# *Identities and Inequalities Exploring the Intersections of Race Class Gender and Sexuality 3rd edition Newman Solutions Manual*

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# Chapter 2
# Manufacturing Identities: The Social Construction of Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality

## Brief Chapter Overview

- Perspectives On Identity
  - Essentialism
  - Constructionism
- Definitions of Differences and Identities
  - Racial/Ethnic Identities
    - The Social Construction of Race and Ethnicity
    - Multiracial Identities
  - Class Identities
    - How do Americans Determine Class Standing?
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  - Gender Identities
    - Doing Gender
    - The Sexual Dichotomy
    - Intersexuality and Anatomical Ambiguity
  - Sexual Orientations
    - The Complexities of Sexual Identity
    - Heteronormativity
    - "The Closet"
  - Identities on the Borderlands
- Conclusion

*Investigating Identities and Inequalities—A sociological treasure hunt: The artifacts of identity*

## Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 begins with a discussion on the active processes of making identities through two narratives. The first example is about the transgendering process from man to woman

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(so far as that was possible through internal and external medical treatments). The second example is about the process of going from black to white to black again. The chapter addresses the shifting boundaries between identity categories as well as their intersections. The chapter defines identity and discusses where or in what criteria is identity located. The chapter defines essentialism and constructionism, and raises the question of which, if any, social identifiers exist as natural objective entities, and which emerge from particular cultural and historical contexts and active human processes. Race, ethnicity, class, sex, gender, and sexuality are all defined and reflected upon regarding the poles of essentialism versus constructionism. The chapter concludes with an examination of gay black men on the down low and the consequences they face.

## Key Terms

Note: consists of both terms highlighted/defined by the author, and terms suggested for instructor emphasis.

**Identities**: These are definitional categories used to specify to oneself and to others who one is; social locations that determine one's position in the world relative to other people.

**Multiple identities**: We all possess many identities be they based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, sexuality, oc-cupation, education, family, age, geography, or some other aspect of our background. At any given moment, some of these identities can overshadow the others.

**Essentialism**: This focuses on what are believed to be universal, inherent, and unambiguous "essences" that clearly distinguish one group from another.

**Constructionism**: An alternative to essentialism is constructionism (also known as the social construction of reality perspective)**,** which argues that what we know to be real and essential is always a product of the culture and historical period in which we live.

**Race**: To most people, race is a category of individuals who share common inborn biological traits, such as skin color; color and texture of hair; and shape of eyes, nose, or head. It is widely assumed that people who are placed in the same racial category share behavioral, psychological, and personality traits that are linked to their physical similarities.

**Ethnicity**: Sociologists typically use the term ethnicity to refers to the nonbiological traits—such as shared ancestry, culture, history, language, patterns of behavior, and

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beliefs—that provide members of a group with a sense of common identity.

**Honorary white**: The government created a category of "honorary white" for rich, powerful Asians (Hu-DeHart, 1996). Less affluent Asians—such as immigrant laborers from China—weren't afforded this privilege and remained "colored.".

**Social class**: It is a group of people who share a similar economic position in society based on their wealth and income.

**Caste system**: It is a stratification system in which one's socioeconomic status is determined at birth and considered unchangeable. Ancient Hindu scriptures identified a strict hierarchy consisting of elite priests, warriors, merchants, artisans, and untouchables who were so lowly they were actually considered to be outside the caste system.

**Social mobility**: It is the movement of people or groups from one class level or another.

**Upper class**: This group is the highest-earning 5% of the U.S. population. It is usually thought to include owners of vast amounts of property and other forms of wealth, major shareholders and owners of large corporations, top financiers, rich celebrities and politicians, and members of prestigious families.

**Middle class**: This group roughly comprises of 45% of the population. This group is likely to include college-educated managers, supervisors, executives, small-business owners, and professionals (for example, lawyers, doctors, teachers, and engineers).

**Working class**: This group comprises of about 35% of the population. They typically includes industrial and factory workers, office workers, clerks, and farm and manual laborers. Most working-class people don't own their own homes and don't attend college.

**Lower class or underclass**: This group is also referred to as the "poor," (about 15% of the population) and consist of people who work for minimum wages or are chronically unemployed. These are the people who do society's dirty work, often for very low wages.

**Moral boundaries**: In terms of social class, this consist of assessments of such qualities as honesty, integrity, work ethic, and consideration for others.

**Cultural boundaries**: These are identified on the basis of education, taste, and manners. Class distinctions often go beyond upper-class snobbery and distaste for the lifestyles of "lower" classes.

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**Poverty line**: It identifies the amount of yearly income a family requires to meet its basic needs. Those who fall below the line are considered officially poor; those above the line are not poor.

**Sex**: It is typically used to refer to the biological markers of maleness or femaleness.

**Gender**: This designates the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of masculinity and femininity.

**Sexual dichotomy**: This implies the natural division of sex into two categories: male and female. These categories are considered to be biologically determined, permanent (you are what you're born with), universal (males are males and females are females whether one lives in Seattle, Seoul, or São Paulo; in the 15$^{th}$ century or the 21$^{st}$ century), exhaustive (everyone can be placed into one of the two categories), and mutually exclusive (you can only be one or the other sex; you can't be both).

**Transsexuals**: This includes people who not only identify with a different sex but sometimes undergo hormone treatment and surgery to change their sex.

**Intersexuals**: These are individuals in whom anatomical sexual differentiation is either incomplete or unclear. They may have the chromosomal pattern of one sex but the external genitalia of another, or they may have both ovaries and testicles.

**Sexual orientation/sexual identity**: It indicates the sex for whom one feels erotic and romantic desire.

**Heteronormative**: This implies a culture where heterosexuality is assumed to be the normal, taken-for-granted mode of sexual expression. In a heteronormative culture, heterosexuals are socially privileged because their relationships and lifestyles are affirmed in every facet of the culture.

**The closet**: It is a metaphor popularized in the 1950s that has played a prominent role in gay life in the United States. Traditionally, remaining in the closet has been a life-shaping strategy of concealing one's sexual identity to avoid interpersonal rejection and social discrimination. Historically, the closet has been a rational and understandable response to the typical treatment afforded gays and lesbians in the workplace, in the criminal justice system, in families, and in everyday encounters with others.

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**Being outed**: The ever-present threat of being "outed," or forced to publicly acknowledge homosexuality, has long served as a means of social control, keeping homosexuals silent and invisible.

**Coming out**: This implies acknowledging homosexual identity; coming out of the closet; the process of discovering and/or developing a homosexual identity (Source: Fausto-Sterling; R. W. Connell; Tomas Almaguer).

**Gay Black vs. Black gay**: This is a concept that emphasizes the intersectionality of identities where gay Black men may emphasize their sexual identity (gay Black) or their ethnoracial identity (Black gay) and remain largely closeted (Source: Cochran and Mays).

## Discussion Questions, Activities, and Assignments

1. Deirdre McCloskey asserted that "the world does not demand 100 percents and essences," yet the bulk of this chapter provides a great deal of evidence to the contrary. In what ways does the world demand essences, and in what ways does it allow for the recognition of social construction? What situations (historical, political, social) do you think demand essentialism more than others?

2. How easy or difficult is it to "pass" in terms of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and class? Do identities other than sexuality encourage us to "closet" ourselves? If yes, in what ways?

3. The following two websites contain information on government food and nutrition guidelines (*may be paired with activity/discussion on food and health from Chapter 8*).
   U.S. Department of Agriculture's new food and nutrition guidelines: http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=food-nutrition
   The USDA's food and nutrition information center—search for the cultural and ethnic resources: https://fnic.nal.usda.gov/professional-and-career-resources/ethnic-and-cultural-resources
   a) Compare the guidelines; is one of the culturally specific pyramids better based on the new standards? What other differences are notable? b) Scout out several places where food is available for purchase—grocery stores, fast food and other restaurants, and convenience stores. Make note of the following: the apparent socioeconomic and racial/ethnic identity of the location, the cost of items recommended in the guidelines, the availability of items recommended in the guidelines, and the accessibility of the location (Is there a bus or other public transit nearby? If so, how

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far? Are there sidewalks? Does it seem to be only accessible by car?). Based on your research, which location affords the easiest and most affordable way to meet the new food and nutrition guidelines? c) Based on the new guidelines, what is a subsistence diet, and how much would it cost? Is the current poverty line enough to meet the new dietary/health standard?

4. "We all possess multiple identities, be they based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, sexuality, occupation, education, family, or some other aspect of our background. At any given moment, certain identities might overshadow the others. For instance, if you suddenly find yourself in a crowd of people of a different race than yours, that feature of your identity will no doubt become quite salient to you. When circumstances change, though, a different characteristic is likely to emerge as the most noticeable feature of your identity" (70). With this set of assertions in mind, keep a detailed journal for one week about the various situations in which you find yourself. Make note of the times and places in which the various aspects of your identities shift and are more or less salient. If you find that you DON'T notice much shift in salience, think about why. Do you typically find yourself with others like yourself? Is your most salient identity one that is normative?

5. "The individual level is over-socialized, but at the same time it becomes the locus of resistance and the potential arena of conflict. Individual identity is subject to social pressures and to new forms of power, which require a 'structural,' systemic level of analysis" (Melucci, 418). In light of this quotation, how easy/difficult is to locate yourself socially?

6. What does blackness mean? What does whiteness mean? Are these "meanings" mere stereotypes, or do they signify something real? Should blacks give up blackness? Why, or why not? Should whites give up whiteness? Why, or why not? What is the future of race? Of racism? (*These question are also appropriate for Chapter 9.*)

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