REFLECTIONS ON RACE/ETHNICITY, CLASS AND GENDER INCLUSIVE RESEARCH

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We are pleased to write this introduction to the special section of this issue of *African American Research Perspectives*. Nearly four years ago, the PRBA Gender Working Group was launched by a group of faculty and graduate students interested in understanding how gender and race produced and reproduced differences within and between Black Americans. The group has grown into an interdisciplinary team of students, faculty, and administrators interested in research that expands our knowledge of race/ethnicity, gender and social class. The road has not always been smooth. We faced methodological challenges. For instance, most of the research examining male-female differences among Black Americans has been concentrated in the gender-role and attitudes literature (e.g., Hunter & Sellers 1998). While this area is important, other dimensions of social life, such as occupational progress, received less attention. Further, this research on how gender-related attitudes vary among Black men and women has produced contradictory results (for a review, see Kane 2000).

We faced political challenges. Black men hold some patriarchal privilege relative to Black women and the Black experience often becomes articulated through male perspectives. Our commitment to research on Black Americans had the potential to constrain articulation of within-group differences. In essence, the politics of race clashed with the politics of gender. And, heading the challenge of Black feminist theorists to consider other social forces, we struggled to broaden our research to include social class. Our focus became the production of empirical research that attends to the intersections of race, gender, and class as different but overlapping features of social life.

Within the social sciences, the notion of "intersectionality" has attracted substantial attention in the last decade and has gained some prominence because of the works of many feminists and other critical thinkers (e.g., Davis 1983; Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1992; King 1996; Omi & Winant 1994). Generally, these works stress the idea that race (or ethnicity), class, and gender (in addition to other social forces) are not separate and additive, but rather interactive and multiplicative. Although the concept has gained currency over the last ten years, some still claim that little theory has been

produced on the idea and that the literature on intersectionality remains descriptive (Chafetz 1997). While the charge of limited theory production may be questionable, it is certainly true that more empirical work on intersectionality and the concomitant differential social, economic and political outcomes is required in the social sciences. How do we in our research designs, decide and deploy comparisons across race (and ethnicity), gender, and class?

Comparisons across and within groups by all three social factors – race, class, and gender – are complicated. In our investigation of the research, we encountered much difficulty in locating empirical work that actually examines intersectional differences. We were more likely to find studies that examine the interactions between any two of these prevalent social categories (e.g., race by gender differences), but few actually examine race, class and gender. Even anthologies dedicated to the subject of race, class and gender in the United States have little to show on the complex, intersectional study of these three social factors (e.g., Anderson & Collins 2001; Rothenberg 2001). At most, when it comes to class and economic outcomes, we are most likely to find analyses of differences by race, gender and educational level; and race, gender and poverty (Corcoran, Heflin & Reyes 1999; Pearce 1978).

The aim of this introduction is not to present an exhaustive review of the research literature related to the intersections of race, class, and gender. Rather, we consider three areas of social life – occupations, education, and mental health to illustrate the challenges and some promising approaches for integrating race/ethnicity, gender, and class. We select these three areas in part because of our own scholarly interests and in part because over the past few decades these areas have witnessed substantial increases in research activity.

We do not mean to suggest that the collection of articles that follows are immune from the difficulties examined here. We recognize that dealing with the intersections of social forces is a difficult, often frustrating, enterprise. We also acknowledge that when considering within-group research, as many of the authors here do in their work on African American women, many different social categories may be relevant. The triumvirate of race, gender and class are most often cited as important, but when dealing with Black women, for example, the intersections of age, sexual orientation, ethnicity or national origin, and religion may be crucial to understanding the issue at hand. In addition, we must begin to recognize and analyze ethnic differences within racialized groups. Recent demographic changes necessitate attention, both theoretical and empirical, to the interaction of ethnicity and race within Black collectives. Thus, determining which intersecting factors should be included is another relevant area to explore for social scientists who want to bring greater depth and complexity to their studies of social groups and individual members of said groups.

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Occupations

One interesting outcome from the body of empirical research examining variation by race and gender is its position on the matter of occupational "progress" – particularly, since "progress" is relative to whom African American women and men are compared. For example, much of the literature tracking African American women's economic progress tends to focus on comparisons among women by race (i.e., Black women vs. White women) (See Sokoloff 1992). These studies tend to suggest that Black women have made substantial progress, yet closer examinations suggest a more complicated occupational picture. Levy (1998), using Census data, suggested that Black men and women were occupationally mobile, but at different rates and over different time periods. In 1996, 17 percent of Black men held white-collar positions, up from 12 percent in 1960. But the rate of increase slowed and then started to erode. In the early 1970's, Black and White male college graduates were on par in terms of earnings and representation in managerial and administrative positions. After 1976, this parity deteriorated, and, by early 1990, Black male college graduates earned 17 percent less than their White counterparts.

Historically, White women have had lower levels of labor force participation and higher levels of economic dependence on men than African American women (Almquist 1979; Farley & Allen 1987; Sorenson & McLanahan 1987). Despite higher rates of labor force participation, African American women, disproportionately poor and working-class, have suffered from higher unemployment rates, greater difficulty finding full-time, high-wage jobs, and are much more likely to head families alone (Amott & Matthaei 1996). Although work has appeared to be more plentiful for African American women, many tend to be employed in lower-paying jobs, compared to the higher-paying, though less secure, jobs of their African American male counterparts (King 1993).

Prior to the 1950's, most Black women worked in low-status or domestic jobs (Levy 1998). By 1990, Black women had experienced a dramatic improvement in their labor market status, both absolutely and relative to other workers (King 1993). Most of Black women's recent economic advancement is accounted for in their movement into clerical work positions (King 1993). By 1976, women comprised over 80 percent of all clerical workers; nearly 25 percent of all working Black women were concentrated in six of forty-eight clerical occupations (Sidel 1991). The other primary employers of women are service, operative, and professional occupations. Their representation in these fields has increased, while their hold on domestic and agricultural work has relaxed (Levy 1998).

As Sellers (2000) noted: "This slow but continual progress of Black women has helped to foster the perception that Black women are 'doing better' than Black men.

When considered in a historical context, the occupational progress of Black men and women highlights racial inequalities in career and occupational mobility" (pg. 24). We would add that gender inequalities also become apparent when the economic attainment of White women is brought into the study. Some have reported that many African American poor and working-class men believe that African American women have better employment opportunities than African American men (Cazenave 1983; Cazenave & Smith 1990). Indeed, Black women have more choice due to the availability of administrative support and clerical occupations, although the quality of jobs are uneven in terms of pay and career advancement (King 1993; Gibson, Darrity & Myers 1998).

Current data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that of the top ten occupations with the largest growth in the decade from 1998-2008, 60% are positions that are primarily dominated by women. These include retail salespersons, cashiers, general office clerks, registered nurses, personal care and home care aides, and teacher assistants (Levy 1998). Gibson, Darrity and Myers (1998) have found that Black men with the educational and skill levels commensurate with these jobs are heavily underrepresented in these occupations. Since these white- and pink-collar jobs are highly segregated by sex, and because of the racial barriers to private sector, highly professional managerial occupations, Black males, particularly poor and less educated ones, are left with few choices. In this case, the intersections among race, class, and gender are clear, although the tendency in studies is to emphasize the race and gender patterns found.

Education

Over the past two decades, educational researchers have made issues of race, class and gender quite prominent (Foster 1999). We know that social identities such as race, class, and gender influence the educational outcomes of students from various social groups (Clewell & Anderson 1991; Weis & Fine 1993). For example, MacLeod (1987) considers race and social class simultaneously in the explanation of how African American and White males' social identities influence their educational behaviors. Some (Fordham 1993; 1996; Holland & Eisenhart 1990) have emphasized how gender and racial identities impact the educational performances of African American females. Others have paid attention to how gender and social class have influenced students' educational orientations (Fine & Zane 1989; McRobbie & Garber 1993).

Much attention has been given particularly to the significant differences in educational achievement between African American youth and other racial groups (i.e., Whites). Studies that examine the achievement gap among African Americans and Whites generally account for race (see Jencks & Phillips 1998; Ogbu 1974; 1978).

And although researchers have found race effects, generally they tend to homogenize the experiences of African American students, who vary by socioeconomic status, gender, family experiences, and location, among other factors. For example, a prevalent thesis used in educational research to explain the achievement gap is the idea that African American students are more likely to level their expectations and reject schooling because they perceive it as primarily beneficial to Whites (Fordham & Ogbu 1986). However, cultural explanations used to explain achievement outcomes have not fully accounted for the intersections of class and gender with either race or ethnicity (Carter 1999).

A more holistic understanding of African American students' educational attitudes, beliefs, expectations and performances would require analyses that attempt to deal with the interconnections among race, class, and gender. An intersectional approach would not only explain differences between groups but also allow for differences within social groups. For example, while African American youth maintain high aspirations for education, in general (Mickelson 1990; Solorzano 1992), they may level their expectations for actually realizing their aspirations (Solorzano 1992; Mickelson 1990; Hanson 1994). Research has shown that class resources matter (Bourdieu 1977; McClelland 1990; Zweigenhaft & Domhoff 1991). Other research has shown that females, in general, fare relatively well in the area of access to higher education, although they are particularly disadvantaged with respect to the outcomes of schooling, such as job attainment (for a review, see Jacobs 1996). Hence, these findings beg the question of whether we are more likely to find significant pairwise differences frequently not discussed and analyzed among subsets of African American students, when we account for factors like class and gender. With few exceptions (e.g., Mickelson 1990; O'Connor 1999), the body of educational research has tended to examine differences in school behaviors and performances by either singular or a combination of two identities, but not by the intersections of all three of these social categories. An examination of all of these social positions may provide a better context in which to interpret findings and patterns among African American students (O'Connor 1999).

Mental Health

A substantial body of research indicates that socially disadvantaged groups (e.g., women, Blacks, lower-income) tend to report poorer mental health (Brown & Harris 1989; Kessler & Neighbors 1986; Thoits 1995). Much of what we know about mental health focuses on one (e.g., gender) or two (e.g., race and gender) categories. Yet these studies provide tantalizing hints of the importance of intersectionality. For instance, women across every racial/ethnic group report higher rates of depression than men in the same group. However, compared to White women, Black and Hispanic women tend to report lower rates of depression (Kronenfeld 1999). We are only

beginning to develop models that move beyond the "generic" woman or man to consider race, gender, class and other social relations, such as age, that help to shape mental health outcomes. Few studies have the necessary data, sample size, and measures to simultaneously investigate multiple intersectionalities (e.g., race, gender, class, and age). Nonetheless, much can be drawn from research that considers fewer interconnections.

Of late, research efforts have focused on mapping the human genome and biological and physiological explanations for health and illness. Emerging models in studies of gender and mental health attempt to balance biological differences with the social context and processes. The interconnection between biology and social factors makes gender differences in mental health particularly difficult to untangle. Differences in rates of disorders such as depression (Weissman & Klerman 1992) and eating disorders (Kronenfeld 1999) for women, and substance abuse and conduct disorders for men (Kessler & Zhao 1999), are counterbalanced with similar rates of obsessive-compulsive disorder, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder (Kronenfeld 1999).

Recent studies suggest that gender differences in mental health are primarily the result of environmental factors rather than biological differences (Kessler & Zhao 1999; Kronenfeld 1999). The gender differences in particular disorders have been explained by role theories (men have higher expectations and are more likely to use lethal methods), access (men have greater access to guns and drugs), and differences in reporting behaviors (men are less likely to report problems early) (Mirowsky & Ross 1995; Timms 1998). Role theory arguments are less persuasive in explaining men's mental health and these "curious asymmetries" (Glass & Fujimoto 1994: 180) highlight a conceptual problem in some of the existing research. The difficulties are multiplied when the intersections of race and class are included. Gender role aspirations, expectations, and identities vary across race, class, and gender groups (Hunter & Sellers 1998; Kane 2000), and may figure in mental health outcomes. Minority status may serve as a proxy for exposure to stress and fewer resources to cope with the stress (Williams & Williams-Morris 2000). Additionally, recent research suggests that race-related stressors, such as the experience of racial discrimination (Jackson, Brown, William, Torres, Sellers & Brown 1996) and blocked opportunities (Sellers & Neighbors 1999) adversely affect the mental health of Black Americans.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for research on race and mental health is "untangling" the effects of socioeconomic status (Williams & Fenton 1994). Kessler and Neighbors (1986), for example, found that Blacks had higher rates of psychological distress than Whites, but only those Blacks with low incomes. Unfortunately, the study did not consider either within- or between-group gender differences. However, in an ongoing study of treatment of depression among low-income women, Miranda and colleagues (2000) found that nearly one-fourth of the poor predominantly African

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American women in the study met the criteria for major depression (Miranda, Green & Krupnick 1997). In contrast, the National Co-morbidity Survey sample estimates the prevalence of major depression among women to be 4-6% (Kessler & Zhao 1999). Miranda and colleagues (1997) also document higher rates of trauma exposure and that this exposure is associated with high rates of psychiatric disorder. Taken together, these studies suggest that the consideration of race, class, and gender intersections may uncover more variation in rates of psychiatric disorder and other risk factors, such as exposure to trauma, than previously recognized.

Despite substantial growth in the research on race and mental health (Jackson et al. 1996) and gender and mental health (Mirowsky & Ross 1995; Umberson, Chen, House, Hopkins & Slaten 1996), and the nearly ubiquitous finding that lower socio-economic status is related to poor mental health (Williams et al. 1997), very little research has examined the intersections of race/ethnicity, gender, class, and mental health. Although studies of one or two social categories provide important insights into the relationships between race and mental health, gender and mental health, and class and mental health, a more holistic approach to understanding the role of race, class, and gender in mental health is needed. These studies not only need to articulate between-group differences, but it is also important to investigate within-group variation as well (Sellers 2000). These models have the potential to improve theorizing, strengthen research, and improve lives. For instance, traditionally low rates of suicide among Blacks are on the rise (Hood-Williams 1996). The suicide rate for Black men is 11.1 per 100,000, and the rates for Black women are 2.0 per 100,000 (Blumenthal 1996). One wonders about the coping strategies employed by young Black women. Perhaps the most important point is that our understanding on mental health is enriched by research that grapples with the complex interplay between gender, race, and class. Consideration of these overlapping social forces is critical if we are to understand and ameliorate disparities in well-being.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Paradoxically, as we heighten awareness of the need for research that struggles with intersections of race, class, and gender, the race, class, and gender biases in contemporary research become more difficult to expose. Studies specify the sample's composition and relegate complications of race and class to "future research." Research that truly considers intersectionality is difficult. While we have made great strides in theory, empirical studies lag behind. We need datasets with sufficient sample sizes, and measures of social class that do not simply account for socioeconomic differences (e.g., income, education, occupational prestige), but also social divisions related to wealth, domination-subordination, and demand/control ratio in work environments. Certainly, many qualitative research studies that incorporate an understanding of how race, ethnicity, class and gender interact can provide some insight

into the impact of the meanings and interpretations of these different social categories among individuals and between groups.

The conventional pairwise comparisons used in social science research limits the vision of what "progress" of one group means relative to another, when certain contextual and social categories are excluded. Certainly, it is rare to find research when race, class and gender are considered in tandem. And, the lack of multidimensional comparisons may result in homogenous assumptions about race, gender, or class. As Cole and Stewart (2001) note, comparisons across identity groups are often made using essentialist notions of group differences, resulting in what they refer to as "invidious comparisons." This is not to say, of course, that comparative research should not be done, but that the comparisons need to be considered carefully to resist the tendency to reinforce or reify social inequalities. For instance, the political success of Glazer and Moynihan's (1995) research, reported in *Beyond the Melting Pot*, serves as a stark example of how decontextualized comparisons can produce devastating public policy and reinforce offensive stereotypes. Thus, we are often faced with the juxtaposition of sociological data that declare progress for Black women, while images of welfare queens, matriarchs and over-sexed teens circulate in popular culture and political discourse. We do not use this example to promote a "victimization contest" between groups, but only to show how anemic attempts to combine race, class and gender can translate into myopic conclusions, and perhaps, misguided debates over public policy.

The essays gathered here represent the work of members of the PRBA Gender Working Group, who are concerned with the issues raised in this review. Although each piece deals with different combinations of intersecting factors and expands across a variety of settings, all of the authors are particularly interested in how these combinations affect the lives of Black women. It is our hope that these pieces inspire others to take a closer look at gender differences in Black communities and to wrestle with the complexities of race, class, gender, nationality, and sexual preference as they act simultaneously on Black women and other social groups.

Studying the intersections of race, class, gender and other relevant social categories is a relatively new endeavor, and a complex one. We need more models of how to study these factors simultaneously in a way that captures the complexity of different experiences. There are significant obstacles to furthering intersectional research. It can be expensive and time-consuming to get large enough heterogeneous samples to test hypotheses or launch qualitative research projects that require interview staffs and/or long amounts of time in the field. But while the means may be arduous, we should not shy away from the challenges because the end results could break new grounds for understanding how these elements of experience shape our lives and life outcomes.

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