WHAT SOCIOLGY TEACHES US ABOUT BLACK WOMEN

A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF INTRODUCTORY

SOCIOLOGY TEXTBOOKS

By

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Submitted to the

Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences

of American University

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In

Sociology

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_May 1, 2013_____
Date

2013

American University

Washington, D.C. 20016

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ABSTRACT

My thesis examines the ways in which Black womanhood is constructed in introductory sociology textbooks. My research adds to the research on the depictions of Black women in sociology textbooks by looking beyond numerical references to examining how the textbooks are representing Black women and thus constructing the meaning of Black womanhood. My sample consists of 7 best-selling introductory sociology textbooks that are currently used in courses at 5 different universities in the D.C. Metro Area. I used qualitative textual analysis to understand the ways in which the texts construct meaning through the use of language and other discursive practices. My findings reveal that sociology textbooks reinforce hegemonic power through the lack of representation of Black women in sections not related to the family, gender or race as well as constant comparisons Black women's experiences to white "norms." My analysis also indicates that textbooks can resist those hegemonic representations by contextualizing inequalities and including research and analyses from Black scholars.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to be Black woman? Depending on where one looks, the answer can vary widely. Historically, Black women in the United States have been portrayed in a myriad of unrealistic, demonizing, and stereotypical depictions. Intersections of race- and gender-based oppression tend to put Black women at the bottom of the social hierarchy even today. Though we have seen an increase in the representation of Black women in politics, media and generally a trend towards including Black women in mainstream American culture, representations of Black women to a certain extent reify stereotypical portrayals that stemmed from slavery such as the images of the overly sexual vixen, single mother, and the subservient helper. These stereotypes have been used as a way to justify the inequalities that Black women have faced (and continue to face) in America.

Sociology is an academic discipline in which inequalities that Black women face can be addressed because according to the American Sociological Association, sociology is the "study of the social lives of people, groups, and societies" (ASA) and as such, many sociologists focus their studies on differences and disparities between and among people, groups and societies. As a result, social inequality has become a major area of interest in sociology departments across the country and taught in most introductory sociology courses therein (Kenworthy 2007). Furthermore, two of the most significant concepts of study in sociology are race and gender. In these courses, sociologists generally tend to expose the social construction of both gender and race while acknowledging the implications of race and gender distinctions. The textbooks used for introductory courses provide a broad overview of the history of sociology and of sociological theories and perspectives, including problematizing racism and sexism. However, because of the

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nature of textbooks to reproduce dominant ideologies, it is important for sociologists to critically examine introductory textbooks to understand what messages they are putting forth about Black women to college students. As a discipline sociology sees itself as critical of the dominant ideologies—especially as related to inequality and thus has the potential to dissipate negative stereotypes about Black women and other marginalized groups in order to promote a more equal society.

Numerous scholars have studied introductory sociology textbooks to examine the ways in which they propagate or omit certain ideas. Researchers have demonstrated that the general trend of the discipline is toward the increased inclusion of race, class and gender and, thus, Black women (Ferree and Hall 1996).Though the portrayal of Black and other minority women in Sociology textbooks has increased from 11 percent to 22 percent (Clark and Nunes 2008), quantitative representation is not sufficient in understanding the "nature in which a group is depicted" (Stone 1996). Measurements of under-representation are important but, as Ferree and Hall (1990) assert, it is imperative that scholars understand *how* and *in what contexts* minority groups are represented to gauge an understanding of the messages that textbooks are sending to college students. For this reason, I will examine the ways in which introduction to sociology textbooks discuss Black women through the use of textual analysis. I aim to answer the following questions: In what ways and under what conditions are Black women represented in Introduction to sociology textbooks? And how does this representation construct the meaning of Black womanhood in the field of sociology?

Textbooks are a common tool used in introductory classes due to their broad content and distributional convenience. They provide a general overview of the themes and concepts in a given area and are written to feed the same information to a large number of students at the same

time. Because introductory classes are designed for the consumption of knowledge rather than the creation of knowledge, introductory textbooks tend to represent and reproduce the dominant ideas in a particular field (Kuhn 1976, [1979] 1996). They generally do not engage in meaningful debates and because they are widely distributed, they tend to avoid controversial topics, or at least take conservative view on those topics considered controversial (Provenzo et al 2010). "Textbook[s]… draw upon disciplinary ideas and debates (as well as material from popular media), but unlike critical sociology [they do] not seek to challenge or transcend, but merely to digest and disseminate them" (Manza, Sauder and Wright 2010). For this reason the study of textbooks has been frequent in academia to examine the ways in which texts propagate, neglect, or misrepresent certain ideas.

Sociology textbooks are ideal for my research design because they are widely used in college courses and have the potential to shape the way college students think about Black women. "Textbooks are unique scholarly products aimed at large and growing markets as systems of higher education span around the world" (Manza, Sauder and Wright 2010). They provide sociological analysis and history at the introductory level and at more advanced levels of higher education instruction. Introductory sociology textbooks draw from historical knowledge in the field of sociology as well as popular culture to provide up-to-date and relevant examples of the material being covered (Lipsitz 1992). Although textbooks are used for instructional purposes, scholars must keep in mind that they are cultural productions. Their existence relies on a not only a host of publishing requirements (e.g. how the books are predicted to sell) but also, to a certain extent, cultural expectations. The information in textbooks is often thought to be comprehensive and unbiased; however, they are essentially socializing agents for the students who consume the information. In a United States context, textbooks are received as unbiased

truth by college students who may not yet be keen on critical thinking. Thus making it difficult for many professors to "teach against the text" (Hood 2006). Hood (2006) argues that because students are resistant to challenging the information that is presented in sociology textbooks, not only should professors practice teaching against the text but textbook authors and publishers should continually make considerable revisions to address the concerns of scholars who criticize the lack of or marginal inclusion of race (Stone 1996) and gender (Hall 1988; Ferree and Hall 1990, 1996), and those who focus their analyses of introductory texts on other topics as well (Najafizadeh and Mennerick 1992; Taub and Fanflik 2000; Lewis and Humphrey 2005; Suarez and Balaji 2007). Taking a critical look at how textbooks construct the meaning of Black womanhood is relevant because limited representation and/or misrepresentation can serve to perpetuate negative stereotypes and biases against Black women.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is little research on the representation of Black women in sociology textbooks specifically. In the same vein there is little to no research on the construction of Black womanhood in sociology texts; therefore, I will frame the relevant field of literature by drawing from how Black womanhood has been constructed in scientific research, popular culture and media, and finally how Black women have been represented in introductory sociology textbooks.

In scientific research on Black women, the central concerns have been how scientific racism has reified stereotypical images of Black women as inferior. Collin's work on Black feminist thought, exemplifies what I believe to be the best in articulating the four basic stereotypes or "controlling images" of Black women in a United States context. (1) The welfare queen, who exploits the welfare system by having multiple children and living off of government money. (2) The mammy, the friendly, asexual servant who is more concerned about the white children that she cares for than her own. (3) The matriarch, who is powerful and dominant; so much so that she emasculates her male counterpart forcing her into single motherhood and (4) the jezebel or whore whose sexuality is out of control and sexual desire cannot be quenched (Collins 2000:83-89). For centuries, white racism advanced and relied upon racial stereotypes such as these to establish and maintain both physical violence against and the social subordination of Black women.

Black Women as Objects of Social
and Natural Science

Early research on Black women began when Black men and women—and most women, in general—were prohibited from attaining higher education and participating in the creation of scientific knowledge (Collins 1998). As a result, scientific research reflected the dominant ideas

about Black women at the time; which were, in most cases, one or more of the classical stereotypical images of Black women. For example, Monroe Work (1901), Francis Galton (1904) and Edward Ross (1906), all focused their scholarly work around Black women and their criminal sexual deviance (Work 1901) and overactive fertility (Galton 1904; Ross 1906); all failing to examine how poverty contributed to both crime and birth rates. These authors also failed to contextualize the time period and acknowledge the role that the Reconstruction Era played in social phenomena. Many scholars of the time engaged in "scientific racism" which legitimized the stereotypes that they were reporting as empirical reality. Moynihan (1965), for example, argued that the single most important social issue facing America, based on labor statistics, was the demise of the Black family unit which was a result of the overbearing Black woman, the "matriarch." Analyses from these early studies were based on beliefs of racial superiority and as a result, tended to reflect and support racist sentiments. However, these types of studies paved the way for recent scholarship with more nuanced examples of racial biases.

Psychological studies of race and intelligence as recently as 2007 have consistently reported that Black women and men are "intellectually inferior" (Hocutt and Levin 1999; Sternberg, Grigorenko and Kidd 2005; Hunt and Carlson 2007). Most of these, however, fail to recognize race as and intelligence as social constructs (Daly and Onweuegbuzie 2011). Sex research overwhelmingly reports that Black women are more sexually permissive (Weiburg and Williams 1988) and tends to generally narrow the scope of their focus to aspects of Black sexuality that are most deviant from the white norm (McGruder 2010). This includes prostitution, sexually transmitted infections and disease, adolescent sexual activity and promiscuity (see McGruder 2010).

An influx of diversity in academia led to Black women critiquing and resisting the appropriation of exaggerated stereotypes in scholarship as Black women started to become "agents of scientific knowledge" rather than just objects (Collins 1998). Chaney (2011) for example, specifically examines how Black women define and practice their own womanhood acknowledging that Black women are not a homogenous group that can be reduced to a finite set of images. Studies like Chaney's are increasing in number but are seldom products of mainstream sociology. Furthermore, despite this change, scholars still contend that social and natural science research continues to use some of the language and stereotypical myths from the past which reinforce the subjugation of Black women (McGruder 2010). The findings of these studies are indeed significant in that they legitimize and naturalize inequality in addition to shaping the discourse on racial and ethnic minorities and women. The studies themselves do not necessarily reach non-academicians except through the form of textbooks which I use as a proxy for mainstream sociology.

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Cultural Construction of
Black Womanhood

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A wide range of scholars have studied stereotypes of Black women in television, magazines, movies, plays, and music videos (cf. Pough 2004; Chen et al 2012) but also, albeit less frequently, as sites of resistance (cf., Emmerson 2002; Woodward and Mastin 2005). A common trend in studies of Black womanhood is the lack of specificity as to how the cultural mediums are constructing Black womanhood. Many of the studies focus primarily on whether the outlet challenges or promotes stereotypes. For example, Woodward and Mastin (2005) examine the ways in which *Essence* magazine, which has predominantly Black women authors, dispels stereotypes of Black women. Woodward and Mastin (2005) however, only mention that the myths were dispelled and do not provide any discussion on *how* this was done. Pough (2004)

demonstrates how Black filmmakers, musicians and novelists marginalize Black womanhood by giving Black women relatively no voice and portraying them as one of three types of women: the "ghetto girl", the "baby mama", and the girl with "bourgeois aspirations" (Pough 2004:131). Pough argues that while there are positive and diverse representations of Black womanhood, she envisions, and demands a future in which Black women are not vilified, marginalized or reduced to stereotypes but, again, gives no attention to the ways in which this can be accomplished.

The authors that analyze forms of resistance do so by examining the process by which Black women self-construct their womanhood. For example, Emmerson (2002) examines how Black women performers construct the meaning of Black womanhood through their music videos. While she found that they do often restrict themselves to being "eye candy" through their clothing and the camera angles, they also define their Blackness as a positive attribute by refusing to relate Blackness with negativity. Richardson (2007) found that Black women can compartmentalize stereotypes and through language, distance themselves from negative images, thus redefining Black womanhood. While self-construction, a bottom-up approach, is pertinent to understanding how Black woman create their womanhood for themselves, scholarship in mainstream sociology is more accessible to a greater number of people. Therefore it is also vital to understand how Black womanhood is made meaningful in that realm.

<u>Depictions of Black Women in</u>
<u>Sociology Textbooks</u>

Introductory sociology textbooks have the potential to dispel the stereotypical images of Black women that are prevalent in today's society. However, a significant amount of research on these texts argues that they have not. For example, Ferree and Hall (1990) found that introductory texts under-represent Black women relative to white people and Black men. Similarly Hall (1988) and Stone (1996) assert that when Black women are mentioned in

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introductory texts, they are significantly underrepresented in chapters not dedicated to "race" or "gender." Stone (1996) calls this process "ghettoization" and it has even been found in a more recent replication of Ferree and Hall's (1990) study by Clark and Nunes (2008). Ferree and Hall (1996) examined introductory texts again to determine if a feminist perspective was incorporated.[1] Their findings demonstrate that race, class and gender inequalities were addressed in a marginal way which failed to acknowledge the importance of race and gender as intersecting oppressions. Ferree and Hall's 1990 study of introduction to sociology textbooks became a foundation for future research in the field. In subsequent years a number of scholars have replicated (in some form) their initial study. Manza and Van Schyndel (2000) and Puentes and Gougherty (2013) both argue that newer introductory texts mentioned intersectional paradigms, however Puentes and Goughtery (2013) suggest that Manza and Van Schnydel (2000) overstated the extent to which intersectionality was included. Furthermore, neither of these two studies explain how the concept of included in the textbooks. Clark and Nunes (2008) found introductory sociology textbooks have been more inclusive of women of color and other minorities in terms of numerical references, but critiqued the marginalized placement in the texts.

With the exception of Ferree and Hall (1990; 1996), these studies examine the content in which Black women and other minority groups are represented, for example, how often mentions or images of these groups are found throughout the texts and in certain sections of the texts. But they do not address the mechanisms used in textbooks to construct the meaning of Black womanhood. As Ferree and Hall (1990) explain, though over- and underrepresentation are important in and of themselves, neither can answer the question of *how* textbooks are putting forth "realistic" messages about Black women. To address this concern, I will use qualitative

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[1] Ferree and Hall (1996) define the "feminist perspective" as the extent to which textbooks holistically address issues related to women with specific regard to gender, race and class stratification.

textual analysis to analyze the ways in which the texts construct meaning through the use of language.

As Audrey Lorde contends, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (1984:110), thus if we want to advance equality, it is imperative that scholars are mindful of how their inclusion/exclusion of certain groups and concepts as well as their language use creates meaning in mainstream sociology. Continuing to use the same hegemonic language, tools, concepts and frameworks in our research and textbooks will not create in college students the urgency to challenge the hegemony. Sociologists must continue to challenge the information presented in the texts used for educational purposes and it is equally important to understand the opportunity that textbook authors and publishers have to address the growing diversity in our society (Norris et al 2007). Furthermore, it is essential for sociologists and scholars of various disciplines to produce a wealth of research that addresses the ways in which stereotypes and discrimination are being produced and reproduced within and among different fields of study.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

<u>Foundations of Gramsci's</u>
<u>Theory of Hegemony</u>

I use Gramsci's theory of hegemony in my analysis of the representations of Black

women in sociology textbooks. Hegemony is a social process through which oppressed people

come to see the interests of the dominant class as their own; consequently they become complicit

in their own subordination (Gramsci 1985). According to Gramsci (1985), ruling classes cannot

maintain their power solely through armed force but need to gain the support of the ruled class to

maintain stability. Through the process of hegemony, the morality, philosophy, culture and

language of the ruling elite permeate everyday life and become so internalized that the interests

of the elite become constructed as common sense (Gramsci 1985). Gramsci asserts that these

hegemonic practices form people's consciousness and determine how people organize and

understand the world (Ives 2004).

Representation is an integral aspect of hegemonic power. Gramscian scholars argue that

power is constructed in part through representation (Beverley 1999). The dominant class is able

to represent itself through the use of social institutions but it also represents what Gramsci would

call "subaltern" or the non-dominant classes. This power of representation further distinguishes

the groups from one another and serves to reinforce the dominance of the hegemony. For

example in the United States, negative stereotypical images of Black women are a result of

representational power of the dominant group. These representations so often permeate media

and popular culture that they become taken for granted. The hegemonic ideologies about Black

womanhood "are often so pervasive that it is difficult to conceptualize alternatives" to resist

them (Collins 2000:302-303). Hegemony does not involve a false consciousness which implies

that people are deceived into believing the dominant ideology; rather they endorse these ideologies as a result of their ubiquitous existence. In fact, hegemony remains persistent because of superficial lapses in hegemonic domination which appear to break down the walls of hegemony but only serve to keep the ruling class is power. As Collins argues, Black women who have been subject to marginalization oft celebrate the increased inclusion of Black women and other minorities in popular culture even when this inclusion further subordinates them. These ideologies that are established to maintain power dynamics need this type of endorsement of the subordinated groups in order to function (Collins 2000). The consent to subordination helps the ruling class remain the dominant producer of cognitive authority.

Gramsci explains hegemonic power through the conceptualization of normative and spontaneous grammars (Ives 2004). Spontaneous grammar is defined as the language people speak unconsciously while normative grammar is "made up of reciprocal monitoring, teaching and censorship, in other words, the "correct" way of speaking. Normative grammar is the type of language taught in schools and used in textbooks, for instance. However Gramsci explains that while normative and spontaneous grammars are distinct, they are not polar opposites; the two are inextricably linked. Spontaneous grammar is the culmination of the "interactions of past normative grammars" and "normative grammar is created from spontaneous grammar" (Ives 2004:44). For Gramsci, the relationship between the two grammars is parallel to that of coercion and consent: both interact with one another to create a stable hegemonic power (Ives 1997).

Hegemonic dogma gain legitimacy and popular endorsement in a number of ways including educational systems. "School curricula…have long been important social location for manufacturing ideologies needed to maintain oppression" (Collins 2000:303). Included in this "curricula" are academic textbooks. Textbooks are written in normative grammar and this

language establishes certain norms and beliefs as the normative language. And in turn, inevitably impacts spontaneous articulations of what it means to be a woman, and specifically a Black woman. Based on my analysis of introductory sociology texts, I argue that textbooks have a unique impact on the construction of the meaning of Black womanhood both in academia as they serve to reinforce and further legitimize popular research and also outside of academia in that they influence the spontaneous grammar of the students and other persons who consume the textbook information.

Scholars often treat normative grammar and hegemony as negative or undesirable but Gramsci, in fact, delineates hegemony into two types. While regressive hegemony is operated for and by authoritative groups, progressive hegemony involves the creation of a new hegemony specific to the interests or the subordinated class. Gramsci encourages the establishment of this "counter-hegemony." While he does not claim that this new hegemony is non-dominant, Gramsci argues that a progressive hegemony would be a democratically-derived ideology that produced "a culture, a world-view and institutions that integrate and organize diverse ways of understanding the world" (Ives 2004:100). A progressive hegemony as it relates to the construction of Black womanhood is vital according to Collins who argues that, "reversing this process whereby intersecting oppressions harness various dimensions of individual subjectivity…becomes a central purpose of resistance" (Collins 2000:304). She further maintains that the critiques of the regressive hegemonic images (those garnered from the top down) must be coupled with efforts to deconstruct them in order for a counter-hegemony to be successful.

<u>Hegemony and Intersectionality</u>

It is important to infuse Gramsci's theory of hegemony with the concept of intersectionality. For centuries in America, people's personal identities of race, class, gender,

sexual orientation, age, nation, and ethnicity have been used as tools of oppression through the act of labeling certain groups "outsiders" or "deviants of the norm." Power is constructed through the dualistic conceptualizations of race, class, gender and other identities where the White, middle-class, heterosexual male is constructed as the norm and the labeling of "others" is a result of binary oppositions. This othering creates a hierarchical society in which one's location determines how one experiences the world. Intersectionality is the acknowledgement that people's identities shape how they see the world, how the world sees them and the type of knowledge that they have (based on their experiences).This concept has had a profound impact on women of color, particularly Black women who, due to their intersecting oppressions, were virtually invisible in almost all realms of society for decades. The idea of intersectional oppression traces back to the 19th century when, in her historic speech, "Ain't I a Woman," Sojourner Truth describes how the traditional hegemonic definitions of femininity and womanhood do not apply to her and other Black women (Stanton 1881). For centuries hegemonic femininity painted women as delicate, dainty, in need of protection, pure, and most importantly, white (Dickerson and Rousseau 2009). Slave women did not fit this description because of their Blackness; their physical strength and other characteristics depicted as opposite of white women and thus not worthy of the same treatment.

The actual term "intersectionality" was first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 claiming that studies of Black women that failed to take into account the ways in which gender is racialized or race is sexed are critically inaccurate. She furthered her study of intersectionality to address issues of sexual violence that were particularly unique to Black women because of the intersection of both racism and sexism (Crenshaw 1991). Patricia Hill Collins (2000), in *Black Feminist Thought,* defines intersectionality as a stance that opposes hierarchies of oppression

where race undermines gender, or gender outweighs class; instead she argues that these and other identities are interrelated, mutually constructing, and must be studied as such to truly grasp the unique experiences of Black women (Collins 2000). Biases based on race, class, gender, age, sexual orientation, and nationality work together to create unique experiences of oppression and domination in the United States. It is imperative that social science scholarship addresses the interconnectedness of these identities in order to accurately study them.

For this research I will examine the extent to which hegemonic representations of Black women are reproduced or resisted in introductory sociology textbooks. Intersectionality theory poses that Black women are at the bottom of the social hierarchy because of interlocking oppressions. However, it also presents the hope that through accurately examining and resisting these intersecting oppressions bestowed upon us, we do not have to remain in that position. An important ideological standpoint for Black feminists is to reject the notion that Black women are victims (King 1990); yet, it is still vital to recognize and study the how race, gender and power affect the way in which Black women are represented in what sociologists deem to be authoritative knowledge in the field.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Because I am using Gramsci's theory of hegemony and intersectionality as my theoretical

framework, I use a methodological approach that deals specifically with the complexities of

intersectionality research. McCall (2005) describes intracategorical complexity as a methodology

that addresses the means by which analytical categories (i.e. Black, woman, Black woman etc.)

are constructed. This methodological approach, though recently given the name of

"intracategorical," has been long used by feminists of color to address ways in which Black

women have been neglected (Crenshaw 1991), marginalized (Stone 1996) and misrepresented

(Collins 2005). McCall explains that researchers who adopt this approach utilize qualitative

research methods to problematize the construction of identities as tools for inequality (McCall

2005; Knusden 2006).

Qualitative research is "a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning" (Shank

2000:5). "Systematic" refers to the agreed upon rules and formulas by a research community.

"Empirical inquiry into meaning" suggests that qualitative researchers seek to understand a

social problem or experience by examining meaning-making processes (Ospina 2004).

Qualitative research methods range from interviews, to participant observations to document or

text analysis. In comparison to quantitative methodology which uses statistical analyses to verify

a set of hypotheses, qualitative research seeks to instead "uncover the meaning of a phenomenon

…[through] understanding how people interpret their experiences and construct their worlds"

(Merriam 2009:5). Qualitative researchers tend to

> Stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the
> researcher and what is studied and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. They
> seek answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning.
> (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:8)

Because I was interested in examining how meaning is created in introductory sociology textbooks, qualitative inquiry was ideal for my thesis.

For the purpose of this thesis, my epistemological framework is that of a critical social constructionist. I operate within this framework because I examine the ways in which Black women are discussed in introductory sociology textbooks and, more specifically, how these books construct the meaning of Black womanhood. Social constructionism is an approach to social science that is "rooted in a belief that all reality is a constructed reality" and that reality "is created in the liminal zone between a perceived external reality and a subjective meaning making process" (Daly 2007:31-32). A critical approach to social research is concerned with how power is embedded in social structures and examines the way language and communications are used as tools of inequality (Shank 2002). Though sociology textbooks traditionally serve to expose how key aspects of experience are socially constructed systems, they also serve to produce and reproduce those constructions as well. Therefore, I begin my critique of hegemonic forms of representation in textbooks with this epistemological framework.

My analyses are guided by a critical social constructionist approach that treats data as cultural artifacts that express certain beliefs, values, and traditions. Existing literature demonstrates that representations of Black women in sociology texts contribute to the marginalization of Black women. However, I did not approach the data looking to support any particular assumption. Rather, my path of inquiry is inductive. Inductive analysis requires that researchers base their theoretical explanations on observations of the world rather than preconceived notions and assumptions about a particular phenomenon; this involves allowing the data to develop or expand theory (Daly 2007). Ultimately, I use induction to learn more about the context in which Black women are discussed in these textbooks.

The process of analytic induction is inflected by my focus on textual analysis. Textual analysis allows for a holistic approach to a particular artifact, in this case, textbooks. This is important in order to gauge how Black women are represented in relation to other groups. Using textual analysis, a researcher performs a thorough reading of the data with the aim to understand how meaning is made through discursive elements and then groups the text into relevant themes for "subsequent coding and categorization" (Ruiz Ruiz 2009:16). It also calls for a holistic approach to analyzing texts as it incorporates an analysis of context (i.e. when and where are Black women mentioned) and language (i.e. how Black women are being talked about). And due to its attention to cultural context and meaning-making, textual analysis overcomes the limitations of content analysis which is merely the quantitative representation of themes in a particular text. As a method it provides me the opportunity to see what knowledge sociologists are producing and reproducing about Black women.

While one might argue that a potential limitation my data is that there is no way to determine how these books are used in sociology (or other) classrooms; for example, whether or not they are used in conjunction with other books as supplements or if instructors encourage their students to take a critical approach to the information presented in these texts. However, this concern is unfounded simply because regardless of how they are used, textbooks remain significant indicators of the nature and prevalence of authoritative knowledge in the field of sociology.

There are two immediate benefits to using unobtrusive data collection methods "(1) the data are non-reactive, (2) the data exist independent of the research" (Hesse-Biber 2006). This is particularly important in regards to researcher reflexivity because the data is not going to change because of the mere presence of the researcher. Therefore, because my data is "naturalistic" my

reflexivity will focus on how my identities may shape the research outcome. I am a Black woman and I acknowledge my particular stake in this research. I personally benefit from the increase in representation of Black women in any form of scholarship. This provides much of the basis for my interest and passion for this topic. I will engage in "dynamic objectivity," which as described by Daly, "keeps the researcher's self squarely inside the research process" (2007:193) as opposed to creating a sense of separation between the researcher and the object of study.

There has been a notable shift in the use of validation in qualitative research. In 1981, Guba and Lincoln proposed that qualitative researchers use the term "trustworthiness" in place of validation, which they argued connoted positivist epistemologies associated with quantitative research (Morse et al. 2002). According to Morse et al. (2002), the criteria for trustworthiness has often led "qualitative researchers to focus on the tangible outcomes of the research rather than demonstrating how verification strategies were used to shape and direct the research during its development" (p.17). Verification strategies because they inform the researcher when to modify, stop or continue the research process in order to ensure validity and reliability in qualitative research. The strategies that More et al. suggest are as follows: methodological coherence, sampling efficiency, collecting and analyzing data concurrently, thinking theoretically, and theory development (2002:18). I used each of these strategies to ensure validity and reliability in my research.

In order to ensure validity for this research I took a number of steps. First, to insure methodological coherence, I did substantial research before the data collection process to gain an understanding of the literature on introductory sociology textbooks to ensure that the method I chose (textual analysis) was suitable for answering my research question. Second, to address sampling efficiency, I was concerned with the issue of saturation. Qualitative research should

employ saturation as a part of ensuring the validity of the research outcomes. Saturation entails gathering data until there are no new emerging aspects of the phenomenon. "By definition, saturating data ensures replication in categories; replication verifies, and ensures comprehension and completeness" (Morse et al 2002:18). I used a contained sample provided by the American Sociological Association (ASA) and therefore I argue that saturation is not an issue with my research. Because of the vast number of introductory sociology textbooks, I wanted my sample to consist of those that are top-selling and widely used. The logic behind this was that the most popular textbooks are the likely the most comprehensive. Because I used a specific list recommended by the ASA, I did not need to continue to collect data until saturation.

An integral part of qualitative research, is coding. I addressed the third verification strategy, collecting and analyzing the data concurrently, by beginning the coding and analysis processes while I was still collecting data. Concurrent collection and analysis of data is a verification strategy because it creates a link between what is known and what needs to be known and thus helps the researcher determine the appropriateness of the analyses in relation to the research questions (Morse et al. 2002). This strategy is important for qualitative inquiry because it supports the iterative process of qualitative research.

> A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data. […]The portion of data to be coded during First Cycle coding processes can range in magnitude from a single word to a full sentence to an entire page of text to a stream of moving images. In Second Cycle coding processes, the portions coded can be the exact same units, longer passages of text, and even a reconfiguration of the codes themselves developed thus far (Saldana 2008:3).

I began the coding process using a first cycle of codes. Then I used second cycle coding in order to group the existing codes based on their thematic relationships to one another. This process created the concepts on which my analysis is based. Since my research objective is two-fold: to

examine how Black women are represented and the methods by which Black womanhood is constructed, my thematic codes incorporate both representation and methods of construction.

The last two verification strategies involve the development of theory. Unlike quantitative methodologies that seek to produce generalizable results to a particular population, qualitative research seeks to theorize the empirical data to formulate theory that is comprehensive and well-developed (Glaser 1978). The development of theory is a verification strategy for validity and credibility because it connects the micro perspective of the data to a macro conceptual understanding of a particular phenomenon with attention to empirical support. For my research, I used theoretical thinking particularly in my development of themes. Again, through the use of first and second cycling coding, I coded and recoded data based on new emerging themes to ensure that the themes I found were appropriate and reflected across my data.

In order to ensure reliability, I kept a research journal in which I documented the entire research process including sampling difficulties, codes and their definitions as well as initial noticings in the data. By taking care to be consistent with how I collected the data from each textbook, I attempted to ensure that my research can be replicated.

CHAPTER 5

METHODS

For my research, I used a nonprobability sampling design in which the selection of cases is non-random (Singleton and Straits 2005). I used purposive sampling in which "the general strategy is to identify important sources of variation in the population and then select a sample that reflects this variation" (Singleton and Straits 2005: 133). Purposive sampling was most ideal for this research design because it was important to choose books that are widely used in college classrooms to get a better understanding of the messages that are being sent to a greater number of students. Because of a limited time frame in which to complete the project I created a self-contained sample of the most popularly used textbooks in the field.

Currently, there are over 40 introductory sociology textbooks on the market (Manza Sauder and Wright 2010). Because of this large population, I was initially unsure from which authors I should draw my sample. To mitigate this issue I contacted the director of the American Sociological Association (ASA) Department of Research on the Profession and the Discipline and requested assistance in finding the most popularly used textbooks for the introduction to sociology course. She directed me to a list on the ASA website; this list was provided as a resource for teaching introductory sociology courses. The sample consists of nine textbooks excluding the readers. These textbooks were written by fifteen authors and published by five publishing companies. Upon further research I found that the texts in this sample reflected the mainstream top-selling introductory sociology textbooks (Suarez and Balaji 2007) making it ideal for my research.

I utilized three resources to obtain the newest edition of these texts. First, I contacted professors in the sociology department at American University and ask to borrow the textbooks

if available this yielded four books. Second, I contacted professors in the sociology departments at neighboring D.C. universities and ask to borrow available textbooks which yielded one textbook. Finally, I rented two of the texts from an online source. I was unable to obtain two textbooks due to the lack of availability.[2] This reduced my sample from nine to seven textbooks. To determine where Black women were mentioned in the text, I searched the indexes for words and phrases that I thought would yield discussions of Black women. In each of the 7 textbooks, I searched the indexes for the terms "African Americans," "black," "black Americans," "black feminism," "discrimination," "family," "feminism," "gender," "intersectionality," "race," "racism" and "women." I wrote down the coinciding page numbers to all the topics that were listed under these headings. Then, I went through and read each page taken from the indexes and typed every phrase that mentioned Black women specifically or alluded to Black women, for example, "black mothers," and "black female-headed households."

The number of excerpts/passages that mentioned or alluded to Black women varied between the textbooks from 4 in one book to 27 in another. After collecting all of them, my data consisted of 94 excerpts.

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[2] The two unavailable textbooks were Tischler, Henry. 2013. *Introduction to Sociology, Eleventh Edition.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth and Macionis, John J. and Ken Plummer. 2012. *Sociology: A Global Introduction, Fifth Edition.* New York: Prentice Hall. Tischler (2013) had not been released at the time that I began data collection and Macionis and Plummer (2012) was back-ordered from multiple websites at the time of data collection.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS

When analyzing the segments of the textbooks Black women were mentioned or referred to in four major ways across all of the texts. The first theme was that of non-representation. In sections not related to the family, race or gender, the texts treated race and gender as if they were non-overlapping identities. When Black women were discussed in the family, gender and race segments they were talked about in three ways: relation to white women as the "norm," as recipients and givers of community support and as poor, single, heads of households. In this section I analyze the meanings and consequences of these representations of Black women.

Separation of Blackness and Womanhood

A longstanding issue in the lives of Black women is membership in two historically oppressed groups. Even while acknowledging intersectionality as important concept in understanding the experiences of women of color, sociology textbooks continue to separate Blackness and woman-ness as if they are non-overlapping identities in sections not specifically related to the family, race or gender. The textbooks relegate Black women into these three sections while in other sections, for example theory, religion and politics, the textbooks mentioned women and racial minorities as separate groups refer specifically to nonwhite groups by labeling them "minority," "Black/African American" or by a specific nationality. These texts also use the term women without a marker of race or ethnicity. When the term "women" is not given a label of race or ethnicity, I presume the authors are referring to the dominant hegemonic group. Thus, when references to "women" are made, I assume that they are referring to white women. Textbooks from which this theme did not emerge, labeled women according to their race or ethnicity and labeled ethnic groups according to their gender. This pattern of separation,

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however, was repeatedly used in various ways in these texts to compare or contrast the experiences of minorities as similar or different to those of women.

One way in which this separation was used was in the discussion of disadvantages and progress in the workforce. Consider one example of how gender is separated from race across my data: "Although predictions are not always reliable, sociologists and labor specialists foresee a workforce increasingly composed of women and racial and ethnic minorities" (Schaefer 2012:400). And another example, "these trends, however, do not mean—as popularly believed—that minorities and women are routinely taking jobs from White men" (Andersen and Taylor 2012:376). On the surface, these segments seem to have a positive message of progress in the workforce however, this dichotomous separation seems to neglect the fact that Black women one, exist and two have always been members of the workforce dating back to slavery. These authors state that women *and* minorities are entering the job force without mention to women who are minorities. Furthermore, the second example while trying to refute "popular beliefs" about the dangers of "women and minorities" working, merely reproduces the language of white male entitlement. This is done ensuring the audience that white men's job security is not at risk when women and men from various race and ethnic groups start entering the workforce. By separating "women" and "minorities," these authors erase Black women and their experiences from the equation.

A similar erasure of the Black women, through the separation of race and gender is found in a discussion about the glass ceiling:

> Women and minorities, on average, occupy lower positions in the organization. Although a very small number of women and minorities do get promoted, there is typically a glass ceiling effect, meaning that women and minorities may be promoted but only up to a certain point…The glass ceiling is the term used to describe the limits to advancement of women as well as racial-ethnic minorities, experience at work. Many barriers to the

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advancement of women and minorities have been removed, yet invisible barriers still persist (Andersen and Taylor 2012:379).

Here, the authors explain what the glass ceiling is and mention how it affects "women" *and* "minorities." Again, because the term "women" is not qualified with a racial or ethnic label, the authors are presumably referring to white women. Black women are not mentioned specifically in this passage, thus according to these texts Black women are either subsumed into the category of women (not likely) or into the category of minority. The practice of labeling Black women as a part of the "Black" or "minority" category as opposed to the "women" category has been and still is a common practice in social science scholarship (c.f. Hull 1982; Spelman 1988).This categorical assignment essentializes the womanhood as experiences of white women and the Blackness and the experiences of Black men. This erasure obscures the qualitatively different experiences of white women and Black women in terms of participation in the workforce. This discursive separation of gender and race also implies that the barriers to promotion are the same for white women as they are for people of color and thus ignores the fact that because of race, Black women face barriers that white women do not.

The separation of race and gender as mutually exclusive identities in these texts is not limited to discussion of the workforce; consider another example in my data: "Just like African Americans are victimized by racism, women in our society are victimized by sexism. Sexism is the ideology that one sex is superior to the other. The term is generally used to refer to male prejudice and discrimination against women" (Schaefer 2012:273). Here, the author attempts to define sexism by making a parallel to racism. He posits that one group (African Americans) experience one type of oppression (racism) while another group (women) experiences a different kind of oppression. By doing so he, again, creates the image that African Americans and women are two separate categorical groups that face a similar—albeit distinct—victimization. This

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definition leaves no room for the Black woman who has been, to use his terminology, victimized by the interlocking of sexism and racism or what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) calls the "matrix of domination." For her, the two oppressions cannot be separated so neatly. Speaking of Black women's situation as the addition of two oppressions implies that racism and sexism are distinct and reintroduces (or reinforces) the idea that Black women can choose which identity is more "fundamental" (Spelman 1988).

The pattern of separation of Blackness and womanhood in these introductory sociology textbooks is evidenced in their discussion of issues of inequality as experienced by "women *and* minorities" but not women who are minorities. The treatment of women and minorities as two non-overlapping groups works to erase Black women and their experiences. In these segments of the texts Black women are not represented at all. An obvious consequence of this lack of representation is the elimination of significance in the meaning of Black womanhood. And an undermining of the experiences of Black women that is different from those of white women and Black men. And as Black feminists have argued for decades it is imperative to examine the ways in which sexism is raced and racism is sexed to better understand the oppression of women of color. By failing to acknowledge Black women's existence in certain instances these texts further subjugate Black women as a group.

When separating Blackness and womanhood in sections not related to the family, gender or race, the textbooks inadvertently subsume Black women into one of the two groups. While this practice could be seen as inclusive, it has the consequence of obscuring the differences between groups, overlooking critical sociological analysis and thus has the effect of exclusion. Writing about inequality and other social issues in ways that exclude Black women, reinforces

the notion of marginality to the readers because it gives the impression that Black women's

experiences are not worth mentioning or examining in the grand scheme of sociological analysis.

<p align="center">Discussion of Black Women in
Relation to White Women</p>

When introductory sociology textbooks incorporate discussions of Black women, they do

so in three ways. The most significant is the consistent mention of Black women in relation to

white women to the extent that Black women are positioned as deviant from the White woman

standard or norm. All of the textbooks positioned white women's experience in health, income,

education and family life as normal or ideal and then compared Black women's experiences to

those norms. This comparison emerged as a consistent theme throughout all of the textbooks.

However after deeper analysis, I noticed nuanced ways in which these comparisons were made.

When the textbooks compared Black women's role in the family to that of white women, Black

women's experiences were positioned as deviant from the norm. When textbooks compared

disparities between white women and Black women in educational and monetary attainment, the

comparison was done in a way that obscured the role of racism by shifting the blame for the

disparities from racism and discrimination to Black women, themselves. In this section I will

analyze the theme of Black women as deviant and its variation in my data.

All of the textbooks compared Black women to white women using specific statistics to

illustrate the differences between the two groups. Consider this exemplar in my data that

compares Black women to white women. In this discussion the placement of white women as the

norm was displayed in the absence of racial categorization:

> Blacks have higher rates of child bearing outside of marriage, they are less likely to ever
> marry and they are also less likely to marry after having a nonmarital birth (344)….single
> parenthood is associated with high rates of poverty in the United States…Throughout
> most of the twentieth century, black families were more likely than white families to be
> headed by a female. In 1960, 21 percent of African American families were headed by

> females; among white families, the proportion was 8 percent. By 2010, the proportion for
> black families had risen to more than 44.3 percent, while that for white families was 15.2
> percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2010n)…Female headed families are more
> prominently represented among poorer blacks (Giddens et al. 2012:344)

In this quote, the authors begin by saying that "Blacks have higher rates of child bearing outside

of marriage" but they do not specifically state the comparison point. The lack of specificity raises

the questions: Whose rates of childbirth outside of marriage are Blacks' higher than? Blacks are

less likely to marry than whom? It is clear by the mentioning of white families and white women

later in the excerpt that the authors are comparing the rates of Black unwed motherhood to that

of whites. Again, when categories are left unmarked, in this case when no racial identity is

assigned, the authors are referring to the dominant group. Because white people are the dominant

hegemonic group, racial categorization often eludes them. Thus I understand the lack of naming

a distinct group as the point of comparison as a way of standardizing white women. By not

indicating the comparison point in the first sentence the authors are normalizing the white

experience of motherhood and showcasing how the Black experience deviates. The authors go on

to discuss how the rates of female headed families differ among Blacks and whites. This

discussion further establishes white women as the standard or ideal by associating female-headed

and single parent households that are more prevalent among Blacks with poverty.

Within the theme of Black women as deviant women emerged a subtheme of Black

women being responsible for the deviations from the white norm. This theme only appeared

when texts discussed monetary or educational attainment and my analysis has implications for all

comparisons of Black women to white women. In this example, Black women are assigned

responsibility for income disparity with the use of speed race imagery:

> Black women fare relatively better but still lag behind white women today, earning just
> 89.6 percent as much…Between 1979 and 2009, inflation-adjusted earnings of black
> women grew by 25 percent, but this increase lagged behind that of white women who

experiences a 32 percent increase in earnings during the same period (Giddens et al. 2012:324).

It is evident here that the authors are trying to describe the inequalities that exist between white women and Black women with regards to income increases over the years. In doing so the authors use the phrase "lagged behind" twice when referring to Black women's income increase lagging behind that of white women. The phrase "to lag behind" evokes the imagery of a speed race in which Black women are losing because they do not earn as much money. This imagery removes the responsibility for these disparities from structural and interpersonal racism that lead Black women to earning less than white women and places it on Black women. By saying "Black women lag behind white women," this imagery implies that equality is attainable if Black women (and their wages) would just pick up the pace.

A similar use of speed race imagery is found in a discussion of the gap in educational attainment:

> Black women earned twice as many bachelor's degrees as Black men (National Center for education Statistics 2002), yet females who are racial or ethnic minorities lag behind White women (King 2000). Despite the sex difference, some researches argue that the gender gap is not nearly as significant as the difference for race or ethnicity and social class (Ballantine and Roberts 2013:360).

Here, the authors acknowledge the progress that Black women have made as measured against Black men. Though this may not be seen as progress to many, the authors describe the trend in a way that is seen as gender progression in education. It is clear from this excerpt, though, that this progress is not enough since Black women still "lag behind" white women in the number of degrees received. This language, again assigns a false blame to Black women for this difference. A "false blame" lacks context and subverts the responsibility for disparities from structural to individual factors. The use of the speed race imagery again obscures the role that racism plays in disparities. However, I found this excerpt contradictory because the authors go on to mention in

the second half that there is a larger racial disparity than there is a gender disparity in education which suggests that racism and classism do play a large role in educational disparities. Despite this contradiction, because the text does not offer any further explanation of the role of racism, it obscures it as an influencing factor on educational disparities.

In order to acknowledge inequality, it is necessary to discuss disparities between groups by way of comparison. However, when textbooks neglect to discuss the context of these disparities they tend to undermine the significance of sociological examination. While it is important to acknowledge Black women as active and capable in their fight for inequality, it is equally important to acknowledge the social factors that contribute to the disparities of which these texts speak. Without the sociological context, these textbooks imply that equality is attainable if Black women progress but do not address the importance of the removal of structural barriers to increased income educational and attainment.

By constantly describing the experiences of Black women in relation to the experiences of white women, these texts establish a pattern of drawing attention to social inequality. However, in the process of doing so, sociology textbooks use language that deemphasizes the social factors that contribute to the inequality between white women and Black women when addressing issues of attainment. An inclusion of these factors would not give readers the impression that Black women are responsible for these disparities. Furthermore these textbooks also neglect to acknowledge the fact that Black women have an identity that is not related to white women's identity. In this constant comparison, authors seem to suggest that being a Black woman means being different (i.e. less than) a white woman. While the texts are successful in showcasing the effects of racial and gender oppression of Black women, this comparison to

white women suggests that liberation from oppression requires that Black women become like white women.

<div align="center">

Black Women as Givers and Recipients
of Community Support
</div>

The second way in which Black women are discussed in the contexts of the family, race and gender sections in introductory sociology textbooks is as support systems in their communities. This theme emerged from most of the textbooks; they discussed community support, emphasized the resourcefulness of Black women and the mutual benefits of sharing parenting responsibilities. Textbooks that did not discuss Black women as givers and receivers of community support only talked about Black women in the context of dominant culture rather than in Black culture or Black communities (see previous section). In this section, I analyze this theme of community support and all the variants in my data.

One way in which the theme of community support came across in my data is as a coping mechanism for Black women to deal with inequalities. Consider this example:

> It is true that in a significantly higher proportion of Black than White families, no husband is present in the home. Yet Black single mothers often belong to stable, functioning kin networks, which mitigate the pressures of sexism and racism. Members of these networks predominantly female kin such as mothers, grandmothers and aunts— ease financial strains by sharing goods and services (Schaefer 2012:314).

The author begins this excerpt by comparing the structures of Black families to that of white families. As mentioned earlier, this is problematic in the establishment of a Black woman identity. However, what I found most interesting in this excerpt is the suggestion that although Black women are more likely to be single mothers, they are also likely to be members of communities of women that help them to cope with the perils of racism and sexism. This act of giving and receiving support is not just something that Black women do because it is convenient, this community support is essential for them to "mitigate the pressures" of being Black and

women in a racist patriarchal society. Here, community support is treated as a coping mechanism that helps Black women deal with the stresses of oppression. The author goes on to write that these networks "ease financial strains by sharing goods and services," because they are not specific about who's sharing what with whom, I understand it to mean that all the members of the networks share goods and services with each other. Thus Black women are seen here as engaged in an act of collectivism that aids in the preservation of their community.

Consider another exemplar in my data where, in a similar manner, the theme of community support is discussed as a means of preservation:

> Supportive ethnic enclaves are also found in African American inner-city neighborhoods of predominantly single mothers and children. Stack (1998) found that women created support networks—sustaining each other through sharing of child care and resources (Ballantine and Roberts 540).

In this excerpt, the theme community support is discussed as a method of survival. The authors proclaim that Black women "sustain each other" through this support by sharing responsibilities and resources. "Sustain each other" suggests that Black women are helping each other survive in the difficult environment which includes raising children and supporting a family. The authors are unclear about which resources are shared but given the context of the passage they are presumably referring to resources that are necessary for survival such as food, money, transportation and other necessities that can be shared amongst members of the community. In this example Black women are represented as a system of support.

Another way in which community support was talked about was through a discussion of othermothering:

> *Othermothers* may be a grandmother, sister, aunt, cousin, or a member of the local community, but she is someone who provides extensive childcare and receives recognitions and support from the community around her (Collins 1990:119) This term emerged from the experience of African American women, whose historically dual

responsibilities in the family and work have meant that they have a history of creating alternative means of providing family care for children (Andersen and Taylor 2012:302).

Here the authors point out that not only do the mothers receive support from othermothers but, othermothers are acknowledged and supported in their endeavor to care for the children in the community. Again, there is an emphasis on reciprocity; there is a cycle of giving and receiving support. It is important that the authors note that the concept of othermothering emerged from the Black experience of motherhood. Even in the absence of Black mothers due to time spent at work, children still receive "family care." This suggests that not only are Black women resourceful in finding new ways to care for a family but that their experiences have encouraged them to develop a definition of family that is distinct from the traditional definition because it includes these othermothers who may or may not be biologically related to the children for whom they are providing care.

I found it interesting that only one of authors referred to these groups of women as family. The use of the phrase "kin network" instead of "family members" reinforces the strict definition of what a family is and the idea that only certain relatives (i.e. spouse and children) are to be considered "family." Through this theme of community support, Black women are represented in different ways throughout the data. When community support is talked about as a mutually beneficial relationship, Black women are represented as coping with the race, class and gender oppressions. They are depicted as resourceful in finding survival strategies that sustain the community.

<u>Poor, Single Heads of Households</u>

Introductory sociology textbooks frequently represent Black women as poor single mothers who are often referred to as heads of households. This theme incorporates race, gender

and class in the description and treats Black women as a sociological case study. This theme emerged in all of the textbooks but it came across in two distinct ways. Most of the textbooks mentioned statistics about or trends referring to Black women as poor single mothers and/or heads of households as a way to describe the dynamics of the Black family. The texts that follow this pattern routinely discuss Black women as lacking agency and being stuck or trapped in their situation. However, the texts that did not follow this pattern, explained the social factors that contribute to the phenomenon of Black women as lower/working-class single mothers.

An exemplar that exhibits the first pattern in my data represents Black women as passive victims in the struggle of poverty.

> The underclass includes many African Americans who have been trapped for more than one generation in a cycle of poverty from which there is little possibility of escape (Waquant 1993, 1996; Waquant and Wilson 1993, Wilson 1996).These are the poorest of the poor. Their numbers have grown rapidly, over the past quarter century and today include unskilled and unemployed men, young single mothers and their children on welfare, teenagers from welfare-dependent families, and many of the homeless. They live in poor neighborhoods troubled by drugs, gangs and high levels of violence. They are the truly disadvantaged, people with extremely difficult lives who have little realistic hope of ever making it out of poverty (Giddens et al. 2012:217).

Here, the authors generalize the "underclass" as being comprised of Black women and their children on welfare. The association of the word "underclass" and African Americans creates an image of a caste system in the United States in which Black women and men are at the bottom.. This discussion of the underclass represents Black women as passive in the struggle of poverty. The use of the passive voice in the phrase "They are the truly disadvantaged," implies that poverty "just happens" to a group of people without any social context or assignment of responsibility. The passage goes on to further imply the lack of agency in Black women and other members of the so-called underclass to escape poverty. In this passage, poverty is

something that defines certain Black women since they have "little realistic hope of ever making it out."

Though most of the texts represent Black single motherhood as problematic, those that do not follow this pattern resist the hegemonic representation of Black women in different ways. One way in which this is done is through providing social and cultural context. Consider an example of this subtheme that provides an explanation as to why the "Black female head of household" phenomenon exists:

> One reason for the increase in single-parent households among African American women is that there are 1.81 million more African American women than men (U.S. Census Bureau 2007), due in large part to high mortality and incarceration rates of African American males. Although African Americans value family, many poor men cannot fulfill the economic role of husband and father because the number of jobs available to less-educated men is decreasing (McLeod 2004; Wilson 1987). Although the percentage of births to unmarried women has increased over time, it has leveled off for African Americans in recent years (Ballantine and Roberts 2012:339).

In this excerpt, the authors use Census data and other forms of evidence to explain why there is a large proportion of Black families headed by women. They explain that there are simply more Black women than there are Black men. When using the phrase "due to in large part" the authors assign a significant amount of the blame of this female to male ratio to mortality and incarceration rates. With this explanation, the authors shift what is frequently analyzed as a micro level problem to an issue that incorporates macro level issues. Furthermore, the authors go on to dispute commonly held beliefs that more Black women are unwed mothers than white women and that the number of unwed Black mothers is on the incline.

Another way in which the hegemonic representations Black single motherhood as a negative aspect of Black womanhood is resisted in this second subtheme is the critique the norm of motherhood and family:

Scholars like W.E.B. DuBois had argued all along, however, that African American female-headed families were the outcome, rather than the cause of racial oppression and poverty…If Black women didn't work to the pay the rent, put food on the table and take care of the kids who would?... After all, this particular type of family [nuclear family] evolved from the socially constructed separation of home and work—a separation rooted in the upper in the upper classes—so, of course, the experiences of most African American families stray from the norm. In fact, asserts Patricia Hill Collins, women of color have never fit this model (Conley 2011:259).

Here, the author includes the analyses of two prominent Black scholars, DuBois and Collins to explain why Black women were often heads of households and to problematize the "normative" definition of family. Historically, family studies in the United States have used a monolithic definition of the family which automatically positions different family structures as deviant from the norm. Collins (1998) suggests that using an intersectional approach would reduce the marginalization of women of color whose families do not look like that traditional family unit consisting of a mother, father and children. The author does just that by acknowledging the biases in how 'family' is conceptualized.

Also consider this final exemplar of the second subtheme in which the authors describe an empirical study of poor, Black, teenage mothers that examines the extent to which hegemonic representations of teenage motherhood are based in real experiences.

Sociologist Elaine Bell Kaplan knew that there was a stereotypical view of Black teen mothers that they had grown up in fatherless households where their mothers had no moral values and no control over their children. The myth of Black teenage motherhood also depicts teen mothers as unable to control their sexuality, as having children to collect welfare checks, and as having families who condone their behavior…Kaplan found that teen mother adopt strategies for survival that help them cope with their environment, even though these same strategies do not help them overcome the problems they face. Unlike what the popular stereotype suggests, she did not find that the Black community condones teen pregnancy; quite the contrary, the teens felt embarrassed and stigmatized by being pregnant and experiences tension and conflict with their mothers who saw their pregnancy as disrupting the hopes they had for their daughters' success. These conclusions run directly counter to the public image that such women do not value success and live in a culture that promotes welfare dependency…Instead of simply

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stereotyping these teens as young and tough, Kaplan sees them as struggling to develop their own gender and sexual identity. Like other teens, they are highly vulnerable, searching for love and aspiring to create a meaningful and positive identity for themselves. But failed by the educational system and locked out of the job market, the young women's struggle to develop an identity is compounded by the disruptive social and economic conditions in which they live (Andersen and Taylor 2012:8).

Here, the authors include the questions and findings of a research study on Black teenage motherhood. Kaplan, a Black sociologist, used ethnography to examine the experiences of Black teenage mothers. The authors report the findings from Kaplan's study that refute the stereotype of Black teenage mothers as complacent. Instead, these young women are depicted as being normal teenagers with the use of the phrase "like other teens." They did not represent Black teenage mothers deviant from the teenage norm but showed ways in which Kaplan's study puts their experience and behaviors into perspective. These women however, are unlike other teens in that there are social and cultural realities in which they have to live their lives. It is important to note that in this exemplar the use of the analyses of a Black woman scholar; by doing so the authors indirectly represent the voices of the women in the study. They did not incorporate any direct quotes from the women in the study and instead represented them through the words of Kaplan. One significant consequence of this type of representation is that Kaplan's research can be seen as a valid and responsible way to conduct sociological work on Black women.

Sociology textbooks often discuss Black women as being poor single mothers. There was no variety in Black women's socioeconomic status in the textbooks. Whenever class was mentioned or alluded to in regards to Black women, there was direct association with poverty and single motherhood. There was, however, variation in how the texts presented this theme. Textbooks that included some type of scholarship or analysis from Black sociologists tended to resist the hegemonic representation of Black women as poor single mothers. These texts did so by providing social factors as explanations of the high rates of single motherhood, challenging

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the traditional definition of family, and providing insight from Black single mothers themselves that dispute commonly held stereotypes. There are two notable consequences of this representation. First, it is problematic that these books only associate Black women with poverty and single motherhoods because this consistent association fails to give readers any variation in the experiences of class status of Black women and may lead to the continuation of stereotypes. It seems that according to these textbooks, to be a Black woman is synonymous with being poor.

On the other hand the second consequence of this theme, particularly the subtheme, is that readers may come to recognize the social context surrounding Black single motherhood, and challenge the take-for-granted nature of such stereotypes. Though resistance to the hegemonic representations of Black single motherhood is visible in some of these texts, it is the minority voice and may not have an impact on the reader's impressions of Black women at all. The marginalization of resistance in the textbooks themselves could work to further perpetuate the subalternity of Black women.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

Prevalence (and Resistance) of Hegemony

The theory of hegemony states that the dominant group obtains and maintains its

dominance through consent of the dominated classes. This consent is obtained because the

dominant group has control of the media and other social institutions such as educational systems

to the extent that the hegemonic group's interests are accepted as the interests of the entire group.

Since the dominant group has that power to represent itself as well as other groups, the

hegemonic images of non-dominant group members are often negative, and/or unrealistic if they

are represented at all. In the case of the representation of Black women in introductory sociology

texts, hegemonic images dominate but in certain instances have been challenged or resisted.

In introductory sociology textbooks we see that there is a pattern of non-representation in

sections other than those dedicated to the family, gender and race. This pattern of exclusion

supports Stone's (1996) argument that women (and men) who are racial and ethnic minorities are

ghettoized into certain subjects in sociology textbooks as opposed to being integrated throughout

the texts. Outside of these three sections, Black women are not specifically mentioned in

discussions of "women and minorities." This lack of representation reflects a historical trend of

categorizing Black women as women *or* Black. By subsuming the experiences of Black women

into those of Blacks (Black men) or of white women, much is lost in the analysis of inequalities

or oppression because of the unique experiences of Black women. The treatment of Black

women as members of one group or another at any given time suggests that they "experience one

form of oppression as Blacks (the same thing that Black males experience) and that they

experience another form of oppression, as women (the same thing that white women

experience)" (Spelman 1988:122). This pattern of separation neglects the interlocking effects of intersectional oppression and in the process erases Black women. This erasure in these discussions of inequality reinforces hegemonic power in a number of ways. The most significant being that if a group is not being represented it cannot logically form a counter or progressive hegemony that challenges the existing one.

These texts also reveal a pattern of relational representation in which Black women are constantly compared to white women. This theme across the data reinforces the white woman as the norm. As Crenshaw (1995) argues when whites and their experiences are associated with normative behaviors and positive characteristics, the comparison of Blacks to whites automatically reinforces the subordination of Blacks as deviant "others." Non hegemonic groups do not have the power to decide what is normal. Thus the construction of normality is a result of hegemony and also reinforces hegemony. Audre Lorde once wrote "Black women speak as women because we are women…" This statement emphasizes that Black women's blackness does not make them any less women. Scholars who take an intersectional approach criticize the idea of the essential woman because it is exclusive and divisive. Comparisons are important in the study of inequality but if relational representation is the most common way that Black women are being represented, we are being denied an identity that is unique.

The third emergent theme in the data is that of community support. Black women are represented as both givers and receivers of community support in which Patricia Hill Collins (2000) argues is an integral part of Black motherhood and the Black family. Othermothering is a key example in how the concept of family has changed over the course of history for Black people. These textbooks in their description of othermothering as a means for community survival use language to depict Black women as more than just victims of oppression insomuch

as they have found a way to "mitigate" societal pressures, and "sustain each other" in the midst

of difficulty. While this theme reveals a more positive representation of Black women we must

remember that

> Even though many Black women are able to overcome difficult situations, Black women
> are not 'Superwomen' devoid of needs and emotions. […] Carol Stack indicates clearly
> that although Black families have developed survival strategies, which do satisfy certain
> needs, other needs are left unmet" (Higginbotham 1982:96).

It is important to acknowledge the collectivism in these support networks because it presents an

image of Black women that is not commonly seen in popular culture (Collins 2000). However,

we must keep in mind the conditions that have made forming these types of networks necessary

for Black women. The depiction of "Black women as resourceful in the face of difficulties […]

is to be appreciated. Yet the current state of the field [of sociology] calls for more empirical work

and the development of a perspective which seeks to reveal the complex lives of Black women"

(Higginbotham 1982:97).

The final theme that emerged from the data represented women as poor single mothers.

This was the most prominent theme across all of the textbooks and in many cases they simply

described Back single motherhood as a taken for granted notion. However, as we see in the

subtheme that emerged, some of the texts challenged the stereotype by contextualizing the

factors that contribute to Black single motherhood and challenging the idea of the "traditional

family" as normal.

This subtheme challenges hegemonic depictions of Black women insomuch as it gives

the readers new ways of thinking about and explaining Black single motherhood. This is an

important component in formulating a counter-hegemony because certain images are so deeply

ingrained that it is hard to refute their taken-for-grantedness. This resistance, however, is not

enough because the prevalence of this theme suggests that motherhood is an essential part of

Black womanhood because Black women are frequently referred to in these textbooks in the context of motherhood. This relegation of Black women to the realm of the family has two significant implications. First, it excludes Black women who are not mothers and second, it suggests that Black women are most significant in discussions of the family as opposed to other core sociological topics.

<div align="center">Responsible Representation</div>

There was a noticeable resistance to the hegemonic representations of Black women in the introductory sociology textbooks especially in the themes of community support and poor single motherhood. However, patterns of exclusion from certain sections of the texts and constant comparisons to white women in these texts are problematic in understanding of the meaning of Black womanhood; one suggests that Black womanhood is nonexistent in certain circumstances and the other that Black womanhood is contingent upon white womanhood. In the previous section, I discussed how these representations create the meaning sociology gives to Black womanhood. The findings of my research led me to address the issue of responsible representation.

It is important to note that none of the texts were authored by minority women (and only one minority man). The patterns in my analysis show that when authors incorporate the scholarship of Black sociologists, more attention is given to context when discussing Black women's 'condition.' I know that the average student in an introductory class is not going to know that a particular sociologist is Black just by looking at the name in the citation. However, my research suggests that when authors do incorporate these voices, hegemonic representations are more likely to be challenged or resisted. This is not to suggest that all textbooks have multiple authors from diverse backgrounds, but as seen in examples from the data, the use of

scholarship from Black women scholars can provide the argument for the inclusion of Black

scholars. I do not suggest that Black women scholars are the gatekeepers of all knowledge about

Black womanhood, to say that would suggest that the experiences of "ordinary women of color"

(see Higginbotham) are unimportant and further subjugate them to the margins of academia.

Nevertheless, I am suggesting that many Black women scholars tend to make more conscious

efforts in rearticulating the standpoint of Black women than white men. Many Black women

scholars see it as their responsibility to represent themselves and other women of color in ways

that are not congruent with the hegemonic representation (Fine et al. 2000).

The representation of a subaltern group is a complex issue. As scholars, sociologists must

recognize the privilege that exists in the ability to represent another group. And it is key to

understand that through the representation of others, we as scholars are "participating in the

construction of their subject positions" (Alcoff 1991:80). Alcoff argues that the act of

representation is not just a means of reflecting reality; it is a means of constructing a situated

identity. In the case of Black women in introductory sociology texts, the representations are not

necessarily erroneous but it is important to acknowledge how they are mediated by discourse

power and location as well as their material effects.

<center>Note on Intersectionality</center>

Interestingly, none of the textbooks that I used in my sample had "intersectionality" in

the index. This surprised me because it is a term that has gained wide popularity in sociology

especially in regards to inequality. As I read further, it became clear to me that these textbooks

do not infuse the concept of intersectionality very well. This is apparent in the consistent

separation of race/ethnicity and gender in a majority of the core sociological subjects. Perhaps,

this is done for simplicity purposes as most introductory textbooks follow a specific outline of

<center>44</center>

topics. But I argue that not incorporating intersectional analyses is doing a disservice to the students who read these books.

To further the argument for intersectional approaches it is necessary to point out that even when Black women are mentioned, it is a certain type of Black woman. These texts only hint at elder Black women when discussing "othermothers" and grandmothers" as givers of support. Similarly there is no mention of Black nonheterosexual women in these texts. In order to have a comprehensive analysis of the experiences of Black women, sociology textbooks cannot limit their discussions to young, heterosexual, Black women as this is another means of essentialism and exclusion.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

There were a number of limitations to my research that must be addressed before I articulate its contributions. First, I only used words and phrases that appeared in the indexes of the textbooks, therefore there is a possibility that there were pertinent phrases that were not included in my analysis. Second, my sample was also relatively small considering the vast number of introductory sociology textbooks currently on the market. Despite these limitations my research has contributed to the current literature examining sociology textbooks. It has demonstrated the need for more qualitative and mixed-method examinations of *how* as opposed to solely *how often* groups are represented and discussed. The frequency of minority group mentions in these textbooks is not indicative of progress if the groups are mentioned in ways that reproduce hegemonic images. My research has also demonstrated the need for scholars to the role that they play when representing other groups.

It is evident that the nature of Black womanhood is complex and that in different circumstances being a Black woman can mean different things. In sociological scholarship it is imperative that researchers account for that complexity to avoid sweeping generalizations that work to further subjugate already marginalized groups. I hope that my research has shown the ways in which discussions about Black women (or any other marginalized group) have implications about what it means to be a member of that group that expand beyond the boundaries of the classroom. I believe that if scholars incorporate the idea of representing people's experiences responsibly in their research and in their textbooks, there's a greater chance to move the field in a direction that refutes myths about Black women and redefines Black female identity (Higginbotham 1982:93). If sociologists want sociology to be a discipline that

challenges stereotypes and work to expose and eliminate inequality, increased participation of women and men of color would be beneficial to the discipline and the students.

There is a need for more research examining how sociology textbooks (and textbooks in other fields) represent minority groups. Future studies should incorporate how introductory sociology students are interpreting the representation (or lack thereof) in these textbooks as well. This type of research would allow scholars to be self-critical and more intentional about the scholarship that is being produced in the field and its contribution to a more equal society.

APPENDIX A

COMPLETE TEXTBOOK SAMPLE

1. Anderson, Margaret and Howard Taylor. 2012. *Sociology: The Essentials, Seventh Edition.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

2. Ballantine, Jeanne H. and Keith A. Roberts. 2011. *Our Social World: Introduction to Sociology*. Newbury Park, CA: Pine Forge Press.

3. Conley, Dalton. 2011. *You May Ask Yourself: An introduction to Thinking Like a Sociologist.* New York: W.W. Norton.

4. Giddens, Anthony, Mitchell Dunier, Richard Applebaum and Deborah Carr. 2012. *Introductions to Sociology.* New York: W.W. Norton.

5. Henslin, James. 2013. *Essentials of Sociology: A Down to Earth Approach, Tenth Edition.* Boston, MA: Pearson.

6. Kornblum, William and Carolyn Smith. 2011 *Sociology in a Changing World, Ninth Edition.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

7. Schaefer, Richard T. 2012. *Sociology, Thirteenth Edition.* New York: McGraw Hill.

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