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Class Dismissed?

ROSEANNE AND THE CHANGING FACE OF WORKING-CLASS ICONOGRAPHY

“Well, it’s a show about class and women.”
—Roseanne Arnold, interview with Terry Gross

Julie Bettie

In a 1989 article on working-class identity, Stanley Aronowitz intends to “trace the *displacement* of representations of the working class” in mass-mediated culture, arguing that “there are no longer direct representations of the interactions among workers on American television.” We see “workers,” he tells us, almost solely in police shows and in beer commercials. He goes on to say that working-class representations disappeared, for the most part, with the unfortunate Archie Bunker stereotype. Forging a class identity is now difficult because the media denies working-class existence. Working-class identity is “no longer an option,” Aronowitz concludes, for “class has been removed ideologically and politically from the politics of subalternity . . . and has been replaced by new identities” resulting in a kind of “cultural homelessness.”¹

Aronowitz hastens to point out that he does not mean to give centrality to class or to suggest that “gender and race are simply derived from class or occupy its space.”² However, there is a persistent slippage between this hopeful statement and the ensuing analysis which reveals that we are to read “workers” as white men in industrial occupations. Participating in the historic and continuing cultural reification of the working class as white and male, Aronowitz nostalgically asserts that “working-class culture is preeminently urban” and “still finds renewal on the shop floor,” that the barroom is a “typical working-class cultural scene,” and that “the cultural traditions of workers are disappearing,” even as he hopes to deconstruct this image.³

Sherry Ortner also uses the word *displacement* to describe *folk* understandings of class, but she offers a different way of understanding the term. Ortner argues that while “class is not a central category of cultural discourse in the U.S.,” it “does appear in native discourse . . . just not in terms we recognize as ‘about class.’”⁴ In Ortner’s formulation, class has not been *replaced* by other categories of difference, such as race and gender, but is expressed *through* them. Thus, discourses on gender and race, which traditionally position these categories as fixed and natural, have offered sites on which class issues are articulated in other terms and have

helped sustain the long-standing, ideological representation of the U.S. as a classless society.

Where Aronowitz refers to the emergence of contemporary discourses on “difference,” which he sees as offering oppressions that displace those of class, Ortner refers to older discourses of race and gender which posit both as fixed and which have historically worked to preclude class visibility. There is, however, another way to read current articulations of class with race and gender—not as displacements in Aronowitz’s sense or as part of a long-standing tendency to think class in other terms, but as a possible evocation of actual social changes in class structuring and of the related family revolutions of the twentieth century, social forces which render the very term *working-class* anachronistic. Economic restructuring has seen the rise of low-paying service and manufacturing jobs performed largely by women and men of color, and by white women. As the working class is reconfigured in this way, the gendered and raced nature of class becomes harder to ignore. Class, race, and gender become more visibly entangled as the working class is increasingly composed of people who do not represent the *unmarked* categories of whiteness and maleness. More than ever, we need to look at the nature of these entanglements rather than see race and gender as displacements of class. Viewing class as an identity that is historically and contextually created, we must forgo nostalgia and acknowledge the changing demographic composition of postindustrial labor. Rather than lament the disappearance of working-class imagery, perceived in monolithic and ahistoric terms as urban, masculine, and white, I suggest we examine instead the androcentric and ethnocentric biases which underwrite this iconography and try to imagine a less exclusionary formulation of class.

A full analysis of these intersections would examine how images and utterances across multiple discursive sites (state discourse, social theory, and multiple cultural arenas) coalesce to produce class imaginaries. What I explore here, however, is the symbolic economy of class representations as they interact with ideologies of gender and race/ethnicity (as well as with other categories of difference) in popular culture, and, more specifically, in the genre of television domestic situation comedies. Popular culture is a site of struggles over meaning and over the power to represent and establish preferred meanings, and television messages, in particular, are received and interpreted by masses of people across race, class, and gender identities. Working in a convention of cultural studies that is concerned with the relationships between supposedly separate domains like popular beliefs (the everyday terrain of people and popular representations) and other discursive formations like the knowledge produced by social science,⁵ I juxtapose the two by performing a reading of the sitcom *Roseanne* as a way to explore biases found in class analysis.

Images of “Working-Class” Families: An Overview

He [the original writer for *Roseanne*] could not get it into his head that a woman was the main character and that she was *not passive*. He couldn't understand that the female character could *drive* scenes, that the family functioned *because* of her, not in spite of her. I gave him books on feminist theory, talked into tape recorders for hours, lectured him on motherhood and patriarchy for hours and hours, but he just never caught on.

—Roseanne Arnold, *My Lives*

Class inflation typifies the world as seen on television. Surveys of television sitcoms, for example, reveal very few representations of working-class families. One study of 262 domestic sitcoms from 1946–1990 found only 11 percent of the shows had blue-collar, clerical, and service workers as heads of households.⁶ In contrast, families like the Huxtables (*The Cosby Show*), headed by a physician/husband and lawyer/wife, become “average among the privileged populace of television.”⁷ In keeping with this class inflation, most TV wives who work do so not out of economic necessity but in pursuit of personal professional success, and 21.7 percent of TV families have servants (a maid or handyman). There appear to be three periods when working-class series appeared: the mid-fifties (*I Remember Mama*, *The Life of Riley*, *The Honeymooners*); the early seventies (*All in the Family*, *Good Times*, *Sanford & Son*); and the late eighties (*Married with Children*, *Roseanne*).⁸ New working-class family sitcoms continue to appear in the early nineties (*The Simpsons*, *Roc*, *Grace under Fire*, *Thea*, *704 Hauser*, *South Central*).

Interestingly, as Barbara Ehrenreich notes, the politically militant sixties rarely offered blue-collar representations at all (short of cowboys and juvenile delinquents), but the seventies saw a media (and social science) “discovery” of the working class. Prior to this “discovery,” liberals may have tended to imagine the oppressed as a tiny minority of poor in “pockets of poverty,” failing to recognize the “possibility that huge numbers of people, in many respects thoroughly ordinary, were also in some sense deprived, neglected, and downtrodden.”⁹ Ehrenreich suggests that the discovery of the white working class was due, in part, to the fact that working-class whites showed signs of discontent with the civil rights and antiwar movements and with middle-class liberalism more generally. When polls showed that at the 1968 Democratic convention the majority of the population sympathized with the police, not with demonstrators, the media turned “scattered signs” of white working-class discontent into a “full-scale backlash,” moving “quickly to correct what they now came to see as their [own] ‘bias,’” a sympathy toward “militant minorities.” Perhaps motivated by a “search for novelty” or by the “fear of being out of

touch with the majority,” the newfound focus of the middle-class media and intellectuals on the working class might also have provided “legitimation for their own conservative impulses.” The “working class *as discovered*,” then, “was the imaginative product of middle-class anxiety and prejudice.”¹⁰

With the hit of the new television sitcom, *All in the Family*, this new working-class “folk hero, who happen[ed] to be white” and male, was etched into America’s class consciousness. He “happened” to be male because the working class “was conceived in masculine terms” since “work, and especially manual labor, was still considered a masculine activity.” The Archie Bunker caricature of the white working class became “a major sociological reference point, and . . . white working-class males [were] conveniently [referred to] as ‘Archie Bunker’ types.”¹¹

Importantly, this folk hero was found not only in media imagery but in academic work as well, where white working-class men became the newest exotic anthropological subjects even though the working class was already increasingly composed of women and ethnic minorities.¹² Even men on the left, who would be potential allies of feminism, were and often continue to be equally unable to see the category *working-class* unless it is marked white and male.¹³ The pervasiveness of this identification of the working class as white and male might reflect the fact that for white liberal middle-class men, the primary producers of such images, “the blue-collar stereotype could never be such a distant ‘other’ as the poor, especially the black poor,” and could never be such a distant “other” as women, and especially working-class women. In the ethnocentric, androcentric working-class fiction there are, for many white middle-class men, “blood brothers, personified in personal memory, by the high school teammate left behind in one’s hometown pumping gas . . . the father or grandfather with callused hands and a knack with tools.”¹⁴ Working-class women and men of color were no doubt distant others to most of the producers of television entertainment, as well. As in sociological and leftist work, folk understandings of class are tainted by the hard-hat stereotype which promotes the invisibility of white women, and of women and men of color as class subjects.

While white men have primarily been the central representatives of working-class life, there have been at least a few women representatives. Andrea Press suggests that sitcom images of blue-collar families have often offered us the stereotype of the “working-class matriarchy.”¹⁵ Like Edith Bunker, Archie’s deferential wife, Alice Kramden of *The Honey-mooners* (1955–1956) did not work outside the home, but was supported by her bus driver husband, Ralph. Ralph’s character, however, like that of many sitcom working-class men, was that of the “incompetent, arrogant, and bumbling” buffoon while Alice was “the voice of authority, sense, and

reason.” Mama, of the show by the same name (1949–1957), controls family affairs and finances, and the show *Alice* (1976–1985) which featured a widowed mother and her coworkers at Mel’s Diner, was rich with strong female characters as well.¹⁶ Buffoonish or not, however, white men for the most part remained the primary representatives of the working class. More recently, in response perhaps to actual demographic shifts in the new proletariat, the identification of the working class with white men on television appears to be changing.

Contemporary Images

To analyze the ways in which newer working-class representations on TV intersect with race and gender, I spent approximately fifty-six hours during the spring of 1994 engaged in saturation viewing (recording and re-viewing) of the prime time band of television programming. Documenting the demographics of domestic sitcom families, I found that out of thirty-five sitcoms aired across four networks, only eight could be coded working-class.¹⁷ This confirms the impression that class inflation is characteristic of TV sitcoms but it suggests that the working class is not invisible. Four of the eight working-class shows featured African American families (*Roc*, *Thea*, *704 Hauser*, *South Central*), while four featured white working-class families (*Married with Children*, *Roseanne*, *The Simpsons*, *Grace under Fire*). Remarkably, out of the thirty-five programs I viewed, only six revolved explicitly around adult female lead characters. Four of these, *Thea*, *Grace*, *The Nanny*, and *Roseanne* specifically featured working-class women.¹⁸

This latest proliferation of working-class sitcoms is worthy of note and exploration. While we must be cautious about crediting quickly changing television fads with too much social significance, “fads with staying power” are worth investigating.¹⁹ The iconography of class found in popular culture, which informs folk understandings of class difference, has historically represented the working class as white men in industrial occupations, but this appears to be changing in TV sitcoms. In the sitcoms I viewed, for example, images of *white* working-class men are largely absent. The few images of white working-class men available are generally, as in the past, those of buffoons (witness Homer Simpson of *The Simpsons* and Al Bundy of *Married with Children*. *Roseanne*’s Dan Conner may be the only exception). It appears that the Archie Bunker stereotype, the white working-class man as head-of-house, may be replaced by images of white working-class women and black working-class women and men. In fact, *704 Hauser*, which featured working-class blacks, appeared to be an *explicit* attempt to defeat this stereotype as the voice-over promoting the

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show exclaimed, “Look who’s living in Archie’s house!” 704 Hauser, of course, was the Bunkers’ address in *All in the Family*, but the new resident patriarch is played by the same actor who played the father on *Good Times*, the black family hit of the seventies.

The most successful and provocative of the working-class family shows is *Roseanne*. The top-rated sitcom in the fall 1988 season when it first aired, it has remained in the top five ever since.²⁰ The show’s popularity is evidenced not only in ratings (a dubious measure of audience popularity²¹), but also in the extraordinary attention that the popular press affords Roseanne Arnold.²² *Roseanne* provides an iconoclastic inversion of *All in the Family*, making the show ripe for an analysis of class, gender (and, at times, race and sexual) politics. *Roseanne*, indeed, delivers a radical reversal of *All in the Family*’s white, “hard-hat,” patriarch and twittering wife. For it is the feminist wit and cynicism of this clever, working-class woman that is the primary source of comedy for the show.

Roseanne

In *my* show, the Woman is no longer a victim, but in control of her own mind. I wanted to make family sitcoms as we know them obsolete.

—Roseanne Arnold, *My Lives*

In pointed contrast to middle-class sitcoms, *Roseanne* emphatically articulates working-class themes. *Roseanne* is about a married thirty-something couple, who have three children and live in the fictional Midwestern town of Lanford, Illinois. High school graduates, Roseanne and Dan have had unstable employment throughout the years. Roseanne has held a series of pink-collar jobs, such as being a “shampoo girl” in a beauty parlor, waitressing at a café in the local shopping mall, serving fast food under the supervision of a manager who hasn’t yet graduated from high school, and laboring as an assembly line worker in a factory that manufactures plastic eating utensils. Dan’s work history includes “doing dry wall,” owning a motorcycle shop (which failed), and experiencing periods of unemployment. The couple have experienced some stability (and perhaps mobility) recently in that Dan is now in a supervisory position working for the Lanford City Garage and Roseanne is part-owner of a “loose meat” sandwich shop with her sister, Jackie, and a lesbian friend.

In contrast to most television sitcoms, a frequent theme on this show is economic struggle. For example, we have seen the Connors have their electricity shut off by the power company for failing to pay the bill on time, and in one episode, Roseanne arrives late to her job as a waitress in a mall café only to have her new manager, Leon, scold: “Five minutes late, docked five minutes pay!” Roseanne responds, “Wow, that’s almost thirty

cents. Here's a dollar, I'm going to the bathroom." This focus on the economic, moreover, may be central to the show's popularity for many viewers. A book signing by Roseanne Arnold, which I attended, was appropriately located inside a Price/Costco store, where folks clustered around her table, their grocery carts spilling over with reduced-price bulk goods. When I casually interviewed approximately twenty people, asking them why they like *Roseanne*, the most common comment I heard was that they liked the show because it is so "real."²³ One woman told me she liked the show because "it's real life. Like the time they had to take Dan's shoes back in order to buy Becky [their daughter] that dress. You know, you can't just whip out the credit card." It appears that "the problems of surviving in a post-Reagan America (for example, with a mortgage, three children, two wage-earners, and employment problems) has broad appeal."²⁴

While many forms of popular culture occasionally present class themes, they often do so irresponsibly. That is, class is nodded to but then obfuscated.²⁵ They generally omit representations of the structures that trap individuals with high aspirations, or situations that reveal a lack of opportunity and options.²⁶ Plots either offer the unlikely scenario that top dogs are overcome by underlings, or they suggest that in the end we are all really the same across class lines.²⁷ Even in *Roseanne*, which deals with the taboo subject of class conflict in the workplace, bosses routinely turn out to be human after all.²⁸ Of course the restraints imposed by the sitcom genre determine that the "situation" for the episode be resolved by the end of the show. In short, *Roseanne* almost never explicitly challenges the class system (with the exception perhaps of the episode in which Roseanne leads a factory walkout). Class is primarily represented "in an individual-interpersonal way through a character's problematization of classism in a narrative."²⁹ Indeed, part of Roseanne's genius appears to be her ability to maintain a balance between "the individual and the institution" and the ability to maintain "the impersonal nature of her anger and humor, which are targeted not so much at the people she lives with as at what makes them the way they are."³⁰

In spite of the fact that *Roseanne* may not proffer meanings to viewers which seriously challenge the class structure (this is television after all), the program does at times represent the "hidden injuries" of class: the social psychological burden of class status anxiety, "the feeling of vulnerability in contrasting oneself to others at a higher social level, the buried sense of inadequacy" which impacts "those who lose the most by being classified."³¹ The plot lines and stories in the show often imitate the unspoken class boundary work that is a part of everyday interactions, interactions that reveal symbolic class distinctions or differences in "cultural capital"³² between the working and middle classes. The *Connors*, for example, persistently reveal a simultaneous envy of and disdain for mid-

dle-class culture, demonstrating the way working-class culture is at times expressed through a refusal to take on middle-class cultural forms. This attitude is revealed in the show where the Conners appear “content with their working-class manners. They could use more money, but they’re not conflicted about behaving ‘properly’ and don’t aspire to cultural upward mobility.”³³

At times, the characters reveal a contempt for and bitterness toward the middle class. As Ehrenreich suggests, “to the working class, the professional middle class *is* an elite [and] money is only part of its perceived advantage.” The power and authority, and “intrinsically rewarding, creative and important”³⁴ work that professionals enjoy are also apparent to those who work in jobs such as those held by Roseanne Conner and her family and friends. Working-class people encounter the professional middle-class primarily through those in the “helping professions”: teachers, social workers, physicians, bankers, and bosses. These are “roles that confer authority and the power to make judgments about others.” This type of class relation is “a one-way dialogue” that imposes silence. Refusing to be silent is seen as rude or insubordinate, for the middle class “imagines it is the sole repository of useful information.”³⁵ It is here that Roseanne is in peak form; refusing “to be intimidated by middle-class authority, she has the last outrageous word with her bosses, she refuses to be intimidated by the principal at her daughter’s school, or the IRS or anyone for that matter.”³⁶

As one woman I interviewed told me, she liked the show because “it’s about the shit that happens to women at work. You wish you could be so quick and witty, say those things like she does.” For unlike the bourgeois feminism of a Murphy Brown, Roseanne Conner’s “proletarian” feminism expresses itself as a series of assertive responses to the daily personal injuries experienced by women who hold jobs with little power and prestige. Roseanne is rude, insubordinate, and rarely a passive victim, on either class or gender grounds. The show routinely provides a fantasy response to working-class women’s attempts to sustain self-esteem in a world where they have little control.³⁷

Class Formation, Postindustrial Labor, and “the Family”

Current iconographies of class are informed by the historic transformation of U.S. labor and class formation. Between 1979 and 1984, for example, job growth for middle-income occupations dropped 20 percent while the growth of low-income jobs soared.³⁸ In 1959, 60 percent of those employed worked in the production of goods and 40 percent in services. By 1985, only 26 percent produced goods while service occupations increased to 74 percent.³⁹ Between 1981 and 1991 the number of manu-

facturing jobs shrank by 8.1 million.⁴⁰ Researchers estimate that between 1988 and 2000 the total number of jobs in the U.S. will increase by 18 million; 16.6 million of these will be in service industries and the bulk of those will be “bad jobs” characterized by few skills, low pay, and poor job security.⁴¹ Roseanne Conner’s pink-collar, service-sector jobs, for example, evoke the fact that as employment shifted from heavy industry to nonunion clerical and service-sector jobs, “employers found themselves irresistibly attracted to the non-unionized, cheaper labor of women and, thus, increasingly to that of married women and mothers” whose labor had been made cheap, in part, by the historic working-class struggle for a male breadwinner wage.⁴² Recent economic restructuring, in short, “has replaced white male workers with women and minority men, but at lesser-paid, more vulnerable jobs.”⁴³ Even according to Eric Olin Wright, chronicler of the U.S. class structure, “the majority of the working class in the United States consists of women (53.6%).”⁴⁴ These changes have pushed the concept of the working class into its “current problematic, transitory status.”⁴⁵ While “popular images of working-class family life . . . [once rested] on the iconography of unionized, blue-collar, [white] male, industrial breadwinners,” Judith Stacey argues that

in an era when most married mothers are employed, when women perform most “working-class” jobs, when most productive labor is unorganized and fails to pay a family wage, when marriage links are tenuous and transitory, and when more single women than married homemakers are rearing children, conventional notions of a normative working-class family fracture into incoherence.⁴⁶

With the exception of a significant minority of privileged women who benefited from feminism’s ideological support for divorce and female autonomy and from the massive entry of women into the paid labor force, most women’s conditions have worsened as the rates of female-headed households have soared. Without access to male income, many women plummeted into poverty as they became the “postindustrial ‘proletariat’” performing low-skilled, low-paying jobs.⁴⁷ Within this context, conservative forces succeeded in selling pro-family rhetoric with its nostalgic longing for the “modern” family,⁴⁸ in which women are economically dependent on men and children are dependent on women. By offering the traditional family as a solution to “larger” social malaise—rising crime, juvenile delinquency, welfare fraud, et cetera (for which single mothers are routinely blamed, and black single mothers in particular)—public debate on “the family” (read heterosexual and nuclear) often works to displace economic analysis of social crisis and of women themselves.⁴⁹ Women’s class situation, that is, is often obscured in discourse on “the family” where women are seen as gendered but not as class subjects (even as

women swell the ranks of the new proletariat). Thus, impoverished single mothers are understood not as poor women but as women in between men. That women's interest in economic equality in and out of marriage is left unaddressed strengthens the traditional assumption that women's economic dependence on men is only natural. This naturalization of gender, work, and family arrangements, in turn, helps to underwrite the gender-blind imaginary of class, precluding us from viewing women in class terms apart from attachments with men.

Moreover, in spite of the historic participation of white women and women and men of color in industrial labor, union activity routinely excluded these groups of people, claiming the category *labor* as an exclusive domain of white working men. Thus, the historic "making of the American working class," as well as its representation in culture, makes it difficult to envision white women and people of color as working-class. Because *working-class* is identified with industrial labor, nonindustrial, nonunionized jobs, held largely by white women and people of color, appear to be outside the working-class category. It is worth considering what cultural labor a representation like *Roseanne* might perform in such a context.

En-gendering Class

The "Roseanne" show is about America's unwashed unconscious. Every episode sprouts at least something banal turned on its ass, something so pointedly "incorrect," filtered through a working-class language that claims every MALE-defined thing from family to economics, to God, as belonging, rightfully, and at last, to the realm of women.

—Roseanne Arnold, *My Lives*

One of Roseanne Arnold's stated goals is to represent working-class culture. When asked in an interview to sum up what the show was about, Roseanne responded "Well, it's a show about class and women." The interviewer went on to suggest that as *Roseanne* became wildly successful, Roseanne Arnold's real life and her TV character's life became increasingly disparate, so much so that she is no longer a working-class person. To this Roseanne responded:

Well, does working-class just mean how much money you make? See that's part of the whole class issue that I want to talk about and address because that is not true. . . . It is a culture, and that is the culture that I was raised in and that is the culture I portrayed and will always be a part of no matter what because that's where I came from and it's who I am.⁵⁰

While we could read her statement critically as a claim to authenticity, a ploy for marketing herself by capitalizing on her lack of cultural capital, I suggest as well that we consider seriously Roseanne's claim to class as a *cultural* identity, her implicit recognition of cultural memory and class longing. I mean a class identity which is not to be understood as a politicized identity (or class for itself) but a "sense of one's place" in a cultural economy of meaning; that is, a sense of place or difference which may or may not contain a feeling of opposition or antagonism, and which may or may not (more often the latter) be commonly named and known as "class." Such an identity cannot be understood as unmediated by race/ethnic and gender cultures (among other salient identities) and by history, but rather might be better explored as "ethnic-gender-class"⁵¹ cultures and identities.⁵²

In this rare instance of working-class female identity politics, Arnold's assertion that class is more than economic opens up for consideration the ways in which women's relationship to class may be expressed not only in terms of work identity and income, but also in terms of familial relations, social relations unrelated to those of employment, and practices of consumption.

In *Roseanne*, for example, "the family" is specifically classed through its direct and implied contrasts with middle-class sitcom families. A parody of the "affluence and perfection of other family sitcoms," *Roseanne* fractures the myth of the "happy suburban family of TV land"⁵³ by presenting as its primary source of humor the incongruity between the Conners' life and that of other families in sitcoms past and present. In one episode, for example, Roseanne's sister Jackie fills in as "mother" for Roseanne's family when Roseanne has gone out of town to care for her own mother for a time. We see Jackie attempt to perform the traditional mother role "perfectly" as, wearing an apron, she hands the three kids their lunch boxes and kisses them each on the cheek as they march out the door accompanied by the theme music from *Leave it to Beaver*. Here we see June Cleaver invoked in pointed contrast to Roseanne Conner, whose life circumstances preclude practicing the fiction of traditional motherhood.

In further contrast to the harmonious life of middle-class TV families, the Conner family is riddled with conflict as the characters "disagree, argue, even hurt each other and still continue to protect and care about each other."⁵⁴ Unusual in its cynical critique of "the family," *Roseanne* suggests that "the family is hardly a haven" but is riddled with conflict, and "coming from mom, rather than [from] a jaded teenager or a bystander dad, this is scary news indeed."⁵⁵ This conflict is implicitly linked to working-class culture. For while women across class lines combine work and family, *Roseanne* refuses to offer viewers the contemporary

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“superwoman” image of a woman able to manage an impressive career, maintain a healthy family, have a loving marital relationship, and meet normative standards of beauty and tact (an unrealistic standard unattainable even under conditions of class privilege). When Roseanne’s family complains about the burnt meat loaf she serves for dinner, Roseanne, far from maintaining the composed dignity of a Claire Huxtable (*The Cosby Show*), responds, “I’m not a restaurant, okay, you eat what I cook or you don’t eat at all.” *Roseanne* represents class identities as lived out in private life and in personal relations.

Roseanne portrays consumption, and not just production, as a defining class activity; and it is here in its exploration of women’s traditional concern with shopping and buying that Roseanne specifically genders class experience. In one episode, for example, Roseanne’s youngest daughter’s school has invited parents to talk to classes about their jobs, and Roseanne (much to Darlene’s embarrassment) talks about being a mother and the work it entails. She takes her daughter’s class on a field trip to the grocery store to shop for dinner. In the meat department she asks a student to make a selection, and a girl chooses steak. Roseanne queries, “What does your father do for a living?” Upon finding out the girl’s father is a doctor, Roseanne says, “Well then that would be a good choice.” She then tells Darlene to make a selection and Darlene heads straight for the ground beef. They proceed to move about the store shopping for the remaining generic brand ingredients for meat loaf as Roseanne lectures students on how to feed a family of five on a limited budget.

In *Roseanne*, class experience is also inflected by gender, through its portrayal of women’s role as the family’s status producers. Women, that is, produce and express class culture through consumption. This idea, for example, is displayed in the Connors’ home decor which, in stark contrast to middle-class television homes, features a living room sofa and chairs purchased from the Sears catalog,⁵⁶ a multicolored acrylic throw, a wall hanging of Elvis, and a velvet painting of poker-playing dogs. That the symbolic boundaries of class are expressed through women’s consumption is also evidenced in an episode in which a middle-class neighbor’s house is burglarized while they are out of town. Two men load the family’s belongings into a Salvation Army truck, as Roseanne watches, not knowing that they are burglars. In fact, Roseanne interprets the fact that her neighbor, Mrs. Coleman, is “giving away” such expensive items as a display of arrogance. In what appears as an effort to both swindle and mock her neighbor, Roseanne gives the driver \$20 for a statue of a dog he is loading. Contemplating it at home with Dan, she notes that she’s seen this item at Rodbell’s for \$200. Here we see the Connors’ living room decor juxta-

posed with the dog statue, an obvious artifact of middle-class culture. When Dan explains, “It’s art,” Roseanne adds, “It ain’t just art, it’s got a hole in the back where you can stick stuff in it.” The dog represents both \$200 which Roseanne and Dan could put to better use at the same time it represents the related class status they lack. Later, when Mrs. Coleman spots her “umbrella stand” in Roseanne’s house, Dan says, mockingly, “Umbrellas, of course,” both as if to say “I knew that” and to scoff at the ridiculousness of paying \$200 for an umbrella stand.

In an unusual attempt to think class through women’s experience, Carolyn Kay Steedman, in her autobiographical novel, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, challenges the gender bias of traditional leftist class analysis by looking at class consciousness not as an automatic unfolding from the relations of production, but as a learned position. She recognizes that women and children’s relationships to production and consumption have been different from men’s and that this must be a part of a gender specific understanding of class. Class status comes to be known by markers which exist outside of discovering one’s position in the realm of production. But the masculinization of class in social semiotics has ignored the transitional objects of women’s experience of class identity and mobility, “the material stepping-stones of our escape: clothes, shoes, make-up.”⁵⁷ The heroism in stories of working-class men’s lives are afforded a romance and a power of meaning (the combination of maleness, manual labor, physical prowess, and class struggle) not culturally accorded to women’s stories. The cover of Sennett and Cobb’s *Hidden Injuries of Class* features the torso of a muscular white man in a denim shirt operating a jackhammer. But women are often assumed to be “without class, because the cut and fall of a skirt and good leather shoes can take you across the river and to the other side: the fairy-tales tell you that goose-girls may marry kings.”⁵⁸ The “structure of feeling”⁵⁹ women experience, as shaped by class, has been left largely unexplored.

In speaking to such markers of class meaning as clothes and makeup, Steedman directs attention to the way in which social distinctions are expressed, inscribed, and transformed on the body, and in so doing she points to the gender-specific hidden injuries of class as experienced by women. She uses her mother’s desire for “a New Look skirt,” for example, as a metaphor to explore “the politics of envy” and “culture of longing” her mother experienced. In *Roseanne*, the socially “low” is marked by Roseanne and Dan Connors’ large bodies, in striking contrast to the thin and normatively beautiful characters of middle-class sitcoms. In the U.S., where weight is inversely correlated with socioeconomic status,⁶⁰ fat, itself, becomes associated with “lowbrow” status. One episode highlights the class marking of the body through a parody of the television

show *Cops*, a documentary-style show in which a camera follows real-life police officers as they perform what are deemed the most dangerous and interesting parts of their jobs. Inevitably this includes barging into the homes of lower-class people (often black and Latino). Through the voyeuristic lens of the camera, TV viewers can observe what is presented as the “exotic” and baffling lifestyles of lowbrow folks (who are always already potential criminals, and thus whose right to privacy appears permanently suspended). In the *Roseanne* parody, we witness the Connors through a jostling camera lens that catches Dan holding a large pizza box, wearing a cutoff T-shirt that exposes an enormous stomach. Roseanne’s hair is ratted and she’s wearing heavy makeup. As she turns to run away from the camera it zooms in on her butt, her too-small polyester pants dimpled by fat. This image of the Connors, which exaggerates the way in which class is traced out on the body, stands in contrast to the family we see in each week’s episode (where the body is still class-coded, but this is not overstated), pointing to the disparity between the Connors’ self-perception and the interpretation of them offered by the objectifying media camera.

Roseanne’s clothing, her casual posture, and her overt expression of sexuality (especially taboo because she is fat), are the antithesis of a refined, repressed, bourgeois feminine ideal. Roseanne’s body, then, can perhaps be read as an expression of gender-specific class culture.⁶¹ Class differences are often represented as sexual differences, where “the working-class is cast as the bearer of an exaggerated sexuality, against which middle-class respectability is defined.” Among women, “clothing and cosmetic differences are taken to be indexes of the differences in sexual morals between the . . . two classes.”⁶² Ironically, working-class females who are presumed to be promiscuous by middle-class men and women “will be taken by their own men to be agents of middle-class values and resented as such.”⁶³ Resistance to middle-class culture, as seen in *Roseanne*, therefore is sometimes expressed through the gendered body.⁶⁴

Class as Race

Well they’ve been sayin’ it for years, but now it’s official. We’re poor white trash.

—Roseanne Conner, *Roseanne*

At times *Roseanne* also holds the potential to make class visible by unpacking the common conflation of class as race. In their audience study of *The Cosby Show*, Jhally and Lewis talk at length about the representation of

class on television and about how the media perpetuates the delusion of equal opportunity by turning exceptional cases of upward mobility into the rule, and therefore hiding structural barriers. They, too, are concerned with the way class is displaced by other discourses, but their point is to argue that the U.S. myth of classlessness lies behind our regressive beliefs on race. Jhally and Lewis argue that because Americans are unable (and perhaps unwilling) to conceptualize class as a social structure, they are unable to understand institutionalized racism and the link between class structure and racial control. The myth of classlessness leads Americans to understand racism only within the ideology of individualism; racism is only about individual behavior and acts of discrimination; it is not a systemic problem. In this light, Jhally and Lewis discuss the inability of TV viewers to talk about cultural differences based on class and the tendency to invoke instead a discourse of race. For example, in the void of an available public discourse on class, black viewers complain that the middle-class Huxtables (of *The Cosby Show*) are “too white.”

The analysis, however, fails to explore the way in which a historic discourse on race as a fixed category of identity also diminishes the visibility and consciousness of class. It is not just that we can't see class because of the U.S. myth of a classless society, but also that we have readily available a discourse of race which historically has “naturalized” a racial division of labor. Thus there tends to be a “shift [in] the domain of discourse [on class] to arenas that are *taken to be* ‘locked’ into individuals—gender, race, ethnic origin, and so forth.”⁶⁵ The question raised is whether television viewers read class categories on television or if indeed the visibility of class remains disguised by the “naturalization” of other categories of social difference (like race, gender, and family structure). The social reality that blacks are overrepresented among the poor was made possible and legitimated by racist discourse, resulting in the “common sense” understanding, that the middle class is white and that the poor are black. The working class, however, has been persistently marked as white and male. Certain combinations of identities, therefore, appear to violate, confuse, or contradict “common sense” understandings. The category of middle-class blacks, for example, threatens to relocate difference in class rather than in race.

If television is viewed as a “complete ideological field”⁶⁶ in which representations of, as always, middle-class whites and now middle-class blacks (*The Cosby Show*, *Living Single*), as well as working-class whites (*Roseanne*, *Married with Children*, *The Simpsons*) and working-class blacks (*Roc*, *704 Hauser*) can be found, it offers us the potential to see class difference as a category of its own, a category which manifests itself differently across race/ethnic cultures. *Roseanne*, as an explicit attempt to represent white working-class culture, appears potentially powerful in making

class visible. The Roseanne character, for example, occasionally makes reference to her family as “poor white trash.” On one occasion, Dan is arrested after having punched the abusive boyfriend of Roseanne’s sister, Jackie. When it is clear that Dan is going to jail, Roseanne exclaims, “Well, they’ve been sayin’ it for years, but now it’s official. We’re poor white trash.” On another occasion Roseanne criticizes the mother of her daughter’s boyfriend who was being verbally abusive: “It’s people like you that give poor white trash a bad name.”

The category “poor white trash” speaks volumes about “common sense” understandings of race and class subject positions. Since “whiteness” most often goes as an unstated but assumed racial referent (that is, when race is not mentioned whiteness is assumed), when it is present, it reveals much. The phrase “poor white trash” alludes to the racist assumption that color and poverty and degenerate lifestyle “automatically” go together, so much so that when white folks are acting this way, their whiteness needs to be named. That is, it is a racially marked category used to describe those who are not performing whiteness (read normative middle-class whiteness) appropriately. Within a race-centered social discourse, these folks are a failure to their race. If people of color are always already trash, either because of innate inferior difference or because of culturally learned difference (that is, culture of poverty), how then, within the bounds of a classless imaginary, can one explain white people who behave this way without being forced to acknowledge the existence of class difference per se? The presumed inherent superiority of whiteness, as well as the ideology of upward mobility, is challenged by the existence of white trash, and thus the difference of class *as class* is made visible. Roseanne’s use of “poor white trash” emphasizes the idea that her family’s “difference” (from predominantly white middle-class television characters) is not race, but class.⁶⁷

While in folk discourse it appears that class is easily displaced by a discourse on race, the logic of leftist social theory, on the other hand, tends to reduce race to class (presumed more fundamental), failing to see race as an autonomous field of social conflict (race as race) and as a “fundamental axis of social organization in the U.S.”⁶⁸ While the notion of a “literal correspondence” between race and class may be gone, a political and analytical privileging of class is not,⁶⁹ and analyses too often fail to explore “the different axes along which ‘workers’ . . . are organized, linked in the system of social reproduction and ‘constructed’ as ideological subjects.”⁷⁰ As John Clarke explains, class essentialism implies “the presence of a class of ungendered and unraced labourers who are here and there interrupted by becoming gendered and raced.”⁷¹

. . . And Other Displacements: Viewer Reception

While *Roseanne* does a reasonably good job of representing white working-class culture, which is one of Roseanne Arnold's stated goals, there is, of course, no control over how the audience receives and interprets these messages. Class is not only thought out through, or conflated with, the categories of race and gender; it is also understood as a hierarchically organized difference of taste, moral behavior, lifestyle preference, and intelligence.⁷² An alternative viewer response is to view Roseanne, her family, and friends as clowns to be laughed at, or worse, to be regarded with disgust. Arguing that perceptions of class on television depend on the viewer's own class location, Jhally and Lewis cite these white middle-class viewers' responses to *Roseanne*:

I don't know. I mean I've turned *Roseanne* on, and I cannot get into that show at all. How it's popular is beyond my understanding. And I'm afraid that if you took [the Huxtables, the middle-class black family of *The Cosby Show*] down to this level, in terms of their working-class strata, then the humor would be like *Roseanne*. Because what happens when you work in a factory? What do people talk about? I mean, you know, for one day of my life I worked in the kitchen of a nursing home, and the humor was so awful, and I was sixteen years old, that I did not go back. Do you know what I am saying? It was just something I could not relate to at all.⁷³

Sometimes I can watch it [*Roseanne*] and sometimes I just can't look at them, you know, I mean watch it. The house is a mess and I just can't deal with it. . . . I just don't like the way they look.⁷⁴

This raises the question of whether working-class representations are inherently negative, or perhaps even threatening, to middle-class viewers. Aside from the *racial* referent in the category white trash, *trash* itself refers to a variety of excesses or indulgences middle-class people (and "respectable" working people) supposedly disallow themselves. In contrast to bourgeois repression are the excesses of trash: junk food, perversions of sex, cheap commodities, and generally tactless and loud behavior. (Note the differential effect such activity has by gender: to be fat, loud, cheap, or oversexed are particularly consequential transgressions for women.) Just when *white trash* threatens to be a subversive term that works to clearly locate difference in class itself, other traits perceived to be inherent, like morality, taste, and intelligence, appear to suggest that the hierarchy of differential access and rewards is only natural. White trash can leave intact yet one more set of "naturalized" differences.

The working-class caricature, Archie Bunker, provides a classic example of the potential disparity between authorial intent and viewer interpretation. According to Butsch, in “making Archie a ridiculous figure, [Norman] Lear hoped the viewers would question their own prejudices.” But some research found that viewers in agreement with Archie’s prejudices felt that Archie *won* his debates with his son-in-law Michael who was, as a student of sociology, both a “liberal” and a representative of the middle class.⁷⁵ *Roseanne*, too, may have contradictory political effects. It may both undermine and participate in sustaining the invisibility of class, depending on viewers’ reception and negotiation of the meaning of the show. But while ethnographic studies of audiences may at first appear to be an obvious method for apprehending the program’s class meaning for various viewers, there is reason to caution against a too-easy empiricist approach. Because of the various and many displacements of class in everyday talk, it would be easy to conclude from viewer responses that class meanings are absent for them. For example, one young girl told me she likes *Roseanne* because “she’s big like my grandma.” Some women told me they like the “realistic” portrayal of the difficulties for women of meshing family and work responsibilities. Yet others spoke directly to the show’s portrayal of marital power struggles. And, as mentioned above, the most common response was that the show is well liked because it is about “real people.” While “class” was not explicitly mentioned in any of these responses, it does not follow that class is irrelevant to the show’s appeal for these viewers. The lack of an available public discourse on class *as class* makes it difficult to understand it, to put a label on this difference. *Fat* might stand in for working-class here, or the term *real* might function as a class marker: “real people” (read “common folk”) as opposed to the “middle-class characters of most sitcoms.”⁷⁶

Because it is hard not to see the relevance of class difference in *Roseanne*, the show potentially helps restore class visibility to the overwhelmingly middle-class world of television. Moreover, while the Archie Bunker caricature could never be a working-class hero, *Roseanne* can be. She represents the working class as blatantly feminist and progressive in a moment of backlash, thumbing her nose at class stereotypes and providing a reversal of Archie’s “hard hat” prejudice. Far from the submissiveness of an Edith Bunker, *Roseanne*’s gritty feminism is also far removed from the bourgeois and careerist feminism of middle-class television women like Murphy Brown and Claire Huxtable. *Roseanne* does indeed attempt to refute the historically gender-biased conceptualization of class, offering class subjectivity instead as “belonging . . . at last, to the realm of women.”⁷⁷

Conclusion

Social and historical context, and structures of ideology, frame our reading of any cultural object, including TV sitcoms. We do not interpret cultural objects in isolation; rather, our readings are mediated by the conjoining of discourses of the state, social theory, and multiple cultural sites. These contexts pressure readers to interpret a cultural text in a particular and circumscribed way. And while the reading a text proffers can never be guaranteed, its framing works to preclude our ability to think otherwise about it.

An analysis of television domestic sitcoms suggests that the parameters which limit the way audiences decode television imagery include ideologies of race, gender, and family form, all categories of difference that are easily essentialized, or taken to be fixed. This can work to preclude the ability to see class difference and erase an understanding of class as a fundamental category of difference shaping people's lives. Class difference *is* potentially disguised by race and gender categories. That is, while empirically the agency of class remains and structures people's lives, in folk discourse it is often conceptually displaced onto or expressed through other categories of difference, rather than being understood as *mediated* by, or inextricably intertwined with, other categories of difference.

Feminists have long attempted to correct understandings of class structure and formation that maintain the invisibility of women and the impact of the "gender order"⁷⁸ on class processes via the naturalization of "the family" and a gendered division of labor. They have as well (although perhaps less thoroughly) documented the gender-specific subjective class experiences of women.⁷⁹ I have tried to argue that these conceptual "corrections" are needed not only for the common sense ideologies which inform the production and reception of the iconography in popular culture, but to leftist social analysis as well, which appears too often to retain an androcentric and ethnocentric conceptualization of class. In comparison to folk "displacements" of class, which underwrite the imaginary of a classless society, the "displacement" in leftist social theory works differently, as class was originally all that could be seen: it was centralized while other differences were subordinated to it.

Recent scholarship reveals a renewed interest in class as an analytic category to be rethought in light of antifoundationalist turns in social theory as well as the (related) foregrounding of gender and race in feminist and ethnic studies. My concern and caution is with how this rethinking of class would manifest itself. The perception that working-class representations are becoming less frequent is true only if we continue to utilize a white- and male-centered concept of class. Leftist theorizing still often separates class from gender and race and finds class hard to locate unless it is white and male. What we need now is a cultural analysis that will not

permit gender and race to conceptually replace or dismiss class, but that will study the historically shifting intersections of their political meanings and cultural performances.

Notes

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1. Stanley Aronowitz, "Working-Class Culture in the Electronic Age," *The Politics of Identity: Class, Culture, Social Movements* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 194, 199, ix, 201.

2. *Ibid.*, ix.

3. *Ibid.*, 204, 199, 195.

4. Sherry Ortner, "Preliminary Notes on Class and Culture," in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research Press, 1991), 164.

5. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler, "Cultural Studies: An Introduction," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1991), 11.

6. Richard Butsch, "Class and Gender in Four Decades of Television Situation Comedy: Plus ça Change . . .," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 9 (December 1992): 387–99.

7. Sut Jhally and Justin Lewis, *Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences, and the Myth of the American Dream* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1992), 23.

8. Butsch, "Class and Gender," 389.

9. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 143.

10. *Ibid.*, 98–101.

11. *Ibid.*, 100, 109, 115.

12. *Ibid.*, 109.

13. There is a lengthy list of "class ethnographies" and studies of youth subcultures that reveal a continued androcentric and ethnocentric bias in the way class is conceptualized. Prefeminist work tends to ignore gender saliency altogether, while later work, which at times is more cognizant of gender, chooses to focus on men's lives. See, for example, Richard Sennett and Jonathon Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972); Joseph Howell, *Hard Living on Clay Street: Portraits of Blue Collar Families* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1973); Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979); David Halle, *America's Working Man: Work, Home, and Politics among Blue Collar Property Owners* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Jay MacLeod, *Ain't No Makin' It* (London: Westview, 1987); and Douglas Foley, *Learning Capitalist Culture: Deep*

in the Heart of Tejas (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990). These works vary in the degree of analysis accorded to race and gender.

14. Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 121.

15. Andrea Press, *Women Watching Television: Gender, Class, and Generation in the American Television Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991). Given the history of racial subordination, the black matriarch stereotype as well as images of working- or lower-class blacks more generally carry distinctly different meanings than those of whites, and therefore might warrant separate consideration. On the other hand, when accounts of working-class imagery fail to include blacks (consider for example black domestics such as Beulah from *The Beulah Show* and Florence from *The Jeffersons*) it becomes clear that blacks are analyzed as race subjects but not as class (read white) subjects. For a separate account of the historical representations of blacks on TV see Marlon Riggs's film *Color Adjustment* (San Francisco: California Newsreel, 1991); Jhally and Lewis, *Enlightened Racism*; and George Hill, Lorraine Raglin, and Chas Floyd Johnson, *Black Women in Television: An Illustrated History and Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990).

16. Press, *Women Watching Television*. Press argues that images of middle-class woman are often childlike and presented as under the thumb of patriarchal authority or, at times, as in egalitarian marriages. On the other hand, while the Edith Bunker character appeared deferential and self-effacing on the surface, at times she demonstrated feminist ideals, sticking to her principles, and refusing to let Archie force her to take a position she opposed. It could be argued that she represents an early example of feminism, perhaps especially to an older generation of women.

17. I use *class* here as a synonym for socioeconomic level: a combination of occupation, income, and education. Shows were class-coded based on the socioeconomic level of the main characters. Those characters whose occupations were characterized by low prestige, and relatively low income, were coded working-class (for example: garbage collector, retail salesperson). Characters who were college-educated professionals were coded middle-class (for example: teacher, lawyer).

18. *Thea*, a show about a single black mother who worked two pink-collar jobs, is no longer on the air. *South Central* portrays not so much a working-class but an impoverished African American family headed by a single mother. *The Nanny* features a Jewish woman who is working-class by virtue of being a nanny, but who is situated in the world of the upper-middle-class family she works for and lives with.

19. Ella Taylor, *Prime Time Families: Television Culture in Postwar America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 3–4.

20. The Nielsen Reports on Television 1987–1993.

21. For an account of the methodological limitations of television ratings as indicators of audience popularity, see Mike Tomlinson's film *Can You Believe TV Ratings?* (1992)

22. Roseanne appeared on the covers of more than thirty separate magazines in 1989 alone (and more since), and was named "T.V.'s Funniest Lady" by *U.S. Magazine* (Janet Lee, "Subversive Sitcoms: Roseanne as Inspiration for Feminist Resistance," *Women's Studies* 21 [1992]: 87–101). Roseanne has published two books on her life, which is followed closely by the tabloid press.

23. See Press, *Women Watching Television*, and Jhally and Lewis, *Enlightened Racism*, for discussions of viewers' search for realism on television.
24. Judine Mayerle, "Roseanne—How Did You Get Inside My House? A Case Study of a Hit Blue-Collar Situation Comedy," *Journal of Popular Culture* 24 (1991): 83.
25. Benjamin DeMott, "Class Doesn't Put Up Much of a Struggle in Hollywood," *Sacramento Bee*, 10 February 1991, 2.
26. Gray, "Television," 382.
27. DeMott, "Class Doesn't Put Up," 2.
28. Ehrenreich, "The Wretched of the Hearth: The Undainty Feminism of Roseanne Barr," *New Republic*, 2 April 1990, 29.
29. Lee, "Subversive Sitcoms," 92.
30. Kathleen Rowe, "Roseanne: Unruly Woman as Domestic Goddess," *Screen* 31 (1990): 418.
31. Sennett and Cobb, *Hidden Injuries*, 58, 76.
32. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1977), and Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).
33. Butsch, "Class and Gender," 90.
34. Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, 132.
35. *Ibid.*, 139–40.
36. Lee, "Subversive Sitcoms," 92.
37. Zita Dresner, "Roseanne Barr: Goddess or She-Devil," *Journal of American Culture* 16 (1993): 40.
38. Katherine Newman, *Falling From Grace: The Experience of Downward Mobility in the American Middle Class* (New York: Free, 1988), 31.
39. *Ibid.*, 30–31.
40. Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele, *America: What Went Wrong?* (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1992).
41. George Silvestri and John Lukasiewicz, "Projections of Occupational Employment, 1988–2000," *Monthly Labor Review* 112 (1989): 42–65.
42. Judith Stacey, *Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late Twentieth Century America* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 11.
43. *Ibid.*, 257. Ehrenreich suggests that the subsequent decline in middle-income earners may not have signaled a disappearing middle class so much as a disappearing middle-income blue-collar working class (*Fear of Falling*, 202).
44. Eric Olin Wright et. al., "The American Class Structure," *American Sociological Review* 47 (1982): 722. As Rosemary Crompton describes, feminists have suggested that the persistence of occupational segregation creates an obstacle to any single classification that includes both men and women (*Class and Stratification* [Cambridge, Mass.: Polity, 1993], 17). See also Elizabeth Garnsey, "Women's Work and Theories of Class and Stratification," in *Classes, Power, and Conflict: Classical and Contemporary Debates*, ed. Giddens and Held (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), for a discussion of individual vs. family as a unit of analysis and a discussion as well of the problematic distinction between blue and white collar, and manual and nonmanual labor in thinking through women's class location.
45. Stacey, *Brave New Families*, 5.
46. *Ibid.*, 255.
47. *Ibid.*, 13.

48. Ibid., 13.

49. See Judith Stacey, "Scents, Scholars and Stigma: The Revisionist Campaign for Family Values," *Social Text*, no. 40 (fall 1994): 51–75, for a discussion of the latest incarnation of the "family values" debate, the liberal "revisionist campaign."

50. Interviewed by Terry Gross, 3 March 1994, National Public Radio.

51. John Clarke, *New Times and Old Enemies: Essays on Cultural Studies and America* (London: HarperCollins Academic, 1991).

52. I'm not interested in employing a categorical notion of class (where class is an aggregate of occupational categories, a structure assumed a priori) but a relational one (where class is a historical process of class conflict and action, always in formation); class as a relationship, not a thing (E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* [London: Penguin, 1963]). However, I use class "identity" rather than "consciousness" to avoid the baggage of any normative Marxist or sociological understandings of what constitutes class consciousness; namely, (a) that such an identity may not necessarily be a politicized one, and (b) that class is only one among many identities that might mobilize people. Roseanne's statement here might be read as essentializing identity by rendering it transparent, failing to recognize that identity and experience do not exist outside of or prior to ideology or discourse but are constructed through them. In the context of recognizing that identity and experience are always constructed discursively, I wish to emphasize here an "understanding of identity as self-presence" (Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* [New York: Routledge, 1989], 103) or to point to the way in which a less-theorized, spontaneous understanding of identity and experience can be a window into the webs of power and meaning that make those identities and experiences possible. Roseanne's remark is consistent with many narratives of class mobility that suggest that the cultural baggage of one's class background is brought to the present in spite of mobility and that document the pain of this discord. See, for example, Sennett and Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class*; Richard Rodriguez, *The Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982); Jake Ryan and Charles Sackrey, *Strangers in Paradise: Academics from the Working Class* (Boston: South End, 1984); and Michelle M. Tokarczyk and Elizabeth A. Fay, eds., *Working-Class Women in the Academy: Laborers in the Knowledge Factory* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

53. Lee, "Subversive Sitcoms," 93.

54. Dresner, "Roseanne Barr," 39.

55. Ehrenreich, "Wretched of the Hearth," 30.

56. Mayerle, "Roseanne—How Did You," 72.

57. Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 15.

58. Steedman, *Landscape*, 16.

59. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 132. Williams used this term to indicate that meanings and values are "actively lived and felt" and to refer to the "affective elements of consciousness and relationships" in a given historical moment.

60. Jeffery Sobal and Albert J. Stunkard, "Socioeconomic Status and Obesity: A Review of the Literature," *Psychological Bulletin* 105 (1989): 260–75. While this correlation is particularly true for women, the findings are less clear for men. This raises a question about the causal direction of such a correlation. W. J. Cahnman, "The Stigma of Obesity," *Sociological Quarterly* 9 (1968):

283–299, considers that fatness may effect opportunities for mobility, especially for women. Also, Wendy Chapkis (*Beauty Secrets: Women and the Politics of Appearance* [Boston: South End, 1986]) speaks to the importance of normative standards of beauty for women's mobility.

61. Over time, Roseanne Arnold did not resist the bodily ideal which money could buy her, undergoing multiple plastic surgeries. Her real-life wealth manifests itself on the body of the television character, as her appearance differs greatly in later episodes than in earlier ones.

62. Ortner, "Preliminary Notes," 177.

63. *Ibid.*, 179. Ortner goes on to explain that women who perform service-based work are often perceived as middle-class (at least by working-class men) because their work is often clean, nonmanual, and located in offices near management, in spite of the fact that it is low-paying, low-prestige, and routine. "Here truly is a 'hidden injury of class'" where class antagonism is "introjected into, and endlessly replayed through social relations internal to the class itself." Further, Ortner suggests that this "sexual mapping of classes" might be experienced by middle-class men (and women I would argue) as a "kind of smorgasbord of sexual-cum-class possibilities" (176–79). A common theme in popular culture is the cross-class romance where class differences are sexually exoticized.

64. The entanglement of class and gender codings on the body was evident in the media portrayal of Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan. In spite of the fact that both women hailed from blue-collar backgrounds, the media constructed Kerrigan as a bourgeois ice princess and Harding as a gritty blue-collar girl trying to make it in the wrong world. The exaggerated portrayal and perception of their class difference obscured the larger difference between them, which was a mediation of class and gender cultures. Tonya, not unlike Roseanne, appeared as an antiheroine, refusing to learn to pass, refusing to acquire middle-class cultural capital. Most importantly, Harding refused to learn the middle-class version of *femininity*, wearing instead a bad perm, gaudy costumes, heavy makeup, and an undeferential demeanor. Ironically, the middle-class feminine ideal learned and performed to near perfection by Kerrigan would be the only version of femininity considered appropriate for a female figure skater who would "represent" a country that prides itself on being undivided by class.

65. Ortner, "Preliminary Notes," 171; emphasis mine.

66. Gray, "Television," 377. Gray analyzes the relationship between both fictional (black middle-class success on sitcoms) and nonfictional (black urban poverty on news and documentaries) television representations of black life available to viewers for interpretation, suggesting that television "representations operate intertextually."

67. Jhally and Lewis (*Enlightened Racism*) argue that some audiences were more uncomfortable with representations of working-class blacks (as potentially racist stereotypes) than they were with working-class whites who appear to be safer objects of class humor. Hence, the buffoonery of Archie Bunker, Homer Simpson (*The Simpsons*), and Al Bundy (*Married with Children*) might be acceptable to viewers precisely because color and lower-class status are not conflated. Jhally and Lewis suggest that for white viewers, images of working-class blacks are an unpleasant reminder of racial inequality whereas representations of middle-class blacks offer guilt-free viewing pleasure and a false sense of "enlightenment" about racial others (thus accounting for the success of *The Cosby Show*). The four black working-class sitcoms from my viewing survey in the spring of 1994 have since gone off the air, leaving only images of white working-class families, and perhaps providing support for Jhally and Lewis's thesis.

68. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 13.

69. David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991), 7.

70. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 32.

71. John Clarke, *New Times, Old Enemies: Essays on Cultural Studies and America* (London: HarperCollins Academic, 1991), 45. See Omi and Winant's critical discussion of a class-based paradigm of race. See also Tomas Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), for an account of the way class hierarchy and racial order were mutually constitutive in the making of white supremacy in California. And see Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) and Joan Acker, "Class, Gender and the Relations of Distribution," *Signs* 13 (1988): 473–97, for explorations of how gender is constitutive of class formation.

72. Benjamin DeMott, *The Imperial Middle: Why Americans Can't Think Straight about Class* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1990). There are geographic codings of class as well: consider the class, and race, meanings associated with "the suburbs," "the inner city," and urban vs. rural. Penelope Eckert (*Jocks and Burnouts: Social Categories and Identity in the High School* [New York: Teachers College, 1989]) shows how class is coded as lifestyle preference in her study of high school categories: "the jocks" and "the burnouts." Such cliques are not understood as related to class differences and yet there is a pattern (imperfect) of membership in the different groups by class. Chapkis (*Beauty Secrets*) notes that reference to one's "background" also serves as a euphemism for class.

73. Jhally and Lewis, *Enlightened Racism*, 77.

74. *Ibid.*, 78.

75. Butsch, "Class and Gender," 393, n. 8.

76. See Andrea Press, "The Sociology of Cultural Reception: Notes toward an Emerging Paradigm," in *The Sociology of Culture*, ed. Diana Crane (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), for a critical discussion of reception theory. Press argues that viewers do not interpret TV texts unmediated by other preexisting interpretations. She goes on to suggest the need for a "non-naive ethnography" which "takes account of the constructed nature of audiences and readers" (236, 240).

77. Roseanne Arnold, *My Lives* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994).

78. Robert Connell, *Gender and Power* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987).

79. While there is a long history of socialist feminist analysis of the relationship between gender and class, most of this exploration focuses on the interaction between abstract "systems" of capitalism and patriarchy, revealing women's exploitation as a consequence of relations of reproduction, household labor, and occupational segregation. Less has been said about the subjective experience of gendered and race/ethnic-specific class identities. The experiential level of analysis is best found in autobiographical writings. See, for example, Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*; Janet Zandy, ed., *Calling-Home: Working-Class Women's Writings* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990); and Tokarczyk and Fay, eds., *Working-Class Women in the Academy*.