

**Sociology 621/929**  
**Week 6: Class, Gender, Race**  
**October 6, 2014**

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It is impossible in a single lecture to really explore the complex problem of the interactions and intersections of class, race and gender, either as a theoretical problem or as an empirical/historical one. My goal here is to discuss some salient theoretical problems concerning class/race/gender and just touch on some of the interesting empirical implications. And remember: the point here is for this to help deepen our understanding of class analysis rather than to sketch a Grand Theory of Everything.

**I. Preliminary general considerations: setting the stage for the analysis.**

**1. The problem of laundry-list oppressions**

There is a tendency in some currents of radical theory to want to treat all forms of oppression symmetrically. One therefore frequently encounters lists of various sorts: sexism, racism, classism, ageism, ableism. In one sense this is a legitimate move: in terms of the lived experience and identity of people there is no a priori reason to regard any form of oppression as intrinsically “worse” than others, as more harmful than another. The oppression of people with handicaps can create harms as deep as class or gender. (When middle class kids asked in a survey whether they would prefer to be poor or be grossly obese without the possibility of losing weight, they say poor). Nevertheless, if the implication of the laundry list is that the specificities of the mechanisms of oppression are of secondary importance, or that all oppressions have the same *explanatory importance* for all problems, then I think this is a mistake.

The task of a critical theory of class, race, and gender then, is to understand the specificity of each of these and the nature of the causal interactions among them.

**2. Conceptual specificity and the problem of “essentialism”**

The first thing to note is that the theoretical specificity of a particular concept or category depends upon how it figures in some theoretical problem or question. To argue that a particular category has a particular *definition irrespective of its theoretical purpose* is, for some people, the sin of “essentialism”, but more often it is just sloppy thinking.

Two things should be classified together if it is the case that they identify the same kind of causal process within some social phenomenon under investigation. It may turn out when you push this that some commonsense, everyday distinctions dissolve, and other things which look very similar “on the surface” may in fact be very different. This also means that for different theoretical purposes different kinds of *conceptual lines of demarcation* and *aggregation* need to be drawn. Ultimately the issue, of course, is not so much which things for example get the tag “racial oppression” – there may be historical and linguistic (if not theoretical) reasons to use this label quite narrowly – but rather how we understand the *conceptual space* within which racial domination/oppression is located and gender relations/oppression is located. This is tough work and fraught with political passion in the case of racism and racial oppression.

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### A DIGRESSION ON DISCOVERING “SPECIFICITY”

The problem of properly elaborating the specificity of a concept is basically the task laid out in the Old Sesame Street ditty: “one of these things are not like the others, one of these things just isn’t the same...”. There was a funny version of this I heard on BBC Radio 4 in a spoof about Bush. Bush was given four things: a mouse, a turtle, rabbit and a waffle iron and was asked which of these was not like the other. He called up the Sesame Street hotline to discuss the matter:

Bush: “Well I think it is the turtle. It’s not like the others.”

Kermit: “Mr. President, I think it is the waffle iron”

Bush: “No, I don’t think it is the waffle iron. A waffle iron’s got a tail just like the bunny and the mouse. But the turtle doesn’t have a tail.”

Kermit: “I think it is the waffle iron because it isn’t alive. The other three are alive.”

Bush: “A waffle iron is alive. It smokes. You have to breathe to smoke.”

Kermit: “Mr. President. It doesn’t really have a tail. That is called an electric cord with a plug on the end. You put it in the wall socket.”

Bush: “Well, you can put a little mouse’s tail in a wall socket too. I bet it would smoke then also.”

Kermit: “Anyway, a turtle also has a tail, you just can’t see it under the shell”

Bush: “You’re joking, a little turtle really has a tail?”

Kermit: “Yes, under the shell”

Bush: “Well then, that doesn’t count because you can’t put it in a socket.”

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### 3. “Intersectionality” as a way of thinking about class/race/gender

In recent years the term “intersectionality” has entered the discussion of race/class/gender as a way of thinking about the way these (and other) forms of oppression operate in the world. When intersectionality is simply a new word to talk about causal interactions, then I think it is unproblematic. This is simply the claim that in the world people’s lives are always shaped simultaneously by class, race and gender (among other things), never simply by one, and for some problems the effects of each of these are contingent on the effects of others. This simply means that social causes do not simply have additive effects.

Let me explain this using gender and class interactions. The interactive effects thesis implies the following kind of model for an explanation of X:

$$\text{Explanandum } X = B_1\text{Class} + B_2\text{Gender} + B_3(\text{Gender} \times \text{class})$$

Example: in predicting income, gender has an effect, class has an effect, and there is an interactive effect. An example would be the observation that the difference between the average earnings of managers and workers is greater among men than among women.

In this general abstract model, there is also no universal presumption that class is “more important” than gender, i.e. that  $B_1 > B_2$ .

Note: A famous claim in the sociological literature on race is the “declining significance of race” thesis by William Julius Wilson. What does this thesis mean?

Race equation: Explanandum  $X = B_1\text{Class} + B_2\text{Race} + B_3(\text{Race} \times \text{class})$

- Strong version:  $B_2$  and  $B_3$  are declining over time.
- Weak version:  $B_2$  is declining over time. Race has weaker *additive* effects.

But sometimes intersectionality is a stronger claim that simply a thesis about structural interactions among distinct causal mechanisms. The claim is something like saying *class itself is inherently gendered*. The two are so entwined that it is impossible to separate out separate class and gender effects. This means that in principle one can never really talk about class as such; one must always talk about class and gender (and race and other relevant processes) as indissoluble, co-present, entwined processes. I have to say that I do not fully understand what this means, What does it mean to say that class is inherently gendered? Is to treat class and gender as something like elements in chemistry: The effects of water,  $H_2O$  cannot be understood as the effects of H and O as separate elements, but entirely as the effects of the specific forms of interaction of  $H + O$  in constituting the water molecule. This is close to arguing that in the equation above  $B_1$  and  $B_2$  are always zero. If this is what one really means, then it suggests we should drop the terms class and gender entirely and replace them with clender....

#### 4. What does “interaction” really mean?

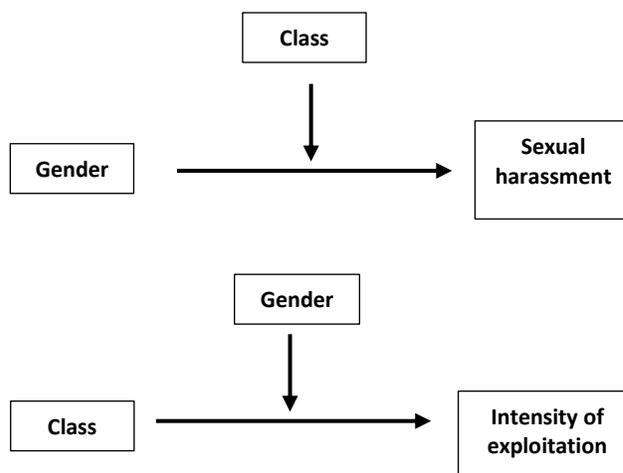
Here is how to think of the processes of interaction. Let’s take something which we think that gender helps explain and something class helps explain. (A similar illustration could be used for race). In both classes the idea is that gender or class mechanisms generate effects.

Core explanations:

- sexual harassment: Gender processes generate sexual harassment
- material exploitation: class processes generate material exploitation (extraction of labor effort).

“Interaction” then implies something like this:

- Sexual harassment: the intensity and forms of sexual harassment vary by class
- Material exploitation: the intensity and forms of exploitation of workers varies by gender



## II. The specificity of race and gender as forms of division/oppression/domination

So, the key thing to remember here is that we need to explore the concepts of race and gender with respect to the problem of studying their interactions with class.

### 1. Race

In the 2003 UN conference on Racism there was a resolution proposed by a number of delegations that “Zionism is a form of racism”. Many people regard this as an absurd statement; others regard it as capturing some underlying, deep theoretical unity between Zionism and other, more generally acknowledged forms of racism. The methodological problem of “specificity” involves providing a theoretical understanding of a particular form of social interaction so that we know when specific empirical cases should be treated as similar or different, as falling under the same broad category or not. This can be an arbitrary exercise in wordplay for political purposes, but can also be a more rigorous matter of figuring out how concepts fit together within theories.

Defining the theoretical specificity of racial oppression involves three sorts of tasks:

1. Specifying what is the abstract category within which “racism” would count as one specific type. This requires developing a real theory of this more abstract category.
2. Within this abstract category, specifying what distinguishes racism as a specific sub-type.
3. Figuring out which historically concrete forms of oppression are instances of racial oppression, which are not, which have some aspects of racial oppression, etc.

### *Community and Communal Identity*

Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel have an interesting proposal for how we should think of the conceptual category within which racial division is a specific example. The more abstract category is “communal identity”. The basic idea is this: at the very core of social life is the idea of “community” – the circle of people with which one regularly cooperates and feels bonds of trust and solidarity, the circle of people that provide the basic building blocks of social interaction and reciprocity. We are social animals; this is part of our evolutionary history. At its most fundamental level, the social cooperation of community is anchored in face-to-face relations and reciprocities reaching back to our hunting-and-gathering past. But now, of course, this fundamental idea extends to larger circles of people.

With this very general understanding, then, “Communal identity” refers to the criteria one uses to decide what sorts of people fall into this category of “community” and what sorts do not. One can have multiple communal identities in this sense, and the various kinds of community in which one’s life is embedded can have a shifting, fluid and potentially contradictory character.

### *Alienated community and communal oppression*

Defined in this way, community and communal identity need not imply anything about oppression; just trust, cooperation and sociability. Communal identity becomes the basis for oppression when it gets combined with mechanisms of domination and exclusion. One might want to call this an “alienated form of community”. Just as class can be thought of as an alienated form of the division of labor – i.e. an economic relation which gets linked to mechanisms of domination, exclusion and exploitation – and male domination is a form of alienated gender relations (i.e. the gender division of labor gets linked to mechanisms of

domination), so too can communal identity become a form of alienated solidarity. Ethnicity, religion, language, nationality, tribe, and other forms of communal identity all can, in certain situations, be alienated in this way and become sources of communal division, antagonism and oppression. Racial division is one specific form of such communal division.

*Racial oppression as a form of alienated communal relations*

Consider the following list of social divisions each of which in various times and places is a source of both conflict and – arguably – oppression:

- black and white in the US
- Jew and Muslim in Israel/Palestine
- anti-Semitism in Europe
- Catholic/Protestant in Northern Ireland
- Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda
- untouchable castes in India

Which of these constitute instances of *racial* oppression? You see that in the absence of a theoretical agenda and some explanatory purpose, the question is very hard to resolve.

Now, I will give a provisional elaboration of the specificity of racial oppression, but it is one whose boundary conditions – the criteria for what is included or not – may shift depending upon explanatory contexts. This is a bit more than a simple *definition*, for it includes some discussion of the conditions under which racial oppression is stable and extensive:

**i. Biological lineage.** Racial division is a *socially recognized distinction* between people based on *biological lineage*: you are born into a racial category by virtue of the racial category of your parents. It is an *ascriptive category*, although in some special cases there are socially validated ways of “escaping” a racial classification. Classification systems based on biological lineages are *socially constructed* rather than “natural”: *they always constitute a social transformation of the raw material of biologically-based lineages.* (Note the arbitrariness of the U.S. “one drop rule” – imagine a “one drop” whiteness-making rule).

**ii. Visible attributes.** Typically the biological lineage is linked to some socially recognized and symbolically salient *visible physical attribute* (technically: phenotypic differences), but this need not be the case. Anti-Semitism in Europe was not linked to any consistent, visible phenotypic characteristics, although there was always a stereotyped “Jewish look”. You could be blonde and blue-eyed and be a Jew.

**iii. Communal identity.** Racial classifications become subjectively salient divisions when they become embedded in communal identities of solidarity and reciprocity. Without that connection they are simply descriptive classifications of racial difference.

**iv. Exclusion and power.** Racial *division* becomes racial *oppression* when it corresponds to some form of socially-significant *exclusion*, typically in the form of economic exclusion, but also political and cultural forms of exclusion. “Exclusion” always implies some set of power relations which back up the exclusion – i.e. exclusion is not simply a voluntary, mutually agreed-upon consensual restriction of access to something.

**v. Stigma.** When racial division takes the form of racial oppression, the oppressed group is also invariably stigmatized, given an inferior social status, in the extreme case regarded

as an inferior type of human beings in the biological not just social sense (and sometimes even subhuman). It is possible that the stigmatization and status denigration can continue even if the exclusions have largely disappeared. The most striking example was anti-Semitism in Germany.

**vi. Racialized family.** Racialized communal identities will in general imply that racial divisions are mainly *between* families rather than *within* families. When inter-racial families become common this inherently undermines the stability of racialized classifications and solidarities. This is why anti-miscegenation rules or norms are part of racism.

### *Racism as a practice*

Another way of understanding this conceptualization is in terms of the idea of racism as a form of *social practice*. We will be talking a lot about this way of understanding social action when we discuss politics and ideology. “Practice” as I will use this term is a specific way of looking at human actions. A practice involves some kind of raw material which is transformed into some kind of product using means of production within specific social relations. The simplest case is economic practice: nature is transformed using means of production within the social relations of production into goods and services. Racial oppression then *involves transforming biological lineages into communal identities linked to systematic exclusion*.

Now, this provisional definition of the distinctively *racialized form of oppression* did not, directly, make any reference to class. But a class-relevant idea enters in criterion iv: exclusion. Remember that in the definition of exploitation one of the three principles was the exclusion principle, and the idea of social relations of production centers on rights and powers over resources, which are fundamental powers of exclusion.

## **2. The specificity of gender**

Gender, like race, is connected to biology. Neither of these, however, should be thought of as pre-social “natural” biological categories. Race is a transformation of biological lineage into socially salient classifications. Gender is a transformation of biological sex into normatively salient categories. At its core are the social practices built up around biological reproduction and the closely connected practices through which sexuality and sexual desire are produced and experienced. I think that biological reproduction is the more foundational issue around which gender is socially constructed. If one imagines a world in which extra-utero reproduction was possible and became standard, then even if sexual desire remain largely heterosexual, the inequalities connected to gender relations would be quite dramatically eroded.

Gender oppression and domination occur when forms of exclusion are connected to gender. These can be formally backed by the state, but even in the absence of state enforcement, culturally backed norms about gender can effectively function as mechanisms of exclusion.

## **3. Race and Gender and the connection to class**

Both race and gender oppression involve exclusions (and accompanying inequalities), especially in terms of access to power and dominant class positions. Both also involve the social construction of categories out of biological raw materials which link both gender and race to the problem of family formation and biological reproduction. Norms (and laws sometimes) against inter-racial marriage are integral to racial domination because of the role of biological lineage in

the very definition of race. This is why issues of sexuality figures strongly in both racial domination and gender domination.

The key conceptual connection of both race and gender to class centers on the problem of *exclusion*. All oppressions involve exclusions; this is what turns a social difference or demarcation into an oppression. Some of these have little directly to do with class. Being excluded from certain kinds of clubs or residential areas or restaurants is a harm, and it may have implications for class, but is not itself generally directly a connection of race/gender and class. However, the social exclusions involving access to power and dominant class positions directly link race and gender relations to class relations. Sometimes this is absolutely blatant as in slavery and late Jim Crow color bars, but also to rules about gender exclusions in inheritance. In more recent times the gender and race exclusions which tie race and gender to class operate less through formal legal and more through cultural practices and informal modes of exclusion. One of the reasons that both gender and race oppression have undergone such a rapid period of transformation in the last half century in the US and many other places is precisely because of the elimination of direct state enforcement of those exclusions most tied to class.

This does not mean that gender and race are in any sense “reducible” to class – they each have their own distinctive mechanisms which have genuine autonomy. But for both race and gender an important part of the way they generate harms is through their connection to class.

### III. The effects of gender and race on class: the problem of Functional Explanations

So far the discussion has revolved around the specificity of race and gender as forms of oppression and how class specifically intersects these relations. There is also the critical question of how gender and race affect class relations. Here I want to explain one specific aspect of this issue: the problem of functional explanations in Marxism. We will look much more closely at this in the discussion of the state, ideology and the theory of history.

A typical kind of Marxist explanation of gender and race looks like this:

- Gender: the unpaid labor of housewives is crucial for capitalism because it lowers the cost of reproducing the labor power of workers. Capitalism *needs* this kind of gender division of labor. This explains the fact that women work more in the home and men more in the paid labor force.
- Race: A unified working class is a threat to capitalism. Capitalism therefore needs to find sources of social division and antagonism within the working class. Racism is one of the most effective ways of dividing workers and undermining class solidarity. Racism is explained by the functions it fills for capitalism.

These are both “Functional explanations”: some property of a system – the gender division of labor, a racially divided working class – is explain by the beneficial effects of that property for the stability of the system. Engels famously proposed a somewhat different functional explanation for male domination: women were subordinated to me because this was necessary for the reliable inheritance of property to the children of fathers (because unless men controlled the fertility of women they could never be sure that they were the fathers of their own children).

These kinds of functional explanations are always vulnerable to a kind of sloppy just-so story telling. And they also tend to selectively ignore all the ways in which a given set of relations can

be dysfunctional: racial inequalities can generate huge overhead costs in mass incarceration and other deadweight losses; the traditional gender division of labor removes exploitable labor from the labor market and requires a family wage for male workers. While functional reasoning can be useful, it needs to be complemented with what can be called strategic or interest explanations. Functional outcomes don't just happen though some kind of Darwinian natural selection, they are the result of struggles and balances of forces as actors struggle to create or erode such functional relations.

#### **IV. Struggles for emancipation**

Inequality and oppression anchored in gender and race have autonomous, distinctive mechanisms. Neither are simply reflections of class domination. Racial and gender domination, oppression and inequality cannot be explained simply by the functions these fill for capitalism or class relations, nor by the interests of strategic actions by class-based actors. This is what it means to say that they are not "reducible" to class.

Still, the historical changes in the connection of race and gender to class relations have played an important role in shaping the possibilities of their transformation through struggle.

##### **1. Transformation of gender domination/oppression/inequality**

Here is the question to ask: Why have inequalities and domination connected to gender relations been so dramatically transformed in the last fifty years? Why now? We can point to the women's liberation movement and all sorts of struggles for rights and equality, struggles in workplaces and politics against discrimination and so on, but how do we explain why these occurred when they did and why they were so effective? This is where the specific problem of the connection of gender to class structures enters the analysis. Here is the stripped down version of the argument (perhaps most clearly elaborated in Robert Jackson's book, *Destined for Equality*):

- Changes in the nature of labor force requirements for literate labor increased dramatically in the post-WWII period.
- The most ready-available un-tapped supply of educated labor were women
- Employment opportunities for women began to increase
- University education also increased dramatically for a variety of reasons
- The increased employment opportunities for women had ramifications for power and inequality in the home/family
- This eroded the model of female domesticity
- By the 1970s the interests of powerful men, especially in business, in fighting for strong male domination and female exclusions in the public arena had declined
- This made struggles against exclusion more effective

There is a deep *dynamic asymmetry* here between class and gender: class structures have not become more vulnerable to significant emancipatory transformation as a result of the weakened connection between gender and class, but gender relations have become more transformable.

##### **2. The Transformation of racial domination**

A similar kind of story can be told about racial domination. Again: Why have inequalities and domination connected to race relations been so dramatically transformed in the US since the 1950s? Why in this period and not the 1910s or 1930s? Of course the civil rights movement is crucial – agency and struggles mattered, and without such struggle transformation would not

have occurred. And also – another “of course” – racism remains a powerful and pernicious source of harm and oppression: it has not disappeared. But the contours have been transformed and in certain critical respects, racism has been weakened. Why now?

As in the analysis of gender, the analysis of this problem centers on the changing connection between racial domination and class relations. David James’ research on sharecropping and racial oppression is a specific lays out this argument in an especially clear way.

**Core thesis:** The Southern racial state was instituted and stabilized because it was a solution to a serious problem in the post-civil war era. The problem was this: how to secure the extraction of surplus labor from peasants in a liberal democracy? This was an acute problem especially in cotton agriculture. Solution to the labor extraction problem = sharecropping. Problem = the need for coercive mechanisms to reproduce these relations, prevent coalitions with poor whites, prevent excessive labor migration (keep the peasants on the land). Racialized sharecropping with political disenfranchisement was the successful solution. This strategic reconstruction of the connection between race and class in a way stabilized the class structure. Implication: the destruction of that connection to class structure should render this specific form racial domination more vulnerable to challenge.

**Alternative hypothesis:** there was a pervasive, intractable culture of racism generated by slavery. As soon as the North withdrew, this southern racism was unleashed to restore racial domination, the driving force being white racist identities, prejudice, hatred, etc. The specific class component is not central to this dynamic.

**Empirical claim (David James):** if the class analysis thesis is correct, then two predictions:

- (i) The resiliency or fragility of the racial state would depend significantly upon its correspondence to the underlying material conditions linked to the class structure.
- (ii) Challenges to the racial state would be both easier and more likely to be successful when the class structure no longer functionally depended upon it.

### **Historical Trajectory of creation, stability, dissolution of the Southern Racial State**

- 1. material conditions at creation:** Dissolution of Slavery: manifest problems of surplus extraction, stabilization of labor force.
- 2. political conditions at creation: populist threat:** threat of black/white poor alliance | escalation of KKK
- 3. solution:** the creation of widespread sharecropping
- 4. Superstructural consolidation:** Jim Crow laws to disempower sharecroppers; vagrancy laws to enforce surplus extraction; etc.
- 5. New Deal Agriculture:** agricultural relief programs | unintended consequence of massive incentives from above which to eliminate sharecropping | acceleration of the dissolution of this form of class relations. By 1950s coercive extraction of surplus had almost disappeared.
- 6. Cold War & post-WWII US world position** | National geopolitical reasons to end racial state in the South
- 7. Resistance to destruction of racial state in late 1950s and 1960s:** greatest in those countries with the strongest legacies of sharecropping.

## V. The implications of race and gender for Emancipatory Critical Theories

To conclude I want to briefly discuss two issues: (1) the problem of the *explanatory* asymmetry between class and race/gender as forms of inequality, domination, oppression. (2) the ramifications for the kind of theory that has developed within the Marxist and Feminist traditions of emancipatory theory.

### 1. Normative symmetry and explanatory asymmetry in the interconnection of race, gender and class

The normative foundations of Marxist class theory are broader than simply the problem of class. At least as I understand these normative foundations, they call for human emancipation, not simply the elimination of class oppression. The egalitarian principle is “All people should have equal access to the material and social means necessary to live flourishing lives” and clearly racial and gender domination/inequality/oppression violate this principle. Even if in some sense or other one believes that eliminating class oppression is a precondition for other forms of liberation, the normative vision is a world free of oppression, not just class oppression. What the Marxist tradition does, then, is focus on one specific dimension of the emancipatory problem – class oppression – because of its importance and complexity. But as I have said, this commitment can itself be agnostic on the question of whether other forms of oppression are robustly reproduced autonomously from class or their reproduction is in critical respects anchored in their connection to class.

What I would argue, controversially I imagine, is that there is no reason to believe that there is also symmetry in the interconnections between race, gender and class in terms of the problem of emancipation. Thus, while it is true that in various ways gender inequalities may serve “functions” for capitalist class relations, those class relations are robustly reproduced through mechanisms that do not depend on gender domination. As a general proposition I think this is true for race as well: Capitalist class relations can be robustly reproduced even in the absence of racial divisions within the working class or racialized forms of super-exploitation. While it may be in the *interests* of capitalists to take advantage of these divisions and exclusions for purposes of increasing exploitation or weakening working class solidarity, the reproduction of the class system does not functionally require this. The basic point here is that there are multiple equilibria for stable, reproducible capitalism. In some of these capitalists are wealthier and have more unconstrained power than in others, so capitalists prefer some equilibria over others. A deeply divided working class can help capitalism reach the better equilibrium. But this is not the same as asserting that it is a functional requirement of capitalism as such that it be at the preferred equilibrium – the optimal balance of power for the interests of capital.

Capitalism has not become more vulnerable to dissolution by virtue of the progress that has been made against gender and racial inequalities and exclusions. But male domination especially has been rendered considerably more vulnerable because of the changing connection between gender and the class structure. For race the case is more complex, because the connection between race and class remains very strong, and this certainly contributes to the reproduction of racism. But even here there remains the relevant form of asymmetry: racism “needs” a connection between race and class to remain robust – it needs the forms of exclusion that tie race to class for its robust reproduction – but capitalism can survive perfectly well without racially-anchored super-exploitation and marginalization.

## 2. Marxism and Feminism as theoretical structures

The discussion here draws largely from my essay “Explanation and Emancipation in Marxism and Feminism”

### Marxism & Feminism as emancipatory critical theories

Recall how I defined an emancipatory critical theory in the first lecture of the semester: This is a social theory that analyzes existing institutions and practices in terms of an emancipatory alternative. Both Marxism & Feminism are emancipatory traditions of social theory in this sense. They are both grounded in a normative ideal of a world free of oppression; where they differ in these terms is the kind of oppression around which the theory revolves – class oppression in Marxism, and gender oppression in Feminism.

### The emancipatory visions

What, precisely, are the emancipatory visions of these two traditions?

**Marxism & classlessness.** Marx himself was fairly explicit in his characterization of the emancipatory ideal – a classless society. The institutional implementation of this ideal was much less clear, but the principle of the ideal was clear: a society without class exploitation and alienation, a society governed by the distributional maxim “to each according to need from each according to ability.” Capitalism, then, is to be analyzed from the vantage point of these ideals: how does capitalism block the realization of these ideals? What dynamics in capitalism point in the direction of the realization of this ideal of emancipation?

**Feminism & Emancipation.** The positive normative vision in feminism is perhaps less clear and contested among feminists. Is the emancipatory ideal *gender equality* or *genderlessness*? Does a radical egalitarianism within gender relations imply an obliteration of gender difference or just a valorization of gender difference? But whatever else feminists might believe about this, the emancipatory vision involves an end to inequalities of power, opportunity, and status built around gender relations.

*A side note on the normative foundations of gender emancipation:*

I think the most coherent position is in fact *genderlessness* in the following precise sense: gender is a social construction. It is a social transformation of sexual differences which are biologically-rooted into social differences between men and women that are culturally salient and *enforced* through various kind of gender-specifying norms. Genderlessness means the destruction of all gender-differentiated normative rules that govern and enforce expectations about the proper and appropriate roles or identities or behaviors of biological men and women. This does not mean the eradication of all difference between the modal man and woman; and it does not mean normative androgyny in the sense of normatively enforced rules which obliterate expressions of traits that are stereotypically called “masculinity” and “femininity”. What it means is that there would be no *socially enforced* association between masculine and feminine behaviors and dispositions and biological categories. Genderlessness is the withering away of socially sanctioned and normatively enforced expectations about how a man and a woman should behave by virtue of biological sex.

### The explanatory challenges

**The general problem:** In addition to elaborating normative foundations, a fully elaborated Emancipatory theory faces four interconnected tasks, as elaborated early in the semester:

1. *Diagnosis of Harms.* Demonstrating that existing social arrangements impose serious harms on people
2. *Emancipatory alternative.* Demonstrating that an alternative structure of relations in which such harms would be absent would be viable – that a social order with those institutions would actually work.
3. *Practical transformation.* Demonstrating that this alternative is achievable and providing an account of transformation – the process by which people can move from the present world to the alternative.

Both Marxism and Feminism make convincing cases for 1. They face dramatically different challenges in 2 and 3.

**Marxism:** It is easy to convince people that harms exist in capitalism and that they are caused by the social institutions of capitalism; what is hard is to convince people that a radical alternative is feasible and achievable. Both of these constitute huge theoretical challenges to anti-capitalists. The idea that a complex industrial society can be effectively run without markets and private ownership is a tough sell, and the idea that political forces could coalesce to accomplish this transformation is also difficult to make convincing. The relatively deterministic quality of Historical materialism helped solve both of these problems: capitalism is doomed, the vast majority of people would, in the face of the demise of capitalism, benefit from a radical democratic control of the economy, where there is a will there is a way, etc. The strongly deterministic tendencies within the Marxist tradition can be thought of as helping to solve the core explanatory challenge of a theory of anti-capitalist class emancipation.

**Feminism:** Feminists do not face the same challenge. Few feminists have ever worried about the question: is social integration and social order possible without male domination? Is a society of egalitarian reciprocity and equal power and opportunity for males and females viable? These questions are not posed because feminists more or less take for granted that male domination and the associated oppression of women are eliminable. Why is this seen as sufficiently obvious as to require little elaborate defense?

*Hypothesis:* the essential core of the emancipatory vision in feminism revolves around micro-level interactions, not macro-level institutions. To be sure, there are macro-institutions needed to accomplish and sustain the micro-level practices, but the moral vision is deeply anchored in micro-relations. And here, then, is the hypothesis: the possibility of stable, egalitarian, symmetrical, mutually empowering micro-level gender relations is something that people experience in prefigured ways within existing society. And further, people have the experience that struggling around these relations at the micro-level pushes them towards greater egalitarian symmetry. This reality of micro-gender, then, underlies a more voluntaristic agent-centered theory.

**Can one imagine a macro-level unraveling of gender emancipation?** Demographic collapse as a possibility. This is not entirely a far-fetched idea: perhaps it is the case that in the absence of asymmetries in opportunities and power between men and women, fertility would drop below 2.1 per woman, and this would lead eventually to demographic collapse unless some new countervailing mechanisms were created (like strong pro-natalist incentives). We already observe very low fertility in developed economies which have significantly eroded male domination and dramatically expanded the power and opportunities for women. In some countries fertility is well under 1.5 per woman. Perhaps this is a consequence of greater equality, and thus poses a problem of sustainability.

**Addendum:**  
**The following sections appeared in previous lectures**

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## CLASS AND GENDER

### I. Introduction: Standard Feminist Critiques

Both Marxism and Feminism are emancipatory theoretical traditions. Both identify and seek to understand specific forms of oppression in the existing world -- gender oppression, particularly of women, in the case of feminism; class oppression, particularly of workers, in the case of Marxism. Both theoretical traditions explore the consequences of the oppression on which they focus for other social phenomena, and both seek to understand the conditions which contribute to the reproduction of the oppression in question. Both believe that these forms of oppression should be and can be eliminated. Both see the active struggle of the oppressed groups at the core of their respective theories as an essential part of the process through which such oppression is transformed: the struggles of women are central to the transformation of gender oppression, the struggles of workers are central to the transformation of class oppression. And intellectuals working within both traditions believe that the central reason for bothering to do social theory and research is to contribute in some way to the realization of their respective emancipatory projects.

Given these parallel moral and intellectual commitments, one might have thought that Marxists and feminists would work closely in tandem, mutually seeking to understand the complex ways in which class and gender interact. With some notable exceptions, this has not happened. Indeed, far from trying to forge a close articulation of Marxist analyses of class and feminist analyses of gender, in many ways the most sustained challenge to class analysis as a central axis of critical social theory in recent years has come from feminists. The characteristic form of this challenge involves the accusation that Marxist class analysis is guilty of one or more of the following sins:

1. The concept of class in Marxism is gender-blind, whereas class relations are inherently gendered.
2. Marxist class analysis tends to “reduce” gender to class. That is, gender oppression is treated as if it can be fully explained by class oppression.
3. Marxist class analysis treats gender inequality and gender oppression as “epiphenomenal” -- that is, as effects which are not themselves causally important for anything else. They are treated as a “surface phenomena”, symptoms of something else, but not important in their own right.

I do not think that these criticisms are well grounded. Briefly:

1. It is a strength, not a weakness, that the concept of class itself is “gender-blind”. Class *analysis* should not be gender blind, but the concept of class itself should identify a distinctive cluster of mechanisms.

2. There may have been a time when some Marxists saw class – or a related idea like the economic structure or mode of production – as fully explaining other forms of inequality and oppression, but no one claims this now.
3. No Marxist ever regarded gender (or race, religion, ethnicity, etc.) as epiphenomenal, as mere symptoms without effects.

Because of time constraints we cannot, in this course, systematically explore all of the theoretical and empirical problems of the relation of class to gender. Nevertheless, it is important to respond to these objections and define a general perspective on how to think about the structural interconnection between class and other forms of oppression.

If we have time, I will also discuss a number of broad normative issues around class and gender that bear on the contrast between Marxism and Feminism: the nature of their *emancipatory visions* and how this generates some of the *explanatory challenges* each theory faces.

## II. The Interaction of Class & Gender

### 1. Micro/macro analysis

First, a general point of clarification about the context of these issues. The class/gender intersection should be understood as both a micro-issue and a macro-issue:

**Micro:** At the micro-level, understanding the lived experiences, interests, subjectivities, etc. of individuals requires understanding how they occupy locations within gender relations, not just locations within class relations. A “location” is a location-within-a-relation. But what exactly does this mean? What is a location-within-a relation? This can get very murky very quickly, but here is how I think about it: The *relata* of relations are the interacting practices of people – the actions in which they engage that are inherently inter-actions with others. A location is thus a location within sets of relationally interacting practices of different sorts. When people insist that race and gender are important often they are making mainly a micro-claim: the locations people occupy within gender relations and racial relations impact their lives and experiences in critical ways. These impacts explain all sorts of important things, including identities and other aspects of subjectivity, as well as life chances, opportunities, interest, etc.

**Macro:** At the macro level there is significant variation in the forms of gender relations (as well as class relations, of course) across societies (or other units of analysis). These variations are also explanatory of various phenomena.

The analysis of the interaction of class and gender involves understanding interactions at both the micro-level of the social relations of individual’s lives and the macro-level of broader social structure.

### 2. Understanding the interrelationship of Class and gender

Analysis of the inter-relationship between class and gender (or other forms of nonclass oppression) involves two related, but still different sorts of problems:

1. Analyses of the joint effects of class and gender in explaining various things.
2. Analyses of the effects of class and gender *on each other*.

What I want to do here is simply clarify how to think about these questions for the case of class and gender.

### III. Joint Effects of class and gender in explaining various things

Suppose we want to explain some variation across individuals – political attitudes, voting behavior, mortality, standards of living, mental health. How should we think of the way these sorts of phenomena are affected by gender and class?

#### 1. Two basic theses:

##### *Thesis 1. Distinct mechanisms thesis.*

When we speak of “class” and “gender” as forms of oppression we are attempting to identify *distinct causal mechanisms*. That is: “class” and “gender” are each names for causal mechanisms (or clusters of mechanisms) located in specific aspects of social relations. “Distinct” does not imply that these mechanisms do not affect each other, or that in the world any phenomenon we might be interested in is ever simply the effect of one of these mechanisms alone. And it does not prejudge the question of the extent to which changes in one might explain changes in another, but simply affirms the point that these are not just disguised forms of the same thing.

One possible grounding for the autonomy of gender mechanisms is sexuality: Gender oppression is generated in part by the mechanisms through which sexual identities are formed, and these mechanisms are distinct from class exploitation. Another possible grounding is the problem of biological reproduction – the bearing and rearing of children – but not sexuality as such.

To say that gender oppression constitutes a mechanism distinct from class, means that it *generates distinctive effects*. This implies that in our analysis of various social questions -- consciousness, voting, educational attainment, income inequality, conflict, etc. -- we face the task of trying to sort out the distinctive ways in which class and gender affect the outcomes.

##### *Thesis 2: Interactive effects Thesis.*

While different forms of oppression identify distinctive kinds of causal mechanisms, in the world these mechanisms *interact*: **the world is not additive!** This is of fundamental importance and can be called the *structural interaction thesis*. This implies a rejection of two possible claims:

- (1). The view that the category “class” should be regarded as inherently “gendered”. Class and gender are ways of identifying specific causal mechanisms, and our task is to understand the specific forms of their interaction. In effect this is like arguing in chemistry that the effects of water cannot be understood as the effects of H and O, but of the specific forms of interaction of H + O in the water molecule.
- (2). The view that these mechanisms only have additive effects: that the effects of class, for example, do not in part depend upon gender.

The interactive effects thesis implies the following kind of model for an explanation of X:

$$\text{Explanandum X} = B_1\text{Class} + B_2\text{Gender} + B_3(\text{Gender} \times \text{class})$$

The claim that class is “gendered” is, in effect, the claim that coefficient  $B_1 = 0$ .

Example: in predicting income, gender has an effect, class has an effect, and there is an interactive effect.

In this general abstract model, there is also no universal presumption that class is “more important” than gender, i.e. that  $B_1 > B_2$ .

Note: A famous claim in the sociological literature on race is the “declining significance of race” thesis by William Julius Wilson. What does this thesis mean?

Race equation: Explanandum  $X = B_1 \text{Class} + B_2 \text{Race} + B_3(\text{Race} \times \text{class})$

Strong version:  $B_2$  and  $B_3$  are declining over time.

Weak version:  $B_2$  is declining over time. Race has weaker *additive* effects.

#### IV. Effects of class and gender on each other.

##### 1. Effects of GENDER on CLASS:

There are two main ways that gender relations affect class:

###### 1.1. *Shaping the way people are tied to the class structure*

a. allocating people into class locations: discrimination affects probabilities of getting into class locations either because of blocking access to relevant resources (credit markets, educational attainment) or through direct exclusions (marriage bars, glass ceilings, sexual harassment within work, etc)

b. shaping various indirect linkages of people to class structures. Critical example = the way people are linked to class structures via family and kinship relations. This is the heart of of the debate with John Goldthorpe over the class location of married women in the labor force. (See the addendum to the lecture for a summary of this discussion)

###### 1.2. *shaping the nature of class locations themselves.*

Gender relations can have a direct impact on the nature of class relations themselves. Given certain forms of gender relations, some kinds of class locations are much more likely to occur to be filled by individuals. Particular gender relations around the social standing of unmarried daughters of farming families, for example, was very important for the creation of working class textile jobs in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in New England. These young women could not inherit the farm and because of the specific gendered practices of family formation, they were an available labor supply for these positions.

##### 2 Effects of CLASS on GENDER:

The basic idea here is that the nature of class relations and their changes over time helps us explain certain features of gender relations and their changes.

###### 2.1. *Functional explanations & interest explanations*

In discussions of the way class relations affects gender relations, two kinds of explanations are often invoked. These can be called “functional explanations” and “interest explanations”. We are going to have a lot to say about functional explanations when we discuss the theory of the state and ideology. This is a very interesting and complex idea. I don’t want us to get bogged down with this here, so I will not go deeply into what a functional explanation is, but I still need to briefly introduce it.

*What is a Functional explanation?*

The simplest kind of functional explanations occur in biology, where this is completely standard. If I ask you, why are the bones in the wings of birds hollow, a good answer is: because this enables birds to fly by reducing the weight of wings. Why is the neck of the giraffe so long – a favorite example of evolutionary biologists? To enable the giraffe to eat the leaves of the acacia tree. In each case the explanation for some structural property of a creature is explained by its *beneficial effects for the creature*. This is what we mean by the “function” of the property in question and we say that the function of something explains its form.

The reason this is a special kind of explanation is that we are explaining the existence of something by its effects, by its consequences. In ordinary causal explanations the cause comes *before* the effect; in functional explanation an effect explains its own cause!

As we will see later, some people reject out of hand functional explanations in social science. They work in biology because of the theory of evolution – this provides a mechanism by which functional relations come into existence. In sociology they are more precarious. But we won't worry about that here.

*Interest explanations*

There is another kind of explanation that sometimes looks like a functional explanation, but really isn't. This is an explanation that invokes the *intentions* of people. It goes like this: Why are tax policies beneficial to rich people? Because politicians intentionally design tax policies in the expectation that they will serve the interests of rich people. Here again the beneficial effects of something (tax policy) help explain the policy, but they do so because politicians consciously designed the policies to generate these effects. An interest-explanation is different from a functional explanation because it works through the intentions of actors. A key difference between a functional and an intentional explanation – which we will make much of later – is that in the former something is explained by *actual* effects whereas in the latter, in intentional explanations, the explanation is based on *anticipated* effects. More on this later in the semester.

*Back to gender*

“Functional” explanations and “interest” explanations often work together, but they have some significantly different features. A class-functional explanation of Male domination has the form:

Aspects of Male domination in contemporary society are explained by virtue of their positive effects for capitalists or capitalism.

A class-interest explanation has the form:

Aspects of Male domination in contemporary society are explained because capitalists realize that they are in their interests and so see to it that male domination continues.

Similar kinds of arguments are often encountered for racism, nationalism, and many other things. As we will see later, in many circumstances, a combination of functional and interest explanations are needed.

Here are two examples of class based functional explanations of unequal gender relations that come from the Marxist tradition:

- (1). Frederick Engels' argument in his influential book *The origins of the Family Private Property and the State*: This is a complex and very interesting theoretical account of the *origins* of male domination. Here are the basic elements:

*Thesis 1*: A gender division of labor pre-existed male domination. This division of labor, Engels believed, had biological foundations given the level of technology. Women had greater responsibility for early childrearing and associated domestic tasks; men for hunting and large-animal husbandry

*Thesis 2*: In this division of labor, men tended to have physical control of the most valuable potentially heritable property. Large animals was the pivotal resource here.

*Thesis 3*: For men to insure that this property would be inherited by their own progeny, they needed to control access of other men to the fertility of the mothers of their children.

*Thesis 4*: Male domination of women is the mechanism through which this control of reproduction is assured.

*Conclusion* Male domination of women is thus explained by the *functional requirements for a stable system of inheritance of male-controlled property*.

- (2). More contemporary argument of Marxist feminists: Unpaid domestic labor is functional for the accumulation of capital by lowering the costs of reproducing labor power. Structure of the argument:

*Thesis 1* The provision of unpaid domestic labor is beneficial for capitalists by lowering the costs of reproducing labor power (since some of those costs are provided by unpaid domestic services). The question then becomes: who will perform this unpaid domestic labor.

*Possibilities* There are three options: 1. Equal sharing; 2. Predominantly performed by women; 3. Predominantly performed by men

*Thesis 2* Until very recent times, the care of small children was most easily and efficiently done by women because of breastfeeding, relatively high fertility rates to insure surviving adult children, etc.

*Thesis 3* Because of thesis 2, it is more efficient for households for mothers/wives to take primary responsibility for the necessary unpaid household work than for husbands. The allocation of men to the role of fulltime breadwinner and the wife to homemaker will be more efficient -- on average -- than other arrangements. This is the cheapest solution for capitalists and the most advantageous for households.

*Thesis 4* Because the solution 2 is the best for capital, this solution will tend to be the most stable in capitalism.

*Thesis 5* Allocating women to these roles generates (or strongly reinforces) their subordination to men because of economic dependency, isolation, lowered status.

**2.2 Class structure may obstruct change (even if gender or other oppressions are not positively functional for reproducing class structures)**

Two basic arguments

1. class structures shapes *resources* available for struggle:

class structure → access to resources → affects struggles over gender oppression

2. Struggles over nonclass oppressions require mobilization of solidarities and popular power and this mobilization is threatening to dominant classes (the Pandora's box problem) so they act to undermine such struggles:

class structure → dominant classes are threatened by sustained mobilization of oppressed groups of any kind → oppose struggles against nonclass oppression, even though the oppression itself does not especially benefit them.

### 2.3 Dynamic Asymmetry of Class and gender

If we look at the question of reciprocal effects *dynamically*, then a pretty good case can be made that, at least within capitalism, *changes* in the class structure have had a bigger effect on *changes* in gender relations than vice versa:

**Gender:** why have gender relations been so dramatically changed in the past half century years? Massive entry of women into the labor force -- which is a change in their class locations -- seems the central factor. The dynamics of capitalism → change in the demand for different kinds of labor → entry of women in the labor force → change in gender relations. It is hard to construct a symmetrical reciprocal argument since there is not a theory of the "laws of motion of gender dynamics".

In the section on race we will see a parallel case for race:

**Race:** why did the civil rights movement succeed in the 1960s but fail in earlier decades? Transformations of the class structure seem critical for this.

## V. An example of Class & Gender: The class location of married women

### 1 Stating the Problem

1.1 Consider the following objective locations of women. What is the class location of each?

<i>Wife's Job</i>	<i>Husband's Job</i>
1. Typist, full time	no husband
2. Typist, full time	factory worker
3. Typist, full time	capitalist
4. Typist, part time	capitalist
5. Homemaker	factory worker
6. Homemaker	capitalist
7. Homemaker supported by the state	no husband

1.2. Basic problem: we have until now treated individuals as the incumbents of class locations. But individuals are also members of families. Problem = how do we accommodate families into the class structure? And, how does this affect the "class location" of the members of families.

1.3. *Remember the point of all of this:* class is meant to explain things. The point of this question is that it affects the explanatory power of the category for explaining such things as consciousness formation, class formation, class conflict.

1.4. Basic strategy = different specific instances require different logics to answer the question:

1. *children*: their class = the class of their family -- strictly derived from the class of their parents

2. *students*: their class is *objectively indeterminate* with varying degrees of indeterminacy (not “contradictory”, but indeterminate): they have particular probabilities of ending up in particular classes, and these probabilities define the class character of their studenthood.

**NOTE:** this problem with students is present for people with jobs as well because the *degree of attachment of a person to a given class may be variable* = the problem of intra-generational mobility: a worker who is saving up to become a petty bourgeois *and earns enough to do this* is simultaneously a worker and a pre-PB -- this can be considered an *intertemporal contradictory location*. This raises the important problem of the temporal dimension of class structures.

3. *housewives*: their class = derived from the insertion of their family into the system of property relations and exploitation → derived from their husbands. Note one possible alternative = housewives occupy a class location within the domestic mode of production. (Christine Delphy)

1.5. Difficult case = married women in the labor force.

## 2 Goldthorpe’s view

- Families pool income as units of consumption → all family members benefit from the exploitation-derived income of any member.
- Families have unitary class interests: class struggles occur *between* families, not *within* families.
- families are mobilized into class formations, not atomized individuals.
- *Because of the gender division of labor and male dominance*, the economic fate of most families depends upon the class character of the husband’s job.
- Therefore: the class of married women is derived from the class location of her husband.

## 3 Critique

- Given high rates of marital dissolution, many married women are rather like students in the sense that the temporal dimension of their class location is important: whatever we decide about families, they have a current class location and simultaneously have a kind of **shadow class location** = the class location that they would have if the marriage dissolved.
- class formations do not simply mobilize families as units; they also mobilize individuals. Different members of the same family may be inserted into class formations differentially, and at a minimum this means that individual locations may also matter.
- The interests that are tied to classes are not simply income-based interests. Issues of autonomy and domination, the politics of production, are also bound up with class, and these center much more exclusively on individuals as job-holders.

- The degree to which the material interests and fate of a woman are heavily dependent upon the class of her husband (and vice versa) varies across time and place. A variety of institutional features can intensify or weaken this dependency. *The more dependent is the economic welfare of a wife on her husband's class, the more it makes sense to see her class location derived from that of her husband.*

#### 4 Implications

- Under certain conditions, Goldthorpe's account is correct. In particular, if there is a) low divorce and b) high material dependency, then the class location of married women would tend to be identical to that of their husbands. If there is a) high divorce rates and b) low dependency, then the class location of women will be more determined by their own jobs, their individual insertion into the class structure.
- The overarching criterion for understanding class structures is this: class structures link individuals to class interests -- interests defined with respect to the mechanisms of exploitation. [NOTE: there is a second possible view of what it is that class structures distribute: class structures distribute identity-formation experiences -- Bourdieu's class habitus]
- If we take this interest-centered approach to class, then there are three primary ways in which individuals become linked to class interests and thus class structures. We can call these the *three axes of class location*. Each is relevant to the analysis of class and gender:
  - axis 1: direct class**
  - axis 2: mediated class**
  - axis 3: Intertemporal class:** critical issue = *shadow class if household breaks up*
- To fully specify the class location of women, it is necessary to define their linkage to the class structure along all three of these axes. This opens up the possibility of many more nuances in the structural map of locations themselves: individuals have direct and mediated class locations which may or may not be the same; this opens up possibilities for contradictory combinations of class locations within families; all of these combinations may exist with differing degree of temporal stability; and temporal instability suggests that there is an element of uncertainty in the very specification of a "location" -- locations of intrinsic ambiguities in their properties because of the temporal dimension.

#### 5. US/SWEDEN Comparison

The empirical patterns we observe indicate that in the US the mediated class location of women matters a great deal more than their direct class location in shaping their class identity whereas in Sweden the two have roughly equal weight. Why should this be so? Possibilities:

1. Greater dependency of wife on husband in the US --> her class interests are objectively more subordinated to his. This is due to a) greater income inequality between men and women; b) role of the state in partially disengaging material welfare from family income --> less income drop upon marital dissolution.
2. Greater salience of the job itself in shaping consciousness in Sweden than in the US because of greater workplace mobilization through unions, etc.

## CLASS AND RACE

### III. The Class Analysis of Racial Oppression

#### 1. The central Question

In thinking about racial oppressions and their link to class structure, the important question to ask is less: “What are the origins of racial inequality?” but rather, “What explains the durability of racial divisions and the difficulty in eliminating racial inequality?” The central claim of class analysis is that the interactions of class and race help to answer both of these questions. This does not mean that class and class alone is sufficient to explain the durability of racial inequality and oppression, but that it is one of the central processes involved. In particular, there are certainly cultural processes embedded in racial orders which play a critical role and have autonomous effects independently of their interactions with class. I will not attempt to sort out those cultural processes here or weigh their importance. Rather I will focus on the problem of the class/race interconnection.

#### 2. *Who Benefits from Racism*

A useful way of approaching these issues is to begin by asking what seems like a simple question, and then seeing what makes this question more complex (and more interesting). The simple-sounding question is this? *Who benefits from racial inequality?* Let us try to answer this question with an initially quite simple model of the relevant actors about whom we ask the “who benefits” question: White capitalists; White workers; Black workers.

There are four traditional answers to the questions of who benefits from the overall patterns of racial disadvantage of blacks:

1. *White workers exploit black workers*: there is actually a transfer of surplus from black workers to white workers → they are really in distinct classes. This is the strong version of internal colonialism arguments, theories of super-exploitation. White workers and white capitalists form a racial alliance because they share common interests in the exploitation of blacks. *White workers would be worse off if black workers simply disappeared.*
2. *White workers oppress black workers* but do not exploit them: they benefit from exclusionary practices, but do not receive direct transfers = split labor market theories. White workers would *not* be worse off if black workers disappeared.
3. *White workers neither oppress nor exploit black workers*: capitalists differentially exploit different categories of workers, but all workers suffer from the differential exploitation. This is the traditional Marxist class analysis. This differential exploitation creates cleavages within the working class which weakens workers in struggles with capitalists. Sometimes this is seen as a deliberate strategy; other times more of a functional relation. But in any case: *Capitalists alone benefit from racism.*
4. *The differential exploitation of black and white workers is of decreasing relevance.* The key issue = the marginalization of segments of the black population from the system of exploitation altogether: the theory of the underclass. *The underclass = oppressed but not consistently exploited* (e.g. welfare mothers; permanently unemployed; “criminal

underclass”). Racial conflict therefore centers on the State’s intervention to deal with underclass phenomena, not directly on class antagonisms/competition between black and white workers.

Different theorists have different answers:

**William Wilson:** historical transition from preindustrial slave relations (white ruling class exploits black slaves), to industrial period (white workers oppress black workers through job competition and exclusion) to contemporary period (differential exploitation disappearing where class inequalities among blacks matter more than between blacks and whites).

**Edna Bonacich:** white workers oppress black workers through exclusions, segmented labor markets = classic divide and conquer dynamic: by structuring the labor market in particular ways, capitalists can pit the real interests of different groups of workers against each other.

**Michael Reich:** capitalists exploit workers of different races differentially. Racial divisions hurt both black and white workers. The econometric data on this are quite compelling: white workers are worse off under conditions where black workers are most oppressed. The wages of white workers are highest where the inequalities between black and white workers are least.

At different times and places each of these views may be correct. There is no particular reason to believe that there is a single, overarching profile of interests that link class and race.

One problem with all of these views, however, is that they fail to pay much attention to the real specificity of “racialization” as a dimension of cleavage, about why this specific form of cleavage has such staying power, such bite, through its interconnection with class. I would like to propose a way of looking at this issue that may help clarify this.

### 3. The problem of solidarity

Regardless of the answer to the question of who benefits from racism, one of the most fundamental ways in which race and class interact is the undermining class solidarity. The segmented labor market arguments and differential exploitation arguments all touch on this. But there is more going on than simply economic cleavages that generate strata within the working class. Here is one way to think about this:

- Solidarity is difficult to achieve and sustain within the working class because of labor market competition, short term advantages, opportunities for individual strategies, etc.
- When there are strong material inequalities within the working class – call these strata – solidarity across those categories often requires that more privileged workers restrain their advantages in favor of less advantaged workers.
- This is difficult even when there is relative cultural homogeneity across the strata.
- Where salient divisions of cultural identity are closely associated with such strata divisions, then robust solidarity is even more problematic. This is especially the case for racial division because of the way race operates to segregate communities and kinship structures, so that identities of mutual regard and trust are demarcated along racial grounds. Market relations continually push for an atomization of the definition of the relevant unit for self-interest; kinship and community relations push for a stretching people’s understanding of their self-interest (i.e. who they consider like themselves). Racial division obstructs this.
- And on top of this the very content of racial ideologies breeds mistrust and fear: the cultural content of racial boundaries is not just difference and otherness, but danger, disgust, disrespect.