5-2017

Exploring Individual's Explanations of Economic Mobility through the Gaze of Intersectionality

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Exploring Individual's Explanations of Economic Mobility through the Gaze of Intersectionality

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts in Sociology

by

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Arkansas Tech University
Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, 2010

May 2017
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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Abstract

This study looks at whether or not adopting intersectionality as a theoretical framework allows for a better understanding of individual's explanations of economic mobility, rather than examining variables such as race, gender, and class as mutually exclusive from one another. The reason for this follows from the understanding that race, gender, and class can intersect to create unique views and opinions of the world and how it operates. Using the 2009 PEW Economic Mobility Survey as a secondary data source, I ran statistical regressions and interpreted the results.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my greatest appreciation to all my graduate committee members. Dr. Yang went above and beyond with regard to devoting his time and energy when helping me with statistical coding and insight on statistics in general. As for Dr. Morimoto, her perceptive and intelligent critiques inevitably shaped the course of how this thesis concluded, which significantly improved its quality.

Finally, I would wish to extend the utmost respect to my thesis advisor, Dr. Anna Zajieck. Without her support and the time dedicated to reviewing and critiquing my work this project would have never come to fruition. It was with her integrity and high expectations that I was able to produce a work of much loftier worth than it would have otherwise been, and because of that, I am infinitely grateful to her and what she stands for.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my mother and father.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Although income inequality in the United States has reached historic levels (Johnston 2005)**,**

economic disparity incites relatively little public protest in contemporary society. As Madrick

notes, "America is now more unequal than at any time since the 1920s, and it has happened with

hardly any discussion" (2003, p. 242). Interestingly enough, despite rising inequality in the

country individuals do not abstain from subscribing in the belief of possible upward mobility.

More Americans now than 20 years ago believe it is possible to start out poor only to work hard

and become rich (Scott and Leonhardt 2005), a belief that exists regardless of the fact that

upward mobility has not increased over the past 30 years.

The academic attention surrounding individual beliefs with regard to wealth and income

inequality started in the 1970s. In one of the first large U.S. studies of attributions for poverty,

Feagin (1975) found that individualistic explanations were supported more strongly than other

explanations, a finding that is indicative of the national tendency to view poverty as a sign of

personal and moral failure (Kate 1989; Shirazi and Biel 2005). In the late 1980s, using public

data on beliefs about 38 often-mentioned causes of wealth and inequality, Smith (1989) looked at

how social class position could be used to explain differences in respondents' explanations.

Smith concluded that individuals coming from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds were far more

hesitant to adopt a meritocratic worldview. In other words, these respondents did not believe

wealth and poverty were solely related to a person's individual talents and abilities, and that

social factors outside of a person's control contributed to their ability to move up the economic

ladder. Smith argued that reflecting their personal life conditions, lower and working-class

members of society were thus more likely than their middle and upper-class counterparts to point out social mechanisms that impeded people's upward mobility.

Moving beyond the question of social class position, in 1999 and 2003, Flanagan and her colleagues argued for the importance of gender as an indicator for the kinds of ideological explanations individuals used for describing the causes of downward mobility (Flanagan and Jenkins 1999, and Flanagan and Campbell 2003). Specifically, they posited that due to societal practices and norms, women were more likely to be socialized into adopting compassionate attitudes, and thus, show consideration especially to individuals who were poorer by identifying factors outside their agency that led to their social position.

Furthermore, looking at race/ethnicity as a factor affecting people's views of upward and downward mobility, Hunt (1996, 2007) reported that minorities (in particular blacks and Latinos) were more likely to use both fatalistic and merit based arguments in comparison to white respondents, who used mostly merit based explanations. Minorities used fatalistic explanations when asked questions about factors that led to downward mobility, and merit based explanations when asked questions relating to what pertinent factors contributed to upward mobility.

Statement of Problem

Important to highlight regarding these academic publications is how class, gender, and race all played a salient role in the adoption of respondents' ideological worldviews. However, a concern regarding these published articles is how researchers only looked at the importance of class, gender, and race as mutually exclusive rather than overlapping social locations and identities (e.g., Smith 1989, Hunt 1996, 2007, Flanagan and Jenkins 1999, and Flanagan and Campbell 2003). To address this concern, it might be best to apply an alternative theoretical framework. That is, a framework that is finer tuned to exploring the connections between one's

social location and their ideological worldview as it relates to upward and downward mobility, rather than the one-dimensional approach used in previous studies. The reason for this is that valuable information might be lost by researchers addressing these independent variables as being isolated from one another. With the knowledge in mind that class, gender, and race are all salient variables utilized in the past, I argue that adopting an intersectional framework and studying these variables as intersecting one another allow for a more complex understanding of how ideologies are endorsed.

Also important to highlight is the fact that the majority of researchers involved in intersectional analysis use qualitative research (McCall 2005 and Covarrubias 2011). Researchers who have adopted the qualitative approach have increased understanding of complex narratives that provide rich detailed descriptions of experiences from a diverse array of individuals (e.g., Delgado Bernal 2001, Solorzano 1998, Solorzano and Yosso 2001, 2002, and Yosso 2006). However, regardless of the fact that intersectional quantitative work aimed at sorting out the multiple effects of race, class, and gender has and still is atypical, it remains an excellent and purposeful field of research (Browne 1999, Browne and Misra 2003, and Manza and Brooks 1999). For instance, Covarrubias (2001) writes that although quantitative intersectional research "does not provide us a detailed narrative of what happened within the lives of individuals, it gives us the patterns that have resulted from varied experiences shaped by ascribed variables." Indeed, quantitative intersectionality helps tell a broader story (Covarrubias 2001, p. 91) describing the complex nature and patterns of intersectional inequalities.

Research Question

I am interested in what substantive differences exist between my independent variables as they relate to my dependent variables. For this particular study my independent variables are

made up of 18 different race x gender x class combinations those being: Upper-Class White Males, Upper-Class White Females, Upper-Class Black Males, Upper-Class Black Females, Upper-Class Hispanic Males, Upper-Class Hispanic Females, Middle-Class White Males, Middle-Class White Females, Middle-Class Black Males, Middle-Class Black Females, Middle-Class Hispanic Males, Middle-Class Hispanic Females, Lower-Class White Males, Lower-Class White Females, Lower-Class Black Males, Lower-Class Black Females, Lower-Class Hispanic Males, and Lower-Class Hispanic Females.

For my dependent variables, I used three questions pertaining to economic mobility. To measure respondents' opinions regarding economic mobility, they were asked a series of questions that may contribute to one's ability to move up or down the economic ladder. In the survey, economic mobility was defined as an individual's ability to move up or down the income ladder over a lifetime, or from one generation to the next. For each factor a respondent was read, they had to identify the aforementioned factor as being 1) essential, 2) very important, 3) somewhat important, 4) not very important, or 5) not important at all as the factor related to one's economic mobility. The three questions I chose concerned the importance that hard work, a person's race, and a person's gender contributed to one's ability to move up or down the economic ladder.

Purpose of Project

The purpose of my project is to discern if intersectionality provides a better theoretical framework to utilize in order to understand individual explanations of upward and downward mobility. This approach might indeed prove more useful than utilizing a less finely tuned or one-dimensional approach, as was previously done in prior studies. Respected scholar and African-American philosopher Cornel West once wrote, "Race matters" (1993), but as an

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intersectional critique would suggest race, gender, and class all matter because they not only structure day-to-day interactions and opportunities, but they also structure ideological perspectives on our social world (Anderson 1996). Keeping with this insight, race, gender, and class are not distinct and isolated realms of experience; thus they should also be treated as such in the empirical arena. By incorporating an intersectional framework, my research can provide a crucial insight that was lacking in the previously published literature.

Project Significance

The importance of utilizing intersectionality as a vehicle for further understanding the topic of individuals' ideological opinions as they relate to upward and downward mobility is a primary goal for my project. Since intersectionality simultaneously acknowledges race, gender, and class as salient variables it is ideally suited for my research question. Likewise, I would also like to capture certain complexities of individual explanations of economic mobility by taking a quantitative approach. Considering the fact that researchers already have concluded that separately race, gender, and class have a significant effect on personal or individual explanations of economic mobility these variables interlocking together deserve empirical attention.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework/Empirical Literature Review

I will cover two topics as they relate to my theoretical framework 1) I will give a brief history of

intersectionality and its uses in sociology 2) I will discuss how intersectionality brings

complexity to my research topic.

A Brief History of Intersectionality

      Although intersectionality has recently been introduced into the lexicon of sociological

vocabulary, its intellectual roots can be traced back to the nineteenth century (Murphy et al.;

2009: 17). This included the writings of prominent African-American thinkers such as Anna

Julia Cooper, W.E.B. Du Bois, Mary Church Terrell, Frances E.W. Harper, and Ida B. Wells.

Academically, the history of intersectionality can be divided into three periods. The first period

was during the early 1900s Reconstruction era. During this period, African-Americans

experienced new levels of freedom; however, this time was still remarkably punctuated by

oppression and discrimination for blacks, especially for black women, and it was the newly

educated African-American women who articulated the plight of this era through their writing

and through means of activism.

      The second period was the modern black feminist tradition, which was born from the

works of black feminists, "who felt far removed from White, middle-class, liberal feminist

discourse" (Murphy et al.: 2009: 21). Lastly, it was during the 1970s through the 1990s that

sexuality as categorical classification or an intersection of oppression came into theoretical play,

bringing about the tertiary period of intersectionality. Insofar as a cardinal definition of

intersectionality, one would posit that, "socially constructed categories of oppression and

privilege, such as race, class, gender, and age simultaneously interact to create unique life

chances" (Murphy et al.; 2009: 7). Consistent with this framework is the understanding that race, class, and gender are interconnected determinants of social inequalities that, "serve as basis for developing multiple systems of domination that affect access to power and privileges, influence social relationships, construct meaning, and shape people's everyday experiences" (Murphy et al,; 2009: 7).

Intersectionality and My Research Question

In the realm of intersectionality, three types of intersectional analysis exist (McCall 2005): anti-categorical (deconstructive), intra-categorical (standpoint), and finally inter-categorical (comparative). Anti-categorical is the most successful in satisfying the demand for complexity and is used to deconstruct analytical categories because social life is considered to be irreducibly complex (McCall 2005). However, with regard to my research, the methodology that best suits my topic is inter-categorical. Inter-categorical analysis recognizes the existence of relatively stable categories or groups of individuals, such as race, class, and gender; while at the same time allowing one the ability to cross-classify analytical categories with other analytical categories.

Gender, for example, assumes two groups (men and women) that can be cross-classified with class, an analytical category that could assume three groups (upper, middle, and lower-class), thus producing six cross-classified analytical groups. Finally, researchers (McCall 2005, and Alexander and Mohant 1997) who adopt the inter-categorical methodology are concerned with the relationships between groups. So in the case of my research, this might include something such as whether or not upper-class black men differ from other groups in their opinion of whether or not coming from a wealthy family increases one's likelihood of upward or downward social mobility.

For an intersectionality theorist, by adopting a one-dimensional perspective one loses the complexities gained by a more nuanced framework. Intersectionality expands beyond this one-dimensional approach and rather than condensing people's experiences as influenced by a narrower definition of the self (Valdes 1995, 1997), acknowledges overlapping identities.

Empirical Literature Review

Initial interest in the causes of upward and downward mobility and other factors that generally contribute to wealth and poverty can be traced back to the works of Karl Marx and his writings on class (Allen 2010). In our society today, wealth has extreme importance in the everyday lives of individuals, and for important reasons. For example, Altonji and her colleagues wrote that:

> Wealth is important in any society. It influences access to capital for new business, is a source of political and social influence, and provides insurance against fluctuations in labor market income. It influences the quality of housing, neighborhoods, and schools a family has access to as well as the ability to finance higher education (Altonji et al.; 2000: 38).

In other words, wealth can be an indicator of success. This possibly explains the contentious debate surroundings wealth, in addition to the rich diversity of explanations accounting for upward and downward economic mobility.

Regarding individual's explanations or opinions as to one's economic mobility, two explanations reign supreme in academic literature. The first is the notion that individualistic characteristics such as talent and ability determine one's likelihood of moving up or down the economic hierarchy. This explanation is commonly referred to as meritocracy, or as a merit based/individualistic explanation. The second explanation is the idea that individuals are not entirely in control of their own fates for the reason that societal factors outside of one's ability determine their position in society, at least economically speaking. This can be referred to as

fatalistic/structural explanations. On the periphery, as McNamee and Miller write in their book The Meritocracy Myth (2009), "Merit and non-merit factors are not mutually exclusive explanations for individual economic outcomes since such outcomes have both individual and structural causes." This third explanation could be defined as the dual explanation.

Turning attention to empirical analysis proper, analysis on various demographics has proved enlightening in the realm of academically published literature. Feagin (1975) found that individual attributions or merit based explanations were supported more strongly than structural explanations. However, with a closer inspection, Feagin found that white Protestants and Catholics, people with middle-income earnings, and those with moderate levels of education favored individualistic explanations rather than structural; whereas blacks, lower-income earners, and those with lower levels of educational attainment favored structural explanations. Kluegel and Smith (1986: 93) showed that individuals coming from lower statuses had a greater tendency than individuals coming from the upper-class to highlight fatalistic explanations (e.g. lower wages in some business and industries and prejudice and discrimination) when accounting for economic inequalities. Likewise, using public opinion data on beliefs about 38 often-mentioned causes of wealth and poverty, Smith (1989) concluded that those who were wealthier were less likely to question merit based views for wealth and poverty as opposed to those coming from an economically disadvantaged background. Additionally, Emler and Dickinson (1985) found that individuals from working-class families were less likely to endorse merit based causes for economic disparities and factors that contributed to upward or downward mobility in comparison to those from middle-class families and up.

However, using information that was compiled in 1999 and in 2003, researchers (Flanagan and Jenkins 1999, and Flanagan and Campbell 2003) found evidence that suggested

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that just the opposite happened to be the case. That is working-class individuals were more

likely to endorse the belief that one's society was a meritocracy. In contrast, middle-class

individuals were less likely to believe that they lived in a society that was meritocratic and that

factors outside a person's ability accounted for their ability to move up or down the economic

ladder (Flanagan and Campbell 2003: 724). According to Flanagan and Campbell (2003), these

class differences were created from educational differences, meaning that individuals coming

from the middle and upper classes had more education, hence a more complex understanding of

how one could move up or down the economic hierarchy. In this sense, researchers argued that

there was an enlightening effect education had on a person, thus increasing awareness of

inequality and compassion towards the disadvantaged (Hyman and Wright 1979).

Continuing with the issue of class differences, Hunt (1996, 2007) reported that members

of households with lower incomes were likely to support fatalistic beliefs when accounting for

the causes of upward and downward mobility (Hunt 2007: 390). Hunt maintains that this results

from life experiences and one's ability to perceive the disadvantaged conditions one is a part of.

Additionally, taking education into account those with higher levels of education were less likely

to adhere to an either/or mentality. This meant that respondents did not solely hold a merit or

fatalistic explanation, but rather what McNamee and Miller referred to as a dual explanation, or

in Hunt's own terminology a dual consciousness. Hunt writes,

> the argument that individualistic and structuralist beliefs may be combined contrasts with
> the assumption of earlier research that people take an either-or approach…research shows
> that these dichotomies are not always warranted since seemingly inconsistent or
> contradictory beliefs can be combined into compromised explanations (Hunt 1996: 295).

Moving on to race/ethnicity, in relatively recent years, Hunt (1996, 2007) examined the

effects that these variables played in respondent's explanations of economic mobility.

Originally, Hunt expected that individuals in groups that are disproportionately poor (e.g. racial

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minorities and women) would hold more fatalistic views in comparison to whites and men. According to his research, there was a strong consensus on the importance of fatalistic reasons for downward mobility across respondents of race (blacks and Latinos) than whites. However, it should be stated that both Latinos and blacks were significantly more anti-meritocratic than their white counterparts, with blacks ranking highest with regard to fatalistic views followed by Latinos. Surprisingly, was the finding that Latinos ranked highest on merit based arguments when accounting for upward mobility in comparison to blacks followed by whites. As a result of this, Hunt concluded that racial/ethnic minorities were more likely to have a dual consciousness (using both merit and fatalistic views).

Regarding education, the higher a respondent's level of educational attainment meant a reduced likelihood of using merit based explanations of economic mobility, which was consistent with the enlightening interpretations of educational effects in prior studies (Hunt 1996: 306). Hunt concluded that education is a stronger predictor for whether or not whites and Latinos used merit based arguments in comparison to blacks.

Using information from 4,508 respondents (2,393 women and 2,115 men), Flanagan and Campbell used gender as an independent variable regarding respondent's explanations of economic mobility. Through their study they found evidence to suggest that men were significantly more likely to endorse the belief that one's society was a meritocracy in comparison to women (Flanagan and Campbell 2003: 724). Drawing from previous research, Flanagan and Campbell concluded that women were more altruistic and empathic than men, due to the customary socialization of the genders. Conversely, due to prevailing societal norms, men were raised from an early age to be individualistic and rugged with a desire to be hyper-competitive.

Finally, regarding the only qualitative study discussed in this literature review, Weis and Fine (1996) examined the voices of poor and working-class blacks, Latinos, and white men and the ways in which they fashioned personal social critiques. Weis and Fine argued that members of these social groups, black and white men in particular, create critiques based on their group's social location, that is the position from which one experiences and sees the world. The study used in-depth interviews conducted with 150 individuals from Buffalo, New York and Jersey City, New Jersey. The interviews were split almost evenly among Latinos, blacks, and whites.

Overall, black respondents tended to blame the economy and racism for their inability to move economically upward, whereas white men blamed black men as the source of much of their trouble. Both these groups looked to external factors to account for their social position, thus meaning that they were skeptical of a meritocratic worldview. However, regarding working-class black men, the disadvantage of their social class coupled with their race led them to look at structural or fatalistic factors outside of their control as leading to their social position, more so than working-class white men. Additionally, Weis and Fine cited empirical evidence indicating that upper-class white men had a strong disposition to account for poverty as the result of individualist characteristics as opposed to both working-class white and black men. Based on their study, Weis and Fine concluded that individual social critiques of meritocracy and fatalistic explanations of economic mobility grew out of distinct vantage points dictated by subject locations of any given group.

Here again, I insist highlighting the fact that crucial insight might have been overlooked or lost by avoiding a direct look at the intersections of race, class, and gender. By considering the possible unique factors that might arise or be created by these intersections, it is worthwhile to pursue empirical analysis which utilizes an intersectional framework.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Date and Methods

Returning to my research question, I am interested in what substantive differences exist between my independent variables as they relate to my dependent variables. For this particular study my independent variables are made up of 18 different race x gender x class combinations those being: Upper-Class White Males, Upper-Class White Females, Upper-Class Black Males, Upper-Class Black Females, Upper-Class Hispanic Males, Upper-Class Hispanic Females, Middle-Class White Males, Middle-Class White Females, Middle-Class Black Males, Middle-Class Black Females, Middle-Class Hispanic Males, Middle-Class Hispanic Females, Lower-Class White Males, Lower-Class White Females, Lower-Class Black Males, Lower-Class Black Females, Lower-Class Hispanic Males, and Lower-Class Hispanic Females.

For my dependent variables, I used three questions pertaining to economic mobility. To measure respondent's opinions regarding economic mobility, they were asked a series of questions that may contribute to one's ability to move up or down the economic ladder.

To investigate my research question, I obtained a data set that was drawn from the 2009 PEW Economic Mobility Survey. The survey I obtained from the PEW center was administered between January 27 to February 8, 2009, via phone interviews, using questions regarding economic mobility common to other large-scale questionnaires such as the GSS (General Social Survey). These phone interviews lasted approximately 22 minutes. In all, 2,119 respondents across the United States were interviewed creating for a substantive generalizability. The survey used Census Data (2007 American Community Survey) for the adult population of this country

to establish the overall targets for their base sample and each oversample. According to the

PEW Trust website:

> The survey included oversamples of African-American (517 total cases), Hispanics (520 total cases), and people under the age of 40 years old (497 total cases). Given the growing phenomenon of young people who do not own or answer a land-line telephone, the oversampling among people under the age of 40 was conducted on cell phones. For the base sample, the survey employed a list-assisted Random Digit Dial sample frame where sample records were pulled proportionally based on the population estimates from the 2007 American Community Survey. However, each oversample required different sampling and, for Americans under 40, different calling methods to complete the interview. For both the African-American and Hispanics oversamples, we used a method called density sampling where all the calling was conducted only in telephone exchanges with a high proportion (40 percent or higher) of these minority groups. In addition, Hispanics and African-American respondents were sampled randomly from the base sample. Up to 55 percent of Americans under the age of 40 and 70 percent of Americans under the age of 30 are not reachable using traditional land-line calling; they either do not have or use a land-line phone, preferring to use their cell phones to make and receive calls. Therefore, the entire oversample for the under 40 population was conducted using cell phones. As this calling often incurs some costs for the respondents, reimbursements were provided for complete interviews (PEW.org 2009: 22-23).

Dependent Variables

To measure respondent's opinions regarding economic mobility, they were asked a series

of questions that may contribute to one's ability to move up or down the economic ladder. In the

survey, the verbatim definition of economic mobility was defined as an individual's ability to

move up or down the income ladder over a lifetime, or from one generation to the next.

Respondents were asked to identify a particular factor (e.g. a person's race) as being 1) essential,

2) very important, 3) somewhat important, 4) not very important, or 5) not important at all to

one's ability to move up or down the economic ladder. Out of the sixteen factors read to the

respondents, three salient factors were chosen as my dependent variables. These dependent

variables were hard work, a person's race, and a person's gender. Essentially, hard work is

traditionally viewed as a contributing factor for upward mobility, whereas race and gender are

traditionally viewed as a reason for downward mobility.

Insofar as statistical coding went, each of these variables (hard work, race, and gender) was reverse coded. This meant if a respondent saw a factor as being essential to one's economic mobility they would score a 5, rather than a 1. If a respondent scored a high number value with regards to the question of hard work, the more meritocratic their opinion would be. Conversely, the higher a respondent's score was as it related to the question of a person's race or a person's gender, the more fatalistic their opinion would be.

Listed below are the descriptive statistics for my dependent variables:

(Table One)

Dependent Variables

	Mean	Median	Mode
Hard Work	4.1795	4.0000	4.00
A Person's Race	2.3466	2.0000	1.00
A Person's Gender	2.2913	2.0000	1.00

Looking at the means listed above for my three dependent variables, I can start to develop a story. For example, the mean for hard work (4.1795) shows how the majority of respondents in this survey thought of hard work as very important to one's ability to move up or down the income ladder over a lifetime, or from one generation to the next. In the case of my other two dependent variables' means, race (2.3466) and gender (2.2913), the majority of respondents interviewed in this survey thought of these factors as not very important in one's ability to move up or down the income ladder over a lifetime, or from one generation to the next. These means were consistent with Feagin's findings that on the whole individuals supported merit based explanations in favor of fatalistic views (Feagin, 1975).

Independent Variables

With regard to intersectional quantitative studies, four intersectional alternatives can be incorporated into a statistical model. These include (race x gender), (race x class), (gender x

class), and finally (race x gender x class). Out of these four social location combinations, race x gender x class is the most difficult to interpret by virtue of the fact that one might be left with a multitude of independent variables (Landry 2007: 391). Regardless of this obvious difficulty, these three social locations combined create a more complex and insightful view of reality, better designed to capture the nuances of everyday reality. It is for this reason, I decided to incorporate a race x gender x class model for exploring my research topic.

Originally, there were more than three racial/ethnic groups respondents could choose from; however, there was only an adequate sample of whites, blacks, and Hispanics to do statistical analysis on. Therefore, these were the three racial/ethnicities I included in my analysis. Dealing with gender for this survey respondents could only choose from male or female. Social class was initially comprised of five classes (upper-class, upper-middle class, lower-middle class, working class, and lower class), but in order to reduce the number of independent variables from 30 to 18, I consolidated the number of social classes into three groups (upper-class, middle-class, and lower-class). In my recoded format, I kept upper-class individuals the same as they were in the original coding, whereas my recoded middle-class was comprised of both upper and lower middle-class respondents, and my lower-class was made up by both working and lower-class individuals.

Listed below are the frequencies and percentages of my independent variables:

(Table Two)

Independent Variable Descriptive Statistics

	Frequency	Percentage
Upper-Class White Males	101	4.8
Upper-Class White Females	100	4.7
Upper-Class Black Males	29	1.4
Upper-Class Black Females	24	1.1
Upper-Class Hispanic Males	29	1.4
Upper-Class Hispanic Females	18	0.8
Middle-Class White Males	242	11.4

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(Table Two Cont.)	Frequency	Percentage
Middle-Class White Females	248	11.7
Middle-Class Black Males	81	3.8
Middle-Class Black Females	138	6.5
Middle-Class Hispanic Males	71	3.4
Middle-Class Hispanic Females	110	5.2
Lower-Class White Males	162	7.6
Lower-Class White Females	171	8.1
Lower-Class Black Males	100	4.7
Lower-Class Black Females	149	7.0
Lower-Class Hispanic Males	94	4.4
Lower-Class Hispanic Females	120	5.7

Mediating Variables

For my mediating variables, I decided on four different categories that could have an effect on individual's explanations of economic mobility. These variables were job status, spouse's job status, respondent's political ideology, and finally respondent's educational attainment. For both job status and spouse's job status, respondents were asked to choose from identifying themselves as employed, unemployed, retired, student, or homemaker. Insofar as coding, the finer tuned categories of unemployed, retired, student, and homemaker were all classified as unemployed. Regarding respondent's political ideology participants were asked whether they identified themselves as conservative, moderate, or liberal. Finally, the participants were given the option of picking from six different categories as it pertained to their educational attainment. Those categories consisted of: 1-11th grade, high school graduate, non-college post high school, some college, college graduate, and post-graduate school.

Listed below are the frequencies of my mediating variables:

(Table Three)

Mediating Variable Descriptive Statistics

	Frequency
Respondent Employed	1001
Respondent Unemployed	1035
Spouse Employed	665
Spouse Unemployed	377
Conservative	782
Moderate	654
Liberal	546
1-11th	203
High School	517
Non-College Post High School	30
Some College	561
College Graduate	504
Post-Grad School	232

Research Hypotheses

By incorporating a race x gender x class combination, I am left with 18 independent variables as mentioned above, in addition to my mediating variables. My three dependent variables were the importance that a person's hard work, race, and gender had in determining an individual's ability to move up or down the income ladder over a lifetime, or from one generation to the next.

- **H1:** There will be significant differences in race x gender x class combinations insofar as respondents' opinions as to the importance that hard work has in contributing to a person's economic mobility. These discrepancies will be such that the most to least meritocratic race x gender x class combinations will be as follows: Upper-Class White Males, Upper-Class White Females, Upper-Class Black Males, Upper-Class Black Females, Upper-Class Hispanic Males, Upper-Class Hispanic Females, Middle-Class White Males, Middle-Class White Females, Middle-Class Black Males, Middle-Class

Black Females, Middle-Class Hispanic Males, Middle-Class Hispanic Females, Lower-Class White Males, Lower-Class White Females, Lower-Class Black Males, Lower-Class Black Females, Lower-Class Hispanic Males, and Lower-Class Hispanic Females.

- **H2:** There will be significant differences in my race x gender x class combinations insofar as respondents' opinions as to the importance that race has in contributing to a person's economic mobility. These discrepancies will be such that the most to least meritocratic race x gender x class combinations will be as follows: Upper-Class White Males, Upper-Class White Females, Upper-Class Black Males, Upper-Class Black Females, Upper-Class Hispanic Males, Upper-Class Hispanic Females, Middle-Class White Males, Middle-Class White Females, Middle-Class Black Males, Middle-Class Black Females, Middle-Class Hispanic Males, Middle-Class Hispanic Females, Lower-Class White Males, Lower-Class White Females, Lower-Class Black Males, Lower-Class Black Females, Lower-Class Hispanic Males, and Lower-Class Hispanic Females.

- **H3:** There will be significant differences in my race x gender x class combinations insofar as respondents' opinions as to the importance that gender has in contributing to a person's economic mobility. These discrepancies will be such that the most to least meritocratic race x gender x class combinations will be as follows: Upper-Class White Males, Upper-Class White Females, Upper-Class Black Males, Upper-Class Black Females, Upper-Class Hispanic Males, Upper-Class Hispanic Females, Middle-Class White Males, Middle-Class White Females, Middle-Class Black Males, Middle-Class Black Females, Middle-Class Hispanic Males, Middle-Class Hispanic Females, Lower-Class White Males, Lower-Class White Females, Lower-Class Black Males, Lower-Class Black Females, Lower-Class Hispanic Males, and Lower-Class Hispanic Females.

These three hypotheses are based off findings from the existing empirical research as they related to race, gender and class as their own discrete/mutually exclusive variables. For example, those respondents that were wealthiest, or those respondents that were white, or those respondents that were males were more likely to endorse meritocratic views. Following from this, it seemed logical to assume that upper-class white men would be the most meritocratic group of all of my independent variables across all three dependent variables. Likewise, a group such as lower-class black women was predicted to be one of the least meritocratic groups of my independent variables, following from the fact that those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds had the tendency to abstain from endorsing meritocratic worldviews.

Intersectional Findings

For each of my research questions, I ran regression models (in SPSS) to determine whether or not there was any statistical significance. (Also it should be mentioned that the tables for the three statistical models are shown at the end of this section.)

My first research question was what substantive differences existed between my independent variables as they related to their opinions as to the importance that hard work had in contributing to a person's economic mobility. The independent variable upper-class black females were used as my control variable. The decision to use this group as the control was made after running a preliminary cross-tab to determine which groups were shown to be most and least meritocratic with regard to the importance of hard work. By virtue of the fact that upper-class black females were the least meritocratic group amongst their mostly meritocratic counterparts, it seemed valid to assume that there was something unique about this race x gender x class group. The mediating variables that were controlled for were respondent's that were unemployed, respondent's spouses that were unemployed, respondents who identified as having a liberal political ideology, and respondents that had attained a post-graduate degree.

After running a regression analysis in SPSS, upper-class Hispanic females were the only race x gender x class combination to show any statistical significance. Looking at Table 4 Model 1, upper-class Hispanic females were shown to have a higher probability of endorsing meritocratic views in comparison to my reference group upper-class black females. Returning to the empirical literature, evidence was found showing that individuals from upper-classes had the tendency to support meritocratic beliefs (Emler and Dickinson 1985, Kluegel and Smith 1986,

Weis and Fine 1996, Hunt 1996, 2007); however, in the case of women and minorities, these two groups had the tendency to be fatalistic. In the case of Hispanic minorities, however, Hunt (1996, 2007) found evidence that suggested that this group ranked highest on merit based arguments when accounting for upward mobility in comparison to both whites and blacks. So in this case, the interaction of class and race contributed to upper-class Hispanic females strongly believing merit based explanations. Taking upper-class Hispanic males into account, although this group was relatively meritocratic in their opinions on hard work, they did not show statistical significance.

As regards to the mediating variables, respondents who attended 1-11th grade, had some college experience, or were college graduates showed statistical significance. All three groups were indicated as having a higher probability to show fatalistic opinions, in comparison to respondents who obtained post-graduate degrees. Looking at respondent's who attended school at some point within the 1st through the 11th grade, it could be possible that these individuals belonged to a lower-class group due to their lack of educational attainment. By virtue of the fact that they might belong to a lower-class, they might be skeptical of the importance of hard work as a way to get ahead in the economic hierarchy (Flanagan and Jenkins 1999, and Flanagan and Campbell 2003, Hunt 1996, 2007). As for respondents who attended some college or graduated with a degree, their skepticism of hard work as an important factor for getting ahead might have been a result of the enlightening effect of education talked about in preexisting literature (Hunt 1996, 2007).

My second research question was what substantive differences existed between my independent variables as they related to their opinions as to the importance that race had in contributing to a person's economic mobility. The independent variable upper-class black

females were used as my control variable, to be consistent with the previous and next model. Also, the mediating variables that were controlled in the previous model were once again controlled for in this particular model.

The regression analysis I ran in SPSS showed that none of my independent variables or for any of my mediating variables showed any statistical significance.

My third research question was what substantive differences existed between my independent variables as they related to their opinions as to the importance that gender had in contributing to a person's economic mobility. The independent variable upper-class black females were used as my control variable, as well as the mediating variables that I had controlled for in my previous two models.

After running a regression analysis in SPSS, both lower-class black males and females showed statistical significance. Looking to Table 4 Model 3, both groups showed a much higher probability to hold fatalistic opinions in comparison to upper-class black females. Meanwhile, all other independent variables and mediating variables did not show any statistical significance. Looking at lower-class black females, this group might have seen gender as an imperative factor regarding an individual's economic mobility given the fact that as a group they suffer from being socially marginalized on three levels. Those levels being 1) part of a lower-class, as well as, 2) being a minority and 3) being female which these three levels interacting together is a truly disadvantaged status (Richard Hogan and Carolyn C. Perrucci 1998). Regarding lower-class black males, this group might see the importance gender plays in one's economic mobility due to being part of two marginalized social locations, those being social class in addition to race (Emler and Dickinson 1985, Kluegel and Smith 1986, Weis and Fine 1996, and Hunt 1996, 2007).

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Unexpectedly, utilizing an intersectional framework did little in the realm of offering very much statistical insight. Because of this, I decided to turn to the theoretical alternative of intersectionality, that being a less finely-tuned approach. In other words, rather than looking at race, gender, and class as interacting variables, I decided to run statistical analysis that treated these demographics as mutually exclusive from one another.

(Table Four)

	Model 1 (Work)		Model 2 (Gender)		Model 3 (Race)	
	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.
Upper-Class White Males	0.334	(0.259)	0.114	(0.478)	0.629	(0.455)
Upper-Class White Females	0.384	(0.258)	-0.17	(0.474)	0.289	(0.454)
Upper-Class Black Males	0.0	(0.285)	0.013	(0.522)	0.652	(0.498)
Upper-Class Black Females (REF.)	_____		_____		_____	
Upper-Class Hispanic Males	0.378	(0.3)	0.413	(0.55)	0.978	(0.525)
Upper-Class Hispanic Females	**0.663 ***	**(0.314)**	-0.166	(0.576)	0.389	(0.55)
Middle-Class White Males	0.257	(0.253)	-0.157	(0.464)	0.236	(0.443)
Middle-Class White Females	0.384	(0.284)	-0.127	(0.466)	0.565	(0.445)
Middle-Class Black Males	-0.012	(0.275)	0.834	(0.503)	0.919	(0.481)

(Table Four Cont.)	Model 1 **(Work)**		Model 2 **(Gender)**		Model 3 **(Race)**	
	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.
Middle-Class Hispanic Males	0.286	(0.271)	0.044	(0.497)	0.314	(0.476)
Middle-Class Hispanic Females	0.27	(0.261)	0.114	(0.479)	0.83	(0.458)
Lower-Class White Males	0.241	(0.26)	-0.183	(0.477)	0.142	(0.456)
Lower-Class White Females	0.346	(0.259)	-0.269	(0.474)	0.376	(0.458)
Lower-Class Black Males	0.338	(0.272)	0.596	(0.499)	**1.056 * (0.478)**	
Lower-Class Black Females	0.087	(0.265)	0.307	(0.486)	**0.922 * (0.464)**	
Lower-Class Hispanic Males	0.47	(0.274)	0.37	(0.505)	0.661	(0.479)
Lower-Class Hispanic Females	0.242	(0.27)	-0.002	(0.494)	0.378	(0.473)
Employed	0.082	(0.044)	-0.126	(0.081)	0.019	(0.077)
Spouse Employed	0.057 (0.046)		0.123 (0.085)		-0.153 (0.081)	
Spouse Unemployed (REF.)	_____		_____		_____	
Conservative	0.074 (0.054)		-0.146 (0.099)		-0.034 (0.095)	
Moderate	0.033 (0.056)		0.08 (0.103)		0.078 (0.98)	
Liberal (REF).	_____		_____		_____	
1st-11th Grade	**-0.175** (0.097)**		-0.047 (0.18)		0.174 (0.175)	

(Table Four Cont.)	Model 1 **(Work)**		Model 2 **(Gender)**		Model 3 **(Race)**	
	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.
High School	-0.213	(0.072)	-0.107	(0.133)	-0.039	(0.127)
NC Post High School	-0.131	(0.193)	0.038	(0.355)	0.213	(0.339)
Some College	**-0.208**	**(0.07)**	-0.084	(0.13)	-0.143	(0.124)
College Graduate	**-0.162***	**(0.066)**	-0.055	(0.121)	-0.111	(0.117)
Post-Graduate	_____		_____		_____	

(Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.)
*p < .05, ** p< .01, ***p< .001

Alternative/Non-Intersectional Findings

For each of my research questions, I ran regression models (in SPSS) to determine whether or not there was any statistical significance. (Also it should be mentioned that the tables for the three statistical models are shown at the end of this section.)

My first research question was what substantive differences existed between my independent variables as they related to their opinions as to the importance that hard work had in contributing to a person's economic mobility. My independent variables used in this question were gender, race, and class. Gender was once again bifurcated into the categories of females and males. The races included whites, blacks, and Hispanics. Finally, social class was made up of the five original categories respondents had the option of choosing from when given the survey, those classes being: upper-class, upper-middle class, lower-middle class, working-class, and lower-class. The same mediating variables I used before in my fine-tuned intersectional

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models were once again utilized. Regarding the variables I controlled for, I used females, blacks, lower-class respondents, respondents that were unemployed, respondent's spouses that were unemployed, respondents who identified as having a liberal political ideology, and respondents with a post-graduate education.

After running a regression analysis in SPSS, the variables that showed statistical significance were my independent variables whites, Hispanics, and upper-class respondents, as well as my mediating variables respondents with high school diplomas, respondents with some college experience, and respondents that graduated from college.

Looking at Table 5 Model 1, both whites and Hispanics were shown as having a higher probability of endorsing meritocratic views in comparison to black respondents. Meaning that both groups, more than blacks stressed the importance of hard work insofar as a person's ability to move up or down the economic ladder. In this model, the two groups were fairly similar in their likelihood of being meritocratic, but Hispanics were just a bit more than whites. Regarding the existing literature, whites had the tendency to express largely meritocratic opinions in general, although ranking last regarding upward mobility. Also, the existing literature showed that Hispanics ranked highest on merit based arguments when accounting for upward mobility in comparison to both whites and blacks (Hunt 1996, 2007). However, it should also be highlighted that according to empirical research that blacks should have been more meritocratic than whites when accounting for upward mobility; which was not the case in this model.

The third independent variable to show statistical significance was upper-class respondents. Looking at Table 5 Model 1, upper-class participants were seen as being more likely to disagree with the notion that hard work played an important role in a person's economic mobility more so than lower-class respondents. This meant that upper-class respondents were

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more likely to express fatalistic opinions. Returning to the existing literature, most researchers (Emler and Dickinson 1985, Kluegel and Smith 1986, Weis and Fine 1996, Hunt 1996, 2007) concluded that individuals with higher incomes had the tendency to favor meritocratic explanations. However, in the case of two articles (Flanagan and Jenkins 1999, and Flanagan and Campbell 2003) evidence was found which suggested that middle and upper-class respondents were less meritocratic in their views due to their educational attainment and the enlightening effect that their education created.

This is interesting, given the fact that the only other variables that showed statistical significance in this model were three of my educational attainment groups. These educational variables were respondents with high school diplomas, some college experience, and respondents that graduated from college. All three of these groups had a higher probability of expressing fatalistic explanations of economic mobility in comparison with post-graduate degree respondents. This meant that with more years of schooling, the less likely a respondent was to express meritocratic views up until their post-graduate degrees. It seems that respondents with a post-graduate degree underwent some reevaluation of opinions. One reason for this might be that individuals with a post-graduate degree understood the value of their hard work as essential for their educational attainment. They might have valued the importance of hard work in their academic career to the extent that they saw it as a necessity for getting ahead in all walks of life, including those walks of life pertaining to economic upward mobility.

My second research question was what substantive differences existed between my independent variables as they related to their opinions as to the importance that race had in contributing to a person's economic mobility. I used the same independent variables and

mediating variables as before. In addition to this, I controlled for the same variables here as I did

for my previous question.

After running a regression analysis in SPSS, the only variables that showed any statistical

significance were the independent variables whites and Hispanics. In Model 2 of Table 5, both

whites and Hispanics were shown as in the previous model, showing a higher probability of

endorsing meritocratic views in comparison to blacks. In this model, whites ranked highest

insofar as their probability to support meritocratic views, but Hispanics had a much stronger

likelihood of being meritocratic than they had in the previous model. Regarding whites, this was

to be expected considering the fact that the published literature showed that whites had the

tendency to endorse meritocratic opinions when accounting for downward mobility (Hunt 1996,

2007). However, before addressing the reasons Hispanics held meritocratic opinions, I want to

first look at my final research question.

My third research question was what substantive differences existed between my

independent variables as they related to their opinions as to the importance that gender had in

contributing to a person's economic mobility.   I used the same independent variables and

mediating variables as before. In addition to this, I controlled for the same variables here as I did

for my previous question.

After running a regression analysis in SPSS, once again the only variables that showed

any statistical significance were the independent variables whites and Hispanics. Looking to

Table 5 Model 3, both whites and Hispanics were more likely to express meritocratic views than

blacks. Much like Model 2, whites ranked highest in their likelihood to endorse meritocratic

opinions. Hispanics were less likely in this model to endorse meritocratic opinions than they

were in Model 2. But like Model 2 there was a higher probability for Hispanics to be

meritocratic than they were in the first model. The reasons that it was expected for whites to be

meritocratic were the same as I mentioned in the previous question. However, when taking

previous literature into account, it was to be expected that both blacks and Hispanics would show

fatalistic opinions insofar as the importance that race and gender played in a person's economic

mobility. Perhaps one reason blacks held fatalistic views with regard to hard work, race, and

gender dealt with their own personal life conditions. Specifically, given the fact that many

blacks are economically disadvantaged (McNamee and Miller, 2009) they may hold critical

views relating to merit based explanations of economic mobility. Now given the fact that

Hispanics remained consistently merit based in their views accounting for economic mobility

remains a perplexing one regarding my last two models, considering the fact that traditionally

Hispanics have been viewed as economically disadvantaged, especially in comparison to whites.

As to what reason Hispanics adopt views contrary to their advantage and not blacks is a question

that would involve further research that existing literature is not equipped at addressing.

However, what one can assess from the information rendered from this study is that both whites

and Hispanics prefer merit based explanations of economic mobility far more than black

respondents, and neither blacks nor Hispanics were shown to hold a dual consciousness.

  Overall, looking at race, gender, and class as their own mutually exclusive variables

proved to be a better statistical model. But the justification for this was made almost solely by

race. It appears that a person's race had a strong influence on whether or not that person adopted

a meritocratic view of an individual's economic mobility or a fatalistic view. As to whether or

not this completely denounces using an intersectional framework from this subject is an issue I

will return to and address in my conclusion. However, regarding my particular analysis, I can

conclude that the alternative approach to intersectionality showed more statistical substance.

(Table Five)

	Model 1 **(Work)**		Model 2 **(Race)**		Model 3 **(Gender)**	
	β	**S.E.**	**β**	**S.E.**	**β**	**S.E.**
Males	-0.053	(0.041)	0.118	(0.076)	-0.091	(0.073)
Females (REF.)	_____		_____		_____	
Whites	**0.174 ** (0.056)**		**-0.591 *** (0.104)**		**-0.49 *** (0.1)**	
Hispanics	**0.2 ** (0.065)**		**-0.344 ** (0.12)**		**-0.273 * (0.115)**	
Blacks (REF.)	_____		_____		_____	
Upper-Class	**-0.396 * (0.172)**		0.143	(0.316)	0.388	(0.304)
Upper-Middle Class	0.045	(0.11)	0.125	(0.202)	0.266	(0.146)
Lower-Middle Class	-0.046	(0.102)	0.127	(0.187)	0.264	(0.18)
Working-Class	-0.041	(0.104)	0.1	(0.192)	0.255	(0.185)
Lower-Class (REF.)	_____		_____		_____	
Employed	0.077	(0.044)	-0.127	(0.081)	0.012	(0.078)
Unemployed (REF.)	_____		_____		_____	
Spouse Employed	0.057	(0.045)	-0.14	(0.084)	-0.175	(0.081)

(Table Five Cont.)	Model 1 (**Work**)		Model 2 (**Gender**)		Model 3 (**Race**)	
	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.
Spouse Unemployed (REF.)	_____		_____		_____	
Conservative	0.064	(0.052)	-0.186	(0.097)	-0.073	(0.094)
Moderate	0.031	(0.055)	0.646	(0.101)	0.036	(0.098)
Liberal (REF.)	_____		_____		_____	
1st-11th Grade	-0.156	(0.096)	-0.043	(0.178)	0.18	(0.174)
High School	**-0.193 **	**(0.071)**	-0.122	(0.132)	-0.056	(0.128)
NC Post High School	-0.126	(0.192)	0.002	(0.351)	0.178	(0.338)
Some College	**-0.194 **	**(0.064)**	-0.113	(0.124)	-0.153	(0.124)
College Graduate	**-0.141 ***	**(0.065)**	-0.055	(0.121)	-0.096	(0.117)
Post-Graduate (REF.)	_____		_____		_____	

(Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.)
*p < .05, ** p< .01, ***p< .001

Chapter Five

Conclusion/Discussion

Conclusion/Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to discern if intersectionality provided a better theoretical

framework to utilize in order to understand individual explanations of upward and downward

mobility rather than utilizing a less finely tuned or one-dimensional approach, as was previously

done in prior studies. In many corners of academic research, intersectionality has highlighted the

valuable insight gained by approaching race, gender, and class as analytically interacting

variables rather than variables that are mutually exclusive or analytically separated from one

another (Delgado Bernal 2001, Solorzano 1998, Solorzano and Yosso 2001, 2002, and Yosso

2006).

Regarding the substantive differences existing between my independent variables as they

relate to my dependent variables, there was little in the way of statistical significance (but for the

exception of lower-class black males, lower-class black females, and upper-class Hispanic

females). Because of this, it appears to be the case that the fine-tuned intersectional approach did

not offer as much insight that I originally wished to discover.

Returning to my hypotheses:

- **H1:** There will be significant differences in race x gender x class combinations insofar as
  respondents' opinions as to the importance that hard work has in contributing to a
  person's economic mobility. These discrepancies will be such that the most to least
  meritocratic race x gender x class combinations will be as follows: Upper-Class White
  Males, Upper-Class White Females, Upper-Class Black Males, Upper-Class Black
  Females, Upper-Class Hispanic Males, Upper-Class Hispanic Females, Middle-Class

White Males, Middle-Class White Females, Middle-Class Black Males, Middle-Class
Black Females, Middle-Class Hispanic Males, Middle-Class Hispanic Females, Lower-
Class White Males, Lower-Class White Females, Lower-Class Black Males, Lower-Class
Black Females, Lower-Class Hispanic Males, and Lower-Class Hispanic Females.

- **H2:** There will be significant differences in my race x gender x class combinations
  insofar as respondents' opinions as to the importance that race has in contributing to a
  person's economic mobility. These discrepancies will be such that the most to least
  meritocratic race x gender x class combinations will be as follows: Upper-Class White
  Males, Upper-Class White Females, Upper-Class Black Males, Upper-Class Black
  Females, Upper-Class Hispanic Males, Upper-Class Hispanic Females, Middle-Class
  White Males, Middle-Class White Females, Middle-Class Black Males, Middle-Class
  Black Females, Middle-Class Hispanic Males, Middle-Class Hispanic Females, Lower-
  Class White Males, Lower-Class White Females, Lower-Class Black Males, Lower-Class
  Black Females, Lower-Class Hispanic Males, and Lower-Class Hispanic Females.

- **H3:** There will be significant differences in my race x gender x class combinations
  insofar as respondents' opinions as to the importance that gender has in contributing to a
  person's economic mobility. These discrepancies will be such that the most to least
  meritocratic race x gender x class combinations will be as follows: Upper-Class White
  Males, Upper-Class White Females, Upper-Class Black Males, Upper-Class Black
  Females, Upper-Class Hispanic Males, Upper-Class Hispanic Females, Middle-Class
  White Males, Middle-Class White Females, Middle-Class Black Males, Middle-Class
  Black Females, Middle-Class Hispanic Males, Middle-Class Hispanic Females, Lower-

Class White Males, Lower-Class White Females, Lower-Class Black Males, Lower-Class

Black Females, Lower-Class Hispanic Males, and Lower-Class Hispanic Females.

But this does not mean that this lack of statistical significance ushers in any reason to abandon

intersectionality as a theoretical framework as it relates to my research question. Perhaps, the

way in which respondents conceptualized the questions given to them could have attributed to

their answers being vastly different from what was originally expected based on previous

research. When given questions as they related to the importance of a person's race or a person's

gender, respondents may not have formed the notion that race and gender were corresponding to

issues surrounding racism and sexism. For this very reason, it could very well be argued, as this

author is, that additional research is needed to be conducted in order to further what has been

produced in this study.

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