COMMENT AND REPLY

Comment on Ferree and Hall, ASR, December 1996

STILL THE MISSING FEMINIST REVOLUTION? INEQUALITIES OF RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN INTRODUCTORY SOCIOLOGY TEXTBOOKS

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Ferre and Hall (1996, henceforward F&H) assert that mainstream sociology—or more specifically, the “non-problematic” sociology found in introductory sociology textbooks—treats gender, race, and class in “profoundly unequal” ways (p. 929). They argue that introductory texts typically treat class primarily as a macro-level phenomenon, race as a group-level (or meso-level) phenomenon, and relegate gender to micro-level processes centered on childhood socialization. Their empirical foundation for these claims is a survey of introductory sociology textbooks published between 1983 and 1988. F&H extend a long-standing feminist critique of stratification research, inferring that feminist scholarship has had minimal impact on sociologists’ understandings of gender inequality (cf. Acker 1973; Stacey and Thorne 1985).

F&H advance a number of claims. They suggest that feminist critiques of stratification research emphasize “four recurrent themes” which are largely absent from mainstream models: (1) the significant contribution of “domestic and public violence . . . to the subordination of women”; (2) the “discounting of women’s earnings” in the distribution of status within households; (3) the consequences of the household division of labor; and (4) male-dominated political systems (pp. 932–33). Because gender differences are presumed to be an outgrowth of socialization processes in conventional stratification theory and introductory texts, F&H argue that textbook authors also fail to examine gender inequality from cross-national or cross-cultural perspectives. Instead, these texts adopt a “victim blaming” (p. 934) perspective, which explains gender inequalities in terms of the different psychological attributes of men and women.

The intellectual stakes raised by the F&H paper are substantial, and their use of introductory textbooks as indicators of the state of “noncontroversial” sociology is a novel and appropriate window on the sociological mainstream. In this comment we reconsider F&H’s conclusions about the treatment of race, class, and gender in sociology textbooks. We use more current (1995–1999) texts for this investigation. While replicating the most important of F&H’s analyses, we also introduce new measures of macro- and meso-level textbook content that bear on F&H’s claims, but which were not considered in their paper.

DATA AND MEASURES

Our reconsideration of F&H is based on a systematic analysis of the universe of 38 sociology textbooks on the market at the time we began our investigation. (See Appendix A for a list of the textbooks.) To ensure a complete sample of all textbooks on the market, we consulted the 1998 edition of Books in Print, looked for advertisements in recent sociological journals, and contacted textbook publishers. We used the most recent edition of each textbook available.

In our content analyses, we searched for textual material relevant for the main indicators employed by F&H in their study, while
also adding a number of additional measures. Given the range of issues we were interested in, we read each text’s chapters on race, class, gender, work/economy, socialization, and political sociology and/or social movements. In addition to reporting the average number of pages on several of these topics, we have also found it useful to distinguish between the percentage of texts with no discussion of a particular subject, those with less than a page, and those with more than a page. This information suggests how much a text emphasizes a particular issue.

F&H examined their sample of 1980s textbooks for material (both text and pictures) associating race, class, or gender with socialization, and for material on cross-cultural and cross-national material in relation to race, class, and gender. In addition to replicating that analysis using more recent introductory textbooks, we also examined the books for additional topics related to the arguments advanced by F&H: textual material that explicitly links socialization to race, class, and gender inequality; the social construction of race, class, and gender; and race, class, and gender conflict. Finally, we added new measures to systematically examine F&H’s claims that the introductory textbooks ignore sexual violence, the exclusion of women from the public sphere, macro analyses of gender and economic inequality, and the interaction between race, class, and gender.

**Primary Variables**

**Socialization and social divisions.** Following F&H, we first looked for all material that discussed socialization as a source of the production or reproduction of race, class, or gender differentiation. (Note that such discussions may, or may not, be explicitly linked to inequality.) We were deliberately broad and inclusive in what we counted as “socialization” arguments in relation to race, class, and gender in these texts, and included both childhood and adult socialization processes involving families, peer groups, media influences, and adult roles.

**Socialization and inequality.** Following F&H’s focus on socialization arguments, we next looked for evidence that text explicitly linked socialization processes to the production or reproduction of inequalities. In other words, we looked for statements such as “[T]he upper class maintains its continuity over time through marriage and the socialization of its children in private schools” (Appendix A: Hess, Markson, and Stein 1996:211) or “[F]amily, schools, work, media, toys and games, and language use operate together in the process of gender socialization, reproducing and reinforcing stereotypes of appropriate and inappropriate gender roles and behaviors” (Appendix A: Neubeck and Glasberg 1996:427). Here our interest is in comparing how and to what extent the texts actually use socialization as an explanation for the production or maintenance of inequality across the cases of race, class, and gender.

**Social construction of race, class, and gender.** Going beyond F&H, we also looked for clear statements in the textbooks arguing that class, race/ethnicity, or gender are constructs arising out of social and political processes that vary across time and space. For example, “[G]ender is socially constructed, it is not fixed, but variable—from one society to another and one time to another” (Appendix A: Kammeyer, Ritzer, and Yetman 1997:329); or “Gender is simply too variable across cultures to be considered a simple expression of the biological categories of sex . . . [W]hat it means to be female and male is mostly a creation of society” (Appendix A: Macionis 1997:356–57). By definition, social constructionist arguments entail meso- and/or macro-level social, political, and ideological dynamics in the production of group differentiation.

**Group conflict.** F&H assert that a focus on group conflict is typical of the presentations of race/ethnicity divisions in the texts, but not for class or gender (e.g., see p. 945). However, they do not provide any concrete measures of group conflict. To test the F&H claims on current textbooks, we examined them for mentions of the labor movement, the civil rights movement, and the women’s movement as indicators of group.
conflict. As the three most important social movements challenging inequalities and power hierarchies along class, race, and gender lines, respectively, discussions of these movements represent clear and direct examples of a text’s attention to concrete, group-based conflict.

**Cross-national and cross-cultural focus.** F&H suggested that the macro-level focus of the textbooks in regard to class can be expected to lead to much higher levels of comparative discussions of class inequality than for either race/ethnicity or gender, with the micro-level framing of gender producing the least comparative analysis. F&H’s analysis of the 1980s textbooks supported that contention. We reexamine the issue by replicating their analysis by simply identifying the average of pages (or fractions of pages) per textbook in the race, class, and gender chapters devoted to (1) cross-national (i.e., non-U.S.) text or (2) cross-cultural text. Cross-national text examines inequality processes in other countries or in comparative perspective; cross-cultural text refers to “tribes” or “nations” not equated with specific states. As in the original F&H paper, we also include a summary measure of “cross-societal” text, which is the average number of pages in each text devoted to either cross-national or cross-cultural text.

**Pictures in inequality chapters.** F&H insist in their article and elsewhere (Ferree and Hall 1990) on the importance of the “visual sociology” that pictures provide to student readers of introductory texts. They report that pictures (and the accompanying captions) emphasizing socialization were much more common for gender than for class or race. They also report that cross-national and cross-cultural pictures were much more common in the class chapters than in the chapters on race or gender. To test these propositions, we counted all pictures with captions referring to socialization or cross-national/cross-cultural comparisons in the inequality chapters.

**Other Variables**

We also looked for textual material on four issues that F&H claim were usually absent from the introductory textbooks they examined:

**Gender and economic inequality.** We searched for text on gender and economic inequality as evidence of the attention paid to macro-level factors such as labor markets, firms, and occupational sex segregation.

**Household division of labor.** We looked to see how and to what extent the textbooks consider the gendering of the household division of labor.

**Sexual violence as a source of male domination.** Here we looked for textual mentions of sexual violence (e.g., rape, spousal abuse, sexual harassment in the workplace) in relation to gender inequality.

**Gender and politics.** We identified text discussing the roles and/or exclusion of women from politics as an indicator of attention to macro-level sources of gender inequality.

**Race, class, and gender interaction.** Finally, we looked to see if F&H’s (p. 936) finding that there was virtually no discussion of the intersection of different types of social inequality in the earlier texts they examined persists in the current texts.

**Results**

Our results are summarized in Tables 1 and 2. The first two rows in Table 1 reveal that 84 percent (32 of the 38 recent texts) devote a full chapter to gender stratification, in contrast to just 37 percent (13 of 35) texts from the 1980s examined by F&H. The average page counts show that nearly as many pages were devoted to gender as to race or class. By the mid-1990s, sociology textbook authors were no longer deemphasizing gender in comparison to race and class.

Discussion of the role of socialization in relation to group differentiation is more common for gender (an average of 3.6 pages), and is discussed in more detail, than for either class (1.1 pages) or race (.5 pages). It is worth noting, however, that differences in the amount of text devoted to gender socialization are smaller than that reported by F&H for the 1980s texts, and further that attention to class socialization has grown over time. Indeed, when contemporary textbook authors invoke socialization arguments, they are no more likely to
make explanatory claims about the causal impact of socialization on the reproduction of gender inequality than they were about the reproduction of class inequality. In other words, those textbook authors who did mention socialization in relation to class inequality were as likely to treat it as a causal factor as they were in the case of gender. In general, however, F&H’s finding of a greater emphasis on gender socialization has largely persisted in recent introductory textbooks. The use of visual images, as revealed in the pictures used in chapters on race, class, and gender, also show no significant change from the pattern reported by F&H for the 1980s.

With respect to meso- and macro-level analyses of inequality, however, we find little support for F&H’s conclusions when either their measures or the new measures introduced here are applied to more current textbooks. First, note that fully 92 percent of the texts refer to the social construction of race, and 87 percent do so for gender. Such discussions, by definition, imply that neither “race” nor “gender” are simple social at-
tributes of individuals, but rather convey to students that they are the result of social and political processes that translate background characteristics into concrete group differences. Second, the amount of text devoted to cross-national and cross-cultural variation related to gender inequality approximates that of class inequality. While there is on average almost one page more of aggregate cross-societal text on class than on gender (and more than one page for race), the proportion of texts including a significant amount (at least a full page or more of text on cross-national differences) is identical for class and gender. In the case of cross-cultural analysis, there is even slightly more text in relation to gender than class. Perhaps the most striking finding reported in Table 1 in relation to non-U.S. textual material is the paucity of comparative analysis in regard to race/ethnicity. Finally, in terms of “visual sociology,” we also find no support for F&H’s claims about the greater comparative focus in the texts on class inequality. Of the 229 pictures we counted in the 38 texts that had either a cross-national or cross-cultural focus, the largest number (97) were in the gender chapters, followed by class (83) and race (49).

Meso-level group conflict is said by F&H to be more common in discussions of race than for either class or gender. Our systematic test of this hypothesis examines the most direct expressions of group conflict: those produced by social movements based on class, race, or gender identities (the labor movement, the civil rights movement, and the women’s movement respectively). Table 1 reports that the largest amount of text was devoted to the women’s movement—on average a full page more than text on unions and a half-page more text than on the civil rights movement. When textbook authors consider group conflict, it is gender, not race or class, that receives the most attention.

In Table 2, we present the results of our findings about the inclusion of issues that feminists have raised about the multiple sources of gender inequality, but said by F&H to be largely absent or minimized in introductory sociology textbooks. More specifically, we looked for text on (1) the economic aspects of gender inequality, (2) the household division of labor, (3) sexual violence as a factor in producing gender inequality, (4) the exclusion of women from politics, and (5) mentions of the intersection of race, class, and gender.

<p>| Table 2. Statistics on Additional Content Measures: 38 Introductory Sociology Textbooks, 1995 to 1998 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average number of pages on gender economic inequality</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with no pages</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with less than one page</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with one page or more</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of pages on household division of labor</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with no pages</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with less than one page</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with one page or more</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of pages on sexual violence</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with no pages</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with less than one page</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with one page or more</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of pages on gender inequality in politics</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with no pages</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with less than one page</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with one page or more</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of textbooks with explicit reference to race/class/gender interaction</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 2, we present the results of our findings about the inclusion of issues that feminists have raised about the multiple sources of gender inequality, but said by F&H to be largely absent or minimized in introductory sociology textbooks. More specifically, we looked for text on (1) the economic aspects of gender inequality, (2) the household division of labor, (3) sexual violence as a factor in producing gender inequality, (4) the exclusion of women from politics, and (5) mentions of the intersection of race, class, and gender.

On the whole, these additional measures provide clear evidence of a multidimensional model of gender inequality in recent texts, rather than the simplistic micro-level model identified in earlier texts by F&H. Fully 97 percent of the texts devoted at least one full page of text to discussing the economic sources of gender inequality, and most devoted many more (producing an average of 4.7 pages across all of the textbooks). This

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2 We found (results not shown) that the more current texts devoted an average of 10.7 pages to discussions of minority groups within the United States (i.e., African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, etc.). The large amount of textbook material devoted to different groups within American society appears to have largely displaced material on non-U.S. analyses of race/ethnic divisions.
material typically included discussions of occupational sex segregation, “glass ceilings,” and the extent and sources of persistent wage differences between men and women working in the same occupation. Most of the texts were either implicitly or explicitly critical of narrow human capital approaches which would be more consistent with a micro-level gender trait approach. 82 percent of texts discuss sexual violence, and exactly the same percentage discuss the household division of labor. An average of 2.2 pages devoted to the former, and 1.2 to the latter. Of particular importance, we found that versions of Hochschild’s (1989) popular “second shift” metaphor are employed by a majority of these texts, clearly indicating some of the links between intra-family household dynamics and labor market dynamics that appeared to have been ignored in the earlier texts examined by F&H. Seventy-six percent of the textbooks discuss gender inequalities in the political sphere, with an average of slightly more than one page of text per book. Finally, we found that 76 percent include at least some explicit discussion of the intersection of race, class, and gender inequalities, although most have not yet fully integrated such accounts into a general model of social stratification.

DISCUSSION

F&H argued that the “nonproblematic” sociology found in introductory textbooks reduces gender stratification to micro-level processes related to socialization. Our re-analysis of more current textbooks show that—long after gender specialists in sociology have abandoned a psychologistic approach—socialization models of gender differences remain in wide usage in the introductory textbooks. But this is hardly the only story, or even the most important one, told about gender inequality in these texts. Textbook authors almost universally adopt a broad multidimensional model of gender inequality that includes, in addition to socialization, attention to both meso- and macro-level processes. Our replication of the measures used by F&H, and the new measures we have introduced here, document this multidimensional view and suggest also that the amount of attention paid to macro- and meso-level factors in discussions of gender inequality is approaching that for race and class.

Thus, the overriding impression about mainstream sociology conveyed by F&H’s paper fails to capture the growing impact of feminist questions on research agendas in the field of social stratification in general (cf. Grusky 1994), as well as on introductory textbook authors. We offer one final check on this claim. The growth of scholarly attention to gender stratification as a meso- and macro-level process can be easily seen by examining the flagship journal in the discipline. We looked for papers on gender stratification in issues of the American Sociological Review in the 20 years before the F&H paper was published (1977–1996). A simple count of regular articles (listed in Appendix B) showed that in the first five year period (1977–1981), there were 10 such articles; in 1982–1986, there were 10; but by 1987–1991 there were 18, and from 1992–1996 there were fully 30 papers addressing aspects of gender stratification. Although this is a very heterogeneous group of studies, none of the papers on gender stratification published in the decade before the F&H paper reduce gender to a micro-level process centered on socialization.

Movements challenging the status quo routinely emphasize the degree to which they are excluded from access to positions of power and influence. During most of sociology’s history as a discipline, feminists have rightly made such claims, and there are still arenas of social scientific inquiry that remain hostile to feminist questions and scholarship. But acknowledging success is also important. Most of the mainstream sociology of the late 1990s, even that in introductory textbooks, embraces a broad view of gender inequality that is not in accord with the conclusions drawn by F&H. Clearly, the study of gender inequality from a macro approach is much more central to the mainstream of the discipline today than it was just 15 years ago. While textbooks typically lag behind state-of-the-art research, they too are catching up with the broader trends in the discipline.

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Appendix A: Introductory Sociological Texts Used in the Analysis


Appendix B. Regular Articles and Comments on Gender Stratification Published in the American Sociological Review, 1977 to 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Volume</th>
<th>First Author’s Name</th>
<th>Number of Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Oppenheimer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>McLaughlin, Rosenfeld, Smith-Lovin, Swafford</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Burstein, Woll</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Cramer, Rosenfeld</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Gender Stratification and Paradigm Change

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**Elaine J. Hall**  
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The comment by Manza and Van Schyndel (2000, henceforward M&V) presents two related issues. The first is the extent of actual change in textbooks over the past decade or so and how best to measure that change. The second, and more central to sociological thinking about stratification, is the nature of a gender-relations perspective theoretically and how it differs from the conventional gender roles/sex roles approach. M&V seem to follow the latter model; we (Ferree and Hall 1996, henceforward F&H) analyzed textbooks from a gender-relations perspective. Given the difference in our paradigms, we are not surprised that M&V are more satisfied with what they find in introductory sociology textbooks than we have been. But to decide whether there has been much change in the books themselves, either in the quantity of coverage of gender issues or in the theoretical perspective employed, it is first necessary to clarify the differences in paradigms. We thus begin by addressing the issue of what gender theory is, and only then do we turn to the problem of assessing change in textbooks.

### Gender-Relations Versus Sex-Role Theories

The gender-relations perspective locates the origins of inequality between men and women in the social organization of relations...