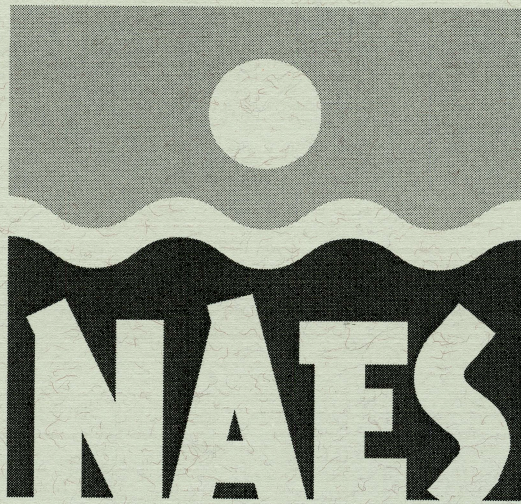


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**EXPLORATIONS
IN
ETHNIC STUDIES**



Race, Class and Gender

January 1994
Volume 17, Number 1

The National Association for Ethnic Studies

The National Association for Ethnic Studies (NAES) was founded in 1971. NAES has as its basic purpose the promotion of activities and scholarship in the field of ethnic studies. The Association is open to any person or institution. The Association serves as a forum to its members for promoting: research, study, curriculum, design as well as producing publications of interest to the field. NAES also sponsors an annual conference on ethnic studies. *Explorations in Ethnic Studies* is an interdisciplinary journal devoted to the study of ethnicity, ethnic groups, intergroup relations, and the cultural life of ethnic peoples. The journal is refereed and provides a forum for socially responsible research. Contributors to the journal demonstrate the integration of theory and practice.

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Special Issue: Race, Class, and Gender

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Editor's Note

This special issue of the journal on the theme of "Race, Class, and Gender" results from papers presented at the Association's 1993 national conference held at Salt Lake City, Utah. Under the able guidance of conference co-organizers, Alberto Pulido and Jennifer Pierce, the meeting was an outstanding success both in attendance and active participation. Fortunately, both Jennifer and Alberto enthusiastically agreed to be co-editors of this special issue.

In their introduction Pulido and Pierce establish the importance of focusing on the vision that has been created by the 'new' scholarship in race, class, and gender. In many instances, this scholarship is not new but only 'newly discovered' and just now being published. In fact, if one looks at the history of ethnic studies publications, many of these publishing ventures resulted because the mainstream journals were not accepting scholarship that challenged the status quo. Ethnic studies journals, newsletters, and even publishing companies grew out of this urgent need for ethnic studies scholars to 'tell their stories.'

The articles found in this special issue are an accurate reflection of the new scholarship which exists and continues to emerge out of the discipline. The authors are excellent examples of the breadth and depth of writers coming out of ethnic studies. As stated by the co-editors, this scholarship repositions race, class, and gender in social institutions. This scholarship recognizes and reveals current contradictions and creates an environment for establishing new perspectives. Hopefully, even the contradictions will result in the establishment and continuation of these difficult dialogues.

This special issue makes an important contribution to the topic of race, class, and gender, and more importantly, to the discipline. I am confident it will serve as one essential piece of the complex ethnic studies mosaic.

Miguel A. Carranza
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

New Scholarship on Race, Class, and Gender: Other Voices Challenging the Mainstream

Jennifer L. Pierce
University of Minnesota - Twin Cities Campus

Alberto L. Pulido
Arizona State University West¹

"You are told who you are, or you know who you are by the stories that are told."
—Leslie Marmon Silko

Introduction

From the margins, we find ourselves well positioned to tell "other stories"—life histories, traditions, and cultural myths which typically go unheard in dominant society.² As illustrated in the lead article, "A Pattern of Possibility: Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior*," by Thelma J. Shinn, such stories are "meronymic"—*mero* from the Greek meaning "part"—because our unique social location allows us to see beyond the dominant mythos and tell "other" parts of "the story." Telling these stories is not only empowering to those whom we name, but it also changes and transforms the official story line itself. Life stories of marginalized peoples demonstrate time and again that there is no one story, no one way of seeing, thinking, or feeling. Moreover, the core of these stories and identities reveal multiple parts of a more inclusive story, a more inclusive way of thinking. Further, meronymic stories unveil the complex operations of power and domination which have denied and suppressed other voices. This special issue of *Explorations in Ethnic Studies* on race, class, and gender is devoted to telling the other parts of "the story."

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Scholarship on race, class, and gender often tells the other story by beginning with the researcher him/herself as part of the problematic—we position ourselves as part of what Shinn highlights in the work of Maxine Hong Kingston—the "frog knot" which is untied, freeing us from the constraints of the dominant discourse. From here, we can begin to formulate and develop theory through conversation and "dialogue" with informants and/or sources in order to work towards the discovery and construction of communities. Communities are central to this approach since the problematic is configured as part of a larger communal and collective dimension that is only meaningful within a specific social and historical context.

The strength of the new scholarship on race, class, and gender lies in its ability to recognize and open up contradictions and to create new beginnings. Through such work, we attempt to break down mainstream story lines by questioning and transforming existing institutional arrangements. By bringing other parts of "the story" into view, we better enable ourselves as scholars and as activists to understand, grapple with, and disrupt the complex relations of power, domination and privilege. As we are reminded by Shinn when describing the significance of Maxine Hong Kingston's work:

With her complex knot-making ability, Kingston reveals that we too must follow the twists of our own lives through family, community, and social versions and know in our own selves the order we can achieve, the work of art we can create by constructing our own story from its many components.... When the novel is made new through fresh perspectives, when the story balances personal, historical, and mythic truths; then the 'storyline' can be spread out, un-knotted, or looped to reveal the simultaneous realities of many cultures, many times, and many places as they repeat the 'absolute truth' of myth in this culture, this time, this place.

Thus, we see the essays in this issue not only as important contributions to the recent scholarship on race, class, and gender, but as efforts to change and transform the "mainstream truths" within the academy.

Repositioning of Race, Class, and Gender in Social Institutions

Mainstream scholarship that examines the role of race, class, and gender in relationship to social institutions seeks to develop ways of knowing in static and fixed categories for understanding the social world. Such a perspective typically highlights the role of institutions in molding and shaping our everyday lives. However, the role of subjective, histori-

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cal, and political actors in helping to shape our realities is at best, minimized, or, at worst, ignored. The introduction of race, class, and gender into mainstream scholarship promises to redefine this view from above by placing social actors at the center of analysis who, in turn, create structure through collective practices. The articles in the first section of our special issue by Gloria Cuádriz and Jennifer Pierce, Heidi Howarth, and Mary E. Kelsey all examine the shifting, complex and, at times, contradictory relations between social actors and the institutions where they find themselves.

In "From Scholarship Girls to Scholarship Women,"³ Gloria Cuádriz and Jennifer Pierce develop "socio-biographies"⁴ about the dilemmas graduate education poses for women of working-class origin. As they painfully learn, the academy as an institution not only validates the experiences of white men, but validates men from a particular class background. In Pierre Bourdieu's term, Cuádriz and Pierce find they do not possess the requisite "cultural capital" to be heard, or even seen, in graduate seminars, by other graduate students, or by faculty members.⁵ Their personal narratives powerfully illustrate not only their feelings of alienation in this environment, but reveal as well the commonalities and differences in their experiences as a woman of color and a white woman from working-class backgrounds. Both women struggle with the academic discourse, the scholarly norms for "objectivity" and "detachment," and their material needs for financial support. Further, their stories highlight the contradictions of race and class: for Cuádriz, color renders her class background visible, whereas for Pierce, "whiteness" serves to obscure and mask her origins. Their collaborative essay—sometimes told in first person and, at others, with both voices—not only opens up their contradictory locations within graduate school, laying bare the operations of power and privilege, but also highlights their individual and collective acts of resistance. Today, as assistant professors within the academy, Cuádriz and Pierce continue their efforts to think, write, and work collaboratively. Their essay concludes:

As working-class women from differing ethnic backgrounds, we have learned to recognize our similarities, to embrace our differences, and to grapple with one another's complexities. We know that unless we come together for the purpose of addressing and acting upon broader issues, we will not challenge the reproduction of inequality in the academy. Our ability to collaborate defies the racism and classism institutionalized in the American educational system. This process is never an easy one, yet we continue to take one another seriously and to move forward the process of institutional change.

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The work of Heidi Howarth, in her article, "The Creation of Education by Hispanic Women," offers yet another interesting and provocative perspective on race, class, and gender in education. By placing non-dominant women at the center of her analysis, and allowing them to tell "their stories," we learn and discover that "Hispanas" in junior high school have created an alternative space for themselves outside the educational system in response to a system that has failed to address their needs within the classroom setting. As women of color, they are left out of the mainstream educational process. However, "Hispanas" do not respond passively to this process, but rather actively seek their own kind of education and learning outside of the classroom. Howarth states:

It is my belief that Hispanas have created a private brand of survival skills. The absence of the appropriate kind of 'cultural capital' pushes the Hispana to develop ways in which to confront the institution's marginalization process and ways in which to educate themselves. Listed among these are anger, independence, separation, the recognition of school and parent ambivalence to their educational needs and desires, and the conscious search for education outside of the public school.

Another important discovery from this research is that patterns of assimilation among Latinas/os in American society vary by gender. Howarth is precise in her argument that making gender differences visible makes "...the assumed hypothesis of identical rates of assimilation for males and females [conspicuous, and]...exposes layers of damaging assumptions." This important discovery emerges **only** because the researcher herself is sensitive to gender, class and racial differences. It is a direct challenge to mainstream research that has dominated the social sciences since the 1950s, which focuses predominantly on the experiences of men of color.

The important article, "Welfare Politics and Racial Stereotypes: The Structural Contradictions of a Model Minority," by Mary E. Kelsey, provides us with another excellent critique of the race relations literature which relies on cultural values to explain the economic success of Asian Americans in the United States. Employing a solid ethnographic approach, Kelsey presents a poignant and theoretically sophisticated argument that the state, in the form of welfare, plays a significant role in the social mobility of Southeast Asian refugees, specifically Laotians, living in California. Unlike research that assumes an extreme structuralist position which denies human agency, Kelsey's work offers a balanced and thoughtful presentation examining the structures of opportunity in relation to individuals and their mobilization of these resources. An important policy implication of Kelsey's work is that with balanced

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structural opportunities, all poor communities of color can achieve social mobility in the United States. Her essay concludes:

A careful examination of welfare state policies reveal that different groups of poor people in America have forged strikingly different relations with the state. For most poor people, the hostile welfare state of the 1950s and early 1960s was modified by a series of reforms under the Great Society programs only to return to hostile state-client relations under the social policies of Reagan and Bush. The 1980s were an era in which Reagan cut material aid to the poor, abolished the successful CETA job training program, and reduced state resources for education. Despite these general cutbacks in social programs, political refugees were offered a comprehensive array of resources.... Hypotheses of social mobility based on errant assumptions of equal opportunity falsely elevate the role of culture in social mobility. Poor communities have not all had access to the same resources and therefore should not be judged as if the playing field were level.

Representations of Race, Class, and Gender in the Media

The next section of our special issue focuses on the role media plays in American society. Media, whether print, television, or film, produces representations of race, class, and gender. Feminist scholar Michelle Fine argues that if we are to understand gender, and we would add race and class, as multiply positioned and relational, "we need to investigate not only what is represented...as gender, [race and class] but what is not represented..."⁶ In other words, as academics and as activists, we must disrupt the prevailing notions of what is inevitable and "natural" about race, class and gender in newspapers and film by telling "other" parts of the "whole story." The articles by Carmen Manning-Miller, Clarence Spigner, and Marian Sciachitano all explore these issues.

Carmen Manning-Miller's excellent article, "Media Discourse and the Feminization of Poverty," effectively disrupts the media's prevailing notion of what is inevitable and "natural" about women and poverty. Through a carefully documented analysis of media discourse on poverty, Manning-Miller shows that journalistic stories and photo essays tend to depict the poor as women of color, neglecting the fact that overwhelming numbers of women in poverty are white: "Reports of welfare-reliant women of color without complimentary statistics of welfare-reliant white women mask the fact that so many poor women are white and make welfare a tool in the politics of race." Furthermore, she finds that a value

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laden distinction is made between "deserving men and women" and "undeserving women." The few references to men or elderly women in poverty are described as "without work," whereas most of the poverty coverage on women focuses on unemployed, welfare-reliant women of child-bearing age.

A *Washington Post* article in the first category, for example, described the impoverishment of elderly nuns "...in retirement binds because, unlike the male hierarchy who controlled the collection plate, the sisters put neither their trust in money, nor their money in trust...." On the other hand, Manning-Miller writes, the majority of the poverty coverage concerns unemployed, welfare-reliant women of child-bearing age. For example, in a *Wall Street Journal* article titled, "Good Girls Fare Better Standard of Living," a hospital nurse's statement of attribution charges: "He's [patient's baby boy] going to be another toy for her to play with... It's pointless to teach her about parenting...." Manning-Miller argues that newspaper representations are ideological: they shift our attention away from social and political processes and focus instead on matters of individual choice. In this way, the media, through its journalists, photographers, and editors' choices, carefully construct racialized and gender specific images of poverty, specifically unmarried Black mothers on welfare, images which do not capture the complexities of the actual lived experiences of poverty.

Clarence Spigner's fine essay, "Race, Gender, and the Status-Quo: Asian and African American Relations in a Hollywood Film," explores the role film plays in creating representations of inter-ethnic tensions between Asian Americans and African Americans in the United States. Spigner's analysis of director Michael Cimino's *The Year of the Dragon* (1985), a police action movie about a "ruthless" Chinese American subculture in New York, shows the white male characters depicted as savvy, street-smart romantic leads, whereas Asian Americans and Blacks are diminished to a degrading and secondary status. Further, Asian/Black relations in the movie are portrayed in a number of negative images: through "master/servant" relationships—Tai, the Chinese gangleader has a Black "buffoon" bodyguard and Tai admonishes his gang members not to allow themselves to be treated as "yellow niggers"—and through interracial competition—Chinese Americans compete with Blacks, not with whites, for scarce resources. On the other hand, Stanley White, the film's white protagonist, is the emblematic police officer/"urban cowboy" who rescues society from this dysfunctional subculture of intrigue, drugs, and violence. Spigner also finds that representations of inter-ethnic tensions also play out in male/female relationships in the film. Tzu, a Chinese American woman in the film is:

initially independent and assertive but remains cold and elitist particularly toward fellow Chinese Americans. Yet

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she is curiously acquiescent to white male authority. As the film's primary female protagonist, her romantic preference for a racist/sexist white policeman [Stanley White] reinforces race and gender domination as desirable and appropriate.

Spigner concludes that the race and gender-specific imagery in this film is functional: it promotes racialized and gendered stereotypes at the same time that it legitimates white male dominance through violence against people of color as rational and necessary for societal harmony.

Marian Sciachitano's essay, "Whose Crying Game," speaks directly to the meronymic story theme of this special issue. By presenting an "other" story about the film *The Crying Game*, Sciachitano raises serious questions about the entertainment industry's efforts to titillate audiences with a "shocking," "surprising," and "hush-hush" conclusion to the movie, specifically, that Dil, one of the main characters who appears to be a beautiful, light-skinned Black woman, is actually a gay Black transvestite. Beginning with her own contradictory location as a bi-racial Asian American woman, Sciachitano reflects that her own lived experiences of being racially ambiguous or "Other" in a culture which values "racial purity" have led her to see that she shares "a great deal in common with men of color and their struggles." Thus, rather than focusing on the film's "shocking" conclusion, Sciachitano asks us to consider instead, "How do men of color in this film get represented or positioned?" She argues that the film represents an exotic and fetishized image of Black gay men. It is through Fergis, the main character, and his white heterosexual gaze, that Dil becomes an object of desire as a woman: a site of both sexual and colonial domination. Sciachitano writes:

The film's focus shifts and ends up exoticizing Dil as well as Fergis' new fascination (and ours) with Dil. It is now Dil's Black body, which on one level is the body of a Black woman made "other" by race and gender, and on another, the body of a Black transvestite made "other" by race and sexuality... [T]he cinematic voyeurism of watching Fergis' attraction to an "image" of a seductive Black woman who turns out to be a transvestite cannot and should not be mistaken or dismissed....

The author concludes her powerful essay by urging us to become "critical citizens" who question these representations, these narratives, and perspectives. Doing so will enable us to "transform these images of men and women of color by how we look, how we think, how we talk, and hopefully, by how we feel.

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In addition to the articles, this special issue offers a list of current readings on race, class, and gender for those interested in learning more about this important and emerging area of study. The bibliography is organized categorically, by alphabetical order, into one of three sections: 1) Anthologies and Edited Volumes; 2) Books; and 3) Journal Articles and Book Chapters. The bibliography offers a fairly comprehensive listing of recent publications in the areas of Education, Gerontology, Ethnic Studies, History, Law, Literature, Media Studies, Sociology, and Women's Studies. We are indebted to Ms. Lisa Kammerlocher from the Fletcher Library, and Ms. Cynthia M. Rasmussen from the Department of American Studies, both at Arizona State University West, for their assistance in helping compile this bibliography.

We began our introductory essay with a quote from the author Leslie Marmon Silko, who in discussing her novel *Ceremony*, explains the important role and function of a story.⁷ *Ceremony* is the story of Tayo and his transformative process. As a novel that recognizes and celebrates the oral traditions of Native people, this book is best described as a "word ceremony." It is a ceremony representative of a curative act, a healing process, that through the act of storytelling radiates power that comes from "word spirits."⁸ For communities on the margins, there are many word ceremonies which have been ignored or forgotten by mainstream scholars. The time has come for all of us to recognize the importance of these contributions and incorporate them into our understanding of contemporary American society. In the process, we work to transform the academy, our communities, and ourselves. Our hope is that this special issue on race, class, and gender will play a part in fulfilling this vision.

NOTES

¹The editors of this volume are **full co-authors** and have listed their names in alphabetic order.

²We have also produced a documentary, *Unheard Voices*, which attempts to tell stories from the margins in Utah Valley. It was co-produced by Jennifer Pierce, Alberto L. Pulido, and Kim Koch. *Unheard Voices* premiered at the National Association for Ethnic Studies Conference on Race, Class, and Gender in Salt Lake City, Utah, March 1993. Copies are available from KUED-TV, located on the campus of the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

³This article was sent out for an external blind review by *Explorations in Ethnic Studies* senior editor, Miguel A. Carranza.

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⁴C. Wright Mills, "The Promise," in his *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford Press, 1959): 3-24.

⁵Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," in *Power and Ideology in Education*, eds. Jerome Karabel and A.H. Halsey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977): 487-510.

⁶Michelle Fine, *Disruptive Voices: The Possibilities of Feminist Research* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1992): 22.

⁷Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (New York: Penguin, 1977); "Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko," in *Sun Tracks*, Vol. 3 (1976): 28-33.

⁸"Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko."



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The American Indian Culture and Research Journal provides a quarterly interdisciplinary research forum for scholars and innovators in the area of historical and contemporary American Indian life and culture. Original scholarly papers are invited on a broad range of issues. While encouraging innovations, the editor will favor those articles that demonstrate rigorous and thorough research in an interdisciplinary context.

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A Pattern of Possibility: Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior*

**Thelma J. Shinn
Arizona State University**

Maxine Hong Kingston is one of the many contemporary American novelists of non-European ethnicities and one of many women novelists who have found in mythology and folklore both stories and images which can transform the genre by providing "novel" patterns of order and "meronymic" language. These inclusive patterns and words help expand our perspective as they encompass both the linear and cyclical stories of the individual within the context of communal and social, mythic and historic, truths. In *The Woman Warrior*, the complex "frog knot" of her female heritage is untied for us not only to open up women's possible stories but also to offer her readers the variety which keeps us sane, freeing us from a dominant discourse which convincingly describes the inevitable tragedy of our common death but often fails to remind us of the simultaneous richness of our uncommon lives.

"The contribution of mythology," Clyde Kluckhohn has explained, "is that of providing a logical model capable of overcoming contradictions in a people's view of the world and what they have deduced from experience."¹ Usually we interpret this concept to mean that myths provide human explanations for natural phenomena, but it seems equally applicable to overcoming *social* contradictions. Perceiving contemporary reality within the greater context of their inherited myths and legends enables some contemporary American novelists of non-European ethnicities to overcome the contradictory ways in which their "people" are seen both within the ethnic community and within the larger American society. As a native-born Chinese American, for instance, Maxine Hong Kingston will never be either "Chinese" or "American"; she is both by

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definition. Within her own self these social contradictions must be overcome and encompassed, which does not necessarily mean they will ever be resolved.²

The novel is the literary genre precisely designed to explore social definitions of the individual, but in American literature the novel has been dominated by the *mythos* of tragedy, the plot which proceeds linearly to a climactic action and aims at a final resolution of conflicts by the end of the novel. Certainly this tragic mode is itself "a logical model capable of overcoming contradictions," but the Greek mythos upon which it is patterned is not the only way of telling our human story. "Americans" from non-European ethnicities have often been exposed to quite different myths which develop along "other" logical patterns. This literature of the American "other" seems to have much in common, whether its alternative cultural source is Asian, Native, Latina/o, or African American. In each case, cultural mythmaking includes patterns which promise new beginnings rather than resolutions, which circle back through time and space to center the individual storyteller in communal traditions. Rather than the linear, instrumental rationality which seeks its inevitable end, this cyclical, associative rationality seeks to establish its centrality within the many contexts of which it is a part. The self and this time and place achieve their individuality by discovering the cumulative stories which can be recognized and encompassed by the human imagination.

Much fiction by women writers in patriarchal cultures can also be seen in this light. Studies such as my own *Worlds Within Women* have traced the oral tradition of pre-patriarchal Goddess cultures as the "cultural otherness" upon which these women writers have drawn, rejecting the definitions of reality offered by the dominant discourse, and turning to forms defined by that definition as fantasy in order to explore the "whole story."³

Conversely, Maxine Hong Kingston and other women writers will draw from the "real world" of family and history in order to create the "whole story" in their fiction. Each attempts to overcome the artificial boundaries which "marginalize" her in order to center herself in her own traditions and see fully in each direction from where she finds herself.

Because the novel is an artifact as well as a language art, it can be shaped by the author artist into the form which best expresses the story being told. Although that story is always a version of the common human story, its universal significance becomes clear only when it is firmly centered in its own traditions, its own *mythos* or pattern of possibility. Furthermore, only when we read the words and connect them in the pattern provided by the author do we understand what stands under, what orders, the actions of the story. The "other" American literature is best able to offer us the "whole" of our common story in "novel forms" which encompass both the linear and cyclical, the predictable and possible, the visible and invisible, the historical and the mythic, because

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these "marginal" writers are best positioned to see beyond the dominant myths. They too, as Americans, have learned that discourse and acknowledge the tragic truth of death as an inevitable resolution of each individual life. However, from the margins of that story, they are well positioned to turn to the "other" story, and that position is enhanced by the still living myths which have been preserved orally and are offered them within their ethnic communities.⁴

I have called their novels "meronymic" precisely because of this more encompassing perspective from which they are told and the "novel orders" it has given their fictions. A meronym—from the Greek *mero* which means "part"—is a composite or cumulative image. Even a word, such as grey, can be meronymic: grey is composed of a balance of black and white but is itself neither black nor white. It is this great but finite variety of different balances of black and white which is defined by the single word. So too is Kingston's perspective socially meronymic, since being Chinese American is not the same as either being Chinese or fitting the dominant definition of Euro-American society. As an artist, Kingston seeks meronymic language, imagery, and understanding of characters and actions to convey her expanded vision of our common story. She best achieves this in her novel *The Woman Warrior*, which, with its companion work *China Men*, is rooted in her own personal, familial, and cultural experiences. Since both Chinese and American societies are patriarchal, however, the problem of gender has forced her to explore her paternal and maternal heritages separately. Since she is female and her mother was the "storyteller" of the family, it is within her maternal heritage that Kingston has the greatest access to the cultural myths which provide her with the "other" parts of her own story.

Therefore, while *The Woman Warrior* has a beginning, middle, and end which allows us to read its linear "progression" from silence to song through the conflict between mother and daughter at its center, it offers simultaneously a cyclical pattern which allows us to emerge from its mythic and artistic "knotmaking" with an expanded appreciation both of the individual self in which the mother finds contemporary expression through her daughter and of this moment of time in which our place has become the planet and our community the human family. Although Kingston's book won non-fiction awards as autobiography, it can only be fully appreciated and understood as a novel, depending more on what Kingston describes as "imagined life" than on historically precise information about individuals. Balancing the personal, historic, and mythic throughout, Kingston the writer condenses time and place into the mind of Kingston the character, who learns to follow the twists and loops of the many stories which together define her life. The storytelling process itself creates the "outlawed knot" which Kingston offers us as a "novel" pattern of possibility.

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Art, of which the novel is but one form, has always offered its unified vision of the human condition, a "truth" which transcends seemingly contradictory realities by encompassing them in an ordered whole. So too has myth been acknowledged, as Mircea Eliade reminds us, as the "**absolute truth**" and "**sacred history**" of the culture from which it comes.⁵ Since the Greek **mythos** can be translated as plot to reveal the connections between the pattern of the novel and the patterns of myth, it is not just the allusions from myth incorporated in such novels but even more importantly the basic pattern of the novel which reflects the cultural "**absolute truth**" which undergirds its story. To understand that story, we must appreciate what "stands under" it.

In *The Woman Warrior*, for instance, Kingston creates a "novel" order as well as incorporating allusions to both Chinese and family history and myth in her exploration of her female self. As Shirley K. Rose has argued, "The particulars of the story are less interesting than her telling of that story, for Kingston's narrative brings together 'reality' and 'myth' from the perspectives of both the Chinese culture and American culture."⁶ Nor should we separate either the "reality" or the "myth" from Kingston's unique perspective on both; as she explains in the novel, she must come to her own understanding of her inherited myths because "How can Chinese keep any traditions at all? They don't even make you pay attention, slipping in a ceremony and clearing the table before the children notice specialness."⁷ "Don't see how they kept up a continuous culture for five thousand years," she complains. "Maybe they didn't ; maybe everyone makes it up as they go along. If we had to depend on being told, we'd have no religion, no babies, no menstruation (sex, of course, unspeakable), no death."⁸

Nor does Kingston want to confront "Chinese culture" in its historical accuracy, or even in China. Her "Chinese culture" consists of her family stories of the "homeland" she has never visited and the lifestyle of Chinese Americans. "I was describing the place that we Americans imagine to be China. They mythic China has its own history, smells, flowers, one hundred birds, long-lived people, dialects, music," she explains in her essay "Imagined Life." "If I had gotten on a plane and flown to the China that's over there, I might have lost the imagined land."⁹ Thus the process Kingston uses to create her novel involves realistic details of a mythic China and mythic training for an autobiographical narrator raised in contemporary America.

True to her traditions, Kingston must encompass the linear story within the cyclical pattern, eschewing the linear tightrope of chronological plot to order her story. Rather, the story takes place as it is written, and memories of the personal, historical, and mythic past blend with direct observation and rational analysis of the present moment to place the reader in the landscape of the writer's imagination. The artistic pattern of that landscape takes shape as Kingston crafts an intricate twisting of five

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knots from her own story-line, her own life, each one curling in on itself to form one of the five sections of the book. The narrator explains her artistic process at the beginning of the final section, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe." She has taken her brother's brief and already second-hand version of her aunt's story as the basis for the previous chapter and has transformed it:

His version of the story may be better than mine because of its bareness, not twisted into designs. The hearer can carry it tucked away without it taking up much room. Long ago in China, knot-makers tied string into buttons and frogs, and rope into bell pulls. There was one knot so complicated that it blinded the knot-maker. Finally an emperor outlawed this cruel knot, and the nobles could not order it anymore. If I had lived in China, I would have been an outlaw knot-maker.¹⁰

Kingston identifies with the Chinese outlaw knot-maker as she follows the twistings of her female heritage and traces how it "branches into" her own life, creating in the process the five-chapter intricately interwoven "frog knot" from the single storyline that comprises her own upbringing as a Chinese American daughter. Paternal aunt, mythic woman warrior, mother, maternal aunt, and an historical exiled Chinese poetess receive individual sections and yet reveal themselves to be part of the possibilities that shape the narrator herself, as is the young playmate she abuses in the final section whose silence threatens to become her own.

However, each character's story is limited by the narrator's use of it, for only inasmuch as she can imagine these women in her own mind, her own life, and conversely imagine herself in their lives are they important to her story. The present rather than the past determines the life Kingston chooses to imagine for each woman. Thus, the narrator refuses to believe that "No Name Woman," her paternal aunt, might have committed adultery because she was sexually promiscuous: "Imagining her free with sex doesn't fit, though. I don't know any women like that, or men either. Unless I see her life branching into mine, she gives me no ancestral help."¹¹

As Kingston's narrator discovers and constructs her own multiple identity in *The Woman Warrior*, she creates anew the inherited culture hero myths of the first woman warrior and of the poetess Ts'ai Yen by recognizing herself as their contemporary expression. She too is a "swordswoman" motivated by, carrying "on her back," the words of her people; she too must sing her own song among "barbarians." Simultaneously she recognizes that she is the contemporary expression, the culmination, of the female line from which she has descended, which helps her to realize fully the shared stories of her father's disowned "no-

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name" sister, her mother's earlier life as a medical student and doctor in China, and even the "madness" which overcomes her mother's culturally-uprooted sister Moon Orchid when she cannot overcome the contradictions which greet her in America.

The center loop of this complex knot of relationships which Kingston must unwind—must imagine and write about—to open the stories of her female ancestry is the story of her mother, which she calls "Shaman." While her mother is also Kingston's source and model for her gift for "talk-story," "Shaman" identifies her role as a doctor in China, which is denied her in America. Her mother, Brave Orchid, is able in this section to face ghosts as well as medical emergencies, as the women medical students are trained in both the science and the magic spells which heal the body and spirit. In America, Brave Orchid must work in a laundry and heal with "talk-story." The differences between mother and daughter, China and America, then and now, are acknowledged and encompassed rather than resolved as the narrator accepts her own role as storyteller and transforms that role to fit the realities of the present moment. She will give the explanations that are never given and write down the stories which were preserved only in her mother's oral "talk-story" tradition in order to offer a contemporary version of the myth, a **mythos** of her own in the order of her novel, to a contemporary world which desperately needs explanations, needs to know the words, and needs a more encompassing pattern. The "wordswoman" that she has become encompasses as well the "woman warrior" role:

The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar. May my people understand the resemblance soon so that I can return to them. What we have in common are the words at our backs. The ideographs for **revenge** are "report a crime" and "report to five families." The reporting is the vengeance, not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words. And I have so many words—"chink" words and "gook" words too—that they do not fit on my skin.¹²

The narrator's ethnic heritage is continuously re-experienced as coterminous with the American context in which she has matured, and her individuality is discovered within her communal roles. Kingston's intricate knot-making enables the reader to realize that history is myth and myth is history, that the personal is communal and vice versa. As we return to a mythic China to discover her real aunt being ostracized in an historic village ceremony condemning her adultery, we also remain with the narrator in contemporary America who must imagine plausible reasons why a woman who shares her ethnic heritage would give up her social status by getting pregnant and then kill herself and her child. Each twist of the knot is imaginative but rooted in the realities of human history.

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We know that only one or maybe none of the "resolutions" given actually motivated this personal act, but we also know that each resolution is possible and **could** have motivated this or a similar act by a similar woman.

Linking myth and reality, Kingston can identify the words at our backs—the words that motivate our actions—and the very **telling** of her version of our story offers us other choices, other patterns. She provides the words particular to her family as a definition of self, those particular to her ethnic heritage as the inescapable "other" demands of community, the plot incidents particular to her female gender as the social impact of belonging to **two** patriarchal societies, and the seemingly contradictory demands of her American context and her Chinese community as twists in an unending knot which her narrator must unwind to know the "whole story" of who she is and thus to escape madness. "The difference between mad people and sane people,' Brave Orchid explains to her children, 'is that sane people have variety when they talk-story. Mad people have only one story that they talk over and over.'"¹³ By sharing her complex skills as a meronymic storyteller, Kingston is offering her reader the variety which keeps us sane, freeing us from a dominant discourse which convincingly describes the inevitable tragedy of our death but fails to re-mind us of the simultaneous richness of each moment of our lives.

With her complex knot-making ability, Kingston reveals that we too must follow the twists of our own lives through family, community, and social versions and know in our own selves the order we can achieve, the work of art we can create by constructing our own story from its many components. When rejecting any of the components means sacrificing parts of the self, is not the meronymic perspective, the both/and, a way to start evaluating and appreciating what we have received from each source and selecting which of their imagined lives we want to include in our self-portrait? When the novel is made new through fresh perspectives, when the story balances personal, historical, and mythic truths; then the "storyline" can be spread out, un-knotted, or looped to reveal the simultaneous realities of many cultures, many times, and many places as they repeat the "**absolute truth**" of myth in this culture, this time, this place.

"There is only the eternal present, and biology," Kingston's narrator explains to her mother as she takes on the role of storyteller, and "We belong to the planet now, Mama. Does it make sense to you that if we're no longer attached to one piece of land, we belong to the planet? Wherever we happen to be standing, why, that spot belongs to us as much as any other spot."¹⁴ Telling the "whole story" from a meronymic perspective, an encompassing vision which expands our definitions of self, family, community, and society, is essential in our contemporary "world village" in which we too "belong to the planet." Kingston reminds

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us that the human imagination is capable of such stretching—is free of the boundaries which separate us in this time and place because there, as St. Augustine explained long ago, "[t]he present of things past is the memory, the present of present things is direct perception; and the present of future things is expectation."¹⁵

Notes

¹Clyde Kluckhohn, "Recurrent Themes in Myth and Mythmaking," in *Myth and Mythmaking*, ed. Henry A. Murray (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 46-60.

²Throughout this article, the term "American" will be used to refer exclusively to citizens of the United States, who have appropriated that term to identify their own literature, and particularly to the dominant discourse of that literature, ignoring not only intra-national diversity, but also the international character of the two American continents.

³Thelma J. Shinn, *Worlds Within Women: Myth and Mythmaking in Fantastic Literature by Women* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986). While this study explores fiction by women from Doris Lessing to Octavia E. Butler who expand our perceptions of reality beyond the literary demands of Realism, such recent writers as Toni Morrison and Louise Erdrich have followed the lead of Eudora Welty in *The Golden Apples* by transforming Realism itself into a meronymic hybrid in which the simultaneity of shared mythologies inform our understanding of the present moment. For Welty, Greek and Celtic traditions manifest themselves in Mississippi as Natchez Trace folklore, while Morrison couches West African cautionary tales in Christian symbolism, and Erdrich explores the roots in Nature of stones strung as Cree prayerbeads or Catholic rosaries in *Love Medicine*.

⁴Just as Kingston has an "other" story of possibilities for women when her mother sings her the tale of Fa Mu Lan, women writers offer other possibilities for their characters from such African traditions as Toni Cade Bambara's "mud mothers" in *The Salt Eaters*, Native American traditions as Leslie Marmon Silko's "Yellow Women" transformations, and Latina traditions as the clairvoyance of Clara in Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*. The typical character of Realism is thus revealed as typical of the dominant culture only, while the possibilities unveiled through myth and folklore find cognates in other traditional tales as well. If in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* Nettie is surprised to find "Uncle Remus" stories among the Olinka, it is the pattern of such a story that the blond

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Squeak earns freedom for Sophie from a white sheriff in the South.

⁵Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, tr. by Philip Mairet (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 23.

⁶Shirley K. Rose, "Metaphors and Myths of Cross-Cultural Literacy," *MELUS* 14:1 (Spring 1987): 5-16.

⁷Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (New York: Random House, 1977), 215.

⁸Kingston, 216.

⁹Maxine Hong Kingston, "Imagined Life," in *Women's Voices: Visions and Perspectives*, eds. Pat C. Hoy II, Esther H. Schor, and Robert DiYanni (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990): 137-44.

¹⁰Kingston, *Woman Warrior*, 189-90

¹¹Kingston, *Woman Warrior*, 10.

¹²Kingston, *Woman Warrior*, 62-63.

¹³Kingston, *Woman Warrior*, 184.

¹⁴Kingston, *Woman Warrior*, 124-25.

¹⁵St. Augustine, *Confessions*, tr. by R. S. Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 269.

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From Scholarship Girls to Scholarship Women: Surviving the Contradictions of Class and Race in Academe

Gloria H. Cuádras
Arizona State University West

Jennifer L. Pierce
University of Minnesota

This article explores the dilemmas graduate education poses for women of working-class origin who come from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. It proceeds in a chronological narrative using examples from the authors' personal experiences to make general points about how the intricate web of class, race, and gender relations shaped their experiences in higher education. Both women—Cuádras, a Chicana, and Pierce, a white woman—struggle with the feelings of alienation and marginality as outsiders within the academy as well as their material needs for financial support. Their personal narratives reveal, as well, how race shapes their experiences in the academy. Racism renders Cuádras' class status visible, whereas "whiteness" masks Pierce's background. Finally, the authors shift their focus from an examination of the structures which shaped their lives to an exploration of their attempts to find their own voices in academic work, and to resist the very structures which excluded their experiences as women from working-class backgrounds.

Introduction

The term scholarship student¹ describes an individual from working-class origins who experience social and economic mobility into the middle classes, largely because of his or her academic excellence

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and achievements. Mobility, however, is not without its price, as these individuals experience a malaise which permeates daily life.² In this article, we appropriate the concept of the scholarship student to describe our personal experiences as white and Chicana working-class women in graduate school. As "scholarship girls," we have experienced the mobility promised by a trajectory of academic achievements, but we also own the uneasiness attributed to that path. In doing so, we have become keenly aware that our trajectory from scholarship girls to "scholarship women" has been and continues to be laden with tensions produced by the very structures which have shaped our experiences. Moreover, as a woman of color and a white working-class woman, we face these tensions from different relational positions to the existing configurations of power and privilege.³

The vignettes presented in this article are meant not only to describe the paths that we took, but to highlight our negotiations with the issues we confront as women of working-class origin who now occupy a space within the academy. It is a well-documented fact that the American professorate draws predominantly from individuals of the well-educated, white Protestant, and middle classes.⁴ Discussing the institutionalization of privilege, Baca Zinn et al., have noted, "Institutions are organized to facilitate white middle class men's smooth entry into and mobility in positions of power⁵. These men establish criteria for the entry of others into similar positions, defining success, the ward system, the distribution of resources, and institutional goals and priorities in a way that perpetuates power." The academic institution and its prevailing culture are not exceptions to this characterization. Depending on whose interpretation one adheres to, the academic culture may be depicted as one ruled by the principle of merit, academic freedom, and professional autonomy,⁶ or as Adams has suggested, "the Profession" is essentially a "men's club" that is hierarchical and patriarchal in its structure, "terroristic and militaristic," "dictatorial," as "rigid."⁷

In this article, we begin by describing who we were when we first arrived in the sociology department at the University of California, Berkeley in the early 1980s. The remainder of the article proceeds in a chronological narrative using examples from our experiences to make general points about how the intricate web of class, race, and gender relations shaped our experiences in higher education. The first section of the paper examines our point of entry into the graduate program as "scholarship girls." Though we share working-class origins, we describe as well the important differences in our racial and ethnic backgrounds. Like many Chicanas, Gloria grew up in an agricultural area of California; whereas Jennifer came from a declining industrial town in the Southwest.⁸ We show how both the similarity and the difference in our class and racialized⁹ positions shaped our experiences when we first entered graduate school. The following section explores our persistence through

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the middle years—post-M.A. and pre-dissertation. Using the concept "endurance labor," we consider the means we employed to get through these years in the face of limited institutional forms of support. The third section, "Lifting as We Climb," describes our experiences during our final years in the graduate program when we were completing our dissertations. Here, our focus shifts from an examination of the structures which shaped our lives to our attempts to find our voices in our academic work and resist the very structures which excluded our experiences. Finally, we address the contradictions we continue to face as women of working-class origin in the academy.

Point of Entry—Scholarship Girls

Gloria:

As the daughter of a farm laborer and a mother whose work revolved around the home and raising eight children, I grew up in a nurturing, noisy, and lively environment. Originally from the small, agricultural town of Brawley in the Imperial Valley of California, I was the sixth born of my siblings. My trajectory as a "scholarship girl" began very early in my schooling. I was often identified as the "teacher's pet" and selected to help others with schoolwork. Between family life and school days, I received a tremendous amount of positive reinforcement from my parents, teachers, siblings, friends, and neighbors. Hence, in doing well, I experienced a collective sense of ownership and pride in my achievements.

Yet, I also received double messages from my parents about my achievements and their expectations for me as a Mexican woman. On one hand, I was encouraged to excel in school; on the other hand, I was told that if I left home for my higher education, I faced the possibility of being disowned. For two years following my high school graduation, I enrolled at the local community college, taking almost double the number of units required. I used the time to demonstrate to my parents that I was serious about attending a university away from home, and when the letter of acceptance from UC Santa Cruz arrived, my siblings joyously celebrated with me and rallied my parents to permit me to leave home. By the middle of the summer, they reluctantly but proudly granted their approval.

My undergraduate years were truly a special time for me. Largely through the core and my sociology courses, I underwent a politicization process that fed my desire to make connections out of my lived experience. I had countless questions and pursued them with a passion. I discovered sociology because I wanted to understand the "class smells" of my childhood—the eastside smell of cantaloupes and onions that permeated our neighborhoods bordering the packing shed, to the smell of chlorine reeking from the pools of the westside of town where the

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"gabachos" lived. I had entered University of California, Santa Cruz as a polite Mexican American, the "polite timidity" Moraga intimates is "killing us,"¹⁰ and left as a Chicana, determined to utilize education as a way of making a difference.

What I did not realize was that the emphasis placed on interpersonal relationships and the collegiality with faculty, administrators, and college staff was an emphasis unique to the Santa Cruz campus. Moreover, the special focus on students of color and the fostering of a multicultural environment was especially distinctive about Oakes College.¹¹ I had become accustomed to a sense of community and a nurturing educational environment. Coffee breaks with faculty and staff were a daily part of life. It was common practice for faculty to leave their doors open, inviting students to come in and talk.

I arrived at University of California, Berkeley with expectations that graduate school would far exceed my undergraduate experience. I was to be proven completely amiss in my expectations. When I arrived on the fourth floor of the Barrows Hall at Berkeley, I was physically struck by the fact that every single door was closed. And they remained that way. I remember asking myself, "Is this a *sociology* department?" It would only be a matter of a few months before I would personally label the fourth floor as "the morgue"—because to me, that is what it was, a floor with two hallways and a row of coffins on each side. (By the time I left, I did not feel all that differently). In any case, on my first visit to the department, I walked to the end of one of these long hallways to the office of the graduate secretary (who is no longer there). I handed her a set of papers. She looked at me and her first comments were, "Well, we don't eliminate you here, you eliminate yourself." Those words were my welcome to the Department of Sociology. I walked out of the office knowing this was going to be different.¹²

And different does not begin to describe it. Because I was the only domestic person of color (male or female) enrolled in my cohort of eighteen students, I initially understood the tensions I experienced as racial. In actuality, it was the convergence of race, gender, and class differences between myself and my peers, as well as my lack of "fit" with the prevailing department culture that produced my sense of alienation. It was in graduate school I first became familiar with the existence of private boarding schools, the seven sisters schools, and the ivy league. They would be the ones who set the tone and demarcate the cultural script.

Because of perceived and actual differences between myself and my peers, I developed few friendships with whites. In the custom Hurtado depicted, my relational position to white men and women was distinct.¹³ The white men did not have a clue as to how to relate to me; because my personal style was not aggressive and argumentative, and I refused to engage in mindless, semantical chest-beating, I was not

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sought out as a "contending force." It was my friendships with two advanced graduate students—a middle-class Jewish woman and a working-class Chicana—who initially decoded many of the cultural and political subtleties for me. Eventually, I became part of a group of Chicana graduate students who came together across the disciplines. Although, at times, this group also proved to be a source of strain, it sustained me through these early years.¹⁴

As for my white female counterparts, the little experience I did have with them, largely in the context of seminars, only reaffirmed my feelings of difference. While I originally saw them as racial/cultural differences, I eventually recognized them as differences confounded by the simultaneity of race, class, and gender. Like the majority of men, these women appeared to be quite comfortable within the culture of the department.

I remember making several futile attempts to get to know the white women in the department. On these occasions my presence was greeted with a very sloppily hidden and uncomfortable surprise—the kind of greeting one gets when one has not attended church in a long time. It became obvious to me in the course of these gatherings that their friendships and networks were firmly established and that their interest in including me would, at best, be what Uttal has referred to as "inclusion without influence"¹⁵ in capturing the continuing tokenism of women of color by white women. So I walked away from such encounters with a strong sense that the potential to establish networks with "sisters" in the department simply did not exist.

At the same time, I was sensitively attuned to the perceptions of others (including faculty) and knew that the responsibility for my alienated status would rest upon my shoulders. I would be known as the alienated one—I was the "minority" who kept to herself and did not integrate into the collegial dynamics of the department. The other irony here, of course, is that throughout my educational trajectory I had been centrally involved in the culture of academic and student life. What then, was so different at this stage? One possible answer is that, drawing from Pierre Bourdieu¹⁶, my "cultural capital"—the attributes, possessions, or qualities I brought with me to the academy—was incongruent with that valued by the academic world. All the qualities that had up until this point been sufficient and even regarded, were suddenly in fierce conflict with the dominant cultural capital. The stakes were higher; to attain the status of writer or scholar is powerful in the technocratic, information society we live in. Moreover, the appropriation of the structures of privilege afforded by the reproduction of cultural capital, which brought others to the same location, were structures I had survived but did not necessarily "own" in the same way.¹⁷ Unlike these students, I was the beneficiary of the contradictions of an educational system set up to allow only a few to enter.

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Much later, at a point when I had constructed and solidified the legitimacy of my own values, did I realize that I too had entered with erroneous assumptions about others and about sociology. I had entered sociology presuming others who did so cared passionately about injustice, about human beings, about changing the state of the world we lived in. Instead, I found that the culture I had entered operated on different values and fundamentally different rules. I learned to expect not to be asked questions about who I was and/or where I was from (questions commonly asked in working-class culture), but rather "What school did you graduate from?"; "Whom have you worked for?"; "What gives you special status (if any) in the department—in other words, who do you know, what are your professional connections and what kind of fellowship or reward brought you here?" Questions asked by peers were basically geared toward determining one's cultural capital. It was not long before I slowly drifted to silence to "claim my education."¹⁸ I found myself listening to learn—to absorb, to digest and to internalize the foreign culture I was immersed in. Eventually I did. While my silence might have been perceived as disinterest, silence for me became a mode of self-preservation.

It was my value system surrounding sociology that clashed most fiercely with the individuals I encountered as my peers. In a course on "Social Change and New Nations," I recall the painful absence of certain kinds of questions. Graduate students rarely expressed concern about human lives, about how people survived living conditions in poor and developing countries. Their concern was with theory—and only with theory. I was amazed at how easily they dismissed, or more accurately, how easily they ignored the human element in our weekly discussion.

If there was a human element in graduate school, it displayed itself in the nature of personal complaints. One of my initial observations about the culture of the department—one that I remain disdainful about to this day—was the all too common practice of incessant graduate student complaining. "The department doesn't seem to care about me." "Professors don't pay enough attention to me." How could I tell them I was grateful to be there? How could I share with them that I felt fortunate? For me, complaining meant forgetting the Chicanos and Chicanas from my childhood whose academic achievements had resulted in similar opportunities. How could I explain that back home my achievements were being watched—with implications for others, particularly other Chicanas? That my success was tied to feeding a hope—a hope that those of us raised in the barrio have seen dissipate among family, friends and neighbors? How could I share with them the facts that I felt a responsibility to others besides myself? Such an obligation was simply not part of the graduate student milieu. Neither their language nor their "moral fabric" made allowances for such background noise.

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Jennifer:

In contrast to Gloria's childhood in the agricultural center of California, I grew up in a declining industrial town at the base of the Rocky Mountains in southern Colorado. In the mid-1970s, the local steel mill shut down from full to one-third capacity, laying off thousands of steel workers, affecting not only the workers and their immediate families, but businesses, schools, and churches which sustained the web of social life in this predominantly working-class community. The decline of the manufacturing sector both locally and nationally meant there were no equivalent manufacturing jobs to replace those which had been lost. Throughout the 1970s unemployment was high.

In this social and historical context, and as the oldest sibling in my family, I had been instilled from an early age with a strong *working-class* work ethic and a sense of pride in a job, any job, well-done. My father taught me that whatever I did in life—whether it was digging ditches or cleaning toilets—it was important to do the very best. "Whatever you do," he would say, "you *will know* you did your very best. No one can take that away from you." This work ethic combined with my family's sense of responsibility to immediate neighbors and community. We not only considered ourselves responsible for our family, but to other people in the neighborhood and in the larger community. These beliefs strongly colored my early schooling and later entry to college as a "scholarship girl."

Like many working-class students, University of California, Berkeley was the graduate program I applied to—partly the result of my financial situation and the location of the university itself, but also because I simply did not know any better. No one had suggested that I apply to more than one program. When I first entered the graduate program, I had very low expectations about the department's faculty members. As an undergraduate, my teaching assistants who were sociology graduate students warned me about the benevolent attitude of neglect most faculty members held toward students, and about the structureless nature of the program itself. "It is the graduate students who will help you get through," they told me, "not the professors." However, the majority of the graduate students were very different from me. As a working-class white woman, I discovered early on that I did not fit into the culture of the academy. Quite simply, I did not speak the language. Although I had always done well in school, my academic accomplishments as an undergraduate did not prepare me for my entry into *academe*. As I was to learn, I simply did not possess the "cultural capital" that graduate students from more privileged backgrounds took for granted.¹⁹

Most of my first year in school, I said very little in seminars. I listened. And what I heard was a language and a style that I was

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unaccustomed to using. When I thought a particular book was bad, I described it that way. Those educated in the Ivy League who held similar views talked about how "the author made problematic assumptions..." Their assessments were cool, aloof, and seemingly "objective." I felt alienated and intimidated by such discussions. My responses to reading felt much more passionate and personal. I did not understand how they could be so detached from what they read. Were they not interested in how sociological theory applied to the real world?²⁰

When I finally began to speak, at the end of my first year, I found myself being "corrected" by other graduate students. For example, in one seminar on the sociology of culture, we read Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's book, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*.²¹ I passionately criticized Adorno, arguing that his theory left no room for the act of resistance. "He assumes that the masses are stupid and uncritical," I angrily concluded. My response to the book was not purely intellectual, but personal. I reacted against what I felt to be the ignorance and elitism of "highfalutin" theories about the working-class. Another graduate student, a male from Harvard, interrupted me: "As Jennifer has pointed out, the Frankfurt School does not adequately theorize the problem of human agency." As he continued to lead the discussion to another topic, a topic reflecting his own interest and expertise, I sat dumbfounded, thinking, "The problem of human agency! What happened to the people? Doesn't anyone care about real people?"

Later, in the same seminar, he interrupted me again, by rephrasing another criticism I had made of the book. This time I did not sit passively, but said, "Do you realize that this is the second time you have interrupted me?" Then I let go of my anger with full force: "Don't interrupt me again. And don't you ever tell me what I said—I said what I said. This is my criticism. Speak for yourself!" The classroom became silent—a long, embarrassed silence. Unwittingly, I had broken an academic norm by showing strong emotion in an intellectual discussion. And, in fact, I was told later by the professor, a professed leftist, that I had been "too hard" on this graduate student. He added that he was disappointed in me because I had disrupted the discussion and made people feel uncomfortable. "What about my feelings?" I wanted to say. "What about the fact that every comment I have made in this seminar has been ignored or overlooked?" But I said nothing. At the time, I was unable to fully articulate the nature of the problem I encountered.

Later that spring, in a graduate student women's group, a group of white women, we discussed the ways our male colleagues discounted and discredited our contributions to seminars. Several observed that men typically interrupted women or restated women's ideas as if they were their own. Although this gave me some insight into my own experience, I still had a nagging doubt about the accuracy of the criticism. Many of these women who complained about being interrupted by men, con-

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stantly interrupted me. When I made this observation, I was met by a flurry of criticism: "You can't be much of a feminist *if you are so quick to criticize* other women." "Feminists are supposed to *support* other women." While it was true that some of the women did support me and later became close friends, I still had lingering doubts about the others.

These other women, who were often from the Ivy League, did not seem all that different from the "Harvard white male." They spoke with a self-assurance and, at times, arrogance. They assumed they would be taken seriously and they appeared to be comfortable using what I considered to be the "male academic style," that is, "a way of standing, or sitting, or tilting one's head and saying in a doubtful yet serious tone, 'We don't know. The data are not in yet'..."²² I began to realize that gender explained only a part of my uneasiness and discomfort. Although we shared similar experiences as women, there were differences among us—class differences. And what I saw in their attitude of confidence and self-assurance was a class privilege—one that they were unwilling to acknowledge.

What I began to learn from these experiences was that in entering the academy I not only encountered a male-dominated world, but an upper-middle-class milieu. My experience as a white working-class woman in graduate school could not only be understood in terms of my gender, but in context of race, class, and gender. White women from the appropriate class background had less difficulty than I did understanding the norms of academic discourse. This lesson continued to play itself out not only in seminars and student meetings, but in my very material needs for financial support.

Gloria and I first got to know one another while working at University of California, Berkeley's Survey Research Center. The pay for this job was minimal, the hours, long—we worked weekdays as well as weekends—and the work, boring and monotonous. In recalling this incident recently, we both laughed about how awful the job had been. During eight-hour shifts, we were simultaneously plugged into a computer terminal and a telephone headset so that we could interview people over the phone while typing their responses on the keyboard. We were not even able to stand up and stretch while "plugged in" because the headset cords were too short. Productivity was measured by our response rates, that is, the percentage of people we were able to convince to participate in the survey. (Those interviewers with low response rates did not last at the "survey factory.") To add to this factory-like environment, our supervisor, much like a quality control expert, "listened in" on our phone conversations to ensure that our interviews were performed in precisely the same way. And finally, Gloria, the token Chicana on the project, was expected to translate interviews into Spanish for Spanish-speaking respondents—an additional, highly skilled task for which she was not paid a higher hourly wage. Suffice it to say, we did not

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have much control over the labor process.²³

Supposedly, both of us had taken the job to get experience doing survey research. However, in retrospect, we have acknowledged that we had also taken this job because we desperately needed the money. Neither of us can recall a time in graduate school when we were not worried about money. Every year I scrambled to get a teaching assistantship for the following year. And every spring, I worried about what kind of job or jobs I could piece together for the summer. The type of work did not matter as much as the fact that I somehow managed to get a job—for without one, I could not pay rent, much less tuition.

I vividly remember sitting in a graduate seminar one spring quarter listening to Professor X who advised us, in the course of his discussion, that we should all be reading books from his reading list during our summer vacation, assuming of course, that we all had the summer off to do nothing but read. I already knew what I would be doing that summer—I had lined up a paralegal job with a law firm in San Francisco. And, I knew that I would be working 40-50 hours a week at the law firm, just as I had the previous summer. Nevertheless, I unwittingly took his suggestion to heart.

When I came home at night from my job in the summer, I was too tired to read, too tired to think, too tired to do much of anything but flop down in front of the television. But what made this summer different is that every time I sat down in front of the TV, I felt guilty about not doing my academic work. I tried to rationalize my behavior—I was too busy, I was working full-time, I just didn't have the time—but I kept hearing Professor X's voice in the back of my head. Furthermore, I knew that some of my graduate student colleagues who did *not have to work* were in reading groups over the summer. As a consequence, in addition to the guilt I experienced, I felt angry and resentful that they had the luxury of spending their summers in this way and I did not.

The following fall, I met again with Professor X. He jokingly chided me for not doing my summer reading. I explained that I had worked full-time during the summer. "Why did you work full-time?" he asked, sincerely puzzled by this seemingly anomalous behavior. Somewhat defensively, I explained that I needed to work to make money for tuition. An embarrassed silence followed. He eventually changed the subject and the issue was dropped. But at the time, I too felt embarrassed, partly because his question made me feel "different" because I *had* to work and partly because his assumptions about my background rendered my experience as a white working-class woman *invisible*. Although I had begun to articulate the reasons for my feelings of marginality and alienation as a working-class woman in the academy, experiences such as this forced me to realize why it was so difficult to do so. When my experiences were brought to light, they were treated not only as if they were invisible, but as if they were something taboo, something to be

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silenced.

The Middle Years—Endurance Labor

In spite of our feelings of discomfort and alienation, we continued to plod through the graduate program. We self-consciously chose the word "plod" not only to capture our feeling—it felt like we were plodding—but because neither of us was ever labeled a "star" graduate student, meaning a student who received tangible awards such as university fellowships or intangible ones such as attention of faculty members. Gloria termed our ability to persist despite the odds—five out of every ten entering graduate students drop out—"endurance labor."²⁴ By this, she meant the relentless drive to persist, in spite of adversity, and many times, because of adversity.

Endurance labor contrasts with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital.²⁵ Cultural capital is available to and transmitted by those who have control over linguistic and cultural competence in society; in other words, the upper classes. By contrast, endurance labor arises from those who have little control over these regimes of power, but who create, nevertheless, an inner and collective strength to struggle against the very structures that disempower them. Thus, endurance labor does not reproduce inequality, but pushes against these configurations of power.

Jennifer:

In addition to its cognitive dimension, endurance capital also contains an emotional and more personal dimension, that is, the "fantasies we have about ourselves to help keep us going."²⁶ My fantasies revolved around the promise an academic job held—academic freedom, autonomy and the joys of teaching. I loved teaching. I strongly identified with the students of color and white students whose backgrounds were similar to my own. In retrospect, I realize that I gave them the encouragement and nurturance that I did not receive as a graduate student. In turn, their enthusiasm and success nurtured me. In addition to the appeal teaching held, my experiences in the work world pushed me back into the academy. Having worked for many years in boring, dead-end, 8-5 jobs, I was well aware of the limited autonomy, low pay, and lack of social meaning inherent in such positions. Obtaining a Ph.D. represented the means of escaping such jobs.

Such a dream is hardly a middle-class fantasy. Middle-class children expect to gain prestige, status, and social meaning from their jobs/careers, whereas working-class people often do not.²⁷ Fantasies about escaping the drudgery of work are the stuff working-class dreams are made of. However, I did not carry these dreams without ambivalence. Becoming upwardly mobile meant entering one world and leaving another behind. For me, such a departure sometimes felt like betrayal. By obtaining a Ph.D., I not only surpassed the class background of my

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parents, but joined the ranks of those who mocked and rejected my class origins.²⁸ Not surprisingly, as sociologists Richard Sennett and Jonathon Cobb observe, working-class men who enter middle-class professions never feel a part of the world they have entered. Instead they experience a profound sense of marginality.²⁹

Despite my personal feelings of marginality and ambivalence, I persisted. Year after year I applied for university fellowships. And, year after year, I was nominated, but did not actually receive one. I was typically an "alternate," a designation which matched my own sense of being alternate, being different, the student at the end of the line who did not make the first cut. By the time I actually received a fellowship—quite late in my graduate career—I had learned to shoulder disappointment and rejection by sustaining myself with my own personal dreams and a strong sense of anger. I had come to understand how such decisions were made. Our graduate program, like the other educational institutions, though based on the ideology of meritocracy, was by no means meritocratic.³⁰ The graduate students who were awarded fellowships were typically those from the upper-middle class who attended Ivy League schools. Fellowship decisions, like most department decisions, were based on politics, not on personal merit. When my dreams failed to sustain me, my anger supported me. As Black feminist poet Audre Lorde has written, "a well-stocked arsenal of anger can be a useful tool against the personal and institutional forces which brought it into being."³¹

My well-stocked arsenal of anger and my dreams continued to sustain me as I slowly began to gain recognition for my academic work. I received an award for outstanding teaching as a teaching assistant the same year that I was awarded the Gertrude Jagger prize from the department of sociology for a paper I had written for my qualifying exams. And finally, after many years of being "alternate," I received a Regents University Fellowship. Though very late in coming, these awards and honors helped to keep me going through the slow and laborious middle years of Berkeley's graduate program.

Gloria:

The Berkeley Sociology Department is considered one of the more progressive departments in the country. What is not asked amidst this "folk understanding" of its place in the broader scheme of things is progressive by whose definition? Scholars of color have long called into question the Left's definition of progressive, especially in the light of the Left's persistent neglect of racism.³² Given our "astute insights" as sociologists into the sources and ramifications of stratification in society, is it progressive to cavalierly endorse a "sink or swim" policy for graduate student retention? Is it progressive to have zero women of color on the faculty?³³

I am reminded of the time when a group of us, as Chicanas, got

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together and decided to meet with the Chair about affirmative action within the department, especially as it pertained to Chicanos and Chicanas. We were inadvertently scolded and accused of "ghettoizing" ourselves in relation to our areas and for working with the same faculty year after year. Of course, our explanations about why we inevitably ended up working with the same handful of faculty went unheard. In fact, since Chicanos and Chicanas were first admitted into the department in the late 1960s, the signatures of the same four or five faculty members continued to appear on the cover pages of our respective dissertations. Is it progressive, then, to accuse students of color of ghettoization when the composition of our faculty (in ethnic, gender, and political terms) is limited in its ability to meet different needs?

Such experiences taught me that there were assumptions about who I was that I had no control over. It became most obvious in relation to exchanges about fellowships. As a recipient of a Danforth Fellowship, I quickly learned not to share such information when queried and to avoid discussions about fellowships, detecting from my interactions with my peers that at least two assumptions about my status prevailed: I was in graduate school simply because I was a "minority" woman—"an affirmative action case"—and the monies provided were sufficient that I did not have to find additional work. On both accounts they were wrong. As a recipient of affirmative action policies and programs in higher education, I have benefitted from the space such policies have made available for individuals like myself. Yet, like the fellow members of my department, I met all the standard criteria required for admission and graduation. Contrary to the disdain for affirmative action espoused by authors such as Shelby Steele³⁴ Richard Rodriguez³⁵, a slate of other neo-conservatives who surfaced during the 1980s, I recognize the importance and the difference such programs made in my ability to advance through higher education.

Their intervention, via the financial, academic, and social support, had aided my retention on the scholarship path. By performing well academically, I was rewarded with fellowships. In spite of the assistance, like Jennifer, I cannot recall a time when I did not simultaneously work at least one job, and depending on the extent of the stipend, sometimes two or three part-time jobs to remain self-sufficient. I also worked as a strategy to find my niche within the culture of the academy. Such a strategy worked in part, however, because one of the most imperative connections to make in graduate school is with faculty. Developing meaningful relationships with faculty is critical for a successful graduate student experience; it is they who will invest in you and look after you. Although I was integrated into a research institute and involved with the governmental body for graduate students, I was not centrally based in my department. I felt disconnected and burnt out from trying to connect. I decided I needed to take a break and took one. I left graduate school after completing my

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post-M.A. coursework, but before taking my qualifying exams.

Ultimately, my endurance labor prevailed. I went home to the Imperial Valley, not sure if I would return to graduate school. In discussing working-class women's writings, Zandy suggests beginning with the home—to think of it as an "inner geography where the ache finally quits, where there is no sense of 'otherness,' where there is, at last, a community."³⁶ For a year, I re-energized with my family and gave serious thought to leaving graduate school. In going home, I once again experienced the feeling of belonging. I realized that my mother's women friends, as my old friends, and the neighbors I had grown up with wanted to know that I was successful at my goals. They wanted to be able to say to their children, "See, I want you to go to college like she did." Going back home helped me put things into perspective again, and I decided to return to the general vicinity and ease my way back into graduate school. In doing so, I was fortunate to meet and work for a Chicana faculty member at another campus, whose unconditional acceptance and confidence in me supported my interest to return. Thus, when I returned to the department, I did so with a decidedly different frame of mind, reflective of a consciousness Chela Sandoval has called the "differential mode of consciousness." She suggests that such a mode requires "grace, flexibility and strength of identity," and

...requires a flexible and mobile form of subjectivity in order to function, one capable of reading the current situation of power and of self-consciously adopting the ideological form best suited to push against its configurations...a form of consciousness well known to oppressed peoples.³⁷

Upon returning, I sought out faculty members in my department who had demonstrated their intellectual and personal support of me in the past and whose expertise would compliment my research interest in a dissertation topic.³⁸ I picked up where I had left off. I also returned at a time when the declining number of African Americans and the stasis in representation of Chicanos/Latinos in graduate and professional education across the country grew as an issue of concern among those interested in increasing faculty diversity at institutions of higher education.³⁹ My impression, in contrast to the early 1980s, was that because of our declining numbers there was a renewed interest in providing academic and monetary support to retain graduate students of color. My participation in two summer research programs designed specifically for Latinos further cemented my commitment to the academic track.⁴⁰ Later, at the dissertation stage, I benefitted from a project designed to provide support during the final stage of the dissertation.⁴¹ Thus, the combination

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of interested faculty mentors, support programs, and my own consciousness and resolution to accept the situational and political complexities that would define my life in the academy resulted in a renewed commitment to scholarship.⁴²

Lifting As We Climb

African American women developed the phrase, "lifting as we climb," to describe their personal and collective experiences in the civil rights movement.⁴³ In the course of the movement, these women not only lifted themselves up, they lifted others with them as they climbed. We use this phrase to describe our final years in graduate school.⁴⁴ In the middle years, "endurance labor" was crucial to our survival in a hostile and unfriendly environment. But in the final years, as we began to work on our dissertations, we found it necessary to work with others, and to lift as we climbed.

After a five-year interlude, we met again in a graduate seminar designed specifically to serve the needs of dissertation students. In the intervening years, each of us had developed confidence in our voices as academics and in our own research. We were no longer silent—we spoke up and, in bell hooks' phrase, "talked back."⁴⁵ We no longer cared what graduate students or professors thought and we had come to value our passion and commitment to our research.

Though we had not seen one another in years, we felt an immediate connection. Both of us had chosen a dissertation topic that was "close to home," something that spoke to our own experience, something that we felt passionate about. The seminar further centered our growing friendship. We found one another's work interesting and exciting. We supported one another intellectually and emotionally. Although we supported each other's ideas, we were always critical and hard-hitting in our comments. In Adrienne Rich's sense of the phrase, we took each other seriously.⁴⁶

Gloria:

I arrived at the seminar with a very focused objective—to get feedback on the dissertation. It is crystal clear to me now that the constant confrontation with privilege continues to gall my better senses. Privilege can be such an amorphous phenomenon; yet privilege is most often defined and recognized from the point of view of the "other."

As an example of such privilege I recount the following story: One seminar member submitted a rather lengthy chapter on her particular topic. I took a considerable amount of time to review the manuscript and provide her with a set of lengthy comments. It appeared to me that a critical gap in her research was a consideration of the impact of the history and racial structures in her analysis. Other seminar members made

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similar observations about her work. While she acknowledged its importance, she nevertheless stated that she would not integrate it into her final work. At the next seminar, she announced that she would not be joining the group because she was under a strict deadline to complete her dissertation. Aside from feeling cheated of feedback she might have provided for our upcoming work, I was angry at her cavalier dismissal of race as well as her position of privilege that allowed her to do so without any consequences or any sense of accountability. I recall thinking, "What would be the repercussions be if I were to ignore race?" Not that I would. But the point still stands. The nature of our existence—as individuals who on a daily basis negotiate to survive the structures we study—situates us in a vastly different relationship to the "isms." The issue of accountability for why and what we study defines our existence in the academy, but it remains a matter of choice for those from more privileged backgrounds.

Jennifer:

Like Gloria, I was also acutely aware of the workings of privilege in this seminar. An incident which I found particularly offensive involved an upper-middle class white woman's ethnographic account of a white working-class community. Her descriptions of the people she studied reminded me of those made by nineteenth century colonizers about the "exotic" people they "discovered" in the New World. For her, white working-class women and men were strange, shocking, almost alien beings. She was greatly surprised, for example, to find overtly racist comments scattered throughout their discussions of otherwise positive interactions with people of color. She opined in class: "I just can't believe anyone would say these things (racial slurs). I never knew anyone who said things like that..."

From my standpoint, her naive "surprise" smacked of racism and class privilege. From the ensuing class discussion it became apparent that she had not read anything about the sociology of white racism⁴⁷ or the history of race relations in the United States. Studying this phenomenon without doing background reading on prejudice or race relations struck me as presumptuous and arrogant. It was as if she, like the early colonizers, considered herself to be the one who discovered this "new" intellectual terrain. In addition, her implicit judgement about the use of derogatory language—*they* say racist things and *I* do not—belied her own unexamined position in the structure of race relations. Though her upper-middle class, liberal upbringing had socialized her to suppress "impolite" racist remarks, it also encouraged her to develop racially homogeneous friendships and relationships. Despite her espoused liberal ideology, her closest circle of friends were upper-middle class people like herself and her own political energies went into a predominantly white middle-class social movement. Like many white leftists, she did not, as graduate

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student Alexandra Gouling characterizes such behavior, "walk the talk."⁴⁸

The student found us to be unsupportive and "overly critical." Rather than listening to our comments, she made imploring remarks: "It seems like you don't like what I'm doing. Isn't there anything you like?... Well, I told you before this is only a draft." She later complained to the professor—but not to us—that she felt we had been too hard on her, and she eventually dropped out of the seminar. While it was true that we had been quite critical of her work, I more so than others, we had used that critical lens for all the work we read that quarter.

What is striking about this incident is how much I had changed from my first year in graduate school. I no longer accepted the scholarly norms of "objectivity" and detachment. I subjected the work of students and faculty to my standards. Racism and class privilege were only part of the problem I saw with this particular student and her work. What was even more disturbing to me was her complete lack of personal commitment to the intellectual project. For her, it was simply an intellectual exercise, a game to be practiced on an objectified and repellent Other. There was no personal investment or passion in her study. Moreover, because I was no longer the lone working-class voice in this upper-middle class environment, my criticisms were no longer met with embarrassed silence. I had found allies among the graduate students who supported rather than rejected my views.

From this dissertation seminar, Gloria and I and two other graduate students went on to form our own informal dissertation group. As Mary Kelsey⁴⁹ was fond of pointing out, it was no accident that the four of us had come together—we all came from some sort of public school background. We continued to meet in each other's apartments, shared home-made meals, and took two to three hours a week reviewing each other's work. It was in this group that I found true colleagues: people who read my work seriously and critically; people who pushed me to do my very best. But, even more importantly, people who shared the same values that I did about teaching, doing research, and being a sociologist. Here, I practiced my job talk, shared my anxieties about the job market, and finally finished my dissertation. It was in this group that we lifted as we climbed.

Conclusion

We began our essay by describing our experiences as "scholarship girls." To conclude we would like to describe briefly where we are today as scholarship women and to outline the conditions of the university setting that continue to influence our lives and our struggles in creating a more inclusive and accountable academy.

Compared to many other graduate students in our respective

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cohorts, we have been among the fortunate few. In a time of serious fiscal cutbacks in colleges and universities across the country, we were able to complete our dissertations and to obtain tenure-track positions. Jennifer recently accepted a job in Sociology at a large public university. After completing a post-doctoral fellowship, Gloria accepted a position in American Studies at a public university.

Our success is not meant to be read as a happy ending, however. In these new positions, we face many of the same problems we experienced as graduate students. Although money is no longer a problem and we have managed to acquire some "cultural capital," we still find ourselves encountering institutionalized racism, classism, and sexism. Moreover, because we are located in the few token positions created for "women and minorities," the demands we face from students, colleagues, administrators, and our communities are tremendous. As the "woman" and the "minority," we are asked time and time again to give lectures and talks on multicultural issues, to assume responsibility for minority or working-class students, to sit on every university committee that requires a token white woman or person of color, to counsel students about sexual harassment, to read papers on multicultural issues, to make appearances on local television and radio, and to act as the bridge for the guilt of our supposedly progressive colleagues and students.

These issues are still considered "our" responsibility: white men (and some white women) rarely receive such requests, much less grant them. At the same time, we are expected to do our research, to "publish or perish," and to meet our teaching obligations. The personal and psychological costs of doing all this work are immense. Because of our ideological and political commitments, it becomes difficult to say "no" to the ever-increasing list of requests. When we say "no" to our students, we are no longer considered part of the struggle. When we say "yes," our department chairs and program directors tell us that we are doing too much service work, which in turn might hurt our chances for tenure and promotion.

Despite the conflicting messages we receive, we continue to speak out, "talk back," and most importantly, work collectively in our respective settings and across them. We have learned that we must pick our battles more carefully. Struggle involves a great deal of time and emotional energy—resources that have become increasingly precious and scarce in our lives as academics. We must continually weigh two questions against one another: 1) What can we do now, knowing that if we do not do something, nothing about the academy will ever change? and 2) Can we retain and act upon our commitments and remain in academic settings?

The answers to these questions are never easy, but the rewards do come. At one level are the institutionalized rewards—those rewards that signify recognition by legitimized, validated bodies—most often

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represented in the mainstream of the academy by grants, teaching awards, and so forth. And then there are the rewards that nurture our souls and the meaning of our place in the academy. They consist of the piles of notes and cards from students, expressing thanks and gratitude for the difference we made in their thoughts, their perspectives, and their educations. They come in the form of statements such as, "Your class changed my life." Moreover, they come in the form of updates from our students, informing us of their latest accomplishments, letting us know how they are now making a difference for others. Or, they come via coverage in the newspaper, as their leadership and work lives unfold.

Regardless of where we go as we pursue our lives as academics, we recognize the structural constraints, the competing demands, and the pressing needs that will continue to come to our attention because of who we are. As women from working-class backgrounds, but different ethnic backgrounds, we have learned to embrace our differences, recognize our similarities, and grapple with our complexities. We recognize that unless we come together for the purpose of addressing and acting upon broader issues, we will not challenge the reproduction of inequality. Our ability to collaborate defies the racism and classism institutionalized in the American educational system. This process is never an easy one, yet we continue to take one another seriously and to move forward the process of institutional change.

Notes

¹ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life, With Special Reference to Publications and Entertainment* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957).

² Examples of the "uprootedness and anxiousness" may be found in texts such as Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory* (Boston: David R. Godine Publishers, 1982); Norman Podhoretz, *Making It* (New York: Random House, 1967); and Budd Schulberg, *What Makes Sammy Run?* (New York: The Modern Library, 1952).

³ Aida Hurtado, "Relating to Privilege: Seduction and Rejection in the Subordination of White Women and Women of Color," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14 (1989): 833-855.

⁴ Martin J. Finkelstein, *The American Academic Professorate* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984); see also E.C. Ladd and S. M. Lipset, *The Divided Academy* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975).

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⁵ Maxine Baca Zinn, L.W. Cannon, E. Higginbotham, and B.T. Dill, "The Costs of Exclusionary Practices in Women's Studies," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 11 (1986): 290-303.

⁶ Martin J. Finkelstein, *The American Academic Professorate* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984).

⁷ Harriet F. Adams, "Work in the Interstices: Woman in Academe," *Women's Studies International Forum* 6 (1983): 135-141; see also Sandra Acker, "Women, the Other Academics," *Women's Studies International Forum* 6 (1983): 191-201.

⁸ This agricultural/industrial economic sector division in our experiences is confirmed by research comparing the historical experiences of people of color and white working-class people in the United States. In his book, *Racial Oppression in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), Robert Blauner demonstrates that people of color are more likely than white working-class people to labor in agricultural settings.

⁹ "Whiteness," though often conceived of as a neutral or invisible racial status in the United States, is a racialized social category. For an excellent discussion of how race shapes the lives of white women, see Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

¹⁰ Cherrie Moraga, *Loving in the War Years* (Boston: South End Press, 1983), 59.

¹¹ It was under the leadership of J. Herman Blake, Provost of Oakes College at University of California, Santa Cruz, that such a positive educational environment was provided. For his discussion of the programmatic approach undertaken, see J. Herman Blake, "Approaching Minority Students as Assets," *Academe* (1985).

¹² In an article on graduate education at University of California, Berkeley, Troy Duster notes that the sociology department's informal culture is characterized by "arrogance and anxiety." Unlike many departments, it is further described as having "negotiated and consultative" relationships with faculty members. Troy Duster, "Graduate Education at Berkeley," *The American Sociologist* 22 (Spring 1987): 83-87.

¹³ Hurtado.

¹⁴ Patricia Zavella speaks to some of these differences that produced strain and conflict in our group in her article, "Reflections Upon Diversity

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Among Chicanas," *Frontiers* 12 (1991): 73-85.

¹⁵ Lynet Uttal, "Inclusion Without Influence: The Continuing Tokenism of Women of Color," in *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: An Aunt Lute Foundation Book, 1990): 42-45.

¹⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," in *Power and Ideology*, eds. Jerry Karabel and A.H. Halsey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 487-511.

¹⁷ This insight surfaced during a lengthy and invaluable conversation with Julia Curry-Rodriguez, spring, 1992. Also, see Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Representation," 487-511.

¹⁸ Adrienne Rich, *Lies, Secrets, and Silences* (New York: Norton, 1978).

¹⁹ Bourdieu, 488.

²⁰ Feminist scholars have long noted the division between "objective" or masculine science and "subjective" or feminine emotions. For example, see Arlie Hochschild, 1975. "The Sociology of Feeling and Emotion: Selected Possibilities," in Rosabeth Moss Kanter and Marcia Millman, eds., *Another Voice: Feminist Perspectives in Social Life and Social Science* (Garden City, NJ: Anchor Press), pp. 280-307; and Hilary Rose, "Hand, Brain and Heart: Feminist Epistemology in the Natural Sciences," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9:1 (1983): 73-90. More recently, Patricia Hill Collins has argued that an emphasis on passion and emotions is the convergence of Afro-centric tradition and feminist thought in her book, *Black Feminist Thought* (New York: Allen and Unwin, 1990). From my own standpoint, I see such an emphasis as the convergence of feminist thought and a historically specific white working-class tradition.

²¹ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Heider, 1944).

²² Susan Krieger, *Social Science and the Self: Personal Essays on an Art Forum* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

²³ Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

²⁴ Thanks to sociologist Ann Leffler for helping us to develop this conceptual tool.

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²⁵ Bourdieu.

²⁶ Kreiger.

²⁷ Lillian Rubin, *Worlds of Pain* (New York: Basic Books, 1978); Richard Sennett and Jonathon Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972).

²⁸ Many scholars have written about the experiences of working-class men who became upwardly mobile. In relation to the academy, see for example, Jake Ryan and C. Sackrey, *Strangers in Paradise: Academics from the Working Class* (Boston: South End Press, 1984). Until recently, little attention was paid to the experiences of working-class women. See Michelle M. Tokarczyk and Elizabeth A. Fay, *Working-Class Women in the Academy: Laborers in the Knowledge Factory* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

²⁹ Sennett and Cobb.

³⁰ Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

³¹ Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," *Sister Outsider* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 124-133.

³² Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).

³³ In 1991, the graduate program at Berkeley hired its first woman of color.

³⁴ Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

³⁵ Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory* (Boston: David R. Godine Publishers, 1982).

³⁶ Janet Zandy, *Calling Home: Working Class Women's Writings* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

³⁷ Chela Sandoval, "Feminist Theory Under Postmodern Conditions: Toward a Theory of Oppositional Consciousness," *Subversions* (Feminist Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz, 1991).

³⁸ I should mention that the faculty member who chaired my dissertation

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was not among those considered to be in the "faculty ghetto," although other members of my committee would have been considered "guilty" by the Chair at the time.

³⁹ Michael W. Hirschorn, "Doctorates Earned by Blacks Decline 26.5 Percent in Decade," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, (February 3, 1988):1; See also, Beatriz Chu Clewell, *Retention of Black and Hispanic Doctoral Students*, (Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 1987); Gail Thomas, *The Access and Success of Blacks and Hispanics in U.S. Graduate and Professional Education*, (Working Paper, National Research Council, Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1986).

⁴⁰ I was a participant in two programs sponsored by the Inter-University Program, Social Science Research Council on Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methodologies and Latino Issues.

⁴¹ The Tomas Rivera Center, sponsored largely by the P.E.W. Foundation, has hosted the Manuscript Completion Project since 1985. I also benefitted from a dissertation/teaching fellowship while a Scholar-in-Residence at the Colorado College, sponsored by the Consortium for a Strong Minority Presence at Liberal Arts Colleges. Both were excellent opportunities to progress on one's work and to network with other scholars.

⁴² Laura Rendon expresses a similar view in her essay, "From Barrio to the Academy; Revelations of a Mexican American 'Scholarship Girl'," *New Directions for Community Colleges* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 1992): 55-64. She argues that "institutions must consider past experience, language, and culture as strengths to be respected and woven into the fabric of knowledge production and dissemination, not as deficits that must be devalued, silenced, and overcome." As in the position I eventually came to embrace, Rendon concludes, "I do not hunger for the past; it is always with me."

⁴³ Theresa Ammott and Julie Mathaei, "We specialize In the Wholly Impossible: African American Women," in *Race, Gender and Work: A Multi-Cultural Economic History of Women in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 1991), 141-192.

⁴⁴ This phrase was originally used to describe grassroots organizing in the civil rights movement. We recognize that the university represents a much more privileged setting; however, we argue that the issues of racism, classism, and sexism continue to prevail, even in this more privileged context.

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⁴⁵ bell hooks, *Talking Back* (Boston: South End Press, 1989).

⁴⁶ Adrienne Rich, "Taking Women Students Seriously," in *Lies, Secrets and Silence* (New York: Norton, 1978) 237-246.

⁴⁷ For example, see David Wellman, *Portraits of White Racism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁴⁸ Alexandra Goulding, personal communication, 1994.

⁴⁹ Mary Kelsey, personal communication, 1990.

The Creation of Education by Hispanic Women

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This paper examines the experience of Hispanic females in the public school in relation to how alternative learning, which takes place outside of classroom activities and discussions, generates a distinct method by which to gain an education. Four major frameworks utilized in discussing minority participation in education are presented and a focus on gender differences in education is submitted. This is followed by information obtained through an in-depth interview process. Analysis of the information shows the failure to account for differentiation between male and female Hispanics presents an assimilationist posturing of research. By placing race/ethnicity, class, and gender on equal footing in research, the institution of education may learn to adapt itself to the unique process of becoming educated which has been developed by Hispanics.

Introduction

As a sociologist I feel impelled to present a scientific, empirically sound work. I continually question my ideas and look to support or deny them with existing sources. This process includes the patterns and behaviors I observe as well as those I suspect exist. I follow this academically correct process because the work is important and deserves to be recognized as important. However, in approaching my work in this fashion, I find myself omitting an important component; I fail to tell the story. The story includes part of the reality in which Hispanic women must live every day.¹ It is the story of double exclusion; first from access to education and then by the lack of specific and detailed research concerning this exclusion.

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Current statistics show that the fastest growing population in the United States is the Hispanic population. By the year 2000, Hispanics will be the largest minority population in this country. Statistics also show, according to drop-out rates, that more than any other group the education system fails to educate Hispanics. Although national drop-out rates have gradually decreased over the years, the rate of Hispanics leaving school without a diploma escalated to forty-five percent by 1984. The current drop-out rate specifically for Hispanics is attributed to early marriage and pregnancy. Although this explanation addresses the observable reason for drop-out, it does not look at the underlying problems extant in the education system which send Hispanic females outside or parallel to the system for their education. I argue that because Hispanic females are not offered education within the system, they do not leave their education behind by leaving school, but are simply moving forward to the next step of their lives and therefore the next step of their education.

This paper examines the experiences of Hispanic females in the public school in relation to how alternative learning, which takes place outside of classroom activities and discussions, generates a distinct method by which to gain an education. Few studies directly address the problem female Hispanics experience in the classroom. Studies are generally focused on males or no differentiation is made by gender. Those which do focus on females do not address Hispanics specifically or do so in a quantitative manner which focuses on questions of numbers of success and failure and factors leading to it. Although a good starting point, quantitative work judges a situation according to normative ideas of success and failure. In other words, school completion in a mainstream school indicates being successful. What is missing is the effect of institutional exclusion and the process by which Hispanic females gain their education. This observation determined the organization of this paper.

The first section of the paper deals with research problems and specifies problems encountered by other researchers as well as those I have encountered. The second section of the paper reviews the existing literature. The literature presents and critiques four frameworks; the cultural deficiency model, sociolinguistics, ethnomethodology, and Ogbu's caste theory. The third section introduces the ideas of Maxine Seller, Joyce A. Ladner, and Carol Gilligan. These theories fill in some, though not all, of the missing pieces of female experience in the public school. They do, however, give us a potential theoretical and methodological springboard by which to discover more about the Hispana experience. The last section is a presentation of information gathered from respondents living in Utah's Salt Lake Valley. This sample was selected from Hispanic females ranging in age from twelve through sixty. The method used to obtain information was an in-depth interview which began by asking each respondent to talk about her public school experience.

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The central purpose in the creation of the education system was assimilation.² For the ethnic minority population, this process alienated them not only from their own culture but from formal education itself. Although the study of the effect of assimilation on minorities has been explored, gender differences in this process have not been explored. By exploring the experiences of Hispanic females qualitatively, differences in the aspects of acquiring an education and learning styles between Hispanos and Hispanas will become visible. Moreover, making gender differences visible would also make conspicuous the assumed hypothesis of identical rates of assimilation for males and females. The ramification of separating minority research by gender is profound in that it takes the process of assimilation and exposes layers of damaging assumption. One such assumption is the salience of race/ethnicity in exploring issues in the acquisition of education. To subsume gender under the umbrella of race/ethnicity plays into the ideology of measuring one group according to the norm set by another group.

Traditional sociological research directs studies towards a normative factor. Complaint of exclusion of groups or social issues making visible problems in the institution results in the addition of factors, such as race, class, and gender, not addressed previously. Thus, the additive nature of research is born. In this way, race/ethnicity is added to traditional frameworks under the assumption that measurement can be taken according to the degree in which excluded groups have assimilated to a cultural norm. The focus then becomes the individual's ability to conform according to the established authority. In education, this perspective is gathered through the opinions of teachers and administrators. The process of retention, of becoming educated, is missing the vital perspective of the student. One such perspective is how the school experiences of Hispanas are both raced and gendered. Unable to cross barriers into mainstream society through education, I will argue that Hispanic women seek their own kinds of education outside the classroom and outside of the assimilation process society felt necessary for their survival.

Research Problems

One of the difficulties in undertaking a study about Hispanic women in education is the lack of usable data available. Adelaida R. Del Castillo et al., cite four major research problems in dealing with this subject. First, few research undertakings investigate how Hispanic women and men differ in their school experiences. This includes research from a gender perspective. Castillo points out that a volume of information assuming the educational process is identical for male and female Hispanics becomes problematic for researchers interested specifically in Hispanas. There exists as well a gap in the literature which is produced

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because of the concentration of studies at the post secondary levels. Second, most of the information dealing with educational experience is written from a cultural deficiency model. The data gathered from this perspective focuses on the negative attitudes, expectations, and values of both the parents and students, which means structural influences are often ignored all together. Third, studies in general treat all Hispanic females as one "monolithic" group. In other words, findings from one group is generalized to all groups. Fourth, Del Castillo points out that no conceptual model has yet been formalized to aid in the analysis and interpretation of the educational experiences of Hispanic women.³ To this list can be added that a great deal of the research on minority education has been conducted utilizing the Black population, which is then generalized to other minority populations. Those studies which do focus on the Hispanic population are often difficult to obtain.⁴

Review of Existent Literature

Even with these outlined problems, there exist some research efforts which give a specific picture of the experiences of Hispanic females in the schools. The four frameworks used to analyze and interpret are the cultural deficiency model, sociolinguistics, ethnomethodology, and Ogbu's caste theory.

Del Castillo and Torres trace the history of research and the use of the cultural deficiency model back to Harvard's Five Cultures project. This project investigated problems and sought to understand minority communities by examination of the community's values, beliefs and attitudes, all of which were found to be deficient in their ability to adopt to social norms. Del Castillo and Torres state that the recognition of this historical background has affected the study of Hispanics in two ways: (1) this framework has inclined scientists to make assumptions about norms and behaviors of Hispanics, and (2) this framework continues to be used in educational studies. This model attaches the problems minorities have in education as one that exists in lack of aspiration and values of the culture.⁵ Del Castillo and Torres cite Gecas⁶ work as showing that in actuality Hispanic students and parents have high aspirations but low expectations due to structural barriers.

The field of sociolinguistics, in its early stages, mirrored the cultural deficiency model. Basically, researchers such as Susan Phillips found that differences in speech styles caused "cultural conflicts" which in turn caused minority students, in this case Indian students, to be low achievers. This position changed the focus of student-teacher relations but failed to answer the problems for minorities created by the assumptions of cultural deficiency.⁷

The first challenge to cultural deficiency was in the field of

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ethnomethodology developed by Harold Garfinkel and Aaron Cicourel in the early 1970s. Cicourel argues that educational failure is socially constructed in the daily interactions of school authorities and students.⁸ The ethnographic studies found less attention in the classroom, less counseling, and less leeway to answer standardized tests was given to Black students. This study, however, is not gender sensitive and only deals with a Black population.

The best criticism of all three of the above frameworks comes from Ogbu's caste theory of education. Ogbu's basic objection to these frameworks is the exclusion of an historical context. The caste theory accounts for the difference of some ethnic minorities who are culturally and linguistically different. Chinese, Punjabi, and Central American immigrants, for example, have not had learning problems that other ethnic minorities, such as African American, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans have. Ogbu states that cultural differences only become salient under particular historical circumstances and these historical circumstances create a division between what Ogbu calls "voluntary" and "involuntary" minorities. Ogbu theorizes that oppressed minority groups were historically assimilated in a negative manner. In response to this negative experience, minorities develop an "oppositional culture" in which mainstream ideas are inverted into negative symbols. This suggests minorities cannot be both successful in school and be ethnically different. Recent immigrants, on the other hand, have not experienced systematically constructed racial assumptions, or the negative assimilation experiences as have the involuntary groups and therefore are higher achievers in school.⁹

Douglas E. Foley points out that researchers have not yet been able to explain the differences in minorities better than Ogbu nor can they adequately defend the exclusion of historical differences in minority groups.¹⁰ Instead, many researchers are now including Ogbu's concepts of stratification, power and history. Foley himself expands Ogbu's ideas by including class in the picture. Foley asserts that a new class segment has emerged which now focuses on the success of what he calls the Mexicano youth. He argues that middle class Mexicanos are becoming a new bicultural generation, able to resist assimilation by gaining "cultural capital"¹¹ through ethnic pride. Foley's weakness in this conclusion is that in determining cultural capital as being gathered through sports, classroom interactions, and joining Anglos in high academic tracks and school leadership, he is speaking of male cultural capital. These are activities that Mexicanos may excel in, but not Mexicanas.

Studies show that Hispanic girls receive less attention in the classroom and do not benefit by classroom interaction in the same way that boys do.¹² Wahalb reported findings that in a classroom situation, Hispanic girls receive less time from teachers, are interacted with less frequently and positively, and are denied personal attention more than all

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other students. Girls also do not receive the rewards boys do in sports. Without these two benefits, obtaining school leadership positions is less likely. The one area in which Hispanas do have the possibility of advancing is in achieving high academic tracks. This is found in Patricia Gándara's study which states that one factor high-achieving Hispanas have in common is having always been good or outstanding students.¹³

Although Foley does not account for gender differences, he does present two concepts exhibited in much of the current literature. First is his use of and then expansion of Ogbu's caste theory. Second is his assessment of research efforts being focused on success rather than failure. He is joined in this shift from school failure to school success by Sylvia Alatorre Alva who links success to perceptions of locus of control;¹⁴ Martha E. Bernal et al., who expands though the social identity approach;¹⁵ Patricia Gándara who, as mentioned before, identifies common factors in the experiences of high-achieving women,¹⁶ and Concha Delgado-Gaitan who records examples of success outside of mainstream education.¹⁷ Alva, Bernal, Gándara and Delgado-Gaitan all focus specifically on school success for Hispanics. Gándara, moreover, writes specifically about Hispanic females.

Gándara's study compares factors of success between Chicanas and Anglo males as well as between Chicanas and Chicanos. This study differs from the other studies which were quantitative in nature and reveals a distinct kind of information because it was conducted through interviews. In agreement with Ogbu, the study found that the majority of successful Chicanas were first generation immigrants, whereas this was not true for male Anglos or Chicanos. Gándara found that Chicanas held in common with successful Anglo males a strong work ethic (although working hard for Chicanas was a result of poverty more than philosophy), parents who were non-authoritarian and emphasized independent behavior, and most importantly, mothers who took strong, supportive roles.¹⁸ The role of the mother was also cited as the most important factor in the studies of Delgado-Gaitan and Del Castillo et al.¹⁹ This does not necessarily indicate that Hispanic mothers support assimilation in mainstream education or believe their children have equal opportunities and access. To the contrary, supportive Hispanic mothers often expend tremendous energy challenging unfair practices by school authorities or searching for alternative ways to help their children when satisfactory answers to problems are not found in the public schools. This is in fact what Delgado-Gaitan found in her study of the schools in a small town in Denver.²⁰

In Delgado-Gaitan's study, one mother found both of her children looking for their education outside of high school. Because she was convinced that school did not offer options for students who did not fit in, she advised both a son and a daughter to look for learning elsewhere. The son eventually returned to school after trying to find other options. This

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son learned with the help of his mother and a counselor that he must find the resolve to complete school and obtain as many resources as possible on his own. The daughter, after becoming pregnant, decided to complete school at the alternative school even though the high school had a program for pregnant teenagers. It was this girl's belief that the high school teachers did not care if she learned, and she felt she needed more individual attention than she was receiving. Delgado-Gaitan argues that pregnancy provided an excuse to quit school all together, but that the girl wanted to continue her education and opted for a better alternative.²¹

This study also reported that even when asking for help, Chicano students and their parents were told to solve their own problems, often resulting in resolving frustrations by dropping out. If parents did not have the knowledge or persistence to help their children in a school situation, the result was often the students turning elsewhere for their schooling. Delgado-Gaitan continues by saying that the rejection of the system by the students and parents reflected how they were treated.²²

This study raises many interesting but unexplored points. First, it must be noted that the boy in the study found the support of a counselor and was therefore able to complete school because he could find the strength through his own resolve. The girl, on the other hand, chose the alternative school not because of her pregnancy, but because the regular school did not offer her a chance for education. Second, it appears that the boy was allowed to assimilate more than the girl. There existed the opinion that he held the personal will power to succeed and this fact alone made the difference. What is not stated is that he, being male, simply has more power in the classroom and more power to demand attention from counselors and teachers. This power exists because of the higher status males own in the education system, which is attributable to the process of assimilation available to them. Males have found a door to acceptance through class leadership and sports which in turn provides them with more attention. Self resolve is easier to find when others allow you to have it. The third point focuses on the perspective of the mother. What educational experiences taught the mother to look for education outside of the school? It seems apparent by the mother's original advice to her children to leave school that she also had experienced exclusion. Examining her educational experiences would have given us a more complete picture of her children's educational experiences and perspectives and perhaps of the different choices made by her son and daughter.

Gándara's findings also support these differences between Chicanos and Chicanas. Chicanos attribute educational success to inner strength and ability whereas Chicanas attribute educational success to family support. Gándara concludes by stating five factors common to all Chicanas which are different from their male counterparts: (1) Chicanas were always good or outstanding students; (2) they attended highly integrated schools; (3) they all felt family support was important to their

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success, but did not know exactly what their parents aspirations for them were; (4) All felt different from others, (5) even though often better students, all felt they received less encouragement.²³

The progress from explanation because of cultural deficiency to Ogbu's caste theory and Foley's addition of class presents a much more complete picture of the Hispanic experience with education. Gándara's comparative of Anglos, Chicanos, and Chicanas gives us a good description of the factors successful Chicanas have in common. What is painfully apparent is that the only "cultural capital" females seem to possess is being "good students". Both Anglo males and Chicanos need not possess this characteristic in order to succeed. This suggests, of course, stratification because of gender but perhaps more because of specific ethnicity and gender. The variation between assimilation because of ethnicity and the assimilation of gender is that females are placed in the position of having to assimilate in two different ways; as a person of color and also as a female. The assumption that women want to be successful in the identical ways, using identical methods as males, devalues female characteristics as well as female history. The assumption that success in the educational process can be obtained by male means establishes a male framework from which to measure female success or failure. Cornel West calls to question the "framework of social reasoning" which subsumes issues of gender in favor of issues of race, calling this kind of thinking a "pitfall of racial reasoning."²⁴ West, in this comment, is speaking to the assimilationist and patriarchal nature of assuming males and females are identical in their experiences. This argument can be stated again confronting gender similarities. It is a devaluation of characteristics and history to believe Hispanic and Anglo females employ identical ways and methods of acquiring an education. This statement along with West's brings to light the obligation of not only individuals, but researchers who affect the individual to evaluate their own participation in assimilationist thinking.

Some Missing Pieces

Race, class, and gender stratification exist historically in the public school system. Maxine Seller provides a class and ethnicity dimension with her writing on the education of immigrant women. Her study significantly recognized that curriculum was shaped specifically for poor immigrant women in order for them to know and keep their place in the reserved labor force. Tracking immigrant girls into vocational training, such as home economics, assimilated them, not to the American dream, but to the dream America allowed them to have. Seller continues by stating that ethnic women's organizations provided important educational opportunities for women in their communities to learn.²⁵ Although Seller describes the historical background established for public school

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curricula for immigrant women, she is specifically referring to those immigrant groups who established themselves in the eastern United States. She does, however, clearly establish the use of assimilation as the dominating theory behind the creation and maintenance of education that has been bound into the structure of the institution of education and which remains discreetly unchanged to this day. Generations of women have experienced, and girls today continue to experience, alienation from their education because of a failure on the part of the system to recognize assimilation's historical and continuing role in the marginalization of these females. Counted among them are Hispanic women.

The work of Joyce A. Ladner advances a concept of Black females resisting assimilation in education by developing survival skills. Survival skills include responses that are adaptive and creative in dealing with their oppressed circumstances. Ladner implies with this concept that assimilation is twofold; one must assimilate but must also be allowed to assimilate.²⁶ Ladner addresses both gender and race to show the differences race can make even when accounting for gender. Although Ladner's study is specific to the Black experience and does not tell the story of other ethnic females, she provides us with a useful glimpse into how females survive and persist in not only a negative situation, but a situation in which they are required to participate. This dichotomy of required participation deficient in access creates the necessity for roads to be built away from the main path in order for educational needs to be satisfied.

Carol Gilligan cites that females discover the kind of relationship Ladner describes to oppressed circumstances allows them to survive in the public schools. Gilligan theorizes that between the ages of twelve and fifteen, females find themselves moving away from the classroom to find their educational experiences. She concludes that between these ages, the time when dropping out of school becomes common in the inner city, girls seem to move from the public to the private sphere for learning experiences.²⁷ Although Gilligan makes a strong argument for gender differences in public education, she does not include the effect of race and ethnicity with gender. As stated in the last section, studies show that Hispanic females receive less attention and benefit from class interaction less than any group. This does not discount but confirms and even escalates Gilligan's moving away process for Hispanas. An example of this process is seen in the experience of the young Hispana in Delgado-Gaitan's study who decides to seek alternative schooling after becoming pregnant, even when given the opportunity to remain in a mainstream school. As pointed out in the study, this individual had the opportunity to leave her education behind. However, moving away from the place where education was not available is not leaving education behind, but a move forward toward a real and inclusive kind of education. Going back to the mainstream school would not have been a move forward educationally,

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but a move backward. Because her life had changed and moved forward (a different way to view pregnancy), this Hispana also moved her means of obtaining an education forward.

Empirical Evidence

Recent literature more clearly defines the Hispanic experience in the public school. Stepping away from racial assumptions has produced studies presenting structural barriers for Hispanics in obtaining an education. These studies specifically acknowledge the unequal treatment received by Hispanic females and, in turn, show how Hispanas seek alternative support as well as alternative situations in which to become educated. What is not explored is the question of difference in assimilation by gender. If Hispanic men gain access to education through sports, class interaction, and leadership, what are the ways in which Hispanic females are allowed to open the door into the mainstream? Do they want to enter the mainstream or simply accommodate it? Do females seek support from family rather than school not only because they do not receive help there, but also because they are creating networks of their own? If this is so, do Hispanas recognize what actions, reactions, or beliefs are giving them their own "cultural capital"?

It is my belief that Hispanas have created a private brand of survival skills. The absence of the appropriate kind of "cultural capital" pushes the Hispana to develop ways in which to confront the institution's marginalization process and ways in which to educate herself. Listed among these are anger, independence, separation, the recognition of school and parent ambivalence to educational needs and desires, and the conscious search for education outside of the public school. Examples of these skills can be seen in the experiences of three Hispanas—Laura, Sarah, and Patricia—all of whom were interviewed in November of 1992.

Laura, age sixteen, relates that although the teacher in her English only classroom knew she did not know English, she did not care enough to help her individually.

In Mexico the teachers took time to help each student. Here there wasn't a special class for non-English speakers - I was just in a regular class. The teachers gave assignments, taught, but didn't really help anyone. So the teacher didn't give me any help and I really didn't know any English. I had a really hard time. I always cried and I never thought I would learn any English. I didn't speak English with the other kids because I only knew words like cat and you can't really have a conversation with that. I just remember one day understanding and knowing English. I remember by the third grade

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my teacher didn't even know I was Hispanic.²⁸

The teacher not being interested in helping anyone was a major change from Laura's experience in Mexico, where she felt the teachers gave everyone individual attention. It is interesting that Laura generalizes her personal experience to all of the children both here and in Mexico. It is not logical to believe that all teachers in Mexico are responsive to all the children's needs and that the opposite is true here. It is more reasonable to conclude that Laura does not yet understand that her school here will not give her the attention other students receive because she is female and Hispanic. Her belief that all students are treated in this manner has caused her to group herself with high achieving minorities who are not Hispanic. She has, in fact, separated herself from other Hispanics in order to be included in the educational process offered by the mainstream and, as Ogbu predicted, her status as first generation immigrant allows her to do so.

Sarah, age forty-nine, also found herself without help when she made the decision to quit school. Although a good student, she quit to care for her mother who was ill. The school, teachers, counselors, and principal offered her no alternatives. Sarah later found her education with the help of the teachers in the Head Start Program.

I always wanted to get ahead and I got the chance when my first child entered Head Start. At first I became a bus aid and then moved on to become a teachers aid. When classes were offered at Head Start to the teachers aids for college credit I did it. Then the funding stopped so the program stopped. Two teachers here at Head Start told me to go to the university and find out what I needed to do to finish. I only had twenty-four hours left to complete and also a Spanish competency test. I finished with other women from the Head Start program - we all finished because of those two teachers.²⁹

Although the program was designed to give children better access to education, Sarah also received help finding educational alternatives. It is interesting to note that Sarah, who earned a degree and teaching certificate, has now taught at Head Start for eighteen years despite the fact she has been offered "better" jobs elsewhere. She remains where she is "to reach others the way I was reached" because she believes it is the best way to help not only the children, but the parents who have had experiences like hers. Sarah discovered a link to learning and continues that link to help those who do not have access by way of the mainstream door.

Patricia, age fifty-five, relates that while attending school in New

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Mexico, she was rewarded for her quick academic abilities. In Salt Lake, however, she did not have the encouragement to achieve her academic potential. Patricia was recognized as capable and intelligent, but was never encouraged or challenged to do more, although she saw Anglos receiving help and attention. Because of being unchallenged, Patricia began tutoring the other Hispanic girls in her school. She believes teaching others helped her find her own learning.

Like Sarah, Patricia found her education outside of the system because the system did not include her. Anger also played an important role for Patricia.

I remember like it was yesterday. There was a counselor at the school who we all knew. Everything that happened at the school everyone knew about. I remember this counselor took a group of Anglos to the university and showed them how to sign up, how to apply for scholarships and counseling. I watched this happen and thought to myself, OK, she'll take another group of good students and then I'll go. This same counselor took another group all right. She gathered the minority kids together and took them to an employment agency and showed us how to fill out applications for low paying jobs.... I don't know why it's making me cry now. I just remember being so angry—how could a counselor do that?³⁰

This experience pushed Patricia further away from being part of mainstream education, but did not keep her from eventually gaining a graduate degree. Her anger has allowed her to continue the fight by helping others like her find different doors to learning.

All three of these Hispanas tell a different story of success in gaining an education. Two are stories of finding doors outside of the public school, one is a story of parallel success. Two are stories of finding doors through associations with others and one is the story of anger being the motivating factor. All three are stories of the desire to become educated regardless of exclusion from access to becoming educated in the public school classroom.

Conclusion

This study was born out of the idea that to be different is not to be deviant, and to be disruptive is not to be unworthy of the access to resources that education can impart. It would be inappropriate to state that this idea is bias-free because it is formulated from personal experience in the hope that this discussion will reveal to other females that more choices are available to them than their educational experience may have indicated. This is possible by the recording and study of the personal

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stories of Hispanic women.

Quantitative research has touched on but not deeply probed these aspects of Hispanic education, and little of that research deals specifically with Hispanic females. Quantitative work also looks at the story differently. It asks how many succeed and fail and the factors leading to these events. The part of the story unexplored deals with the process by which Hispanic females survive their unequal status in the education system. This research requires a qualitative answer. It is my belief that although *Hispanas* may not be invited into the mainstream, or perhaps because they are not invited, assimilation is not now or ever has been the road by which Hispanic females choose to be educated. Gándara's study pointed to the fact that successful Hispanic women were always good or outstanding students. This is a means of survival but does not necessarily insure success in obtaining the education women desire. The issue of assimilation and the access allowed or denied to *Hispanas* places an increasing recognition of the necessity of gender differentiation in the study of education of minority students. This paper is the first part of a three-part process of study I plan to undertake. My first step is current research comparing opposite sex sibling pairs and how different realities of education are constructed according to gender. The second step is the addition of a generational aspect to determine if changes in the educational process have occurred in the perceptions of Hispanic females. The third is a longitudinal study covering a five-year period detailing how perceptions change for *Hispanas* between the ages of twelve and seventeen.

The emphasis of this paper is gender, or more specifically, the need for and lack of literature relating gender differences in conjunction with non-dominant group status. In making a case for gender differentiation, my intent is not to make gender salient over other characteristics. Gender simply cannot be ignored nor can it be added by assumptions of similarity. Race/ethnicity cannot become the salient variable any more than studies on one minority group can necessarily generalize to other minority groups. Likewise, class status is not an additive feature but greatly impacts the life experience and construction of reality of the individual. The intent of this conversation is to make clear my obligation and the obligation of other researchers to make visible those methods of study and analysis which are based in the ideology of assimilation.

It is important to recognize that each aspect of social life impacts the acquisition of education because participation in the institution of education sends the non-dominant individual flying into an ideological wall built on the assumption of a norm and the requirement of the individual to assimilate to that norm. In this manner, race/ethnicity, gender, and class will all impact and be a necessary part of the explanation of the failure or success of the institution to educate the population. Race/ethnicity, class, and gender can all be made visible or invisible by

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the researcher. The question is can any of these three characteristics be ignored by the individual as they are viewed by the institution? It is the visibility, the concern of seeking answers, the phenomena of becoming an educated Hispanic female and the mechanisms needed to achieve in spite of the assimilation barrier that has need of further explorations.

NOTES

¹ When noting gender differences, the terms Hispano/a which refers to male/female are used. The terms Hispanic, Chicano/a, Mexican American, and Mexicano/a are used interchangeably throughout the paper because of the use of all of these terms by the sources applied in the study. I personally selected to utilize the term Hispanic in this study for two reasons: (1) Many terms were used to indicate the ethnicity of Americans of Mexican descent in the existing research, and (2) although all of the respondents in my research are of Mexican descent, this was the term with which all of them were most comfortable. This is a problem faced by all researchers and by all people of Mexican decent. I myself prefer Mestiza. My intention is not to label an entire group, but to use the word Hispanic as a tool for explanation.

² Assimilation is defined as Anglo conformity. This includes the rejection of one's own culture in favor of the dominant culture. Teske and Nelson describe assimilation as a required out-group acceptance and a positive orientation toward and identification with the out-group. It is important to note that the focus on assimilation taken in this paper directs the emphasis of the research in two ways. First, emphasis falls on the effect of the institution on the individual's construction of reality. Secondly, the history of how education was constructed for people of color and what purposes that education served was based in assimilationist attitudes. Assimilation as a normative set of values prescribed to by the institution has produced classroom methodology that does not address the underlying intellectual assumptions present at its inception. Implications of socio-political values, such as assimilation, hidden in curriculum is side stepped by education and generates social meanings which shapes students' roles outside the classroom. [P. Bourdieu and J.C. Passerson, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977); H.A. Giroux, "Theories of Reproduction and Resistance in the New Sociology of Education: A Critical Analysis," *Harvard Review* 53 (1983): 257-293; A. Raimes, "Tradition and Revolution in ESL Teaching," *TESOL Quarterly* 17 (1983): 538.].

³ Adelaida R. Del Castillo, Jeanie Frederickson, Teresa McKenna, and Flora Ida Ortiz, "An Assessment of the Status of the Education of Hispanic Women," *The Broken Web: The Educational Experience of*

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Hispanic American Women (Berkeley: Floricanto Press, 1988), 3-24.

⁴ Difficulty in obtaining studies concerning the Hispanic population are due in part to budget cutbacks such as the University of Utah library is experiencing which demand the cancellation or neglect of Hispanic social science journals. Moreover, many significant ideas cited in existing research come from as yet unpublished papers. The difficulty in publishing is not due to a lack of interest in the subject area by teachers and researchers. The demand on recognized experts in the field of the Hispana experience as speakers and contributors to seminars attests to the shortage of published information. Material which would contribute to this area of study remain unpublished because sociology and related fields still suffer from tokenism on the part of academic authorities.

⁵ Concha Delgado-Gaitan, "The Value of Conformity: Learning to Stay in School," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* (December 1988): 354-381.

⁶ Delgado-Gaitan, 48.

⁷ Douglas E. Foley, "Reconsidering Anthropological Explanations of Ethnic School Failure," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* (March 1991): 60-86.

⁸ A.V. Cicourel, H.M. Jennings, K.H. Jennings, K.W.C. Leiter, R. MacKay, H. Mehan, and D.R. Roth, *Language Use and School Performance* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

⁹ J. Ogbu, "Variability in Minority School Performance: A Problem in Search of an Explanation," *Anthropology Quarterly* 18,4 (1987): 312-334.

¹⁰ Foley, 67-76.

¹¹ Cultural Capital is a phrase used by Pierre Bourdieu which refers to the educational system's adoption of "the attitudes and aptitudes" which appear to be natural in children of dominant-group families. Bourdieu goes on to state that working-class and minority children possess cultural capital as well but that it is dissimilar from the expectations of the institution. An expectation that all children possess the same kind of cultural capital implies that the institution requires students to acquire appropriate cultural capital before entering the institution. Thus, as socialization takes place in the educational process, no link exists between what the non-dominant student possesses and what the school expects. By valuing the cultural capital of dominant-family children, the

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education system reinforces inequality. [(P. Bourdieu, "The School as a Conservative Force: Scholastic and Cultural Inequalities," *Contemporary Research in the Sociology of Education* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).]

12 H.A. Giroux, "Theories of Reproduction and Resistance in the New Sociology of Education: A Critical Analysis," *Harvard Review* 53 (1983): 257-93.

13 Joyce A. Ladner, *Tomorrow's Tomorrow: The Black Woman* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1972): Introduction.

14 Sylvia Alatorre Alva, "Academic Invulnerability Among Mexican-American Students: The Importance of Protective Resources and Appraisals," *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* (February 1991): 18-34.

15 Martha E. Bernal, Delia S. Saenz, and George P. Knight, "Ethnic Identity and Adaptation of Mexican American Youths in School Settings," *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* (May 1991):135-154.

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17 Maxine Seller, "The Education of the Immigrant Woman, 1900-1935," *Journal of Urban History* (May 1978): 307-330.

18 Patricia Gándara, "Passing Through the Eye of the Needle: High Achieving Chicanas," *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 4,2 (1982): 167-179.

19 Del Castillo et al., 3-24.

20 Delgado-Gaitan, 365-369.

21 Delgado-Gaitan, 368-371.

22 Delgado-Gaitan, 376-379.

23 Gándara, 167-179.

24 Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Beacon Press, 1993), 35-38.

25 Seller, 185.

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²⁶ Ladner, 10-11.

²⁷ Carol Gilligan, Nona Lyons, and Trudy Hanmer, *Making Connection: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at Willard School* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

²⁸ Laura, personal interview, November 5, 1992.

²⁹ Sarah, personal interview, November 2, 1992.

³⁰ Patricia, personal interview, October 30, 1992.

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Welfare Policies and Racial Stereotypes: The Structural Construction of a Model Minority

Mary E. Kelsey
University of California, Berkeley

Whereas the economic mobility observed among Asian Americans is often attributed to their cultural values, this article demonstrates the importance of state aid to the economic mobility of a community of Southeast Asian refugees living in California. Using data from a lengthy ethnographic study of rural Laotian refugees, the content and administration of social welfare programs offered political refugees is contrasted with the social policies extended toward other poor communities. As variations in social policies can constrain or facilitate economic mobility, the concrete impact of welfare state policies on different ethnic communities is a topic in need of further exploration.

Culture, Social Mobility and Racial Stereotypes

Since the end of American military involvement in Southeast Asia in 1975, one million Southeast Asian refugees have sought political asylum in the United States. Although most refugees arrived with scant material resources, Southeast Asian communities have diversified to include pockets of prosperity as well as lingering pockets of poverty. Ironically, prevailing explanations for both the achievements and problems of Southeast Asian refugees emphasize the refugees' cultural background. In the popular press, for instance, one writer has proposed that the academic success of Asian American children is due to the "Confucian ethic" prevalent among East and Southeast Asians. Because believers in the Confucian ethic place a high value on education and family responsibility, they create an intergenerational support system. Parents encourage their children's academic endeavors in return for the

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comfort and care they will receive in their old age.¹

Journalists have also used cultural ethos to explain the poverty which has plagued other Southeast Asian communities. In a feature article on California's Hmong communities, a second journalist claims the practices of early marriage and childbirth retard the educational achievements of the next generation, thus contributing to this community's high poverty rates. Although teenage marriage and parenthood are common throughout Southeast Asia, the author notes with implicit disapproval that the Hmong (whom he describes as "one of world's oldest and most primitive tribes") are especially "reluctant" to alter their cultural customs.²

Journalists are not alone in their proclivity to explain the economic trajectories of Southeast Asian refugees in terms of cultural factors. Academic articles on the Mien, Sino-Vietnamese, and Hmong argue that the cultural orientations of these ethnic communities have handicapped their economic advancement.³ Most academic writers, however, echo the sentiments expressed in Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy's study of Indochinese refugees' economic and academic progress. These authors duly note several factors (including government aid) which have facilitated the achievements of Southeast Asian refugee communities. Despite their sociological insights, the authors ultimately embrace a cultural explanation for social mobility.

[I]f asked how we could have identified [Southeast Asian refugees'] predisposition to success, our reply, *if limited to one factor would be cultural compatibility*. . . . Their values emphasize hard work, education, achievement, self-reliance, steadfast purpose and pride—values that closely resemble those viewed as traditional middle-class American prerequisites for success. The major differences between the Indochinese and American values pertain to identity and orientation to achievement. The American value system stresses independence and individualism, encouraging all to seek out competition . . . and to win. In contrast, the Indochinese value system places emphasis on interdependence . . . with a strong, family-based orientation to achievement. (emphasis added)

But is the success of Southeast Asian refugees merely the triumph of a cultural will to excel? When cultural factors are mobilized to explain both the presence and absence of social mobility within Southeast Asian refugee communities, then "culture" loses its explanatory rigor. Lieberman, in his comparative study of nineteenth century African Americans and European immigrants, has noted the thinly veiled circular reasoning often employed in cultural explanations of intergroup differ-

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ences.

Why are two or more groups different with respect to some characteristic or dependent variable? Presumably, they differ in their values or in some norm. How do we know that they differ in their values or norms? The argument then frequently involves using the behavioral attribute one is trying to explain as the indicator of the normative or value difference one is trying to use as the explanation. A pure case of circular reasoning! Obviously racial and ethnic groups may differ from one another in their values and norms, but an independent measure of such values and norms must be obtained to justify such an explanation. It is particularly dangerous to use circular forms of reasoning because they do not allow us to consider the alternative hypothesis that forces outside of the groups' own characteristics are generating these gaps: in particular, forms of discrimination or differences in opportunity structure rather than differences in either desire or goals or values.⁴

Lieberson implies that apart from issues of explanatory coherence, the assumed relationship between cultural orientation and economic mobility has important ramifications for American race relations theory. American scholars have historically measured the progress of racial or ethnic groups in terms of their economic achievements. Unfortunately, the most influential schools of American race relations (e.g., assimilation theory, ethnic pluralism, the culture of poverty) have emphasized cultural or behavioral models of social and economic mobility to the detriment of structural analyses of group progress.⁵ Cultural approaches to social mobility hold poor racial and ethnic communities responsible for structural conditions beyond their control. Moreover, cultural explanations for the economic successes of Indochinese refugees reinforce contemporary characterizations of Asian Americans as a "model minority." The unspoken logic of this model is that if other poor people (the accusatory finger is tacitly pointed at poor African Americans) could adopt the same attitudes and behaviors as new Asian immigrants, they too could arise from the depths of their present squalor. Finally, because cultural explanations of social mobility do not consider the structural opportunities available to people in a given time and place, they shed scant light on the microprocesses behind economic advancement. Social mobility thus becomes an unproblematic event obscured by a Horatio Alger-like gloss of personal determination.

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The Hidden Role of State Aid In Social Mobility

Any serious discussion of the microprocesses underlying social mobility (or its absence) must look beyond explanations of social mobility based on a single factor. Rather than assuming an extreme structuralist position which ignores human agency, this paper investigates the complex relationship between structures of opportunity and how individuals mobilize their resources.

The economic progress of a significant share of Southeast Asian refugees can be easily explained by their class background and its attendant human capital. The first wave of refugees admitted to the United States between 1975-76 was populated by former political, military, and educational leaders of Vietnam. This cohort also included some of the elite from Laos and Cambodia. Although these refugees were stripped of their material resources, their class background had equipped them with considerable educational and occupational skills. Over seventy percent of the 1975-76 cohort had held professional positions in their countries of origin and the majority arrived with some familiarity with English.⁶ This first wave of Southeast Asian refugee secured competitive positions in the American labor market and made exceptional income gains. By 1987, the average income of Southeast Asian refugees who entered the United States in 1975-76 had exceeded the average national income.⁷

A second wave of Southeast Asian refugees, including many of the Sino-Vietnamese "boat people," were admitted to the United States between 1977 and 1979. Many of these asylees were former shopkeepers and small business people in Vietnam. Although the economic fortunes of this group have been modest compared to the Vietnamese elite, this mercantile class has been able to establish small enterprises in the United States to serve refugee enclaves.⁸

A third group of Southeast Asian refugees presents serious problems for class-based analyses of social mobility. Men from rural Laos had served as combat soldiers in an irregular army allied with American military forces. After the demise of the American-backed government in Laos, these men and their relatives fled to refugee camps in Thailand. Entering the United States in 1980 and after, rural refugees were the last group to be granted political asylum. Unlike earlier cohorts of asylees, refugees with rural origins had minimal education (e.g., the 1980-81 cohorts averaged six years of primary school)⁹ and few skills to ease their incorporation into the American labor market. Studies on the income and employment status of the 1980-81 cohorts five years later show these cohorts made progress against their initially high rates poverty. Compared to the economic achievements of earlier refugee cohorts, however, the progress of the 1980-81 cohorts was modest.¹⁰ Given the educa-

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tional and occupational backgrounds of most rural refugees, the surprise is not that rural refugees made slower inroads against poverty, but that this disadvantaged community made any advancement against poverty.

In order to untangle the mystery behind the social mobility of rural Southeast Asian refugees, I followed the economic trajectories of twenty families from remote regions of Laos who had resettled in California.¹¹ I had become acquainted with several Southeast Asian refugee communities during the eleven years I taught English as a second language (ESL) at a local adult school. I was able to use my knowledge of this community to choose a sample which maximized variation in family and household composition. In addition to spending extensive time as a participant observer within these twenty families, I recorded data on their economic history from the time they entered the United States (1979-81) until 1993.

If asked to suggest the factor most critical to this group's social mobility, I would emphasize the astounding array of state resources which were granted this community as political refugees. Moreover, my research will demonstrate that different groups of state clients in the United States have confronted very different social policies. This insight not only reveals that the form of the American welfare state varies with the group targeted for state services, but that differences in state-client relationships have a significant impact on the social mobility of the group in question.

The Laotian families in my research sample arrived with little in the way of human or material capital. They did, however, enter the United States in years when more state benefits were earmarked for political refugees, i.e., 1979-81. Southeast Asian refugees furthermore concentrated in California, a state which had enacted considerable welfare reforms prior to the refugees' arrival. California's welfare reforms had already pushed the state's welfare system into a "family friendly" direction which not only increased poor families' chances of preserving the father's presence in the nuclear family but supported extended family structure.

The conventional wisdom in the refugee literature assumes that refugees settle into their final economic niche within four to five years after resettlement.¹² I, however, found that rural Laotian refugees took longer to enter the labor market. The members of my sample made their most significant gains against poverty within their fifth and tenth year after resettlement. In 1983, only one "family" (a single male living with his girlfriend) had earnings above the poverty level. By 1985, forty-five percent (nine families) had earnings exceeding the poverty threshold. By 1990, seventy percent (fourteen families) had incomes above the poverty line. Of the six families still in poverty in 1990, four families each included one member eligible for higher paying federal disability benefits (SSI). This member's disability benefits elevated the household's income close to the top of the poverty line. Only two families in my sample—each

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headed by a single mother with three or more children at home—subsisted solely on their welfare stipends ten years after their admission to the United States. The twelve families in my sample who entered and remained within the formal labor market averaged four and a half years of welfare receipt before employment. These years of state support and access to state resources enhanced their opportunities for social mobility.

The basic set of state benefits for refugees was established as part of a wider agenda to reform American refugee policy in 1980. In the five years following the collapse of the American-backed military juntas in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, over a million refugees sought asylum in neighboring countries. With refugee camps in Thailand, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Malaysia overflowing with homeless exiles, the refugee problem teetered on the brink of becoming an international crisis. The American government had not anticipated this massive diaspora and did not alter its criteria for political asylum until 1980 when Congress broadened the criteria for political asylum.¹³

The number of refugees granted asylum in the United States between 1980 and 1985 was almost twice the number admitted in the previous five years.¹⁴ In order to support this dramatic increase in asylees, Congress made radical reforms in its domestic refugee resettlement program. Prior to 1980, refugees were compelled to rely on private sponsors and voluntary agencies (usually religious charities) for their initial support. The costs of refugee resettlement, however, were prohibitively high. A 1979 study reported that the resettlement expenses of a single refugee averaged about \$5,000. Few individuals or private charities could shoulder the burden imposed by the doubling of annual refugee admissions. Beginning in 1980 the federal government covered the initial costs of refugee resettlement by entitling political asylees to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or General Assistance (GA) funds from their state of resettlement for up to three years.¹⁵ The federal government would repay states for their refugee-related welfare costs. The 1980 Refugee Reform Act also allotted money for English as a second language and job training programs. In theory, a newly admitted refugee could have up to three years of modest federal support in which to learn English, get job training, learn a new set of cultural conventions, and enter the labor market with reasonably salable skills.

While the federal guidelines for refugee support were generous, the Reform Act of 1980 allowed individual states considerable discretion in the implementation of local refugee policy. Because refugees were initially dispersed across the fifty states to minimize their impact any one community, their resettlement experiences varied widely. States could limit the time of public support offered refugees. If a state had a negligible welfare system, a refugee could be given immediate employment in lieu of public assistance. In locales with few refugees, local communities had

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little incentive to establish ESL or job training classes for limited English speakers. Laotian families who first resided in southern states like Texas, Georgia, and Alabama were sent to work in low-wage jobs within the first weeks to months of their arrival. Limited economically and socially by their minimal English, these people saw no real way to improve their living conditions within their first communities of resettlement. One refugee offered the following evaluation of his initial resettlement experience:

In Texas I couldn't speak English and I couldn't go to school. I was working ten hours a day in a rope factory and I still didn't have money to take care of my family. Besides, Texas is a pretty racist place. I didn't feel loved until I joined a church . . . but, I had to leave to learn English. . . . You can't get a good job without English.

Unlike many states, California implemented the full range of federally funded refugee benefits on top of its comparatively progressive welfare policies. Refugee networks spread word of California's remunerative social services and job opportunities to those living in other states. Not only did relatives join relatives in California, but village members reconnected with other village members reconstituting many small Southeast Asian communities within the state. By 1985, forty percent of the (then) 760,000 Southeast Asian refugees in the United States resided in California. While the initial advantages of reconstituted familial and regional ties were primarily social, these new communities would bear other advantages as ethnic businesses developed to serve ethnic enclaves and as employed community members used their networks to help others find work. But, before members of rural Laotian communities could shed their poverty, these most disadvantaged of refugees would need to take full advantage of state services.

The AFDC and General Assistance funds granted refugees provided a secure if modest monthly income. Cash entitlements were supplemented by food stamps. Refugees were quick to find stores which accepted their food stamps and sold basic commodities in bulk. They initially maintained an inexpensive diet by purchasing rice in 100 pound bags (for about twenty-five cents a pound) and consuming the grain at every meal. In addition to monthly welfare grants and food stamps, refugees had access to the federal Medicaid program for poor people. The state of California supplements Medicaid with additional benefits (MediCal) and special federal funds financed the creation of several clinics to serve Southeast Asian refugees in local hospitals.

In addition to these basic state-funded survival benefits, refugees received aid from private charities. Despite the increased financial role of the federal government in refugee resettlement, private refugee charities were *not* dismantled after 1980. Incoming refugees were still

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admitted under the auspices of sponsoring agencies or individuals. Sponsors helped refugees find housing, often donated used furniture, clothing, and housewares for their first apartments, and connected refugees with appropriate social service agencies. Some of my informants reported that Catholic Charities gave them \$1,000 upon their arrival in the United States in order to set up their apartments. While the high rents and security deposits of the Californian housing market consumed most of this money, this aid was crucial in helping people establish their first homes.

The refugees' first housing, found with the help of voluntary agencies, were usually small and inexpensive apartments. More often than not, the buildings were dilapidated and living quarters were crowded. State services soon made it possible for refugees to leave these humble first abodes and move into public housing projects. Public housing limited rents to twenty-five or thirty percent of the household's income. Three to four bedroom units thus became affordable for large families. While the housing arrangements of the families in my sample often changed, up to fifty percent of my sample lived in subsidized housing at the same time and three-fourths of the families in my sample had once lived in public housing projects or rented highly coveted Section 8 (rent-subsidized) housing. These rates of utilization far exceed the percentage of poor families (a quarter) who receive some kind of housing assistance nationwide. While I could not find written evidence of public housing policies which openly favored Southeast Asian refugees as new tenants, I have had conversations with public housing employees who expressed an interest in achieving racial balance among housing project occupants. The high utilization and relatively quick access to public housing granted Laotian refugees suggest an informal practice of using Indochinese tenants to integrate predominantly African American housing projects.

With government aid and private charities covering their immediate survival needs, refugees were able to enroll in adult education classes. Over three-fourths of the Southeast Asian refugee population enrolled in English as Second Language (ESL) classes.¹⁶ In the particular adult school where I taught, waiting lists of students who wanted to register for ESL classes grew to several hundred names. In the early 1980s, a local community college created a special two year ESL program for refugees without denting the adult school enrollment.¹⁷

Despite their interest in learning English and other basic educational skills, rural Laotians were a difficult group of people to teach. As members of ethnic minorities in Laos, their indigenous languages only recently acquired written scripts (i.e., they were largely a "pre-literate" population). The adult men in my sample averaged about three years of education in Laos. None of the adult women in my sample had received any formal education in Laos. With this meager educational background there was little foundation on which they could quickly build English

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language and literacy skills. Teachers were therefore expected to teach adults who had rarely or never been in a classroom, had limited or no literacy in their own languages, and arrived in class speaking almost no English. In order to reach this new population of students, ESL teachers were forced to make profound reforms in their educational curriculum. Teachers threw out existing textbooks and abandoned many standard teaching techniques. The extent of curricular reform was an unusual example of spontaneous institutional adaptation to the needs of a highly problematic clientele.

State educational aid was further extended by employment programs (Targeted Assistance Programs) for Southeast Asian refugees. Unemployed males accepting public assistance had to enter vocational training classes to maintain their family's eligibility for welfare. Through vocational training, however, Laotian men (and some women) learned to become machinists, welders, autobody workers, cooks, carpenters, custodians, skilled production workers, and assistant nurses. Refugee employment counselors helped refugees find their first jobs. By providing this population with vocational training and employment assistance, state aid helped Laotians refugees enter the labor market and eventually secure better paying jobs. Once state agencies helped rural Laotians secure their first jobs in California, Laotian refugees had the foundation for their own employment networks.

Welfare Paternalism

Anyone familiar with standard public assistance benefits would find the extent of aid offered political refugees exceeded the state assistance granted other poor people. Moreover, the administration of this aid deviated from the normal practices of welfare offices. Academic articles have documented the gap between legal entitlements to benefits and the amount of public aid actually dispensed.¹⁸ When interviewing my informants I expected to learn of myriad problems with their welfare offices. Instead I found that Laotian refugees as public aid recipients had been encouraged to apply for a full range of state benefits. Moreover, refugees referred to their eligibility workers in surprisingly cordial terms. Questions about their relationship with their welfare workers often elicited enthusiastic responses like "he is very, very good to me."

I attribute Laotian refugees' unusual relationship to the welfare bureaucracy to two different factors. First, the context of political refugees eligibility for public welfare benefits was shaped by their unique relationship to the state. Because political asylees gained welfare privileges as an admissions right, their eligibility for state aid was assumed rather than questioned. Welfare workers had a mandate to distribute as many benefits to refugees as they were qualified to receive. Given this mandate, the welfare workers serving the refugees worked under a reorga-

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nized system of dispensing benefits. Most California counties assign eligibility workers to different types of aid programs. A single mother who wants to apply for AFDC, food stamps, and Medicaid benefits would go through three separate interviews by different eligibility workers.¹⁹ Laotian families, by contrast, were assigned a single eligibility worker who could dispense several forms of aid to one family. The reorganization of labor for welfare workers serving refugees meant that an eligibility worker handled fewer cases, spent more time with individual clients, and had the opportunity to address the multiple needs of clients and their families. As the federal government reimbursed the state for its initial refugee-related welfare costs, refugees could be added to the state's welfare roles without depleting local state or county coffers. Given their access to federal resources, local welfare agencies did not have financial incentives to restrict aid to refugee clients.

A second source of the cordiality between Laotian welfare clients and their welfare workers is rooted in the employment of Southeast Asian refugees in welfare offices. Beginning as interpreters and assistants to welfare eligibility workers, many Southeast Asian employees eventually became eligibility workers themselves. Because most of these employees had once been welfare recipients, the Southeast Asian welfare staff understood the difficulties of their clients. Nor were Southeast Asian welfare workers able to separate themselves from their clients outside the welfare office. As members of close-knit ethnic communities, Laotian welfare workers and their Laotian clients shared a common circle of friends and acquaintances and attended the same social events. Were a Laotian welfare worker to treat a client unfairly, the worker could face community censure. Thus, the structure of community relations reinforced Southeast Asian welfare workers' empathy with their clients.

As most Laotian welfare recipients in California were not employed when their three years of federal aid expired, the state of California continued to pay their welfare benefits until families found employment.²⁰ Constraints on state and county welfare budgets meant that Southeast Asian welfare workers confronted intermittent pressure to eliminate longer-term, California-funded refugee clients from their case load. The ways in which the Southeast Asian welfare staff eased these clients off the welfare roles, however, showed consideration of their clients' different situations. Older AFDC recipients with health problems were encouraged to apply for federally-funded disability benefits (SSI). Younger AFDC or GA clients were placed under pressure to get job training and find work. One welfare worker explained her strategy as follows:

If you are young and only have one child or no children at all, you have to find work. Welfare is good for people who need it while they are looking for work, but it's better

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to have a job. It's better for the *clients* if they have a job because they can get more money. . . . But it's difficult to find a good job, especially if you have a big family. . . . Some people really need welfare. (emphasis original)

By eliminating some younger and older clients from their welfare roles, Southeast Asian welfare personnel could better protect the AFDC status of clients deemed most worthy of public assistance. Southeast Asian eligibility workers typically tried to protect the AFDC status of middle-aged adults who cared for an ailing relative and/or several children at home. Not one of the six long-term AFDC recipients in my sample reported pressure from the welfare office to find work. One Laotian AFDC recipient told me that her eligibility worker "knows my situation [with my family] so she never tells me to get a job." Cognizant of these clients' time consuming family responsibilities, Southeast Asian welfare workers did not pressure these clients to enter the labor market.

Stretching the Margins of Survival

The timing of refugee admissions had an important impact on refugees' experiences with public policy. California had already enacted welfare reforms making its welfare program more progressive than the average state. Not only were its AFDC payments among the nation's most generous, but its aid regulations supported the integrity of nuclear and extended families. Until 1988, for example, twenty-four states denied AFDC aid to women and children if an employable father was living in the household. In California, however, recently unemployed fathers had long been eligible for three months of AFDC aid along with their wives and children. California's welfare rules also allowed a nuclear family of AFDC recipients to coreside with employed friends or relatives without losing benefits. This guideline permitted extended families to live together, sharing housing costs and childcare responsibilities.

Welfare rules which permit the father's presence in the household and support extended families redound to the economic benefit of the entire household. I found that households with a higher ratio of able-bodied adults to dependent members (i.e., young children and/or ailing adults) were the first to send family members into the labor market. Thus, household size *per se* was less significant to labor force participation than household composition. In households comprised of extended family members, the public aid received by unemployed family members supplemented the wages earned by employed relatives. By dividing housing and living expenses among several adults, public assistance recipients and workers realized significant reductions in their share of the daily expenses. Public aid recipients, however, made their biggest contribution to the household economy through the enormous energy

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devoted toward the reduction of the family's reproduction costs. In a typical case, grandparents cared for their grandchildren, tended the house and cooked the meals while the parents attended school or worked. Where space permitted, unemployed relatives planted gardens and used the harvest to supplement many a family meal. Thus, adult members of extended family households not only paid a smaller share of their incomes toward rent and other fixed costs, but total expenditures on food and childcare were reduced by the domestic labor of the unemployed family members.

In some Laotian households, the domestic labor and public assistance income of unemployed relatives allowed younger family members to accept lower-wage entry level jobs. With time, the male workers (but only about half the female workers) in my sample who had accepted lower wage jobs were able to find better jobs. Without the extraordinary domestic labor of unemployed relatives to reduce the family's reproduction costs, however, working families would have had fewer resources to buffer the hardships of entry-level employment. And, had welfare policies in California sharply reduced the benefits of state clients who resided with working relatives, extended family structure would have been undermined rather than supported by social policies.

Social Programs and Racial Stereotypes

While the 1980s were a decade of social mobility for Southeast Asian refugees, other poor Americans, especially poor African Americans, suffered economic stagnation and decline. If we are going to celebrate Southeast Asian refugees as examples of upward social mobility, then we must first laud the type of social programs granted political asylees. Laotian refugees entered the United States after the enactment of significant reforms in refugee and welfare policies. Refugees in California received extensive state aid in their neediest time of resettlement and benefitted from California's "family friendly" welfare regulations. Other poor Americans have lived through decades of economic exclusion and social policies which assaulted their families. Urban renewal programs have replaced cohesive communities with high-rise towers of social anomie. In communities with high unemployment, the deleterious impact of joblessness has been compounded by AFDC rules banning the father's presence in the home.

Yet, despite the negative impact of many social policies on poor African Americans, this community did realize significant economic mobility during the United States' most generous welfare era, i.e., the Great Society programs of the 1960s and 1970s. While the Great Society programs did not eradicate poverty, recent evaluations of anti-poverty efforts have shown that some education and job training programs (notably the Job Corps and CETA program) made significant improve-

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ments in the employment and earnings record of its participants.²¹ The poverty rate among African Americans fell from forty-eight percent in 1965 to thirty percent in 1974.²² The American economy was expanding in the 1960s and early 1970s, but times of economic expansion do not automatically incorporate poor people--especially poor people of color--into the labor force. Given the present concentration of poor African Americans in urban areas with declining economic opportunities and the growth of blue-collar jobs in the suburbs, the notable years of economic expansion in the 1980s bypassed a significant proportion of the African American community.²³

A careful examination of welfare state policies reveals that different groups of poor people in America have forged strikingly different relations with the state. For most poor people, the hostile welfare state of the 1950s and early 1960s was modified by a series of reforms under the Great Society programs only to return to hostile state-client relations under the social policies of Reagan and Bush. The 1980s were an era in which Reagan cut material aid to the poor, abolished the successful CETA job training program, and reduced state resources for education. Despite these general cutbacks in social programs, political refugees were offered a comprehensive array of resources. State aid raised Southeast Asian refugees' level of education, enhanced their job skills and ultimately increased their employability. These state-provided assets are overlooked by cultural explanations which reduce social mobility to a given set of attitudes and behaviors. Many Laotian refugees do in fact espouse the values of education, hard work, and family commitment. But, it was the favorable conditions surrounding refugee admission to the American economy that made it feasible for them to retain these praiseworthy values. Hypotheses of social mobility based on errant assumptions of equal opportunity falsely elevate the role of culture in social mobility. Poor communities have not all had access to the same resources and therefore should not be judged as if the playing field were level.

NOTES

¹ Frank Viviano, "When Success is a Family Prize," *This World Magazine*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 October 1989.

² Mark Arax, "The Child Brides of California," *Los Angeles Times*, 4 May 1993.

³ Cf. Jonathan Habarad, "Refugees and the Structure of Opportunity: Transitional Adjustments to Aid Among the US Resettled Lao Lu Mien, 1980-85," in *People in Upheaval*, eds. Scott Morgan and Elizabeth

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Colson (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1987), 66-87; Jacqueline Desbarats, "Ethnic Differences in Adaptation: Sino-Vietnamese Refugees in the United States," *International Migration Review* 20, 2(Summer 1986): 405-27; and George M. Scott, Jr., "The Hmong Refugee Community in San Diego: Theoretical and Practical Implications of Its Continuing Ethnic Solidarity," *Anthropological Quarterly* 55(1982): 146-60.

⁴ Nathan Caplan, John Whitmore, and Marcella Choy, *The Boat People and Achievement in America* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 145.

⁵ Stanley Lieberson, *A Piece of the Pie* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 8-9.

⁶ Seminal works developing these views of race relations include Robert Park, *Race and Culture* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1950) on assimilation theory; Nathan Glazer and Patrick Daniel Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970) on ethnic pluralism; and Oscar Lewis, *La Vida* (New York: Vintage, 1965) on the culture of poverty.

⁷ Office of Refugee Resettlement, *Report to Congress: Refugee Resettlement Program* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Health and Human Services, 1981), 15.

⁸ Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1990, 98.

⁹ Desbarats, 405.

¹⁰ Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1986, 107.

¹¹ For example, forty-six percent of Southeast Asian refugees who entered the United States in 1981 were in the labor force by 1986 compared to sixty-five percent of the U.S. population as a whole (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1987, 108). By contrast, fifty-four percent of 1975 refugees were in the labor force by 1979 compared to fifty-nine percent of the U.S. population as a whole [(Robert Bach and Jennifer Bach, "Employment Patterns of Southeast Asian Refugees," *Monthly Labor Review* (October 1980): 33].

¹² The federal Office of Refugee Resettlement records information on refugee earnings and employment rates during their first five years in the United States, making good longitudinal data on Southeast Asian refugees' economic trajectories scarce.

¹³ Barry Stein, "The Experience of Being a Refugee: Insights from the Research Literature," in *Refugee Mental Health in Resettlement Coun-*

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tries, eds. Carolyn L. Williams and Joseph Westermeyer (Washington, D.C.: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation, 1986), 15.

¹⁴ 166,727 Southeast Asian refugees were admitted to the United States in 1980 compared to 80,678 refugees in 1979 (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1981, 6).

¹⁵ In the years from 1975 through 1979, 250,000 Southeast Asian refugees were admitted to the United States. Between 1980 and 1984, 463,000 Southeast Asian refugees were admitted to the United States (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1990, A-1).

¹⁶ Darrel Montero, *Vietnamese Americans: Patterns of Resettlement and Socioeconomic Adaptation in the United States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), 28.

¹⁷ In 1986, federal reimbursement of refugee AFDC costs was reduced to thirty-one months. Federal reimbursement of refugee AFDC costs was reduced to twelve months in 1990 and to four months in 1991 (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 1991, 27).

¹⁸ *1992 Greenbook: Overview of Entitlement Programs* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992).

¹⁹ David Haines, "The Pursuit of English and Self-sufficiency: Dilemmas in Assessing Refugee Programme Effects," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 1, 3-4(1988): 198.

²⁰ *Federal Adult Basic Education Report* (Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, 1980-84).

²¹ See Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971); Michael Lipsky, *Street Level Bureaucracy* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980); Ida Susser and John Kreniske, "The Welfare Trap: A Public Policy for Deprivation," in *Cities of the United States*, ed. Leith Mullings (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 51-68.

²² Alice Burton, "Dividing Up the Struggle: The Consequences of "Split" Welfare Work for Union Activism," in *Ethnography Unbound*, Michael Burawoy et al. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 85-107.

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²³Robert Bach, "State Intervention in Southeast Asian Refugee Resettlement in the United States," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 1, 1(1988): 50-51.

²⁴See Christopher Jencks, *Rethinking Social Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 70-91, and John E. Schwartz, *America's Hidden Success* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1988) for succinct reviews of the Great Society programs.

²⁵James Tobin et al., "Blacks in the Economy," in *A Common Destiny*, ed. Gerald D. Jaynes and Robin M. Williams, Jr. (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1989), 278.

²⁶John Kasarda, "Urban Industrial Transition and the Underclass," in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, ed. William Julius Wilson (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1989), 26-47.

Media Discourse and the Feminization of Poverty

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Source diversity models suggest that by using non-conventional, non-official sources for news content, the prevailing perceptions about poor people and their needs would be undermined in news coverage. This study found that major newspapers are making efforts to diversify the sources quoted in their coverage of poverty issues. However, the portrayals of poor people have not changed, particularly for women and people of color. Results of this study suggest that source diversity research must go further to explore how sources are used to address the problems of the poor and how media influence public perceptions of public policy related to welfare and welfare reform.

Introduction

News organizations create an important component of public discourse through the selection of events to report, and the interviews and sources employed to interpret these events. As Jannette Dates and Oscar Gandy argue, "news reflects the views of publishers, writers and editors in that they each make choices about what to include, exclude, emphasize or ignore on the basis of political ideologies."¹ Media discourse on poverty, for instance, functions as a medium for both creating and contesting political claims about people who are poor and about the interests of poor people. Feminist scholar Nancy Fraser writes:

We dispute [in the United States] whether existing social-welfare programs really do meet the needs they purport to satisfy. We also argue about what exactly various groups of people really do need and about who should have the

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last word in such matters.²

This article examines and conceptualizes the relationship between media discourse on poverty and other public discourses on poverty following the welfare reform legislation of 1988. Specifically, this study examines how journalists in leading newspapers in the United States selects news **sources** for stories about poverty. To do so, it addresses four questions: How extensive is coverage in major newspapers on poverty? How complete is coverage on the causes of poverty? Is there an elitist bias in terms of sources quoted and governmental themes concerning welfare reform and government responsibility? And finally, how are poor people depicted in the coverage?

The paper begins with a discussion of public discourse on poverty in the United States and describes several interrelated processes in the mediation of poverty. In the next section, the methods utilized for this study are discussed, followed by an analysis of the results and a concluding discussion about the implications of this study's findings for social change in the media.

Public Discourses About Poverty

The debate over how to reduce the problems related to public assistance³ has been raging for decades. Those on the right argue that the current welfare system encourages people to stay out of the labor force because recipients see public assistance as a "free ride," as means of obtaining reward without effort.⁴ Other commentators claim that recipients are so socially and economically isolated that they think of welfare as a way of life, the only one they can envision.⁵ And, scholars such as University of Chicago's William Julius Wilson argue that dependence on public assistance is a rational response to dire economic conditions.⁶

Given this wide range of perspectives, discourse about poor people and their needs appears as a site of struggle where groups with unequal discursive resources compete to establish their respective stories about legitimate social needs. Democratic theory assumes that a particular perspective will not become subject to legitimate state intervention until it has been debated across a wide range of discourse publics. Further, most of us rely on media to present these various perspectives. As we watch, listen, and read about the likely causes of poverty and proposed state intervention—a **mediated reality** of poverty is created.⁷

The mediation of reality on poverty consists of two interrelated processes. First, although media utilizes sources associated with a wide range of discourse publics, these sources vary greatly with respect to the distribution of power in the United States. Sources associated with leading publics such as government officials are capable of setting the *terms* of political debate about poverty. Other sources, however, are

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linked to historically marginalized publics. In mass communications research, source diversity studies demonstrate that elite sources are favored by reports because they provide regular, credible (to reporters) information.⁸ As a result, these sources tend to dominate news content, and consequently skew the balance of sources in the debate about poverty issues in media discourse.

In addition, Fraser claims that when the voices of experts and bureaucratic sources dominate the public debate in media discourse, the people whose lives are in question become repositioned. Media representations of poor people create images of poverty. For example, in the contemporary debate on welfare, poor people are positioned as **recipients** of predefined services rather than active **agents** involved in interpreting their needs and shaping their life conditions.⁹

Not only does media reposition the poor as recipients of services, but it also serves to racialize our understanding of poverty. In studies of media, race, and modern racism, researchers conclude that media content influences American's perceptions about how different racial and ethnic minority groups are faring socially and economically and whether the distribution of economic resources is equitable.¹⁰ G. Blake Armstrong and Kimberly Neuendorf, for example, maintain that the association of African Americans in news stories concerning protest, poverty, welfare, crime, and unemployment contributes to beliefs in racial inferiority.¹¹ Similarly, Robert Entman argues:

Reality alone does not explain the news constructions of reality, they are framed by elite discourse.... Other elements of traditional American ideology that white elites do generally agree upon (or at least endorse rhetorically) and that persist within the culture will more consistently shape the news, and the audience's processing of it.¹²

These ideological elements include a distrust of big government, and more importantly, the assumption that individuals are responsible for their own fate. The American emphasis on individualism recasts the experience of racism and sexism as individual rather than societal problems and denies the history and structure of discrimination.

The mediation of poverty also works to reposition the status of women in American society. Feminist scholars, for instance, contend that media discourse segments and depoliticizes so-called women's issues into specialized arenas, typically the family.¹³ The depoliticalization process pits private-domestic matters against public-political matters. Mass media further participates in the depoliticalization process by emphasizing personal and dramatic qualities of events, and isolating stories from one another so that information in the news becomes

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fragmented, trivialized, and hard to assemble into a big picture.¹⁴ This kind of coverage precludes interpretations linking private troubles such as welfare reliant unwed mothers and their children to public issues, specifically, economic retrenchment and unemployment.

The Family Support Act of 1988 illustrates this problematic. According to Susan Popkin, the Family Support Act did little to quell the public debate about welfare reform.¹⁵ One of its underlying assumptions is that able-bodied, welfare-reliant citizens have lost the initiative to work. The utilization of government incentives through this new legislation are intended to reduce the numbers of people on welfare rolls.¹⁶ To do so, the new law institutes work requirements for some recipients, requires all states to provide benefits to two-parent families, and establishes new policies for collecting child support. Yet as Popkin argues, the new reform affects only a very small number of poor people. Little attention has been devoted to this fact in the media. Given the media is the main source for such understandings, we must carefully interrogate and analyze its content to uncover the ways in which the problems of poverty are framed, explained, and understood. Within this social and historical context, this article explores whose voices and whose perspectives enter into media discourse about poverty and asks us to consider why this is so.

Method

Data were collected from five major daily U.S. newspapers: the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*. Using the index within each paper, every story referenced as a story about poverty or welfare was selected during the four-year period January 1988 through December 1992.

A coding instrument was used to quantify some of the data. The analysis explored subjects of the stories, story emphases, types of stories written, statistics used, sources quoted, and race of the subject(s) used in photographs. Story emphasis were measured with an open-ended question: What issues are raised in this story? The responses were then categorized for analysis.

In addition, story treatment was coded as either issue-oriented or feature-oriented. Issue-oriented reports were defined as articles providing an overview or background of poverty or an aspect of poverty. Categories scaled as issue-oriented dealt with the weakness of current efforts to eliminate poverty the causes of poverty and identification of proposed solutions. Feature-oriented stories were defined as human interest stories focusing on individual triumphs or problems. Categories scaled as feature-oriented included the use of a case study related to personal or individual circumstances. These categories dealt with the personal struggle of an individual or a family in poverty, or existing

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programs designed to fight poverty.

The three statistical references categories were: 1) statistics presenting the percentages of people of color who are in poverty (by U.S. government standards) or are beneficiaries of public assistance; 2) percentages of the number of white people who are in poverty (by U.S. government standards) or are beneficiaries of public assistance; and 3) percentages of the total numbers of people in poverty (by U.S. government standards) or are beneficiaries of public assistance.

The names and titles of sources quoted were recorded. Each source quoted was recorded only one time per story. Source titles were then categorized for analysis. Additionally, subjects of the story were categorized as: 1) able-bodied, retired and/or unemployed, impoverished women who were not welfare-reliant; 2) able-bodied, retired and/or unemployed, impoverished men who were not welfare-reliant; 3) able-bodied, welfare-reliant men; 4) able-bodied, welfare-reliant women; and 5) disabled, impoverished men and women. An inter-coder reliability check was established with eighty-seven percent agreement.

Analysis

An examination of the stories about poverty over the four-year period yielded thirty-eight articles on poverty for analysis. A comparison of the articles in the five newspapers revealed that the *New York Times* (twelve stories) published more reports than any of the newspapers studied. The *Los Angeles Times* followed with eight stories, the *Washington Post* and *Christian Science Monitor* published seven stories each, and the *Wall Street Journal* published four stories.

Most of the newspaper coverage was related to welfare reform legislation and government program development (27.27%). References in story coverage were made to cost of benefits to government (16.88%), lack of motivation of welfare beneficiaries (15.58%), and personal inadequacies (23.37%). Fewer mentions were related to joblessness and economic decline (7.80%) and social discrimination (9.09%).

A value-laden distinction was found between "deserving" men and women, and "undeserving" women in the media discourses about poverty. For example, a total of six references were made to men in the stories. Consistently, men's economic conditions were referred to as "without work or unemployed." The two reports about elderly women in poverty described the women as innocent victims living under changed social-economic conditions. One article highlighted the circumstances of a seventy-year old widowed woman:

I never realized the consequences of working in low-paying jobs that do not offer both Social Security and a pension.... No one discussed it then. It was just assumed

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that your husband would take care of you.¹⁷

In another article describing the impoverishment of elderly nuns:

Elderly nuns are in retirement binds because, unlike the male hierarchy who controlled the collection plate, the sisters put neither their trust in money nor their money in trust.¹⁸

On the other hand, the majority of the poverty coverage concerned unemployed, welfare-reliant women of childbearing age (fifty percent of twenty-eight total mentions of story subjects). A *Wall Street Journal* article headline reads: "Good Girls Fare Better In Standard of Living."¹⁹ A hospital nurse's statement of attribution (*Christian Science Monitor*) charges: "He's [patient's baby boy] going to be another toy for her to play with... It's pointless to teach her about parenting."²⁰ Another front-page article in the *New York Times* describes the causes of poverty for most welfare recipients in a disparaging way: "This is not the South Bronx or Appalachia, where poverty often is attributed to the culture or behavior, to racism, or reckless childbearing."²¹

Such references are made about subjects in the reports. Although poor people were used as sources in 22.86% of the total coverage, over fifty percent of the people in poverty were quoted in the *New York Times*. Two of the five newspapers studied, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Post*, did not use quotes by poor people at all.

Of the stories including statistics about poverty, the majority (fifty percent of thirty-two) of the references emphasized the number of people of color in poverty and total numbers of people in poverty (43.75% of thirty-two). Although the majority of the stories reported poverty rates of people of color, only 6.25% of the stories reported white poverty rates. These figures contrast sharply to actual percentages of women in poverty: 38% of women who received Aid to Families with Dependent Children are white, compared to 40% who are Black, 16% Latino, 2.7% Asian, and 1.3% American Indian.²² News media reports of welfare-reliant women of color without complimentary statistics of welfare-reliant white women mask the fact that so many poor women are white and making welfare a tool in the politics of race.

The newspapers also used **over twice as many visuals of women of color** in poverty as whites in poverty. Out of the ten photographs used, seven of the photographs were of women of color. Only three photographs were of white women. Such visual choices further reinscribe images of the poor as women of color. In addition, the majority of the coverage was feature-oriented. Of the thirty-eight stories, 73.68% of the coverage was feature-oriented and 26.32% of the coverage was issue-oriented. These results suggest that very few of the articles discussed the societal realities that contribute to poverty. Fur-

ther, these data reveal that media reports on poverty adopt a very narrow perspective of poverty and its causes, particularly for women.

Placing the Newspaper Coverage of Poverty in Context

Robert Stallings claims that an isolated incident and a series of like events are quite different in terms of the logic required to make them sensible. The isolated incident is easier to dismiss (and to disown) as an aberration, an exception, or a result of improbably circumstances that are unlikely to be duplicated. A pattern, on the other hand, implies regularities, repeated occurrences that are difficult to dismiss as chance.²³

Maintaining the singularity of circumstance can be an important aspect of what Fraser calls depoliticization.²⁴ Journalists, aided by their news sources, facilitate the depoliticization process through the creation of images in the public arena. Media accounts which link women to singular events (i.e., childbearing outside of wedlock, choosing welfare benefits) preclude an understanding of the systemic reasons for which such "choices" are made. Consequently, the plausibility of poor women being labeled as deviant increases,²⁵ and the lack of concern for their issues as **political** matters increases. Further, the media favors personal or psychological explanations over political and social explanations in poverty discourse. These explanations are most likely to be prevalent because they suit the needs of the contributors to media discourse. Finally, focusing on the individualistic aspects of poverty simplifies the communication process for journalists. Feature and event-oriented treatments of poverty are simply easier to write than those containing more complex, socio-economic explanations.

Through such explanations for poverty, the media powerfully constructs a value-laden framework on social issues.²⁶ In the reports on poverty in the *New York Times*, efforts were made by journalists to use poor people as sources. One might assume that as the use of diverse sources in news coverage grows, social and political explanations of poverty would also increase. However, the story emphases of the newspapers studied did not vary in significant ways. Thus, newspaper representations of poor people occur within a gerrymandered framework. Through political sensibilities and commercial pressures, newspaper stories selectively construct the boundaries within which images of poor people are constructed and maintained.

The conclusions drawn from my content analysis offer further support to the claims of theorists that reporters select media events and issues to fit their audience's expectations. Exposure to the resulting stereotypes over time may make poor women and people of color appear consistently threatening and burdensome, demanding and undeserving of accommodation by government. If humane welfare policy is to be further advanced in combination with traditional democratic liberties, the

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enduring public anger about poor people must be corrected. Such a political approach implies a media discourse that makes connections between hard economic issues and personal "choices."

Because mass communication is a fluid process, source diversity models suggest that by using more non-official, non-conventional sources for news stories in a statistically representative manner, the prevailing negative perceptions about the poor could be greatly undermined. Further, by identifying and highlighting news story "elements" that shift responsibility to different actors (i.e., the government and the social forces such as unemployment), different political solutions can be brought to light.

In conclusion, this study finds that when media portray people in poverty, it focuses on the individual, rather than related institutions. Newspaper representations are ideological to the extent that the assumptions underlying media discourse (i.e., individualism and meritocracy) shift our understanding away from social processes to matters of individual, rational choice. Such representations appear natural and inevitable rather than the result of social and political struggles over power. In most instances, when newspapers report on poverty, governmental policy is not challenged and the underlying social and economic forces go **unexamined**. Thus, the mediation of reality remains a major problem for poor people in the United States' "democratic" society.

NOTES

¹Jannette Dates and Oscar Gandy, "How Ideological Constraints Affected Coverage of the Jesse Jackson Campaign," *Journalism Quarterly* 42 (Fall 1985): 595.

²Nancy Fraser, "Talking about Needs: Interpretive Contests as Political Conflicts in Welfare-State Societies," in *Feminism & Political Theory*, ed. C. R. Sunstein (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 159.

³Public assistance refers to welfare benefits given to people who fall within government-defined poverty levels. Abramovitz argues that everyone is on welfare. Tax codes provide numerous health, education, and welfare benefits to the rich and the middle class and another set of subsidies to corporations.

⁴Stuart Butler and Anna Kondratas, *Out of the Poverty Trap: A Conservative Strategy for Welfare Reform* (New York: The Free Press, 1987); L. Mead, *Beyond Entitlement: The Social Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: The Free Press, 1986).

⁵William Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: The University of

Chicago Press, 1987).

⁶Frances Piven and Richard Cloward, *The New Class War* (New York: Pantheon, 1982); Susan Popkin, "Welfare: Views from the Bottom," *Social Problems* 37 (February 1990): 64-77.

⁷Doris Graber, *Processing the News: How People Tame the Information Tide*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1986).

⁸Jane Brown, Carl Bybee, Stanley Wearden, and Dulcie Straughan, "Invisible Power: Newspaper News Sources and the Limits of Diversity," *Journalism Quarterly* 64 (Spring 1987): 45-54; Lana Rakow and K. Kranich, "Women as Sign in Television News," *Journal of Communication* 41 (Spring 1991): 8-23; Pamela Shoemaker, "Building a Theory of News Content: A Synthesis of Current Approaches," *Journalism Monographs* 103 (June 1987); D. Charles Whitney, Marilyn Fritzler, Steven Jones, Sharon Mazzarella, and Lana Rakow, "Geographic and Source Biases in Network Television News 1982-1984," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 33 (Spring 1989): 159-174.

⁹Fraser, *Feminism & Political Theory*, 159-184.

¹⁰G. Blake Armstrong and Kimberly Neuendorf, "TV Entertainment, News and Racial Perceptions of College Students," *Journal of Communication* 42 (Fall 1992): 153-176; Oscar Gandy and Paula Matabane, "Television and Social Perceptions Among African-Americans and Hispanics," *Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication*, eds. M. K. Asante and W. B. Gudykunst (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), 318-348.

¹¹Armstrong and Neuendorf, 153-176.

¹²Robert Entman, "Blacks in the News: Television, Modern Racism and Cultural Change," *Journalism Quarterly* 69 (Spring 1992): 341-361.

¹³Rakow and Kranich, 8-23.

¹⁴Daniel Hallin, "The High Modernism of American Journalism," *Journal of Communication* 42 (Fall 1992): 14-26; Herbert Schiller, *The Mind Managers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

¹⁵Popkin.

¹⁶Popkin, 64-77.

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¹⁷"Senior Women in Poverty," *Christian Science Monitor*, 26 May 1992, 14.

¹⁸"Vows of Poverty, Lives of Destitution," *The Washington Post*, 20 October 1990, A23.

¹⁹"Good Girls Fare Better in Standard of Living," *Wall Street Journal*, 18 January 1990, B1.

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Race, Gender, and the Status-Quo: Asian and African American Relations in a Hollywood Film

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Hollywood films play a significant role in constructing and reinforcing inter-ethnic tensions through negative representations of Asian Americans and African Americans. While white males are most often depicted as smart and romantically desirable, thereby reinforcing an ideology of white male dominance, Asian Americans and Blacks are typically diminished to demeaning and secondary status. This article explores these racist stereotypes in director Michael Cimino's 1995 film *Year of the Dragon* (as well as a number of other Hollywood films), arguing that such race and gender-specific imagery is functional; for while it promotes race/gender stereotypes, it also serves to rationalize white dominance as necessary to sustain the status-quo.

Introduction

"Seeing comes before words."
—John Berger¹

Contemporary images of race relations in the United States come not only from what we read, but **what we see** in movies and television.² Drawing from Melvin DeFleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach's work on the media, which argues that structural functionalism as a theoretical framework implicitly promotes social harmony and supports the status-quo,³ this article argues that Hollywood film supports a racist status quo through its images of race and gender-specific stereotypes.

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Many critics have advanced similar arguments about film. For example, Jacqueline Bobo describes Black female/male relationships in Steven Spielberg's *The Color Purple* (1985) as sustaining the dominant (white) ideology;⁴ Michael Omi and Howard Winant see the prevalence of racial stereotypes as a means to sustain U.S. racial formation;⁵ K. Sue Jewell observes the internalization of negative imagery reinforces a white status-quo;⁶ and Christine Choy argues that Herbert Shiller's book *The Mind Managers* describes the reproduction of stereotypical images of Asian Americans in television and film.⁷

Reasons for focusing on African American and Asian American relations (within the context of white mainstream cinema) also stem from actual life occurrences of ignorance and mutual estrangement between Blacks and Asian Americans. In 1986, for instance, Japanese Prime Minister Yashio Nakasone slurred African Americans and Hispanics as intellectual inferiors.⁸ Karl Zinsmeister reported feelings of prejudice against Asian Americans "from top (white corporations) to bottom (Black underclass)."⁹ The late 1980s and early 1990s saw segments of the African American community staging boycotts against Korean grocers in New York and Los Angeles. In 1992, Korean American businesses were alleged to be special targets of Los Angeles rioters following the acquittal of white police who beat Rodney King. Letha Lee reported tensions between poor Blacks and Southeast Asian refugees over competition for social welfare resources.¹⁰ Roger Daniels pointed to overt racist comparisons by neo-conservatives between the Black underclass and more upwardly mobile Japanese and Chinese Americans.¹¹ John Russell concluded that much of Black/Asian antagonism is rooted in racist imagery promoted through commercial media, such as the kind seen in many Hollywood films.¹²

This paper shows how Hollywood's limited perceptions of Asians and Blacks reflect and reinforce racial stratification and promote interracial antagonisms. By doing so, the role of white racism in decontextualized and naturalized in film, thereby justifying the dominant status-quo or existing racial hierarchy. Director Michael Cimino's *Year of the Dragon* (1985), a police action film about a ruthless Chinese American subculture in New York City, is a good example of this problematic. Gina Marchetti has made similar observations concerning the unbalanced depictions of Chinese Americans in Cimino's film.¹³ In addition, Lan Nguyen has raised similar issues about Japanese and Asian American relations in Phil Kaufman's *Rising Sun* (1993).¹⁴ And, Donald Bogle has also expressed concerns regarding perceptions of African Americans in Hollywood cinema.¹⁵ In sum, these writers contend that popular cinema has traditionally devalued Blacks and Asians with roles as subservient, deprived, or disruptive characters compared to more positive portrayals of white people. This article explores these issues in detail in Cimino's controversial film *Year of the Dragon*.

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Enforcing the Status-Quo: *Year of the Dragon* as a Prime Example

Mickey Rourke, the unwashed white actor who sexually dominated T.V.'s Cosby child Lisa Bonet in *Angel Heart* (1987), portrays Polish American police captain Stanley White, determined to bring law and order to New York City's Chinatown in *Year of the Dragon*. White's persona, described as "the most decorated policeman on the force," establishes him as an American symbol of "rugged individualism." White (Rourke) brutally "seduces" the film's principle Chinese American female, T.V. news journalist Tracy Tzu (Ariane) and beats up the Chinese American male antagonist Joey Tai (John Lone). Tai is described as "slender and self-possessed...Slightly prissy and impatient"¹⁶ and is constructed as more effeminate in contrast to a more virile White. Chinatown "mafia" elders and a marauding youth gang, the latter paralleling public fear of gun-blasting, dope-dealing Black urban youth gangs, are presented as responsible for societal disharmony. Thus, police oppression is represented as a socially accepted force needed to restore social equilibrium.

Policeman White is indicative of Hollywood's tradition of bullies with badges who emerged during the Nixon administration with Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood in Don Siegel's *Dirty Harry*, 1971)¹⁷ and "Popeye" Doyle (Gene Hackman in William Friedkin's *The French Connection*, 1971).¹⁸ These openly racist/sexist proletariat cops, emphasizing their white ethnicity, became legitimized as mythic "urban cowboys" from American folklore updated for the post-Vietnam and crime-ridden eighties. Galvanizing the ignorance and fear of the American mainstream, a police-vigilante mentality is deemed as necessary to subordinate the rampant dysfunctionality of dark strangers at prey in the cities' mean streets.

The White Ethnic American Versus the Racial Stereotype

Eurasian actor John Lone, seen in Fred Schepisi's *Iceman* (1984) and Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor* (1987), is reduced to secondary status as the antagonist Joey Tai in Cimino's film. A restaurant owner and aspiring crime boss, Tai pursued the American Dream by capitalizing on the underground economy (the heroin trade). But an inescapable distinction between America's history of multi-ethnic gangsterism and Tai is his racial (and not ethnic) phenotype. Here, Joey Tai shares the distinction of visibility with African Americans. Unlike the white ethnic Italian American hoodlums in Frances Coppla's *Godfather* films (1972, 1974, 1990), or Jewish and Irish American gangsters in Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), or Italian/Irish American criminals in Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* (1990), Tai's ruthlessness seems devoid of an objective historical context. *Year of the*

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Dragon leaves the impression of a cold, calculating urban immigrant born of a criminal subculture (the Triads are noted to be a thousand years old). Societal response to such alien outlaws bent on disrupting the smooth functioning of the status-quo is a WASP war hero who has been politically sanctioned to re-establish social harmony.

Boundaries: A Thin Blue Line

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) suggested that deviance in society is functional, for it establishes boundaries which define social norms.¹⁹ Visible Asian criminals in *Year of the Dragon* act more as boundary markers to define non-conformist behavior. As the status-quo's armed guards, the police operate to keep the existing structure in tact by maintaining "acceptable" behavior. The police are arrogant, unorthodox urban cowboys/soldiers presented as independent, tough, and resourceful and who face overwhelming odds from marginalized and dysfunctional people. Thus they are compelled to trample over constitutional rights in order to keep society safe in spite of the liberal rulings of the 1970s Warren Court.

This consistent post-Vietnam image of a racist but gallant hero-cop who does not apologize for race-bashing followed the social upheaval of the 1960s and progressive 1970s. By the decade of Reagan-Bush, audiences seemed conditioned to accept militaristic police behavior as if cop=bigotry was only a minor indiscretion to maintain desired social harmony.

The power of broadcast media educated the public about civil rights workers being hammered into the pavement by redneck sheriffs, and television brought the Vietnam War into American living rooms, hastening its end. But Jewell Taylor Gibbs also notes how television and film also helps "foster the negative stereotype of black men as criminals, drug addicts, buffoons, and hustlers, and black women are portrayed as meddling matriarchs, sexy 'Shappires,' dumb domestics, and welfare widows."²⁰ At present, the "us versus them" portrait perpetrated by Hollywood's power elite is in part responsible for public support for punitive criminal justice policies.²¹ Arguably, such entertainment has helped to create a greater tolerance for police brutality against racial and ethnic minorities, brutality seen to be necessary for maintaining the social system's equilibrium.

In *Year of the Dragon*, policeman White is to Chinatown's Asian Americans what the Ku Klux Klan are to African Americans in D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915). As the main protagonist, the audience's identification with White's racist demeanor in an age of continuing inequality²² suggests how Simi Valley's jury could find Los Angeles policemen "not guilty" of viciously beating Black motorist Rodney King in the spring of 1992. In a society based on race, gender, and economic

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stratification, reprehensible behavior by the armed guards of the status-quo is condoned when perceived as necessary to keep the establishment safe from strangers of a different color.

The cinematic construction of a white positive/color negative dichotomy diminishes racial tolerance and understanding. This socially sanctioned and value-laden duality reinforces social stratification and negatively influences interpersonal relationships between minority couples.²³

Female/Male Antagonism: Exogamous and Endogamous Implications

Year of the Dragon's two principal Asian American characters, Tzu (Ariane) and Tai (Lone), are seen as antagonistic and estranged from each other as are the Black couples in Steven Spielberg's *The Color Purple* (1985) released the same year. The lack of Asian reciprocal romances compared to thousands featuring loving white couples function to reinforce the kind of dominant ideology pointed out by Jewell, Bobo, and Guererro, which devalues Black relationships, and by Choy and Renee Tajima that diminishes Asian romances.²⁴ Melford Weiss's earlier anthropological study revealed how mass media's proliferation of white males as masculine/romantic ideals produces an "Asian male negative/Asian female positive dichotomy" and encourages Chinese/Caucasian dating patterns.²⁵

Tajima sees *Year of the Dragon's* depiction of Tzu as an Asian woman not interested in any Asian man.²⁶ Against the usual stereotype, Tzu is initially independent and assertive but remains cold and elitist particularly towards fellow Chinese Americans. Yet she is curiously acquiescent to white male authority. As the film's primary female protagonist, her romantic preference for a racist/sexist white policeman reinforces race and gender domination as desirable and appropriate. Tzu's evident lack of race or gender consciousness is used as a socializing agent to convince viewers that white male authority, however crude and oppressive, is acceptable when it promotes desired social stability.

Just as *The Color Purple* represents Black men as harsh and brutal, *Year of the Dragon* similarly diminishes Chinese American men. By having Tzu raped by an Asian youth gang orchestrated by Tai, the film serves to justify her contempt for anything "Asian" and her literal embrace of White as protector. (Though Tzu's weakness is set-up earlier when she has an emotional breakdown in the arms of the hero-cop after a vicious shout-out by the Chinese youth gang in a restaurant.) White's pious fury over Tzu's rape— "Now they've gone too far!"—is patronizing and perplexing: he is far less upset over the murder of his own wife by the gang. Such scenes function to place this white male on a moral high ground, since no one else expresses such concern. Such is also

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suggested in White's earlier date rape of Tzu, which is callously presented as of little consequence to him or, curiously, to her, implying that sexual aggression is more "acceptable" to Asians.²⁷ And when endogenous gender enstrangement is juxtaposed with such self-righteous indignation from this chief enforcer of the status-quo, real world and cinematic hypocrisy is clearly illustrated. For just as black-on-black crime brings less media focus and political outrage while black-on-white crimes are treated as a national affront, *Year of the Dragon* constructs White as society's moral barometer and its chauvinistic protector.

Constrained to portray Tai as brutal, manipulative, and a physical wimp, Eurasian actor John Lone continues the Hollywood tradition of depicting Asian men as stealthy, non-assertive, and fearful when surrounded by white people. Writer David Mura criticized this pervasive negative image of Asians: "The men are houseboys or Chinatown punks, kung fu warriors or Japanese businessmen, robotlike and powerful or robotlike and comic."²⁸ Similarly as with Black men like the outstanding actor Jaye Davison in Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1992), effeminate Asian men, seen recently as gay lovers of white men in *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) and *M. Butterfly* (1993) and as non-threatening sex partners to non-threatening white women in *The Lovers* (1992) and *The Ballad of Little Joe* (1993), also found expression in *Year of the Dragon*.

Asian male sexuality, even when depicting ruthless antagonists, comes off as very passive. This perception is against the usual depictions of ruthless Black and Latino men often pictured as sexually aggressive. Asian and Black men tend to share a similar cinematic history as unromantic types when compared to the multidimensional roles allowed white men. On the other hand, unlike Black women who are consistently reduced to depiction of the "exotic primitive" or "sexual savage," Asian women are more often represented as the passive, subservient lovers to mostly white men.²⁹

Preference for a White Significant-Other as Functional

Within functionalism's theoretical frame, Tzu's sexual preference for a racist/sexist white cop seems less a personal option than a limited political choice. Her own elitism and cultural detachment from other Chinese Americans embody her as a living metaphor of assimilation. Tzu's lack of emotional, social, or political consciousness about her lover's overt sexist and racist behavior implies that racial minorities would be better off if they simply accepted the prevailing power structure.

Ariane's casting as Tzu supports a Western mythology of white females as the ideal of feminine beauty. A real-life model of Dutch Japanese ancestry, Ariane has distinct Eurocentric physical features (and her ethnically-neutral name might also account, in part, for her success as an "exotic" model). Within the manifest functions of gender,

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race, and class as deployed through popular culture, the benefits of Ariane's Eurocentric phenotype derives from the inherent biases in Western ideology. As Charles Stember wrote: "A standard of beauty in Western society was probably greatly facilitated by the invention of the movies which projected onto cities and towns all over the world the image of the desirable female on a mass scale."³⁰

Stember's point explains why so few commercial films (or modeling agencies) feature Black women, and those that do tend to promote women with distinctive Eurocentric physical traits. For example; Lisa Bonet in Alan Parker's *Angel Heart* (1987), Cathy Tyson in Neil Jordan's *Mona Lisa* (1986 Britain), Appolonia Kotera in Albert Margoli's *Purple Rain* (1984), Vanity in John Frankenheimer's *52 Pick Up* (1986) and Craig T. Baxley's *Action Jackson* (1988), Rae Dawn Chong in Mark Lester's *Commando* (1985), Cynda Williams in Carl Franklin's *One False Move* (1992), Halle Berry in Reginald Hudlin's *Boomerang* (1992), and yes!...Jaye Davidson in Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1992). As also evidenced in *Year of the Dragon*, racial stratification functions to define and reinforce feminine beauty, interracial relations, and social status, just as it does masculinity, race/gender dynamics, and power relationships in the films mentioned.

Interestingly, actress Rae Dawn Chong (mentioned above) is of Black/Asian mixture, but has never been assigned an Asian role. Does Hollywood's racism deny Chong's Asian heritage? Yet Ariane, as well as Julie Nickson from George Cosmatos' *Rambo: First Blood* (1985), are half white but portray full Asian characters. This is not intended as an argument for racial purity among actors—race is more a social than biological construct—but when Asians manifest a Eurocentric phenotype, Hollywood promotes them as more acceptable Asian characters. Thus the Hollywood status-quo operates to dictate racial inclusivity and exclusivity among Asians and Blacks.

Sexual Imperialism

As in the majority of such Hollywood films, race and gender oppression is highly evident in *Year of the Dragon*. Policeman White practically rapes news journalist Tzu, described by Tajima as a combination clone of Susie Wong and Connie Chung.³¹ Tzu's protest of White's sexual brutality is weak and serves to reinforce chauvinistic practices which link romance to race/gender dominance and power. Tzu's "seduction" represents a symbolic "conquering" of the Orient by an authority of the U.S. government. Her (sexual) acquiescence to the policeman's strong-arm "take over" (of her body) is perhaps symbolic wish-fulfillment for Far East capitulation to Western hegemony.

Year of the Dragon's xenophobic and ethnocentric viewpoint comes partly from co-screenwriter Oliver Stone, a Vietnam veteran. A

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liberal but manipulative myth-maker, Stone is responsible for other films featuring low-life white males romantically paired with passive women of color. For instance, the dark Elpedia Carrillo as the Central American girlfriend of a sleazy Anglo reporter (James Woods) in *Salvador* (1986). Carrillo is featured standing around naked in blatantly voyeuristic scenes in the same way that Tzu (Ariane) is featured prancing naked through her split-level New York City apartment. Ariane (and Carrillo) are reduced to what movie critic David Sterritt describes as "sexist nudity."³² This cinematic rape carries over to white actresses who maintain the symbolism of color. For example, director David Lynch's controversial *Blue Velvet* (1986) juxtaposes a dark, mysterious, bad, and incredibly naked Isabella Rossellini with the light, innocent, and blond Laura Dern. Such instances of gender exploitation illustrate filmmakers (males) use of power against the powerless (females). The existing racial hierarchy in America further exacerbates this exploitation of women of color.

Year of the Dragon moreover treats Asians as Blacks have generally been treated—as monolithic. The film embodies Chinese Americans (and all Asians) as the vicious enemy. For instance, a female youth gang member, in heels and tight skirt, kills a policeman, and after a heart-pounding foot chase through the streets with policeman White in hot pursuit, becomes trapped in traffic and is struck down by cold, impersonal, zooming automobiles (perhaps suggesting the vast power and technology used against the Viet Cong, or to suggest the car wars between Japan and America). The mocking White hovers over the dying youth like a Bell C-140 helicopter and demands a confession. Her response is a fearless—"Fuck you!"

The significance of this dying scene is its remarkable similarity to the death of a lethal Viet Cong female sniper in Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) after she has torturously shot to pieces a Black soldier (Dorian Harwood). Identical reverse angle camera shots in both films frame the impending death of a supine Asian female enemy surrounded by triumphant white males. Such scenes equate Chinese American youth gangs with Vietnamese guerrillas—blurring ethnic distinctions. The initial scene also parallels urban paranoia about young, Black, and fearless street gangs.

This passive/aggressive duality of the Asian female calls for a reiteration about Ariane's role. When contrasting Tzu's physical features with these militant young killers, symbols and imagery become significant: Cimino's youth gang member and Kubrick's V.C. sniper exhibit more phenotypic traits that can be described as Asian. They also represent direct lethal threats to the established social order, while Tzu, on the other hand, is rewarded with romance and protection (recall the audience is supposed to identify with Tzu). Just as Manthia Diawara pointed to the cinematic need to punish Black assertiveness,³³ Asian aggression and defiance against the white establishment must also be

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sanctioned.

Therefore *Year of the Dragon's* main message seems to be that Asians (or any minority group) who accommodates to the dominant ideology will be granted acceptance to the existing hierarchy. Tzu's (willful) subjugation to the status-quo is a metaphor for racial assimilation while annihilation is the consequence when established (white) authority is challenged.

Black and Asian Relations

Earlier motion pictures featuring Blacks within an "Oriental" milieu were the Charlie Chan series, based on Earl Derr Bigger's (1884-1933) Chinese detective character who was always portrayed by white actors (Sidney Toler, Warner Oland, Peter Ustinov). Blacks were used as "comic relief" and were featured in Louis King's *Charlie Chan in Egypt* (1935) with Stepin Fetchit and Phil Rosen's *Charlie Chan in the Secret Service* (1944) with Mantan Moreland. Bogle described Fetchit and Moreland's depictions generally as "coons;" meaning they ranged from portraying harmless buffoons to "no account niggers."³⁴

Year of the Dragon takes place some fifty years later and over twenty years after the modern Civil Rights Movement. Tai's main bodyguard is an African American. Though his Black enforcer's behavior falls short of the Fetchit and Moreland buffoonery a half century earlier, the Black gangster's status among New York's Chinese Americans is that of an ineffective "darker." He is seen opening doors and clearing the way for the more ambitious Joey Tai, thereby positioning Asian/Black relations at the level of master and servant. The Black bodyguard is noticeably middle-aged, thus William Julius William would observe him to be a representative of Black underclass stagnancy vis-a-vis general Asian progress of the post Civil Rights generation.³⁵ Interestingly, the Black led Civil Rights Movement which took place during this hoodlum's youth also opened doors for other minorities and women.³⁶

The social distancing between African Americans and Chinese Americans is clearly articulated by Tai's admonition to fellow Chinese that they avoid becoming treated as "yellow niggers" (echoing John Glover's class put-down of Rob Lowe as a "boat nigger" in Bob Swain's *Masquerade* 1988). *Year of the Dragon's* primary Black character is a social pariah and symbolic of the lowest gratus that could befall any group in the U.S.

Roger Daniels notes that some neo-conservatives interpret the American struggle for upward mobility as inter-ethnic rivalry.³⁷ Racial competition for social positioning might account for Tai's opinionated rankings of race and, in real-life, former Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone's racial slurs against African Americans and Hispanics. The neo-conservative perception that Blacks and Asians must compete for

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placement into America's race hierarchy may have added fuel to the fires that burned Korean businesses in the Los Angeles riots. Indeed, as Russell pointed out about Japan's cultural view of Blacks, Asian Americans might be led to perceive African Americans as the "other"³⁸ and vice-versa, given Nguyen's assessment of Kaufman's *Rising Sun*.³⁹

Perceptions of interracial competition manifested in film imagery are grounded in a kind of white paternalism where the potential for Asian/Black coalitions are often ignored or totally dismissed. As in the false historical revisionism of Alan Parker's *Mississippi Burning* (1988) and Joseph Ruben's *True Believer* (1989), important real-life occurrences of Asian and Black alliances were reconstructed to cast white males as saviors for people of color, suggesting that neither Blacks nor Asians can effectively address their own or common grievances.

Within the dominant white milieu, race and gender rankings result from the existing social, political, and economic structure. In film, Asians and Blacks are not seen working together, doing so might suggest a Marxist approach for solving mutual problems. Instead, they are set against one another. Besides in *Year of the Dragon*, this can also be seen in Ruben's *True Believer*, where a Black policeman is an unlikely co-conspirator with the racist white cops (and system) responsible for unjustly imprisoning an Asian American gang member (Yuji Okumoto). Also in Kaufman's *Rising Sun*, Japanese hoodlums venture into South Central Los Angeles and are successfully intimidated by the area's Black youths.⁴⁰ Unlike the Korean American grocer in Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1988), who declared himself Black (admittedly in the heat of a race riot), films like Ruben's *True Believer*, Christopher Crowe's *Off Limits* (1987), Lee Thompson's *Kinjite: Forbidden Subjects* (1989), Kaufman's *Rising Sun*, along with Cimino's *Year of the Dragon*, do not promote Black/Asian cooperation but seem purposively designed to exacerbate intra-minority tension, and hence, justify white domination by reinforcing race-based stratification.

Conclusion

Commerical films like *Year of the Dragon* reflect and reinforce race, class, and gender stratification. Such racist/sexist film imagery influences endogamous and exogamous relations. Racial accommodation and cultural assimilation into the dominant (white) culture by denying race/gender oppression are constructed as socially and politically appropriate responses. And Asian/Black political coalitions are about as rare as interpersonal romance between the two. (A notable exception is Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala* [1992] involving an East Asian woman and an African American man.)

Hollywood's consistent negative representations of Asian, Asian American, and African American operates to reinforce the existing

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hegemonic structure in American society. This social, political, and economic hierarchy is race and gender based, yet designed to be viewed as functional (thus justified) for it uses such cinematic imagery to sustain the status-quo.⁴¹

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**Whose Crying Game?
One Woman of Color's Reflection on
Representations of Men of Color in
Contemporary Film**

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This film review of *The Crying Game* critically interrogates the politics of representation and domination which "spectacle-ize" Black male bodies. Working out of her location as an Asian American woman who is sensitive to the cinematic and everyday politics of exoticization, this cultural critic provides an analysis of the dynamic relations of power at work in the racial and heterosexual production and exploitation of Black gays in contemporary film. Drawing on the work of such critics as bell hooks, Robert Reid-Pharr, Kobena Mercer, and Judith Butler, she challenges us not to simply perpetuate the imperial gaze.

In the spring of 1993, a small independent Irish film began receiving rave reviews in the U.S. and around the world. This film eventually garnered six Academy Award nominations for Best Picture, Best Actor, and Best Supporting Actor, to name but a few. *The Crying Game*, directed by Irishman Neil Jordan, focuses on a small band of Irish Republican Army terrorists (IRA), or counter-terrorists, depending upon your point of view, who are a part of an armed struggle that has been ongoing in Northern Ireland for nearly a quarter of a century. Most of the entertainment media industry—*Siskel & Ebert*, *Charlie Rose*, *Entertainment Tonight*, and even the ABC and CBS news programs—have given *The Crying Game* a "thumbs up." Contrary to popular as well as academic opinion, these reviews have not concentrated on how this film

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helps us, as U.S. viewers, to gain any better understanding of either the IRA, the longstanding Irish-English crisis, or the impact of colonialism and civil war on North Ireland's communities. On the contrary, these concerns merely underly the surface of the film—they serve as intriguing, though superficial, backdrops to the actual plot. If film viewers were to begin seriously thinking through the complexities of nationalism, colonialism, war and terrorism, much of *The Crying Game's* plot would appear pretty simplistic—even nonsensical.

The media and even the film's leading Irish actor, Stephen Rea, have commented that *The Crying Game's* acclaim has been due in large part to its surprising, even shocking, conclusion—a conclusion which has been kept very much under wraps by industry watchers, film reviewers, and film goers. And though all the industry's "hush-hushness" has been exciting and seductive, at the same time, it is crucial to critically interrogate just exactly why and how "this secret" excites and seduces audiences. As one conference attendee correctly pointed out to me, "When the dominant culture likes something, it's suspect—and you've got to wonder why?"

I would like to briefly reflect on watching *The Crying Game* from a woman of color's standpoint, and my being shocked not so much by the film's conclusion, but by the film's representations of race, gender, sexuality, and to a certain extent, class. More specifically, I want to raise what I see are crucial questions: "How do the men of color in this film get represented or positioned?" and "What are some of the implications, or critical alternatives, for women of color as well as others who view this film?"

In the introduction to bell hooks' most recent collection of critical essays, entitled *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, she observes that,

The emphasis on film is so central because it, more than any other media experience, determines how blackness and black people are seen and how other groups will respond to us based on their relation to these constructed and consumed images.¹

Like most folks, I like to take in an occasional film, relax, eat hot buttered pop-corn, and just plain escape from my everyday worries about finances, teaching, and figuring out what's for dinner. However, as I have become increasingly aware of how images—film images—play a role in determining "not only how other people think about us but how we think about ourselves,"² I can no longer just look at a film—particularly a film featuring peoples of color—without being effected. When I think about it, I now feel ashamed and angry sometimes for having consumed countless films like the futuristic thriller *Blade Runner*, the colonial epic *A Passage*

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to *India*, an American western fantasy like *Dances With Wolves*, or say, a more recent feminist film like *The Piano*—and either "not seen" that there were peoples of color—even entire communities of color in the film—or only half-realized how men, women, and children of color were being depicted or marginalized. This is all the more troubling to me when I think about my unconscious participation in the consumption of these cinematic images. As a woman who is married to a man of color and who acknowledges that "the reconstruction and transformation of male behavior, masculinity, is [also] a necessary and essential part of [feminist struggle],"³ I am very uncomfortable and deeply pained when I see film representations which either trivialize, ignore, brutalize, or exoticize men of color in terms of their looks, speech, habits, physical and intellectual abilities, beliefs (cultural, spiritual, or political), class, or sexual differences.

As my husband and I sat waiting for *The Crying Game* to begin, I could sense that the theatre was going to be packed with people. At least two of their staff members paraded up and down the aisle counting how many seats were still available and asking folks if those seats next to them were taken. Ironically, perhaps, just as the movie was about to begin, a young couple with a baby took the seats right in front of us. I could not help smiling to myself that there might be two crying games to contend with tonight. For the most part the audience was predominantly white, college-educated, middle-to-upper middle class, in their late twenties, thirties, and up.

Because I am a biracial woman of color in her thirties, I tend to be extra sensitive about my cultural and racial identity—my speech, my body, my intellect—how others are perceiving me. And in spite of being born and raised in the U.S., I have had many curious strangers ask me "what nationality I am" or "what country I am from." They are usually surprised to hear that I am half-Italian. It is not what they are expecting me to say. Even as a small child I can distinctly remember strangers being considerably more curious about my "other half"—my Japanese half. I am now beginning to understand why it is that my Japanese half is so intriguing—so exotic to many European Americans. I share this bit of history and memory with you precisely because they are apart of my struggle to understand how I am constantly being positioned—by the gaze of strangers, by institutions, by media such as film, television, and theatre. Even as I speak about this, I am aware that everything in my cultural and gendered upbringing tells me to remain silent—invisible. Reflecting on my lived experiences from the stand-point of a biracial Asian American woman has caused me to gradually realize that, in fact, I do share a great deal in common with men of color and their struggles.

Now, I would like to focus on a few of the disturbing film images which forced me to ask these questions: "Whose Crying Game is being played at the expense of what 'Others'?" If this film's success is because,

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as lead actor Stephen Rea says, "It's a modern love story, and there are few enough of those around,"⁴ then I wonder, "How far have men of color come in terms of either transforming their images or achieving any real power when it comes to gender, race, class, or (hetero)sexual relations?"

The first third of *The Crying Game* centers on the small band of IRA terrorists, two men and one woman, who take a young, Black British soldier—called Jody—as their hostage. They hold him captive—as well as hooded and restrained throughout most of his confinement in a remote greenhouse. From the beginning of Jody's capture, I was disturbed by the IRA's strategy of using sexual seduction as the means of luring him into a vulnerable position where he could be seized as a hostage. While this may be a common ploy in many action film narratives, what most alarmed me as I was watching this opening scene with a predominantly white audience, was that the violent act of taking this Black man as a hostage became secondary to the "spectacle" of a Black man seduced by a white woman—the exoticization of Jody's large black body—his sexuality and masculinity. As cultural critic Robert Reid-Pharr observes, there has been "this tendency to spectacleize Black bodies, to read race as a type of ephemeral surface narrative which need not be understood in the context of American history or culture."⁵ It has been just as much an aspect of mainstream heterosexual cultural politics as it has been of "lesbian and gay identity politics."⁶ While the image of the "woman as seductress," utilized in the opening scene as a sexual object by the IRA to trap Jody, goes way back to biblical and classical times, it is more important to understand that in the context of U.S. history and culture, African American men were often falsely accused of raping white women and routinely lynched by white male vigilante groups such as the Ku Klux Klan.⁷

Not only is Jody's large Black body exoticized within the first few minutes of the film, but a pattern of exoticization and violence emerges. Just as soon as the IRA nab Jody in a compromising position, they shove a burlap hood over his head and tie his wrists up. As I watch these images, other images flashed in my mind—haunting images of lynchings and beatings I have seen repeated on television news. Throughout Jody's captivity, I am acutely aware of how hot, confined, and uncomfortable he is. Jody sweats profusely and has difficulty breathing under the hood. And although the film shifts its emphasis here to Fergis, the white Irishman (Stephen Rae) who is Jody's caretaker/guard, and the most empathetic of the three IRA soldiers, I find myself identifying, on some level, with Jody's silent outrage and confusion over being taken as a hostage. And though Fergis is responsible for partially raising the hood so Jody can breathe and speak more easily, it is Jody's soft-spoken voice, congenial banter, and humanity that I concentrate on. In spite of his being held as an IRA hostage, Jody shows surprising humor and even sympathy towards Fergis' IRA cause. To a certain extent, I acknowledge the

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complexity of subjective positions these two men occupy—one Irish and one British, one white and one Black, who have complicated histories, subjectivities, and relations not only in terms of each other, but in terms of their relations to Ireland and England—and those discourses of power. How have each of these men been positioned within their respective countries? How is the film's director and screenwriter, Neil Jordan, positioning them? And what about us, as North American viewers who know very little about the complexities of the Irish-English conflict, let alone about race relations in Ireland and England, how are we participating in maintaining and perpetuating certain racial and cultural stereotypes? As a Black British soldier who has been sent on a "peacekeeping mission" to Northern Ireland, how in fact is Jody being positioned by those in power?

At one point in *The Crying Game*, Jody's face is brutally beaten by one of the IRA members, almost as if he were a wild animal that needed taming. I recall being very uncomfortable as the camera shot zoomed in for a close-up of Jody's swollen, bruised, and bleeding lips, particularly as he tried to speak. Once again I ask, "Whose Crying Game is being played at the expense of what Others?" Cultural Critic John Fiske, in his analysis of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*,⁸ reminds us that,

Foucault has revealed in detail the ways in which western societies have made the body into the site where social power is most compellingly exerted. The body is where the power-bearing definitions of social and sexual normality are, literally, embodied, and is consequently the site of discipline and punishment for deviation from those norms.⁹

The curious thing about this spectacle of "discipline and punishment" is that it has little to do with the actual plot. The image of Jody's capture and beating occur within the first fifteen minutes or so of the film. Meanwhile, there are a continual string of "o/Other" images in this film which spectacle-ize and exoticize Black male sexuality, the body, and Black culture—images which cause the audience to gaze and gape, and even laugh. Despite insistence by some that this film is actually about a "hostage crisis," how a low-ranking Black British soldier could serve as a serious political bargaining chip in gaining concessions from the British is more a point of absurdity, than mystery.

Still others insist that *The Crying Game* is an important film because it sympathetically portrays, at least at the level of friendship between Fergis and Jody and later between Fergis and Jody's Black gay lover, how the white Irish minority have much in common with British Blacks, even Black gays, and need to be protected as such. While this point should not be ignored or dismissed, there is also concern that an

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important critique involving race and power relations should not be so easily overlooked. There is no question that we should understand the Irish-English conflict and protect Irish as a minority group; however, in the context of U.S. racial politics and recent events such as the Rodney King beating, verdict, and ensuing L.A. rebellion, it is just as important to advance critical interrogations of media and cinematic uses of the Black body as a site where social, cultural, economic, and heterosexual forces are being exerted.¹⁰ How then is Jody's body utilized as a titillating lead in to a supposedly "modern romance" for a mainstream, and most likely, heterosexual audience?

Perhaps this film should be re-titled "The Crying Shame" because what it succeeds in doing is directing our gaze to a more exotic or fetishized image of Blacks¹¹—an image which is hardly "modern" for the nineties. *The Crying Game* is a shame because it really does nothing more than re-create the heterosexual gaze/voyeurism of another kind of body portrayed in this film—the Black body of Jody's lover, Dil. After Jody tells Fergis of his lover Dil and soon after dies in a truck accident/escape, the film's focus shifts and ends up exoticizing Dil as well as Fergis' new fascination (and ours) with Dil. It is now Dil's Black body, which on one level is the body of a Black woman made "other" by race and gender, and on another, the body of a Black transvestite made "other" by race and sexuality. For many mainstream film goers, who are most likely heterosexual, the cinematic voyeurism of watching Fergis' attraction to an "image" of a seductive Black woman who turns out to be a transvestite cannot and should not be mistaken or dismissed by serious critics. It is perhaps too easy and convenient to focus on Fergis' brotherly compassion towards Jody and now this transference of his new love (interracial and homoerotic desire?) for Dil. As a heterosexual, though I feel the tension and limitations of my cultural critique here, I am still very much aware that this film depicts a complex power dynamic enmeshed with race, culture, and sexual politics. bell hooks, in her critique of the film *Paris is Burning*, makes this helpful and pointed observation about heterosexual politics of domination:

Within white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy the experience of men dressing as women, appearing in drag, has always been regarded by the dominant heterosexist cultural gaze as a sign that one is symbolically crossing over from a realm of power into a realm of powerlessness.¹²

For Neil Jordan, a white heterosexual screenwriter/director, to focus on Dil, the Black transvestite, reasserts the prerogative of the white, male colonizer quite literally through the character of Fergis. The politics of heterosexual phallogocentric domination at work here is even more com-

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plex and enmeshed given the fact that in the U.S. "[h]eterosexuality as a form of oppression has also been shaped by the history of racism."¹³ Historically "[r]acist stereotypes of Black people [women and men] as primordially sexual have provided white men with a way of deflecting responsibility for racial sexual abuse and exploitation . . ." ¹⁴ Although Fergis is perceived as the kind caretaker/peacekeeper, it is his heterosexual gaze which constructs Dil as an object of his (and our) desire; Dil's body becomes the site of sexual and colonial domination. She is not only positioned as exotic and erotic, but is even further marginalized as a Black gay who has no agency. At the end of the film, it is ironically Dil who has the gun in her hand, not Fergis. It is Dil who must commit an act of violence towards a white woman who is Fergis' former IRA comrade. And yet, in the finale, it is Fergis—the great white Irish hero/savior—who takes the murder rap for Dil. While on one level it appears that Dil exercises power because she wields the gun—an instrument of power usually held by heterosexual men—on another, there is something very disturbing about this role reversal here. From her first encounter with Fergis, Dil is actually in a very powerless position. She has no idea who Fergis is or what his associations are. Dil certainly does not have the faintest idea of Fergis' relationship to Jody even until the end. Fergis actually withholds this information. Just as he cannot bring himself to tell Dil of Jody's death or his complicity, he also cannot acknowledge his homoerotic desires and accept the fact that Dil is gay. Upon realizing the shocking truth, Fergis' reaction is a physical one: he vomits. By complying with the film industry's request "not to tell"—not to reveal the shocking conclusion [shocking to whom?]¹⁵—we, as heterosexuals, participate in and perpetuate the exoticization of Black gays. It is critical to understand that whether we are watching *The Crying Game*, repeated images of Rodney King's beating, or the 1991 L.A. rebellion, "[t]his is not a simple seeing, an act of direct perception, but the racial production of the visible, the workings of racial constraints on what it means to 'see'¹⁵ Transforming images and creating critical alternatives means we must take the risk of breaking the silence—a silence imposed by a dominant cultural discourse which inscribes, commodifies, and consumes "the Other."

Similarly, bell hooks challenges us to "transform images of blackness, of black people, our ways of looking and our ways of being seen."¹⁶ She argues that:

It is not an issue of 'us' and 'them.' The issue is really one of standpoint. From what political perspective do we dream, look, create, and take action? For those of us who dare to desire differently, who seek to look away from the conventional ways of seeking blackness and ourselves, the issue of race and representation is not just a question of critiquing the "status quo". It is also

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about transforming the image, creating alternatives, asking ourselves questions about what types of images subvert, pose critical alternatives, and transform our worldviews and move us away from dualistic thinking about good and bad.¹⁷

Unless we become critical citizens who see our task as questioning these images, these narratives and perspectives, we are bound, as hooks concludes, to "simply re-create the imperial gaze—the look that seeks to dominate, subjugate, and colonize."¹⁸ This is obviously a challenge which involves us all—whether we are film-makers or film goers, teachers or students, community workers or residents, heterosexuals or gays/lesbians/bisexuals—we can transform these images of men and women of color by how we look, how we think, how we talk, and hopefully, by how we feel.

NOTES

¹bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 5.

²Pratibha Parmar, *Black Looks*, 5.

³bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 127.

⁴*USA Today*, 18 February 1993.

⁵Robert F. Reid-Pharr, "The Spectacle of Blackness," *Radical America* 24 (April 1993): 60.

⁶Reid-Pharr.

⁷See Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam, 1984), 26-31.

⁸Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

⁹John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Routledge, 1987), 248.

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¹⁰For a powerful analysis of how Rodney King's body became "reduced to a phantasm of white racist aggression," see Judith Butler's "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia," in *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, ed. by Robert Gooding-Williams (New York: Routledge, 1993), 20.

¹¹For an excellent analysis of the fetishism of Black bodies and the construction of white identity, see Kobena Mercer's "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary," in *How Do I Look?*, ed. by Bad Object-Choices (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), 171-175, 189-206.

¹²hooks, *Black Looks*, 146.

¹³Diane Richardson, "Sexuality and Male Dominance," in *Thinking Feminist: Key Concepts in Women's Studies*, edited by Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson (New York: The Guilford Press, 1993), 92. See also Barbara Omolade's "Hearts of Darkness," in *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, edited by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (London: Virago, 1984).

¹⁴Richardson, and Omolade. See also Kobena Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing," 206, and especially Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1967), 170; 177-180.

¹⁵Butler, "Endangered/Endangering," 16.

¹⁶hooks, *Black Looks*, 7.

¹⁷hooks.

¹⁸hooks.

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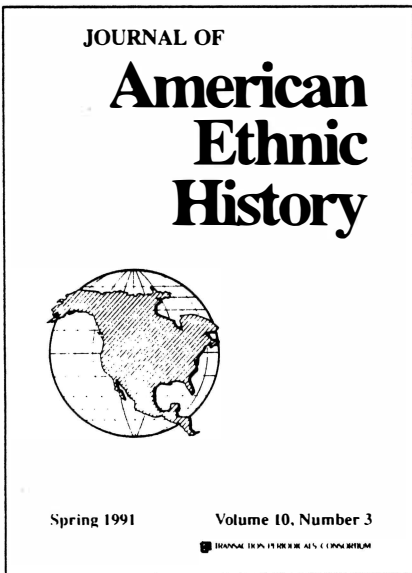
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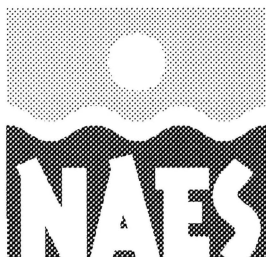


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