographer Christina Xu in 2016, came together to discuss how Asian Americans are imbricated within issues raised by the M4BL. “A Letter for Black Lives” was written to begin conversations about police brutality, anti-blackness, and racial justice with members in their communities; calling for Asian American elders to have empathy and support for their children and youth who support the Movement for Black Lives (BLM 2016a). Since its publication, the letter has been shared online through social media millions of times and has been translated into over thirty languages, also spawning a YouTube video and a comic edition (BLM 2016b). The letter has also been edited for different communities, providing more nuanced discussions. For example, the South Asian American version details how Indians and other darker-skinned Asian Americans have also become victims of anti-Black racism.

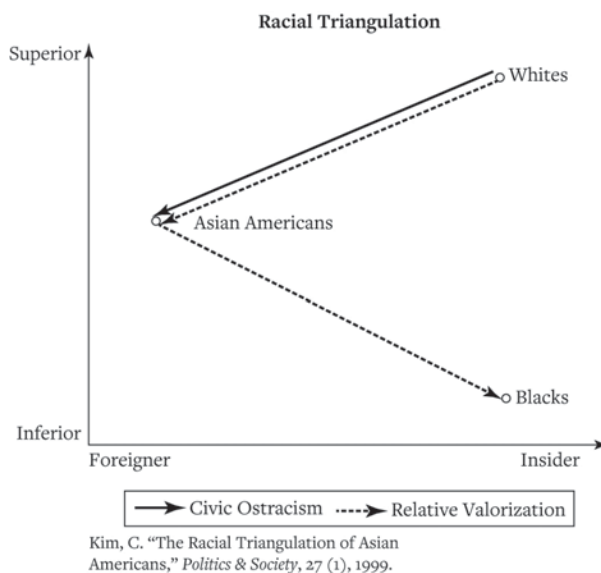


Figure 1.2.2

6. In 1996, with the passage of Proposition 209, California voters decided to do away with affirmative action in the state, including in higher education. Since then, eight other states have followed California's lead. African Americans and Latinx Americans were disproportionately impacted by this decision, with their enrollment plummeting at California's public universities, while Asian Americans witnessed exponential growth. See Erica Perez, "California Proposition 209: Minority Enrollments Down in UC Schools Despite Diversity Efforts," *HuffPost*, last modified April 25, 2012, accessed February 3, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/24/proposition-209_n_1300122.html.
7. The University of California–Los Angeles made news in 2012 for its nickname, “University of Caucasians Lost among Asians,” highlighting the sheer anti-Asian sentiment brewing at the university.

Conclusion

The “Letter for Black Lives” is certainly a step in the right direction to begin having discussions around U.S. racialization, and more importantly on building Afro-Asian solidarity within the current M4BL. In an era fraught with blatant xenophobia and racism being espoused from the federal government, strengthened Black-Asian relations are critical to dismantling the systems of oppression that have stratified these groups based on their proximity to whiteness, instead of their shared humanity.

Strengthening Black-Asian relations is essential to toppling a racial hierarchy that situates African Americans at the bottom, Asian Americans near the top, and other populations of color, such as Native Americans and Chicanx/Latinx Americans, scattered between the two. Solidarities between Black, Chicanx/Latinx, and Native Americans have garnered greater longevity and focus because of the consistent framing of these populations as “problem minorities.” This reading highlighted some of the key moments of Afro-Asian solidarity throughout history, and while much is still being carried out by activists and organizers in the name of building solidarity among Blacks and Asian Americans, the impact of the model minority myth is still present as communities remain disconnected. The rebuilding of Black-Asian relations and Afro-Asian solidarity will help collapse the racial hierarchical structure by shrinking their “distance” from each other, which can only be accomplished by returning to an engagement rooted in a shared struggle and liberation. Furthermore, this hierarchical collapse will also help facilitate the dissolution of systems oppression, such as capitalism, White supremacy, anti-blackness, and anti-Asian sentiment, which have been internalized and thwarted the possibilities of another Bandung or Third-World Liberation Front.

Reflection/Critical Thinking Questions

1. How has U.S. racialization shaped your lived experience?
2. What role do systems and other people have in shaping our identities?
3. What are the consequences and legacies of exclusion for the dominant and marginalized groups?
4. What does solidarity mean to you?

Exploratory Research Questions

1. How has/does Afro-Asian solidarity manifest(ed)?
2. What is solidarity, and what does solidarity look like for communities that are invested in dismantling systems of oppression?

Further Readings and Resources

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Mountains That Take Wing: Angela Davis and Yuri Kochiyama—A Conversation on Life, Struggles & Liberation (film).

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Fig. 1.2.2: Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Racial_triangulation.JPG.

More Than Just Fear of Islam

Muslims in the United States Experience Anti-Muslim Racism

Bradley J. Zopf

Keywords: Orientalism, Islamophobia, anti-Muslim racism, war on terrorism, hate crime, and ideology

Reading Goals

In this reading, you will be able to:

1. Identify and define Orientalism and Islamophobia as key ideologies of anti-Muslim racism;
2. Describe and explain how state-based policies and institutions contribute to the targeting and surveillance of Muslims in the United States;
3. Explain why and how Muslims experience racism; and
4. Discuss the consequences of anti-Muslim racism for Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim.

A Portrait of Muslims in the United States

The now-famous photo of Munira Ahmed adorning a *hijab* in the design of the American flag was taken nearly a decade ago by Ridwan Adhami, not far from where the World Trade Center once stood. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Ahmed described the purpose of the photo: “It’s about saying, ‘I am American just as you are. I am American and I am Muslim, and I am very proud to be both’” (See Figure 3.1.1; Helmore 2017).

Islam is the second-largest religion worldwide behind only Christianity and is the fastest-growing religion in the United States (Mohamed, Smith, Cooperman, and Schiller 2017). Islam began in Saudi Arabia in the seventh century by the Prophet Muhammed, who Muslims believe is the Messenger of God, or Allah. Muslims are spread across the globe with sizable populations in South Asia and the Middle East. Though Muslims are expected to surpass Jews as the second-largest religious group in the United States by 2050, Muslims remain a small percentage of the overall U.S. population (approximately 1.1 percent) (Lipka 2015). The rise in the U.S. Muslim population has led to a misperception that the United States is in danger of Islam taking over Christianity as evidenced by a viral YouTube “Muslim Demographics” video with more than 16 million views (2019).

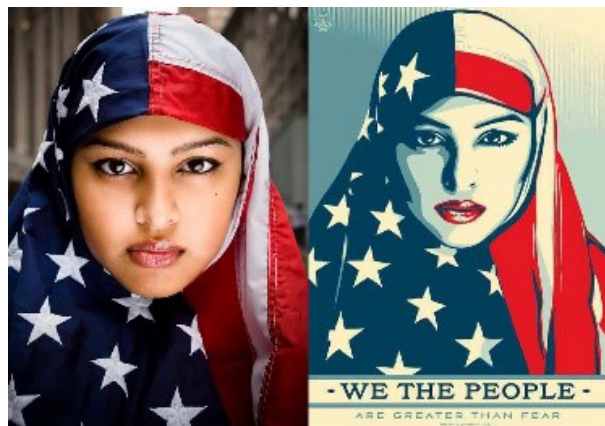


Figure 1.3.1ab Figure 1.3.1a shows a now-famous photo of Munira Ahmed adorning a *hijab* in the design of the American flag. This photo was taken nearly a decade ago by Ridwan Adhami not far from where the World Trade Center once stood. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Ahmed described the purpose of the photo: “It’s about saying, ‘I am American just as you are. I am American, and I am Muslim, and I am very proud to be both*.’” In Figure 1.3.1b, Shepard Fairey reimagined Ahmed’s work as an illustration, which was popularized in anti-Trump rallies. Consistent with Ahmed’s photo, the illustration challenges how we define “American” and who we view as American. Unlike popularized symbols of “Americanism” which utilize images of white Americans, military veterans, or Christian artifacts, Fairey’s work represents racial and ethnic inclusiveness.

*Helmore, Edward. January 23, 2017. “Munira Ahmed: the woman who became the face of the Trump resistance.” *The Guardian*. Retrieved June 8, 2018.

The majority of Muslims in the United States are foreign born, most having immigrated since 2010, representing more than 75 different national-origin backgrounds. Muslims in the United States are phenotypically, racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse. Most Muslims in the United States are citizens, are proud to identify as American, and feel they have a lot in common with Americans. Though Muslim Americans feel they have a lot in common with Americans, prefer to assimilate to American culture, and pursue the American dream, many identify racism as the most important problem facing Muslims in the United States (Mohamed, Smith, Cooperman, and Schiller 2017; Kohut, Keeter, and Smith 2011). Muslims in the United States encounter many misconceptions of Islam, including inaccurate stereotypes about them as religious fanatics and/or terrorists. In addition, nearly 75 percent surveyed believe that there is a lot of discrimination against Muslims in the United States, with nearly half having experienced various forms of discrimination in the past year (Mohamed et al. 2017). In particular, the Council of American-Islamic Relations received reports of nearly 3,000 bias incidents in 2017, ranging from harassment in public spaces to violent hate crimes, as well as FBI and TSA racial profiling (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2018).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. What do you know about Islam and/or Muslims? Where does this knowledge come from? (i.e., personal experience, books, classes, movies and television, social media, other).
2. Complete the Arab-Muslim Implicit Association test (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>) and reflect on your results.
3. What are your assumptions about Islam and Muslims? How accurate are these assumptions?

Anti-Muslim Racism: Ideologies and Structures

Racism is a system of power relations resting on both ideologies of difference and structures of domination and power (Golash-Boza 2016). Anti-Muslim racism can be defined as a collection of ideas about Islam and Muslims manifesting in a set of prejudicial attitudes and ideas (i.e., ideology) expressed in actions and enacted as a system of policies and practices (i.e., structures) designed to surveil and restrict Muslims' everyday lives in ways that erode Muslims' sense of safety and belonging. Anti-Muslim racism is more than simply Islamophobia, often defined as an irrational fear or prejudice against Muslims, because the notion of “-phobia” emphasizes “individual and psychological” attitudes rather than the “collective and the structural” practices that define Muslims as religious, cultural, and indeed racial others (Garner and Selod 2015). Anti-Muslim racism, therefore, turns our focus away from personal biases and prejudices and highlights the integration of shared attitudes, practices of discrimination, and systematic policies that target Islam and victimize Muslims. The following three sections examine the historical antecedent of modern-day anti-Muslim racism by tracing the ideologies of Orientalism and Islamophobia that gave rise to structures and state-based policies impacting U.S. Muslims today.

Ideologies of Anti-Muslim Racism: Orientalism and Islamophobia

Anti-Muslim racism rests on mutually reinforcing ideologies of Orientalism and Islamophobia. Together, these ideologies contribute to stereotypical images and narratives of Arabs, Muslims, Islam, and the Middle East. Persistently negative, homogenizing, and essentializing tropes about Islam (as a religion), Arabs (as a civilization), and Muslims (as people) can be seen in modern-day movies, newspaper stories, and social media posts.

Said (1978) describes orientalism as a set of ideologies and practices that produce distorted knowledge about the geographies, cultures, religions, and people of the Orient (often referred to as the Middle East). These frameworks depict an imaginary, immoral, and exotic Orient that serves as a juxtaposition to the virtuosity of Christianity and rationality of the West. Scholars, artists, and writers alike produced ideas, images, and narratives about the Middle East and Islam that distinguished it from the West and Christianity (Said 1978). For example, *The Arabian Nights*, a collection of short stories and narratives compiled over

decades, fascinated Western audiences during the eighteenth century. Similarly, the nineteenth century gave rise to Orientalist art, such as Eugène Delacroix's *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment* (1834), Vernet's *The Arab Tale Teller* (1833), or Jean-Léon Gérôme's *Snake Charmer* (1870). Orientalist scholars, artists, and writers produced inaccurate and highly stereotypical images and narratives representing Arabs, Muslims, and the Middle East as backward yet exotic, highly sexualized yet oppressed, and as fanatical and dangerous. Modern-day movies, such as *The Dictator* (2012), *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), and *American Sniper* (2014) continue to depict the Middle East, Arabs, and Muslims and continue to rely on that hegemonic framework.

Islamophobia is the second ideological pillar of anti-Muslim racism. The term *Islamophobia* was popularized by the *Runnymede Trust* (1997). Though initially defining Islamophobia as an irrational fear, dread, or hatred of Islam, an updated definition is as follows:

Islamophobia is any distinction, inclusion, or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslim) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing recognition, enjoyment or exercise, or an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life. (Elahi and Khan 2018)

With an emphasis on the consequences of Islamophobia rather than individual prejudices, this definition more clearly fits within an anti-Muslim racism framework. Islamophobia contributes to a homogenized and essentialized view of Islam as a radical and violent religion. As an ideology, Islamophobia perpetuates a distorted fear of Muslims as unwelcome foreigners and dangerous terrorists (Zopf 2018). For example, President Donald Trump's call for a ban on immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries can directly be attributed to this fear of Muslims. Trump signed *Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States* in January 2017, which banned admission from Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen. While a district judge ruled the ban unconstitutional in February 2017, there remains a series of battles between the Trump administration, community activists, and federal courts, culminating in the Supreme Court agreeing to hear oral arguments concerning the immigration ban. While Islamophobia provides the justification for such a ban, the fear is manifestly overstated, as the total number of people killed by immigrations from those seven countries since 1975 is zero (Nowrasteh 2017).

Orientalist and Islamophobic ideologies are collectively held beliefs and assumptions, including stereotypes, that contribute to pervasive and negative stereotypes that essentialize and homogenize Arabs, Muslims, and the Middle East. As a defining feature of anti-Muslim racism, these two ideologies lead to increased fear of Muslims, incite violence directed toward Muslims, and often justify discrimination in social, political, and state-based policies targeting Muslims.

Structures of Anti-Muslim Racism: War on Terror and the U.S. State

On September 11, 2001, terrorists hijacked four planes, two taking down New York City's World Trade Center towers, a third hitting the Pentagon in Washington, DC, and a fourth crashing in a field in Pennsylvania. Nearly 3,000 people died in these attacks perpetrated by known terrorist group al-Qaeda. Soon after the attacks, President George W. Bush announced a U.S.-led war on terrorism. Since 9/11, the United States has been involved in long-standing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, despite killing Osama bin Laden, lead orchestrator of 9/11, in 2011. These wars, along with domestic surveillance and detention policies, have been justified in the name of national security.

Though the term *war on terrorism* appeared as early as the 1980s in response to a series of terrorist attacks in Lebanon, Europe, and the United States, it was not until 9/11 that a global war on terrorism, led by the United States, became an institutionalized and state-sponsored system of surveillance, detention, and war. Although this current “War on Terrorism” ostensibly targets domestic and foreign terrorist organizations, scholars have noted how domestic policies have indiscriminately targeted U.S. citizens, mostly of Arab descent and/or Muslim faith (Cainkar 2010).

Shortly after 9/11, the PATRIOT Act (2002) was passed, authorizing increased measures to prevent and deter terrorism against the United States. The federal government increased funding for antiterrorist programs, including enhancing the capabilities of FBI surveillance and screening, especially for their ability to secure FISA warrants used for wiretaps and monitoring of electronic mail. Altogether, nearly fifteen new governmental policies and laws targeted Muslims as potential terrorists. Soon after 9/11, thousands of Arabs and Muslims—even U.S.-born citizens—were brought in for questioning, some detained without official charges having been established (Cainkar 2002). In 2002, the Department of Homeland Security was established, and the NSEERS, or National Security Entry-Exit Registration System, created protocol for monitoring individuals entering and exiting the United States. As part of the system, Homeland Security, along with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), began collecting fingerprints, facial photographs, and personal information recorded (Cainkar 2002). By June 2003, nearly 83,000 Arabs and/or Muslims had been registered through NSEERS (Bayoumi 2006). Although NSEERS has officially ended, President Trump’s call for extreme vetting and a travel ban on several Muslim-dominant countries rests on the same state polices, agencies, and language.

While Arab and Muslim organizations and individuals continue to be surveilled and questioned by the FBI and Homeland Security, racial profiling in airports by TSA has risen in the past decade (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2018). Phrases such as “flying while brown,” “flying while Arab,” and “flying while Muslim” have entered the common lexicon in the same way as “driving while black” (Baker 2002; Blackwood, Hopkins, and Reicher 2015; Chandrasekar 2003). According to Schildkraut (2009), support for “counterterrorism profiling” is higher than traditional forms of racial profiling, and stories like Mohamed Ahmed’s have become more commonplace. On July 20, 2016, Ahmed was singled out by an American Airlines flight attendant who announced his seat number and said, “I’ll be watching you.” Ahmed was eventually removed from the plane (Revesz 2016). Heightened surveillance by TSA, flight attendants, and other passengers constitutes a form of “terror profiling” in which Muslims—and those appearing to be Muslim—experience “selectively negative treatment by both government and private entities of individuals and groups thought to be associated with terrorist activity, based on race, ethnicity, national origin, and/or religion” (Chon and Arzt 2005). Combining elements of skin color, religious dress, name, national origin, and/or language, terror profiling challenges Muslims’ belonging in public places, especially airports. The U.S.-led war on terrorism has contributed to several state-based policies and structures that surveil Muslims in the United States and contribute to experiences of marginalization, discrimination, and unequal treatment.

Victimized by Anti-Muslim Terrorism: Microaggressions, Hate Crimes, and Discrimination

CAIR has recently reported 2,599 bias incidents against Muslims, including 359 experiences of verbal or physical assaults, 300 hate crimes, 348 encounters with Customs and Border Patrol, 225 workplace

discriminations, and 270 harassment complaints lobbed at the FBI (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2018). In this section, you will explore three spheres in which anti-Muslim racism impacts Muslims in the United States. From verbal harassment and physical assaults to institutionalized discrimination, Muslims in the United States experience racism.

Daily Encounters: Microaggressions

Microaggressions are brief, often daily, encounters where Muslims experience verbal and/or behavioral harassment designed to convey an unwelcoming or hostile attitude, challenge their sense of belonging, or erode their sense of safety and security (Noble 2005). Nadal et al. (2010) define religious microaggressions as “subtle behavior and verbal exchanges (both conscious and unconscious) that send denigrating messages to individuals of various religious groups” (Nadal et al. 2010). These encounters take place in schools and at work, in restaurants and the airport, and on the street and contribute to heightened levels of stress and anxiety, as well as negative health outcomes (Jasinskaja-Lahi, Liebkind, and Perhoniemi 2006).

Microaggressions range from subtle forms of avoidance to explicit forms of harassment, including physical assault. Muslims, and those perceived to be Muslim, can, and often do, experience all forms of microaggression. In my own work, I found some Egyptians were asked if they owned a camel or lived in a tent. The Orientalist stereotype evident here communicates a romanticized and exotic view of Egypt stuck thousands of years in the past. A more common microaggression involves answering “Where are you from?” This question, which assumes they are immigrants, challenges Muslims’ belonging in the United States, especially for those who have been born and raised here. Additionally, Muslims often face negative—and incorrect—assumptions about their religion. Being told to go back home or being called a terrorist reminds Muslims that they are not welcome in the United States (Zopf 2018). Daily encounters where their belonging is challenged, their religious faith is denigrated, and their personal space and safety are violated demonstrate the pervasiveness of anti-Muslim racism.

Hate Crimes

The FBI defines hate crime as a violent or property crime that is “motivated in whole or in part by the offender’s bias against race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity” (FBI Year). A nineteen-year-old Muslim woman wearing a hijab was violently attacked in a Detroit hospital. Victims of hate crimes [...] have their sense of safety and security taken away (CBS News 2018). While 2001 remains the year with the highest number of reported hate crimes against Muslims, the previous two years have seen a rapid increase. According to FBI statistics, there were 307 hate crimes against Muslims in 2016 and 257 in 2015. This two-year average of 282 per year represents a 122 percent increase over the previous 13-year-average of 127 from 2002 to 2014. This surge, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, can in part be attributed to President Donald Trump’s inflammatory discourse on Muslims during his presidential campaign, especially his call for a Muslim ban on immigration (Splcenter.org 2017). Additionally, the SPLC has reported a rise in anti-Muslim hate groups since 2016, especially the rise in ACT for America chapters across the United States (Splcenter.org 2017). While hate crimes remain relatively rare, the past two-year increase in hate crimes suggests that anti-Muslim racism is not likely to disappear anytime soon.

Discrimination in Employment and Housing

Although Muslims in the United States have comparative educational attainment, income levels, and employment levels, studies show that Muslims experience discrimination in employment and housing (Mohamed et al. 2017). Using field audits, Widner and Chicoine (2011) randomly assigned both White-sounding and Arab-sounding résumés to 265 jobs over a 15-month period. They found that White-sounding names, such as John Mueller, received a callback 5.25 percent of the time, while Arab-sounding names, such as Abd al-Malik Khalil received a callback only 1.89 percent of the time (Widner and Chicoine 2011). Similarly, using an experimental design, Nausheen et al. (2014) found that participants viewed women wearing a hijab less employable than women without a veil (Nausheen, Masson, and Pennington 2014). Additionally, Padela et al. (2016) found that 14 percent of Muslims reported religious discrimination in their workplace. These studies suggest Muslims are facing discrimination in employment at various points (Padela et al. 2016). From initial application, Arab- and/or Muslim-sounding names are receiving fewer interview offers, Muslim women in a hijab are viewed as less employable, and once hired, Muslims may expect some level of religious discrimination.

Similar studies have found that Muslims may find trouble finding housing because of discrimination. Gaddis and Ghosal (2015) responded to 560 “roommate-wanted” advertisements in Los Angeles, New York, Detroit, and Houston with both White- and Muslim-sounding names. They found that in every city, White-sounding names received more replies, with the biggest in New York. Just as residential segregation by race reduces the level of integration and inclusion for many Blacks and Hispanics, limited housing choices further isolates many Muslims in the United States (Gaddis and Ghoshal 2015).

Case Study: #PunishaMuslim

A series of anonymous letters sent to six communities in London proclaimed April 3, 2018, “Punish a Muslim Day” (Joseph 2018). The vitriolic rhetoric in these letters warned Europe’s and North America’s “White majority” they were in danger of being “over-run by those who would like nothing more than to do us harm and turn our democracies into Sharia led police states.” In the letters, the author assigned a point system that included verbally harassing a Muslim, removing a Muslim woman’s hijab, physically assaulting a Muslim, burning or bombing a mosque, and other hateful and violent actions. The hateful message illustrates both long-held fears and prevailing stereotypes of Muslims as unwelcome foreigners, religious fundamentalists, and jihadi terrorists. These Islamophobic and racist letters were met with immediate rejection and heightened awareness by police departments, community organizations, and mosques. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the largest Muslim American advocacy organization in the United States, released the following statement in a community advisory:

While the “Punish a Muslim Day” threat seems to target British Muslims exclusively, it would only be prudent to increase security at Islamic institutions and in public spaces, and to remain vigilant to any potential bias-motivated actions. (Council on American-Islamic Relations 2018)

Echoing this call for vigilance, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee similarly released a statement saying:

Originating in London, where they were left at the steps of several mosques, the fliers have alarmed communities across the U.S. From a school district in Vermont to the Chicago Police Department, authorities are worried that the planned day—Tuesday, April 3—may lead to hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims and anyone suspected of being Arab and/or Muslim (American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee 2018).

Additionally, social media responded with the competing message of #LoveAMuslimDay, complete with points for such actions as buying a Muslim a coffee, inviting a Muslim to your home, and buying a *hajj* package for a Muslim family (Khatami 2018). Fortunately, April 3, 2018, did not see any major spike in violence against Muslims, yet the fear and trepidation felt by the Muslim community have not abated as anti-Muslim sentiment in Europe and the United States continues to rise, and Muslims, and those perceived to be Muslim, have faced increased violence and discrimination (Elahi and Khan 2018). Though #PunishAMuslim did not produce a day filled with violence against Muslims, the letters—and especially the message contained within them—serve as a powerful example of anti-Muslim racism.

Conclusion

While #PunishAMuslim was likely penned by a single individual with clearly prejudicial attitudes toward Muslims, the message conveyed in that letter called upon collective feelings of Muslims as racial others, unwelcome foreigners, and dangerous terrorists. The author employed ideologies of Orientalism and Islamophobia to stir people's fear of Muslims into actions targeting individual Muslims, Islamic institutions, and the *umma* (global Islamic community) more generally. Thus, #PunishAMuslim is but one example of how the ideology and structure of anti-Muslim racism operates and can potentially impact Muslims in the United States and beyond. Because anti-Muslim racism cannot be reduced to individual prejudice or solitary acts of harassment or violence, Muslims of all phenotypes, national origins, and ethnic ancestries collectively shoulder these attacks. This reading, thus, extends our understanding of race and racism beyond merely skin color, illustrating how religion intersects with the beliefs, practices, and structures of racism.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. What experiences do you have with Muslims? How have these contributed to your views and understandings of Islam and/or Muslims?
2. How does viewing the experiences of Muslims in the United States through the lens of racism expand our understanding?

Exploratory Research Questions

1. How are the experiences of Muslims in the United States similar to and different from other racialized groups, such as Blacks, Latinx, Native Americans, and/or Asian Americans?
2. Watch the following YouTube videos: *Muslim Demographics* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-3X5hIFXYU>; BBC's *Muslim Demographics: The Truth* <https://www.youtube.com/>

watch?v=mINChFxRXQs. What do you notice about the number of views for each video? Considering the information presented, the source, and the number of views, reflect on how social media contributes to the spread of misinformation about Islam and Muslims. What are the potential consequences of such inaccurate information?

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Race, Ethnicity, and Migration in the Context of Care Work

Tina Wu

Work and labor inequalities in society are profoundly shaped by race and ethnicity, migration, and gender. One example is domestic work, work that is performed in or for the home. Such work includes activities such as household cleaning and maintenance, food preparation, child care, and care for the elderly or disabled. When domestic work is performed in or for a private household for a wage, it is considered domestic labor, one of the oldest forms of paid work in society (Daniels, 1987; England, 2005).

Domestic work is commonly associated with care work and reproductive work, because they, too, are often performed in private homes. Care work entails providing care to other people, whether paid or unpaid. Examples of unpaid care work include the care parents provide to children or the care family members give to the elderly or disabled. Jobs that entail care work include those performed by teachers, nurses, doctors, and therapists. Reproductive work, a related concept, involves activities that help to sustain people on a daily and intergenerational basis. Such activities may include activities associated with child care, such as preparing children for school, and elder care, such as scheduling doctor appointments. Reproductive work, too, may be unpaid and informal, or paid. These terms, *domestic work*, *care work*, and *reproductive work* are often synonymous and are conceptually linked.

What these work categories have in common is that, with rare exceptions, these kinds of work typically offer low financial rewards and limited, if any, labor protections on the job. In many cases, these kinds of work are also socially devalued or invisible. For example, the unpaid care work performed by mothers is considered devalued in societies with limited paid maternal leave policies in workplaces. The babysitters and nannies who are paid to care for children are paid wages that typically range from just above minimum wage to much under the minimum wage. Their work is “precarious” in that they often cannot anticipate their work hours or count on a steady income (Kalleberg, 2009). Furthermore, today, these workers are either not protected by labor regulations—such as those governing legal minimum wage, sick

pay, protection from workplace abuse—or, when they are, cases of violations remain unreported or uninvestigated.

Scholars agree that domestic work and associated forms of work are socially devalued, low paid, and precarious because of long-standing gendered divisions of labor. The work of taking care of a household and family members has traditionally been women's responsibilities. While women and men historically worked side by side to sustain a livelihood (for example, tending to, slaughtering, and cleaning livestock, tanning leathers) (Davis, 1983), by the 19th century, American households—particularly White middle- and upper-middle-class ones that could afford it—emphasized a division of labor by gender. Men were considered breadwinners, working outside the home in paid jobs and bringing home paychecks that supported the entire family. Women were considered “angels of the house,” working inside the home, doing the unpaid work of cleaning and caregiving that sustains and reproduces family life. This gendered division of labor renders the unpaid work of women invisible to society. It does not bring a wage, making women economically dependent on men, and until the last few decades, was not recognized in divorce proceedings. Even today, much of this work remains informal and unaccounted for or undervalued in public policies, or lack thereof, like paid family leave for new parents or caregivers of the elderly or disabled. In summary, domestic work has a history of being associated with women and being unpaid and undervalued (Daniels, 1987; Duffy, 2011).

While domestic work has been shaped by the context of gender, it has also, simultaneously, been shaped by race and ethnicity and migration. Differences in women's racial and ethnic identities, and personal and group experiences of migration, influence women's specific experiences with both paid and unpaid domestic work. Scholars and theorists observe that domestic work has been further divided in society into two categories: nurturant and non-nurturant work. Nurturant work refers to work that is interpersonal and relational and that relies on complex skills in attending to the emotional needs of others—such as teaching or caregiving. Non-nurturant work, in contrast, refers to work that is menial, repetitive, and/or dirty—such as scrubbing floors or doing laundry. Domestic work and its related categories of care work and reproductive work often entails nurturant and non-nurturant components. Taking care of children, for example, may involve teaching as well as changing dirty diapers and cleaning soiled clothing. Sociologists and historians have found that the distribution of nurturant and non-nurturant components of domestic work has not been even; it has followed local patterns of racial and ethnic inequality, patterns that exist to this day. In the United States, enslaved women, immigrant women, and women from minority racial or ethnic groups were historically disproportionately tasked with the non-nurturant, “dirty” components of domestic work, while native-born White women performed the nurturant work. Today, immigrant women and women of color (including women brought involuntarily to the country for work) continue to perform domestic work, and especially non-nurturant domestic work, at a disproportionate rate (Duffy, 2011; Glenn, 1992, 2002).

In the United States, geography and history have played a large role in shaping the distinct work experiences of African American, Latina American, and Asian American women as well as that of White women of European origin. In the 19th century, European immigrant women, particularly those of Irish and German origin, were commonly employed as domestic servants in the Northeast. Meanwhile, in the South, African American women constituted a “servant caste” working for White households. Up until the First World War, 90 percent of African American women employed in nonagricultural work were employed in domestic labor. In the Southwest, Chicanas (U.S.-born and immigrant women of Mexican origin) were disproportionately employed in domestic labor. In the Far West, particularly in California and Hawaii, Chinese and Japanese immigrants, women and men, were commonly employed in this line of work. Asian men became involved in domestic work because of gender imbalances in immigration (in the 19th century, most East Asian

immigrants to the United States were men seeking work; women remained in the home countries) and the race-based exclusion of these men from other jobs. During this period, the growing professions of medicine and nursing in the United States explicitly excluded women and African Americans from their ranks. Instead, many African American women were relegated to specifically nonmedical caring and domestic service jobs. These patterns in domestic work continued into the 20th century, as local immigrant populations and racial and ethnic prejudices determined the supply of workers for cheap domestic labor on one hand and the lack of alternative jobs for these workers on the other (Boris and Klein, 2012; Glenn, 2002).

In the late 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, immigrant women and women of color continue to perform domestic work and care work at disproportionately higher rates than other groups. These patterns are true across jobs in house cleaning, child care, and elder care. Sociologists have documented the working conditions of Latinas working as domestic workers and nannies in California, black Caribbean women employed as nannies in New York, and home care aides for the elderly from across racial and ethnic groups in the Midwest. They have found that in addition to low wages, unpredictable pay, and lack of job security and employer-provided benefits, these workers also sometimes experience isolation, emotional or physical abuse, surveillance, and racial discrimination on the job. Due to precarious immigration status, some workers are especially vulnerable to exploitation (Brown, 2011; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Stacey, 2011).

However, these women are not simply victims. Researchers have also documented the ways domestic workers and care workers utilize social networks to share information, pool resources, and protect one another from abuse. For example, drawing on racial and ethnic ties, immigrant women use public spaces like parks and playgrounds to buffer against the isolation of caring for children in private homes. These communities become spaces to learn about job opportunities, give or receive financial loans, and organize local social and labor movements. Immigrants and women of color actively find ways to make meaningful connections at work, despite the isolation, precariousness, and prevalence of abuse (Armenta, 2009; Brown, 2011).

These communities build on workers' sense of shared identity, often rooted in racial and ethnic familiarity, shared language, and countries or regions of origin. Movements such as Domestic Workers United, a founding member of the National Domestic Workers' Alliance, have grown out of these local communities to organize toward political action, such as demands for legislative labor protections. These activities have led to local, state-level, and national movements, and are among some of the most prominent social and labor movements in the country today.

One of the tasks these movements must accomplish is building collective identity across racial, ethnic, and immigrant groups. In many parts of the country, U.S.-born and White women participate in the same labor market with immigrant women and women of color, performing caring jobs such as nannies and home care aides. Transcending these identity boundaries can be challenging to organizing, particularly when the workers come from vastly different personal backgrounds and have different priorities. For example, while Domestic Workers United and National Domestic Workers' Alliance have vocally aligned with other movements for racial justice and immigration reform, organizations like Nannypalooza, an international nanny conference with corporate sponsors, professional workshops, conference attendance fees, and podcasts, prioritize professionalization, which especially appeals to U.S.-born White workers. In order for organizations like NDWA to achieve large-scale, broad-based organizing, they must appeal to disparate workers with different priorities, which first requires an understanding of how workers think about their identities in relation to their work (Goldberg, 2014).

In a study conducted between 2012 and 2013, I compared the work experiences of two groups of women working as nannies: one mostly immigrant women of color (Black, Latina, and Asian) with high school-level or equivalent education or less, and the other mostly White, U.S.-born women with college-level education or more (Wu, 2016). I relied on in-depth interviews with thirty-two nannies working in the Northeastern United States. I found that they share some precarious aspects of the job, such as low wages and uncertain work hours, but immigrant workers and nonwhite workers are more likely to experience vulnerability to discrimination and abuse. Immigrants and women of color, confronting historical and present-day social contexts of disrespect and discrimination, use stories of resistance to proudly defend their personal dignity and the value of their work. In contrast, U.S.-born women, White women, and/or women from middle-class or upper-middle-class households report embarrassment, stigma, and shame from working as nannies. They feel they have, or ought to have, other employment options, and they are more likely to downplay or hide their jobs from their friends and family or distance themselves from their work, labeling it temporary. I suggest that broad-based mobilization of care workers requires understanding the attitudes and self-concepts of a diverse range of workers.

Self-concept refers to one's overarching image of oneself, and it is achieved as a compromise between one's personal identity, which is self-designated, and one's social identity, which is ascribed or attributed by others. This process has been termed identity work: "the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" (Snow and Anderson, 1987; Snow and McAdam, 2000). These concepts are useful for comparing the experiences of two different groups of nannies.

I conducted my study by visiting local parks and playgrounds in upper-middle-class and affluent residential neighborhoods of a city's downtown area. The nannies I interviewed for the study represented a diverse range of backgrounds, falling into two broad categories. In one group were mostly U.S.-born White women in their 20s and 30s. They spoke English as their native language, and many either finished college or were in college at the time of the interview. Many had been working as nannies for a few years. Some had started during college. One respondent had worked as a nanny for the past 13 years. In another group were mostly immigrant women of color. They were Black, Latina, or Asian and in their 30s to 50s. They spoke English as a second language with varying degrees of proficiency. None held a college degree, and one woman identified her immigrant status as undocumented. A couple explained they had been undocumented in the past while working as nannies. In this group, respondents reported having worked as nannies for a few to over 20 years. Some reported having worked in other caretaking settings; for example, as home health aides for the elderly. While a few respondents in each category did not fully conform to these cleavages—for example, there were U.S.-born White women who were not college educated—these two categories are consistent with findings in other comparable cities and are useful for analysis. Finally, all of the respondents were women, and the vast majority worked for White employers and White children at the time of the interview. Their employers were mostly professionals who worked full time. At the time of the interviews, the respondents were typically working full time—about 30 to 40 hours a week—for one family. They were not live-in nannies, although some had worked as live-in nannies in the past. A few were not working as nannies at the exact time of the interview, but had recently worked as full-time nannies. The respondents drew from their experiences with their employers at the time of the interview as well as from past experiences with other families.

According to my interview schedule, I asked questions along some key themes, including: how respondents found their jobs, how they came to do this kind of work, how they felt about their work and

their current jobs, their view on childrearing, their views on unions and labor and/or political organizing, and details about their pay rates, job benefits, and contracts (if any). The interviews typically lasted sixty to 90 minutes each and were digitally audio recorded and later transcribed for analysis. In subsequent analyses of the data, salient themes that emerged included: stigma of care work, racial and ethnic discrimination, and framing the work as temporary or “just for now.” I coded for these themes in the interview data to look for patterns, which are presented here. I use pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the respondents and their employers. Inconsequential details have been removed or changed.

Comparing the two groups, I found that both groups of nannies experience the precarious nature of the work. In both cases, the respondents were paid about \$13 to \$16 an hour, or \$500 to \$600 a week. The majority did not have contracts, did not receive medical benefits from their employers or other benefits, such as overtime pay, sick days, or paid time off. They all reported having uncertain work hours and schedules, which often caused anxiety because of the uncertain income week to week. In addition, some discussed the uncertain terms of the job and job responsibilities and pay cuts, cutbacks, or job termination with sometimes little or no notice. While most of the respondents worked about thirty to forty hours per week, many reported experiencing these uncertainties that are common in this line of work. As a result, several hold or have in the past held other part-time jobs in addition to their primary jobs as nannies. These other jobs include other caretaking jobs, office temp jobs, online sales, and short-term creative work such as in acting and theater. All in all, respondents in both groups reported experiencing uncertainty that is characteristic of precarious work.

For example, Deliah, a 29-year-old White woman who was born and raised in the United States and holds a bachelor's degree in English and Film Studies, recounts an experience working for a family whose child was about to enter preschool:

For about three weeks, my hours had been cut in half, so I was only getting paid for half. There was no discussion of—Sometimes she [the employer and mother of the child] would just cut my hours for a week. This was three weeks, and I was like, “Uh, all right, is it going to be like this forever now, or ...” And she said, “Oh! I’ve been meaning to talk to you about that. Now that Jamie’s in preschool, we just don’t really need you as much.”

Deliah describes this experience as frustrating, as it led to unanticipated reduction of her income. This experience is common for nannies. Even permanent reduction of work hours, such as in this case, can happen with little advance notice. These occurrences create both feelings of uncertainty about one’s pay and actual fluctuations of income.

Immigrant women, particularly those with uncertain immigration status in the United States, are substantially more vulnerable to precarious working conditions and abuse. Mirabel is a 28-year-old woman from Guatemala who immigrated to the United States when she was 20 years old. She was brought to this country by a former employer under the pretense of working as a live-in au pair in their home in the suburbs. Mirabel was not employed through an au pair program or agency and came to the country on a tourist visa. When her tourist visa expired, she continued to live and work in her employer’s home without a contract and without friends or family in the United States. She reported working in isolation and fear:

I remember just working and being left with the baby. There was no sense of orientation ... I was pretty much working 17 hours a day, 7 days a week. I was being paid \$150 per week, cooking, cleaning, taking care of the children, laundry, gardening, taking out the trash ... I was put to clean the floors with hot buckets of water pretty much by hand—all

five bedrooms, three floors, huge house, cooking for the whole family, washing the dishes ... After a while, I started feeling depression. I lost a lot of hair. I developed arthritis in my hands. For a year, I was [completely] isolated ... It was horrible. I was scared. I thought I was going to be judged over time, and I always lived in fear.

Mirabel told her story in tears during her interview. She has since left that former employer and at the time of the interview she was working for a different family, with a written contract—one of the few respondents to have a contract at all. She is still undocumented, but she discussed having learned over the years how to advocate for herself and for other immigrants like her with the help of local nonprofit and community-based organizations. While Mirabel's story of exploitation and abuse is the most extreme of the interviews I conducted, it was not the exception. Other immigrant women also reported feeling isolation and fear, particularly as undocumented immigrants or immigrants on uncertain, short-term visas. They reported feeling pressured to accept low wages or abusive relationships with employers to a far greater extent than U.S.-born women.

The two groups also experience stigma and low social status associated with child care work. However, they experience the stigma and low status in different ways. Immigrant women of color report being discriminated against based on their racial and ethnic identities and immigrant status both by some employers and by the general public in public places such as parks and playgrounds. As nonwhite women taking care of White children in upper-middle-class neighborhoods, they are visibly marked as nannies. Some give explicit examples of slights or confrontations. Others report that it is an ever-present feeling of being watched or judged. For example, Stella, a 39-year-old black woman who immigrated to the United States from St. Vincent in the Caribbean says, "I used to think that they might say she looks young and she is black and working in the house. She doesn't have any education. She's just [an] uneducated nanny. I used to think like that, but now I'm done. I'm done." When I asked why she felt judged in public, she says, "It's just the negative feeling. It's just a feeling you have. No one ever said anything to me personally, but it's just the thought in your head."

Priya, a thirty-eight-year-old woman of Indian descent who immigrated to the United States from the Caribbean, recounted an interaction with a previous employer. The mother of a child she cared for once gave her a book to read. She says:

I read the book, and it was a hard book to read, and she said, "Well, my therapist was really impressed that you read that book." So I said, "Because I'm a nanny I'm dumb? Like I don't have any knowledge or anything?" It's like, I went to school, I have an education [Priya holds an associate's degree and some training to be a certified nursing assistant], you know what I mean? A lot of people see you and [when] you say you're a nanny, they kind of look down on you like you don't know much, you don't have much knowledge, and that you're limited in your views, but it's not true.

Like Stella, Priya is conscious of slights and judgment, particularly of the assumption that nannies are uneducated. She vehemently states, "I went to school, I have an education," resisting this assumption and saying that "it's not true." In her response to this interaction with her employer, she echoes Stella's sentiment: "I used to think like that, but now I'm done. I'm done." In each case, the respondents refuse to internalize perceived public opinion and disrespect.

These nannies' resistance of public scrutiny and disrespect occur even when their jobs may be on the line. Hanna is a 39-year-old woman from Morocco. She has dark hair and a tan complexion, and she clearly looks different from the blond, White baby she brings to public parks and playgrounds. Her physical characteristics and those of the child she takes care of reveal her role as a nanny, and she says that judgment from bystanders in public places is common. She says:

Something happened to me with one of the moms [a bystander in the park]. The girl that I'm watching, she took something from another child, and she was rough with it. It was time to show her—that's my job—how to share, how to play with other kids. I was like, come over here, we don't do this. You need to say sorry. This is what the family agreed with me, too. One of the moms [in the park], she came from the middle of nowhere, and she's like, "Oh, excuse me, I think you're too tough with her!" Like, you see, she wants to put something on me. She doesn't know the situation. She doesn't know what I'm saying to the little girl, and she just show [off] to the other moms that I'm doing something wrong ... I told her, "Please don't ever tell me what I'm doing. I can give you her mom's number and you can call her. Thank you!"

In this incident, Hana is aware that she was judged and her job performance was scrutinized by one of the mothers in the public park that parents and nannies frequent in the neighborhood. Instead of tacitly accepting this scrutiny and critique or avoiding conflict, Hana actively resists. She believes she is doing a good job, one that the family she works for agrees with, and asserts herself to the stranger in the park. I did not witness any of these interactions recounted by the respondents, so it is unknown what actually occurred in these instances. However, it is notable that in each case, respondents pride themselves in standing up for themselves and resisting perceived judgment or condescension, even when they may be risking their jobs.

In contrast, U.S.-born women with college degrees respond to the stigma of being nannies by tacitly accepting that stigma and distancing their identities from their jobs. They commonly reported feeling judged by family or friends for working as nannies, and that they feel they ought to be doing other, more respected jobs. Lisa, a 26-year-old White woman who holds a bachelor's degree in health care studies, reported that her family was "supportive" of her working as a nanny, but only because she was taking courses to go back to school to become a nurse. She says:

They support that I'm going back to school, so they know why I'm doing it. They know it's a passing thing, and I think if I said, "Yeah, this is what I'm going to do for a while," they'd be like, "Well, what are you going to do next?" They would push me.

Lisa agrees with these expectations that her family has set out for her. She says, "I think they [my family] expect more of me, and they know I expect more of myself." She continues "I sometimes look at it, like, how did I get here? I have a lot of friends that are very successful, and we all went to the same college, and we all started in the same place." Lisa has internalized the judgment of her friends and family. She implicitly agrees that working as a nanny is not "successful" enough, and that she ought to be doing "more." Lisa frames her job as a nanny as temporary work while she pursues going back to school.

Some U.S.-born women with bachelor's degrees emphasize other work that they do to deflect the stigma associated with working as a nanny. Deliah, the 29-year-old White woman who holds a bachelor's degree in English and film, says, "When I was working at the market research place [a part-time evening job she

held while working as a nanny], that was what I would say” when people asked her, “What do you do?” She continues, “I might have also said, ‘I also babysit during the day,’ or something like that ...” She explains why: “As much as I complain this whole time about them [her employers] not considering it to be my job, my real honest-to-goodness job—sure, I don’t have a degree in babysitting, but I may as well, you know, it’s my job—I almost don’t ... It’s hard for me to justify it as a ‘job.’” She says, “I know it’s difficult work. But in my mind, sitting at a desk in front of a computer is a job. Babysitting is like, I don’t know. Anybody can do that. Anybody can babysit.” Deliah’s internal dilemma reflects one that many US-born women, particularly those with college degrees, experience. She acknowledges the social devaluation of child care—“Anybody can babysit”—and while she intellectually disagrees with it—“I know it’s difficult work”—she also struggles to “justify it as a ‘job,’” especially because it does not look like the image of a typical white-collar job that she has in mind. As a result, she distances her identity from her work as a nanny, in order to maintain her image of herself.

For those U.S.-born White women, particularly those from middle- or upper-middle-class households who cannot easily justify the temporality of their work, working as a nanny elicits shame. Lars, a 32-year-old White woman whose father is a lawyer, grew up in an upper-middle-class household. She does not hold a bachelor’s degree, and her work as a nanny is a source of embarrassment. She says, “I think my family would rather I was doing something different ... My mom will be like, ‘I told your grandmother you own a store. And it’s like, ‘Ok mom, got it, you’re really embarrassed.’” She continues:

My mom is very concerned about what people think and how things look. She’s pretty not happy about it. I think she feels a little ashamed, like she can’t—like, even when people ask her what I’m doing, she’ll be like, “Oh, she owns a house.” She’s not trying to broadcast it. I think she thinks it’s not—which I can understand—I have mixed feelings about it. It’s not where I thought I’d be at 32.

Like Lisa, Lars feels social and family pressure to be doing other, more respectable forms of work. She has internalized this pressure, as evidenced by her statement, “I have mixed feelings about it. It’s not where I thought I’d be at 32.” Many U.S.-born White women who hold college degrees or who come from upper-middle-class households feel the stigma of working as nannies. It is seen as socially acceptable for young people, particularly as temporary work while pursuing more education, but as women age and as it becomes harder to emphasize the work’s temporality, respondents report feeling shame or embarrassment.

The experiences that U.S.-born White women report are markedly different from those of the immigrant women of color. While U.S.-born White women report distancing themselves from their work, which they know is socially devalued, immigrant women of color equally recognize the social devaluation of their work but respond with active resistance. Many U.S.-born White women, particularly those with college degrees, feel they have or should have other, more respectable job options; in contrast, many immigrant women of color, especially those without advanced degrees or credentials, recognize they must both actively defend their self-respect in the face of social devaluation as well as advocate for material conditions of their jobs, such as wages and job agreements. By comparing immigrant women of color and U.S.-born Whites, I show that these two groups think about their work and themselves differently, despite doing similar work. Although both groups experience child care as precarious and socially devalued work, I suggest that their responses may pit their efforts against each other. US-born White women’s internalization of social stigma and shame tacitly reinforces the notion that child care is menial work and, implicitly, work suited for immigrant women of color who are low on the status hierarchy. In order for collective organizing to reach broad-based mobilization,

I suggest that it is first important to recognize the identity work that different groups of workers engage in in response to the long-standing, historic social devaluation of care work in society. Students of social inequalities and race, ethnicity, and migration also benefit from these perspectives.

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Discussion Questions

1. Discuss instances where you have struggled to understand a social phenomenon from someone else's perspective.
2. Compare and contrast two theoretical perspectives within a specific social institution. For example, how would you approach racial profiling from a critical race perspective and an intersectional perspective? How do the theoretical approaches converge? How do they deviate?
3. In thinking about your experiences, what does your standpoint look like? How did you develop this standpoint?
4. Thinking of the various standpoints that exist, to which standpoint would you have difficulty connecting? For example, would you have difficulty relating to someone whose standpoint includes ability? Why or why not?

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Resources

Food Access Research Atlas: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/>.
Racial Dot Map: <https://demographics.coopercenter.org/racial-dot-map>.