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operate on its own. We cannot escape other categories of oppression and privilege, including race, sexual orientation, and class. In the next chapter I focus on feminist fieldwork studies of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1995).

6. EVERYTHING IS MORE THAN ONE THING

Feminist scholars in the last 30 years have emphasized that sexism is linked to other forms of oppression, such as racism, heterosexism, and class inequality. While still acknowledging that women are oppressed as women, researchers recognize that women may belong to other oppressed groups or privileged categories. As Frye (1992) put it, women share a "common (*but not homogeneous* [italics added]) oppression" (p. 70). How can fieldworkers give empirical weight to the abstraction of intersectionality?

My examination of feminist qualitative studies has revealed two ways that researchers deal with multiple oppressions. Some studies rely on researchers' usual concepts of race, class, and gender; they compare the experiences of women who occupy different social categories (such as race or class), analyzing differences between them with regard to an identity that the women share (for example, mother or activist). In this chapter I'll focus on studies of women. Feminist studies of men use the same method, as we saw in Messner's (1989) comparison of middle-class white and working-class black male athletes.

More recently, feminists have looked at gender, race, and class as "accomplishments" or "performances" (see Bettie, 2003; Wilkins, in press) rather than as attributes of individuals or taken-for-granted social categories. These studies highlight process and practice (Martin, 2003), focusing on participants' understandings and performances of class, gender, and race. They may, for example, examine the ways that people racialize interactions or make class invisible by equating race with class (for example, by construing white as middle-class and black as poor). In this chapter I explore both kinds of studies and what they contribute to our understanding of people as raced, sexed, and classed beings.

Seeing Similarities and Differences

Feminist researchers can analyze similarities and differences between women who share a common identity but differ by race, class, or sexual orientation. For example, Celene Krauss (1993) studied women at the forefront of grassroots organizing in the area of environmental justice. The

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working-class women in her study shared the identity of activist. She then compared their experiences by race/ethnicity (her sample included white, African-American, and Native American women) to show how "female activist" cannot be understood as an identity that stands apart from a woman's experience of race privilege or oppression.

Krauss (1993) noted that previous researchers and policy makers had thought of grassroots organizers as "particularistic and parochial, failing to go beyond a single issue focus" (p. 248). But she found that women who organized protests against toxic waste in their communities became, or already were, aware of relations of power. Organizing around a single issue brought them a greater awareness of gender, class, and race inequalities.

First she analyzed the *similarities* in the women's experiences of activism around the same issue. All the women developed a political consciousness about the environment through their concerns as mothers. Because of the traditional division of labor in their households, these mothers were in a position to notice environment-related problems, such as multiple miscarriages, birth defects, and cancer. As members of working-class extended families, the women had large networks from which to discover patterns of symptoms. The activists used those same networks to spread the word about environmental dangers. Motherhood became *a motivation and a gendered resource for action*. As one woman said, "If we don't oppose an incinerator, then we're not doing our work as mothers" (Krauss, 1993, p. 252). Fieldworkers, then, can look for the ways that women use so-called traditional roles as motivators and justifications for activist purposes.

The women learned that powerful corporations and the government collaborated in polluting their environment. And they became critical of the mainstream environmental movement, largely run by white middle-class men (Seager, 1993). As one woman put it, "The mainstream groups deal with safe issues. They want to stop incinerators to save the eagle, or they protest trees for the owl. But we say, what about the people?" (Krauss, 1993, p. 253).

Krauss then explored *differences* among these women. The white women had previously thought of "the government" and its representatives as protectors: "I believed if I had a problem I just had to go to the right person in government and he would take care of it" (Krauss, 1993, p. 254). They moved from that perspective to an analysis and critique of the corporate state. As one white woman said:

> We decided to tell our elected officials about the problems of incineration because we didn't think they knew. Surely if they knew that there was a toxic waste dump in our county they would stop it. I was politically naive. I was

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> real surprised because I live in an area that's like the Bible Belt of the south. Now I think that the God of the United States is really economic development, and that has got to change. (p. 255)

These working-class white women learned about class inequality. They maintained their investment as mothers, but expanded its definition from the private to the public realm. Many of the women described themselves as having been shy; later they became public speakers. They continued to see their role as an extension of motherhood, defending their families in the face of a system that had ultimately led to their children's illnesses or deaths.

The African-American environmental activists, however, did not begin with the same political naïveté as the white women. One black woman said:

> When they sited the incinerator for Rahway [New Jersey] I wasn't surprised. All you have to do is look around my community to know that we are a dumping ground for all kinds of urban industrial projects that no one else wants. I knew this was about environmental racism the moment that they proposed the incinerator. (Krauss, 1993, p. 255)

Also unlike the white working-class female activists, African-American women had already worked in the civil rights movement and organized around other issues. Krauss points out that the African-American women's roles in previous movements had been less visible, even if public, than those of black men (consistent with Kolb's 2000 study of black women in a campus activist organization, discussed earlier). Defining motherhood as a role that is public as well as private was not new to black women (Collins, 1990; Higgenbotham, 1993; White, 2001).

Black activists, like their white working-class counterparts, found their concerns different from those of conventional environmental organizations:

> This white woman from a [traditional] environmental group asked me to come down to save a park. She said that they had been trying to get black folks involved and that they won't come. I said, "Honey, it's not that they aren't concerned, but when their babies are dying in their arms they don't give a damn about a park." I said, "They want to save their babies. If you can help them save their babies, then in turn they can help you save your park." And she said, "But this is a real immediate problem." And I said, "Well, these people's kids dying is immediate." (Krauss, 1993, p. 256)

The black female activists fit environmental dangers into the frame of racism; the specific problem was similar to the problems they had already

faced. They also recognized that members of conventional environmental groups sometimes asked them to join a protest in order to have "black faces" present. The women resented not having been asked to participate from the start. Thus, while white working-class women's consciousness-raising was anchored in class inequalities, the black working-class women extended their understanding of racism.

The Native American activists saw environmental problems in their communities as one of genocide. As one woman who opposed a landfill said:

> Ever since the white man came here they keep pushing us back, taking our lands, pushing us onto reservations. We are down to 3% now and I see this as just another way for them to take our lands, to completely annihilate our races. We see that as racism. (Krauss, 1993, p. 257)

Again, unlike the white women who had an initial trust in "the government" and "the system," the Native American women began with distrust:

> Government did pretty much what we expected them to do. They supported the dump. People here fear the government. They control so many aspects of our life. When I became involved in opposing the garbage landfill, my people told me to be careful. They said they annihilate people like me. (Krauss, 1993, p. 258)

Krauss's study suggests that researchers, in their comparisons of women by race/ethnicity, even within the same class, should be open to finding similarities as well as differences among women. The women's shared investment in being mothers, and the primary caretakers of children, made their awareness of toxins in the environment a turning point in their willingness to get involved. Framing their activism as an extension of their role as mothers legitimated the work in their eyes, and perhaps also to others in the community. Although the role of organizer is public, the rhetoric of good mothering as the ground of participation made that role a "natural" extension of what is usually thought of as private—and acceptable—female behavior. Using a *safely* gendered rhetoric made it easier for the women to participate, and for others, especially male partners and other men, to accept their activism.

Yet the women differed in the content of their transformation of consciousness. The white women went through the biggest shift, moving from a belief in governmental protection to one of critical analysis. Perhaps white privilege made it more difficult for them to see how *class* operated in

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their lives. This was true despite the fact that they were working-class and thus lacked class privilege. (I will return later to the idea that people in U.S. society often equate whiteness with being middle-class.) And the white women's new awareness, while class-conscious, did not show evidence of an awareness of environmental *racism*. This is understandable; their actions were based largely in a working-class *white* community.

It's also unclear whether the African-American women knew that some working-class *white* communities shared environmental problems. The Native American women, having a history of participation in the public sphere and a belief system that conceives of self, community, and the environment as one, perhaps went through the least transformation.

Differences in race and class can also be used to raise questions about the consequences of differences among women for social change, a key feminist concern. What would happen if these environmental activists came together? Would the white women extend their analysis to include racism? Would the black women and Native American women recognize that white working-class communities also suffer from toxic dumping and thus build solidarity on the basis of class?

An example of *class* differences between women who share the identity of mother is shown in Martha McMahon's (1995) in-depth interviews with white working-class and middle-class mothers, most of whom were straight. Like the women Krauss (1993) studied, these women experienced motherhood as a moral identity, providing them with a sense of themselves as good people (Kleinman, 1996, p. 5). But they experienced the route to motherhood in different ways. The middle-class women thought they had to be "ready" for pregnancy and motherhood. Their idea of readiness was class based: they expected to have accumulated good finances, good jobs (preferably high-paying careers), the right partner, and emotional self-sufficiency. As one woman said, "When I was 35 I found the right Dad. I had [a child] as soon as I thought I had the right father, and that was simultaneous to the marriage" (McMahon, 1995, p. 70).

The women thought of their readiness, especially in emotional maturity, as an achievement. It was not enough to be a woman or grown in years before having children; one also had to be "appropriately adult" (McMahon, 1995, p. 88). In fact, these middle-class women believed that those who had children and lacked these social characteristics were undeserving of motherhood. They did not recognize that their middle-class privileges gave them an edge in having the "appropriate" readiness for becoming a parent.

The working-class women, on the other hand, saw themselves as becoming mature "*through* having a child" (McMahon, 1995, p. 91). The financial

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readiness the middle-class women anticipated before getting pregnant—accounting in part for their older age, on average, when they had children—was something the working-class women could not count on. As one working-class woman put it:

> [In deciding when to have children] you can't say you wanted to get financially stable, because that never happens, and you'd never have children if you waited for that. It just seemed as good a time as any [to have children]. (p. 101)

In advance of their pregnancies, the working-class women held, on average, a more positive image of motherhood than did the middle-class women. This makes sense; the working-class women had few other options for developing a valued self. The middle-class women had jobs or careers that they valued, and many more of them than the working-class women considered never becoming mothers. As McMahon (1995) explains, the women who considered childlessness and eventually had children were not so much choosing to have a baby and bring up a child; rather, they were choosing *the identity of mother*. The women had internalized the culturally predominant idea that a permanently childless woman is not a real woman and is somehow damaged. McMahon writes:

> . . . [middle-class] women who had earlier thought they would remain childless . . . had [not] taken irrevocable steps in *rejecting* motherhood potential—for example, through sterilization. Whether it was perceived as a desirable option or not, women retained a potential claim to motherhood identity . . . Thus for years women could be nonmothers but potential mothers at the same time. This balancing act made motherhood temporarily a "nonproblem" for both those who "always wanted" children and those who did not . . . The "biological clock" threatened this balance by destroying one side of the equation—the future potential identity and relationship of mother . . . [The women's decision to have children] was more a *rejection* of permanent childlessness than an *embracement* of motherhood. (pp. 64–65)

But not all mothers can appeal to motherhood to convince others that they are morally upstanding people. Krista McQueeney (2006) studied two lesbian- and gay-affirming congregations, one evangelical (predominantly black and working-class) and one liberal Protestant (predominantly white and upper-middle-class). All the lesbians had problems legitimating themselves as Christians. But white lesbian mothers could use the language of motherhood to think of themselves as Christians and extend the traditional family to include lesbian couples. These mothers claimed, with a fair

amount of success, that their lives were just like those of white, middle-class, heterosexual families. As one woman in the predominantly white church put it:

> We have a great family. I mean our family is kind of different than everybody else's but I think we have the same struggles, and the same trials, and the same joys that any other family with a four-year-old has. And I think that's how we are seen in the church, as just another family with a young child. (McQueeney, 2006, p. 54)

White lesbian mothers held a privileged position as mothers even in the black church. For example, they regularly gave thanks to God for their children during the ritual of "prayers and praises." This ritual gave lesbian mothers the opportunity to demonstrate that they were good Christian mothers. Yet in 3 years of fieldwork, McQueeney (2006) never observed a black lesbian who participated. Even on Mother's Day, a holiday that supposedly celebrates all mothers, only white women came forward. In church, black lesbian mothers emphasized their identity as mothers only when making public confessions of guilt about being or having been *bad* mothers. As one black lesbian mother in her 30s testified:

> In my early 20s, I found myself a single mother. I never held down a job before, y'all. You know, they say love makes a family, and I think that's really nice, but money holds a family together. And with my boys, I never felt I could raise 'em right, I felt they needed a man in their lives. I love my kids, anyone who knows me will tell you I love my kids more than life itself, but I couldn't shake the feeling that I was a bad mother. So there I was, a single mother, working at Wal-Mart, doing what I could to support them. And you know, I did things I'll always regret. I gave my kids up to family 'cause I thought they could take care of 'em better than I could . . . but when my brother-in-law took me to court, the things he said about me being a bad mother, the people I had influencing my kids . . . you know what I mean, y'all, it's been a struggle. But God worked it out, thank you Jesus! (p. 55)

Both the white and black lesbian mothers challenged the idea that mothers should be heterosexual and thus resisted heteronormativity. But they still reinforced the cultural idea that morally worthy mothers are white and middle-class. Fieldworkers should consider that identities related to women, even those idealized in the culture at large, may be unequally available to or valued for women in different social categories (see Roberts, 1997; Solinger, 2000).

Until Becky Thompson (2004) compared the experiences of straight and lesbian African-American women, Latinas, and white women, researchers had construed eating disorders as white, middle-class, heterosexual phenomena. Her research also challenged the common idea that eating disorders are a product only of the culture of thinness. Although the mass media send the message that being thin is the gold standard to which all women should aspire, Thompson found that poverty, heterosexism, and racism informed the women's experiences of their bodies and of eating.

What did the women share? They had experienced traumas for which eating-related behavior—bingeing, purging, or anorexia—provided a "solution." Contrary to the idea that all women want to be thin to appear sexually attractive, some of the women who had been sexually abused at a young age believed that their "fleshiness" had attracted the abuser. They dieted, sometimes severely, in order to become *less* attractive to men. Regardless of which direction the women went—overeating, purging, or starving—they wanted to become "a size and shape that [did] not seem as vulnerable to sexual assault" (Thompson, 2004, p. 357).

Food became the drug of choice for many women. It is cheaper than other drugs and women could still function well on it. As Yolanda, a poor single mother, said:

> I am here, [in my body] 'cause there is no where else for me to go. Where am I going to go? This is all I got . . . that probably contributes to putting on so much weight 'cause staying in your body, in your home, in yourself, you don't go out. You aren't around other people . . . You hide and as long as you hide you don't have to face . . . nobody can see you eat. You are safe. (Thompson, 2004, p. 358)

Eating provided an anesthetic for the pain of poverty.

Class mobility among the families of Latinas and black women played a part in the women's eating problems. This is clear in the comments of Joselyn, a black woman Thompson (2004) interviewed:

> When my father's business began to bloom and my father was interacting more with white businessmen and seeing how they did business, suddenly thin became important. If you were a truly well-to-do family, then your family was slim and elegant. (p. 360)

Joselyn said that her grandmother admonished her for being fat. The grandmother also made comparisons between Joselyn and her cousins, all of whom were lighter skinned than Joselyn and thus considered more

attractive. In Joselyn's mind, being thin could compensate in part for being dark skinned.

Women who identified as lesbians at a young age were most likely to link their eating problems to heterosexism. Similar to other women's problems, bingeing became a way to self-medicate; the women became numb in the face of "inappropriate" sexual feelings and others' potential hostility. Thompson's study, then, shows the usefulness of making comparisons of women across social categories. The comparisons she made allowed her to see that eating disorders are tied to racism, heterosexism, and class inequality.

"Doing" Inequality

Those who study race, class, and gender as process/performance conceptualize these categories as meanings that people use in everyday life to make sense of themselves and others. People treat each other's behavior, appearance, and talk "as if they were indicative of some underlying state" of, for example, maleness or femaleness (West & Fenstermaker, 1995, p. 23).

Anything we do in interaction—or fail to do—can put us at the risk of others' assessment of our sex/race/class (West & Fenstermaker, 1995, p. 24). Most of us "do gender" (and race and class) in expected ways (West & Zimmerman, 1987). If we don't, people can hold us accountable for not conforming to what they perceive as our "true" sex, race, or class. We risk being discredited, for example, as real men or women, or as competent persons.

Cultural signifiers of "true" ethnicity, race, class, and sex are based on a system of inequality. As Candace West and Sarah Fenstermaker (1995) wrote with regard to sex:

> Womanly and manly natures . . . achieve the status of objective properties of social life . . . They are rendered natural, normal characteristics of individuals and, at the same time, furnish the tacit legitimation of the distinctive and unequal fates of women and men within the social order. (p. 22)

A contemporary example is provided by the former president of Harvard in his remarks about why women have not achieved the same success as men. Lawrence Summers (2005) said at a conference that "intrinsic aptitudes" are a major factor in explaining differences in achievement between women and men in science and engineering. However, if we apply West and Fenstermaker's (1995) reasoning, we might say that girls and women are treated as less capable than boys and men in science, regarded as strange if they pursue science, provided fewer opportunities to excel at it, and assumed

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to be less committed to 80-hour work weeks (expected of scientists) than men. Then, when women "fail" to achieve at science, this fact is treated as proof that women are essentially (genetically) less capable than men. Summers described his remarks as an attempt to "add some provocation to what [he understood] to be basically a social science discussion" (Dillon, 2005). Yet his preferred "explanation" of gender inequality—assigning blame to women as naturally inferior—is hardly a new, provocative idea.

The example of women in science hides the cultural assumption that men-doing-well-in-science is not only gendered, but classed and raced. If we asked college students, perhaps even at a black college, to draw a scientist, they would probably draw someone white as well as male. If asked what social class the scientist came from, they would probably say the middle class.

Another way of saying that people "do" gender, race, and class is that we *perform* these categories. In feminist fieldwork studies, however, performance does not imply that individual agency (a virtuoso performance) is all that matters. We look for the ways that these performances are culturally scripted as well as improvised. Do these scripts, when enacted, largely reproduce or challenge sex, race, and class inequalities? As Julie Bettie (2003) found in her ethnography of working-class and middle-class white and Mexican-American girls in their senior year of high school:

> Structural, institutionalized inequalities preexist and for the most part produce girls' race-class-gender performances. While these structures are not automatically or inevitably *re*produced, but rather are constantly constituted and historically contingent, by and large structures of inequality reappear over time, albeit with new veneer. With few exceptions, it appeared that working-class girls would have working-class futures, and middle-class girls, middle-class futures. (p. 192)

Bettie's (2003) study shows that we can't fully understand the reproduction of inequality through performance without also paying attention to what is *absent* from participants' discourse. For example, class differences among the students she studied remained obscure; students interpreted each other's behaviors/performances largely as markers of race and sex. When a Filipina-American student told Bettie, "There's a lot of trashing of white girls really, and Mexican girls who act white" (p. 84), Bettie asked what she meant by acting white. The student answered, without hesitation, that she was referring to "the preps" (college-bound, middle-class girls). Bettie then used colloquial terms for categories of students (smokers, hicks) who came

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from low-income white families to see whether the same student thought of whiteness as something distinguished from class:

Julie [Bettie]: Not the smokers or the hicks or—

Erica: Oh, no, never smokers, basically the preps. (p. 84)

Erica, like many other students, conflated race with class. The preps were white middle-class college-bound students, and in that setting, everyone assumed that acting white meant emulating middle-class white behaviors, not working-class white behaviors.

The absence of a recognition of class—culturally widespread in the United States—made it difficult for the Mexican-American girls to understand how white students could be anything other than successful. As one student said to Bettie (2003): "I mean, they're white, they've had the opportunity. What's wrong with them?" (p. 85). Fieldworkers can consider how such statements (and beliefs) make it difficult to build working-class solidarity across ethnic and racial groups.

Bettie points out that Mexican-American middle-class students were more accepting of Mexican-American working-class students than white middle-class students were of white working-class students. The Mexican-American preps called upon racism to explain the difficulties of some of the working-class members of their racial group. But the white preps distanced themselves from white working-class students, seeing themselves as better people than their hard-living counterparts. When the white preps did offer compassion, they tended to refer to broken homes or bad parents as the cause of the students' misbehaviors at school. The preps called upon pop cultural ideas about "family problems" as the original cause of young poor people's problems, even when it made little sense to do so. For instance, when two white middle-class students said that divorced parents accounted for the white hard-livers' lack of success at school, Bettie (2003, p. 118) pointed out that both girls were also from divorced families.

The white preps' accounts offer an image of themselves as somewhat compassionate; after all, they aren't blaming their peers, but their peers' parents. At the same time, the preps' accounts are individualistic and hide the fact that poverty and discrimination are at work. This is not surprising in a society where class is treated as either nonexistent or a result of a natural distribution of talent and hard work.

Bettie (2003) alerts researchers to the importance of *gender strategies* in studying the performance of raced and classed identities. The working-class girls—Mexican-American and white—differentiated themselves from

the preps. Bettie argues that their gender strategies compensated for their lack of opportunities to do well in school and beyond:

> They created styles and practices that worked as alternative badges of dignity; they made overt claims to adult status [such as getting pregnant, bringing up children]; and they invoked various kinds of claims to authenticity (racial, subcultural) as a strategy to heal various injuries of inequality. (p. 167)

Those very strategies, however, made it more difficult for working-class and poor girls to escape from class inequalities and racism. They became invested in being "cool." The performance of "cool" included missing class, not knowing which assignments were due when, attending class stoned, or not doing well. As Bettie (2003) put it, the students' displays of indifference communicated this message: "I cannot fail at your game if I opt out of it" (p. 108).

The Mexican-American poor girls performed, through their clothing and makeup, the kind of sexualized selves that led others, including teachers, to see them as promiscuous and predominantly oriented toward heterosexual romance. Bettie was unconvinced that this group of students was more sexually active than others, including the preps. But the hard-living Mexican-American girls were less likely to have abortions and more likely to keep their babies than other students. This visible display made it easier for others to equate sexually suspect female behavior with poor Mexican-American girls. Bettie also points out that the poorer girls were quite cynical about men and expected to have financial independence. Here is an excerpt from Bettie's (2003) field notes:

Leticia: Them boys who want to date us are buggin.' They try to control you and tell you what to do.

Lorena: Like Omar. We were standing by the business building one day, and he hands me his coat and says, "Watch this." Then he goes off with some friends. I just left the coat on the bench. When he saw me, he said, "Why didn't you watch my coat? It coulda got stolen." Man, that ain't my job!

Yolanda: And they tell you you shouldn't wear certain things.

Lorena: Yah, like that white top I had on yesterday. Miguel said I shouldn't wear that. I look like a hoochie [laughing]. I told him *he* looked stupid, like Columbus. (p. 73)

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As Bettie (2003) wrote, las chicas "brought heterosexual romance and girl culture into the classroom as a favorite form of distraction" (p. 59); they weren't more interested in romance than the preps. But others took their style as indicative of "promiscuity." Such labeling had real effects—teachers took these girls less seriously.

A focus on performance can lead researchers to attend to participants who don't "do" race, sex, or class in culturally appropriate ways. How do others react when they challenge the usual expectations for performance? Wilkins (2004a) studied Puerto Rican wannabes—white, largely middle-class young women who dress and act in ways that violate expectations of proper white middle-class femininity. In Wilkins's words:

> The stereotypical Puerto Rican wannabe rejects white middle-class cultural style, adopting an urban presentation of self associated with people of color. She wears hip-hop clothes and Puerto Rican hairstyles, drinks malt liquor, and smokes Newports. She adopts an attitude, acting tough and engaging in verbal and physical fights. And perhaps most important, she dates and has sex with black and Puerto Rican men. (p. 104)

The wannabe crosses race and class lines, but blacks and Puerto Ricans reject her claims to authenticity. At the same time, whites find her too loud and aggressive or to have fallen from (white, middle-class) grace, a victim of exploitation by black or Puerto Rican men. As one white woman explained, wannabes are "seen as more sexual than other *white* girls. They're more open—they talk about it. They're proud . . . They seem like *typical* boys—sex is an accomplishment" (Wilkins, 2004a, p. 110). Another white woman said, "They let guys talk them into whatever they want them to do" (p. 110). The white nonwannabes alternate between rhetorics of victimization and blame, all the while making it clear that they—unlike the wannabes—will be neither victims nor blameworthy.

Most of the wannabes, like the high school girls Bettie (2003) studied, did not recognize social class. Yet the wannabes' interest in crossing over to another racial group was class-related. These women showed no interest in middle-class black or Puerto Rican men. Their attraction to men of color was informed by stereotyping of poor and working-class men—especially black and Puerto Rican poor men—as tough.

Wilkins's (2004a) study directs researchers to look for the ways that participants use sexuality to police boundaries around class, race, and sex. By dating black and Puerto Rican men, the wannabes reinforced the divide between good (white middle-class) girls and bad (nonwhite poor) girls. Some white men were attracted to the wannabes, seeing them as somewhat

exotic for their racial transgression and "badness." The men positioned themselves as the white (middle-class) knights who were trying to save these formerly good girls—by having sex with them.

And black and Puerto Rican men at times did not take the wannabes seriously as long-term partners. By saying that they saw the wannabes only as sex objects, the men could justify their liaisons with wannabes to black and Puerto Rican women who resented the men for dating white women.

Unlike the young women in Bettie's (2003) study, the wannabes were genuinely interested in long-term romance (with black and Puerto Rican men), and rarely found it. As Wilkins (in press) discovered in her larger study of Goths, wannabes, and women in Campus Crusade for Christ, the women's privileging of heterosexual romance led them to put up with men's mistreatment or set aside their own career goals. It also led the women to value romance with men over friendships with women, in turn making these young women more dependent on men. Thus, their performances ultimately reinforced their vulnerability as women and gender inequality overall.

The example of the wannabes demonstrates that women's performances have *material* consequences and these should be examined along with analyses of identity. The committed wannabes experienced downward mobility. Most of them had children and became single mothers with low-paying jobs or depended on meager public assistance. And these very consequences were resented by women of color who saw the wannabes as reinforcing stereotypes of black and Puerto Rican women as sexually loose welfare queens.

Boys' performances of masculinity can also have consequences for their class futures, and these, too, should be examined. Ann Arnett Ferguson (2001) studied a school in which one quarter of the students were black boys. Yet in 1991–1992, black boys accounted for half of the students who were sent to the "Punishing Room" and four fifths of the boys who were suspended. Teachers and administrators at Rosa Parks School used essentialized notions about race and gender in their treatment of students, especially when it came to punishments. The adults in the setting, including some African-American teachers, *equated* bad behavior with African-American boys. In addition, they tended to "adultify" (p. 80) black boys, seeing their misbehaviors as portents of bad (adult) futures. As Ferguson (2001) recalled from the early days of her fieldwork:

> . . . one of the adults, an African American man, pointed to a black boy who walked by us in the hallway. "That one has a jail-cell with his name on it," he told me. We were looking at a ten-year-old, barely four feet tall, whose frail body was shrouded in baggy pants and a hooded sweatshirt. The boy,

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> Lamar, passed with the careful tread of someone who was in no hurry to get where he was going. He was on his way to the Punishing Room. (p. 1)

Although teachers thought of misbehaviors as gendered ("Boys will be boys"), they made a distinction between white boys and black boys. White boys could be Good Bad Boys, naughty rather than vicious. This became clear in the remarks of one white teacher as she described an ideal male student, a white boy:

> He's not really Goody Two-shoes, you know. He's not quiet and perfect. He'll take risks. He'll say the wrong answer. He'll fool around and have to be reprimanded in class. There's a nice balance to him. (p. 91)

This teacher, like other teachers at the school, made it possible for white boys to live up to conventional standards of masculinity among peers without being seriously punished. But this option was rarely open to black boys. They had to choose between being conformists in school—something that challenged their masculinity among peers—and engaging in misbehaviors that, because of racialized and gendered ideas about deviance, would probably lead them to the Punishing Room.

The boys knew quite well how teachers perceived them, and many opted to act in hypermasculine ways. Going to the Punishing Room became a badge of honor and they performed "badness" for their peers. As one boy told Ferguson (2001):

> The teacher says [he mimics a high-pitched fussy voice], "you not the teacher of this class." And then I say [adopts a sprightly cheeky tone], "Oh, yes I am." Then she say, "No, you're not, and if you got a problem you can just leave." I say, "Okay" and leave. (p. 177)

The black boys' behaviors made major challenges to their teachers' authority. Ferguson points out that for the black boys, making subtle challenges would not have gone over well with peers. Given racist and gendered understandings of black masculinity, the black boy who wanted to get points for performing masculinity had to do so flagrantly. As one of the student specialists at the school told Ferguson (2001), "The white kids are sneaky, the black kids are more open" (p. 178). The black boys' "open" performances tapped into the teachers' assumption that troublemaking is inherent in black boys and thus requires major punishments. These punishments became resources used by the black boys in their dramatic performances, in

turn providing "proof" of their masculinity to peers and of their (racialized) "bad attitude" to teachers. Ferguson's study sensitizes us to the self-fulfilling prophecy of racism that may operate in the settings we study: Teachers' differential treatment of black boys, along with gendered ideas about black boys and men, reproduced the very behaviors that the teachers disliked.

Many of the boys misbehaved by sexually harassing girls. Again, black boys' inappropriate behaviors were taken much more seriously than those of white boys. This was especially true when black boys directed their harassment at white middle-class girls. The teachers, however, saw themselves as race-blind, treating all the children the same way when it came to punishments. As in many settings, race (and racism) formed an "absent presence" (Apple, 1999, p. 12).

An example of how racism and sexism inform interaction in ways that remain hidden to participants and difficult for researchers to uncover is found in Jessica Fields's (2005) study of debates over sexuality education in a predominantly black county of North Carolina. She shows that advocates of abstinence-only programs *and* advocates of abstinence-plus programs used race-neutral rhetorics that relied on racist and sexist assumptions. Both parties claimed that they were merely doing "what was best for the children" while reinforcing images of black girls as sexually corruptible by black men and adultified black boys. White girls (and to some extent white boys) were perceived as those who would be "infected" with the bad behaviors of black boys and black girls.

Children are supposedly thought of as innocent, but Fields (2005) and Ferguson (2001) point out that this idea is white, middle-class, and suburban. Those who espoused the abstinence-only position claimed a 20–60–20 divide to make their claims. Although the statistic comes from nowhere, they said that about 20% of the children are a lost cause—they will engage in bad behaviors no matter what adults do to change them. Another 20% are the best children, who will do the right thing regardless of what adults teach them. That leaves 60% who could go either way and, if given "too much" information about sex, might mess up.

Although the bad 20% were never named, the fact that Southern County was largely African-American and poor meant that "everyone knew" who that number referred to. In a dramatic moment at a board meeting, a white fifth-grade girl, brought by her mother, said, "I don't think you should tell me how to use condoms" (Fields, 2005, p. 561). Whether or not she intended it so, her statement became a performance of white, middle-class, virginal femininity—which should be protected from boys and especially poor black boy-men.

Advocates of abstinence plus (comprehensive sexuality education) "turned the Southern County debate away from continued vilification and toward compassion" (Fields, 2005, p. 563). They argued that educators should care about all children and not just the 60%. Using the language of children-having-children, they argued that teen pregnancy was a problem because it closed off childhood.

But abstinence-plus advocates used rhetorics that rested on the assumption of the "bad" (black) family. If children were having children, they argued, it was because the teens had not been parented adequately, particularly by their mothers. As one white married mother told Fields (2005) in an interview:

> I can pick out girls in her [the daughter's] class who are going to be pregnant before they graduate from high school. . . . They dress suggestively. They are mature beyond their years. They know more information because they have seen it. Granted, my daughter knows about [sex], but she is still very innocent. I can pick out three in her class right now. Their mothers are out there having children with different fathers. (p. 565)

This mother did not say anything about race, speaking as if she were describing any girl or any mother. But in a school that is predominantly black, in a county that is largely black and poor, in a society in which childhood innocence is coded as white, her comments were clear. In addition, abstinence-plus advocates reinforced the view of (black) men as predatory, and black girls' mothers as those who allowed (black) men to prey on their daughters. As one woman said, "I'm talking about mothers who allow men to come into their homes and impregnate their children" (Fields, 2005, p. 566).

As Fields (2005) points out, sexuality education was not targeted at "children," but at girls, especially African-American girls, who were seen either as a corrupting influence on white girls or as victims of (black) boy-men. Young women, especially African-American young women, could be either "hypersexual or asexual—voracious women or chaste children" (Fields, 2005, p. 568). There was no room for healthy sexuality for girls (and women) in these debates about sexuality education, especially if they were black. Fields's study, like Bettie's (2003), demonstrates that people bring race, class, gender, and sexuality into interactions in hidden ways. Researchers must uncover these codes and analyze how people use them to reproduce inequalities.

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The studies in the first part of this chapter offered comparisons among women along the dimensions of race, class, and sexuality (to name three that are key). Comparing groups of women sensitizes us to differences in how women respond to common problems. For example, it is difficult for any woman to escape the mandate to be attractive, and images that are largely white, heterosexual, and middle-class dominate the media. But women react differently to those images, and to messages from parents, friends, and others, depending on their social class, race, and sexual orientation. Feminists can also study how women of different races, classes, and sexual orientations use traditional roles (such as motherhood) as gendered resources to resist patriarchal expectations, even as those very resources also reinforce conventional gender expectations.

To undertake the kind of studies discussed in the second half of this chapter, fieldworkers tune in to how people understand each other in relation to cultural ideas about sex, race, and class, among other categories. As West and Fenstermaker (1995) point out, these categories coalesce. The wannabe, for example, is acting inappropriately not only for her race, but also for her sex and class. A young, white, middle-class woman is not supposed to desire a poor black man sexually—and certainly not as a long-term partner. She is also not supposed to have unprotected sex with black men, and if she gets pregnant, she is not supposed to keep the child. The wannabes do all of the above.

This approach makes us aware of process, examining how people racialize interactions or understand what is going on as a matter of sex or class. And as Bettie (2003), Ferguson (2001), and Fields (2005) make clear, we need to pay attention to what may be less than obvious. Beliefs about race or class might remain hidden from participants—and from us—while still informing interactions and having consequences. Age, ability, and other categories may also work invisibly, and it's our job to make all of these social dimensions visible.

Questions to Ask in the Field or at the Desk

Studies on similarities and differences:

- What do members of the same sex share (for example, are they mothers, activists, athletes)?
- Do they see their identity in the same way? In different ways?
- How does the race, class, or sexual orientation of the women (or men) inform their different understandings of their shared identity?

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- Are the women (or men) who share an identity aware that women (or men) of other classes, races, or sexual orientations also have that identity? Do they identify with them? Do they generalize their understandings about their role (intentionally or not) only to their own race, class, or sexual orientation?
- Do they interact with others who share that identity but differ by race, class, or sexual orientation?
- What categories other than race, class, and sexual orientation (such as age or ability) might be relevant for comparison?

Studies on "doing gender":

- Do participants make universalizing comments (such as, "We need to save the children") that hide who they are really talking about (poor people, people of color, etc.)? If so, what are the indicators that such comments are classed or raced? Do they, for instance, refer to "those people," or use other derogatory language at times that slips from their usual benign-sounding rhetoric of general categories?
- What does universalizing language accomplish? Who does it serve and how?
- Do participants talk about class, or does it remain hidden? Does racialized language work as a substitute for referring to class, or as a way of putting class and race together (for example, does black become a synonym for lower class or poor, erasing the existence of poor whites)?
- Do women/girls in other oppressed categories use sexual strategies as a way of responding to heterosexism, racism, and class inequality as women? If so, what are the consequences of those strategies for reinforcing or challenging sexism, racism, and class inequality?
- If men/boys are members of other oppressed categories, do they respond in "masculine" ways that reinforce racial, class, or sexual oppression?
- How are participants' performances of race/class/gender culturally scripted as well as improvised? Do these performances largely reproduce or challenge inequalities?
- If girls/women or boys/men act in inappropriate ways for their race or class, how do others (those in their own groups or outsiders) respond? Do the girls/women or boys/men justify their actions?

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The studies in this chapter show that sexism, racism, class inequality, and heterosexism are intertwined. And people live out these patterns in everyday