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*Must there be an Empirical Basis for the  
Theorization of Racialized Subjects in  
Race-Gender Theory?*

TOMMY J. CURRY

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

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Somebody in each era must make clear the facts with utter disregard to his own wish and desire and belief. What we have got to know, so far as possible, are the things that actually happened in the world. Then with that much clearer and open...the philosopher...has a chance to interpret these facts.

W.E.B. DuBois—The Propaganda of History—1935

INTRODUCTION

THE MIND OF THE INTELLIGENT PHILOSOPHER is not a well from which theory and method springs, well-formed, and self-justifying. Perhaps this statement is irrelevant to how one thinks about theory and method more generally because it is presumed to be the task of analytic or continental philosophy and inapplicable to philosophies of race-gender. After all, they are philosophy's object. As topics of inquiry, concerns about race and gender proceed axiomatically--representing the interests, perspectives, and experiences of groups not only excluded from academic philosophy but burdened by the failures of philosophy to attend to their struggle and survival. To be understood by more mainstream philosophers, race-gender theory is constrained; often made to confirm the ideological commitments of previous disciplinary regimes. Ideology refers to the brute beliefs reflecting the interests of a community or the collective consciousness communities express as the basis of the programs they pursue. Such programs give rise to disciplinarity and serve as the criteria of expertise. To give such beliefs the appearance of knowledge, theory is used to justify ideology and enable beliefs to appear normal, logically coherent, and organized. Whereas theory establishes an interdependence between facts in the world and ideas about the world such that the relationship between the two seems natural and explanatory, methodology is the rules or practices that act to protect, and justify, one theory while disproving others.

Posited as objective, theory and method purport to be egalitarian endeavors accessible to any trained philosopher, rather than the product of a specific set of ideological commitments or disciplinary programs.

Race-gender theory is no different in its constitution. It presents itself as a specialized knowledge explaining the nature of racial and gendered inequality, but what community does race-gender theory serve? What ideological program is being justified and more importantly what facts about the world, if any, are being used to substantiate the seeming relationships presented as obvious and evident? These questions are not driven by the relationship that race-gender theory has to positivism or other styles of verificationist epistemology. My questions are much narrower in focus. I am interested in how entities claimed to be products of racial-gendered experience and empirical observation become conceptually confined to *abstractions* of social groups rather than *empirically informed theories about* social groups. I argue that race-gender theory (non-ideal theories) are in actuality ad hoc accounts of group formation determined primarily by political ideology, not an actual account of empirical phenomena.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE ORIGIN OF RACIALIZED SUBJECTS: NON-IDEALIZED ABSTRACTION AND THE GROUP

Philosophers tend towards abstractions and generalization regarding matters having profound social consequences, rather than concrete studies of the phenomena under question. The humanist aim of philosophical inquiry tends to incentivize a Manicheanism between social scientific and philosophical approaches to social problems. In philosophy, general patterns of malady are identified as a product of some historical overarching system that the philosopher aims to solve by arguing against the values produced by the system, if not the system itself. Racism is thought to be defeated by anti-racist values, segregation and apartheid are thought to be resolved by integration, patriarchy is thought to be defeated by feminism, and so forth and so on. This dialectical approach towards social problems is framed by what is *accepted as* the political antithesis of the malady. Regardless of success or failure, generalizable values are assumed to be obvious from the political gestures of these liberal policies throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Philosophy tends to engage social problems through idealization. Imagining the tenets of a more perfect society, the philosopher often proceeds by outlining the necessary and sufficient conditions in which more desirable values and behaviors could, and hopefully would, thrive. This is of course nonsense given that the social problems being engaged by the philosopher are the result of social processes and societal inequalities not the rational or irrational directives of individuals. However, this mode of analysis is still the preferred method of social-political philosophy in

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1 Tommy J. Curry, "On Derelict and Method: The Methodological Crisis of Africana Philosophy's Study of African Descended People under an Integrationist Milieu," *Radical Philosophy Review* 14.2 (2011): 139-164.

analytic and Continental traditions. If one's pursuit of racism is a rational decision made in the interest of one's racial-ethnic group or reason is attuned more towards justification or social acceptance, philosophical appeals to the irrational nature and humanist aims of reason would do little to promote individual change, much less social or structural reform.<sup>2</sup>

This problem has been engaged previously in Charles Mills' "Ideal Theory as Ideology." Mills explains that "idealization involves the modeling of what people should be like (character), how they should treat each other (right and good actions), and how society should be structured in its basic institutions (justice)."<sup>3</sup> Mills argues that this mode of engaging social-political problems is simply not useful, because trying to find an ideal model of society tends to ignore vital aspects of subordination and oppression. Idealization proceeds from various levels of abstraction in Mills' view. In an ideal-as-model perspective, the philosopher begins with phenomena in a social context then abstracts away from the empirical phenomena towards its representation. Another form of idealization tends towards description and "purports to be descriptive of P's crucial aspects (its essential nature) and how it actually works (its basic dynamic)."<sup>4</sup> The ideal-as-description model serves as a sort of empirical grounding idea in Mills' work. Some representations of P may be capable of further abstractions away from its concrete forms towards its exemplar. Theorizations that move idealizations toward the most abstract and perfect form of itself is what Mills calls the ideal-as-idealized models. For the philosopher to not become enamored by the exemplar of an ideal representation, Mills suggests that the philosopher must be grounded upon the specific entity they investigate. As Mills explains, "if one wants to change the actual P so it conforms more closely in its behavior to the ideal P, one will need to work and theorize not merely with the ideal, ideal-as idealized-model, but with the nonideal, ideal-as-descriptive-model, so as to identify and understand the peculiar features that explain P's dynamic and prevent it from attaining ideality."<sup>5</sup> Non-ideal theory is separated from ideal theory, not in its use of ideals, but in "the reliance on idealization to the exclusion, or at least marginalization, of the actual."<sup>6</sup>

Because ideal theory offers an account of social ontologies that abstract away from "relations of structural domination, exploitation, coercion, and oppression," attributes unrealistic capacities to human agents and

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2 Hugo Mercier & Dan Sperber, *The Enigma of Reason* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

3 Charles Mills, "Ideal Theory as Ideology," *Hypatia* 20.3 (2005): 165-184, 168.

4 *Ibid.*, 166.

5 *Ibid.*, 167.

6 *Ibid.*, 168.

institutions, ignores historical and current forms of oppression, neglects the specific experiences of groups, and ideally follows the strict compliance of the mandates articulated by ideal theories, Mills concludes “In modeling humans, human capacities, human interaction, human institutions, and human society on ideal-as-idealized-models, in never exploring how deeply different this is from ideal-as-descriptive-models, we are abstracting away from realities crucial to our comprehension of the actual workings of injustice in human interactions and social institutions, and thereby guaranteeing that the ideal-as-idealized-model will never be achieved.”<sup>7</sup>

Mills argues that marginalized philosophers have preferred Critical Race Theory, Marxism, and feminism to ideal theories because these non-ideal theories allow for a more concrete recognition of subordination, while the preference some philosophers have for ideal theory is rooted in ideal theory’s tendency to reify white male identity. “Ideal theory, is really an ideology, a distortional complex of ideas, values, norms, and beliefs that reflects the nonrepresentative interests and experiences of a small minority of the national population—middle-to-upper-class white males—who are hugely over-represented in the professional philosophical population,” he writes. Mills claims that there is an obvious disadvantage that certain forms of oppression have on specific groups. He asserts it’s not in the interests of women to ignore female subordination, or in the interest of Blacks to ignore racial subordination, or in the interest of poor people to ignore classism. “The distinctive experience of women, or of nonwhites, it will be argued, requires the rejection of the bogus generality, the spurious universalism, of hegemonic principles that have proven so clearly inadequate to addressing the situation of the subordinated.”<sup>8</sup>

Building upon standpoint epistemology which assumes that groups oppressed and marginalized have a peculiar and liberatory set of values produced by their “bottom” status within a hierarchy, Mills suggests that one of the advantages that non-ideal theory has to ideal theory is its group particularism. Ideal theory produces deficient abstractions of the ideal-as-idealized-model kind.<sup>9</sup> Mill continues:

What one wants are abstractions of the ideal-as-descriptive-model kind that capture the essentials of the situation of women and nonwhites, not abstract away from them. Global concepts like patriarchy and white supremacy arguably fulfill this role, as Marxism’s class society/capitalism did (however inadequately for non-class oppressions) for earlier generations. These terms are abstractions that do reflect

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7 Ibid., 169.

8 Ibid., 173.

9 Sandra Harding, ed., *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

the specificities of group experience, thereby potentially generating categories and principles that illuminate rather than obfuscate the reality of different kinds of subordination.<sup>10</sup>

The descriptions of actual groups, what is taken to be the conceptual parameters of the group, is what I understand to be the *racialized subject*. I use the subject here not in the Althusserian sense of the word which conveys interpellation of the individual by ideological or repressive apparatus, but as the scene of study. The group is constructed ideally upon this scene where traits conveying the substance of the group are revealed and conceptually animated by, *and for*, theory. Because theory is the justification for ideology, I am arguing that racial subjects—the traits they come to be represented by—are products not of actual *group* behaviors, attitudes, or symbols, but rather the desired representations of various projects be they social, criminological, or academic need to justify their ideological program.

Race-gender theory proceeds from the assumption that the categories used to identify and name larger systems and patterns of domination historically can be used to predict the behaviors of individuals as well as determine the basis of their social interactions and individual psychology. Similar to the macro-micro dilemma found throughout the social sciences, theories of racial subjectivity presume that group characteristics are simultaneously defined by the grand theories above and the individuals below the actual group or community under inquiry. This meso-level concern, or the theorization of how groups interact and relate to other groups within various structures, is often asserted as obvious by philosophers working on problems concerning race and gender with little to no evidence demonstrating that the actual groups being investigated actually behave in the ways asserted.

#### POLITICALLY CONSTRAINED: RACISM, WHITE SUPREMACY, AND THE METHOD OF WHITE POLITICAL ALLIANCE

Despite lacking a clear methodology for the acquisition of empirical data concerning individuals, much less groups, the “empirical” conceptualizations of groups, and consequently the identification of these groups with specific behaviors, actions, or traits can be found throughout the philosophical literature. Race-gender theory depends on the description of meso-level phenomena to give normative theories ameliorative weight. Despite the appeal of framing philosophy as a macro-micro endeavor aiming to improve the lives of individuals through the ethical and political clarification of moral duties, the role group constructions play in motivating philosophical analyses have been overlooked in race-

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



gender theory. In short, group characteristics have been thought either to be the product of how grand theories (e.g.: Marxism, Feminism, CRT) have defined antagonistic class dynamics or the ad hoc observations of the philosopher—their experience. Elizabeth Anderson’s *The Imperative of Integration* is an example of non-ideal theory being utilized as a basis for asserting generalizable traits about Black people that have very little verification beyond the impressions she has of this group.<sup>11</sup> Anderson suggests however that in non-ideal theory, ideals “function as hypotheses, to be tested in experience. We test our ideals by putting them into practice and seeing whether they solve the problems for which they were devised.”<sup>12</sup>By supposing that most racial disadvantages are caused by segregation, Anderson can claim that integration, despite its actual failure as an ameliorative strategy, can solve racism.

For instance, she argues that “segregation leads social groups to form different codes of conduct and communication. Some habits that help individuals in intensely segregated, disadvantaged environments undermine their ability to succeed in integrated, more advantaged environments.”<sup>13</sup> Anderson deliberately constructs a social outgroup of segregated disadvantaged individuals but later explicitly identifies the members of this group as Black and Brown males who adopt aggressive anti-social postures and behaviors to ward off criminal attacks against them. To gain cultural capital, these Black and Brown men need to drop their game face at work. According to Anderson, “the game face is the angry, menacing demeanor these men adopt to ward off attacks in their crime-ridden, segregated neighborhoods...it is the face you wear in the hood and they’re going to try to get you.”<sup>14</sup> This posture is perceived as aggressive by whites and “may be so entrenched that Black men may be unaware that they are glowering at others. This reduces their chance of getting hired.”<sup>15</sup>

Anderson motivates a theory of group-level interaction that not only ignores whites as a group with specific characteristics but articulates the problem of employment not as one of discrimination by whites, but the fear produced by angry Black men. The deficit of the Black male *group* is presented as conceptually relevant to the sociological or observable outcome. Despite framing the concern as one of segregated social groups, Anderson is not discussing sociological dynamics at all but rather the

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11 Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 3.

12 *Ibid.*, 6.

13 *Ibid.*, 35.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*

perceived fear and aggression whites have towards a specific group, namely, Black men. Dismissing racism as the primary cause of the inter-group relation and deliberately not accounting for the ways that the white group can be described by various social science data forces the reader to think about the processes of Black and Brown male unemployment being determined by the behavior characteristic of the constructed group rather than the patterns of discrimination demonstrated by white groups historically and sociologically. As such, the character of the group is ideologically asserted, poor Black men are aggressive and scary, and the outcome of Black men being unemployed is asserted to be the product of the group characteristics.

As a matter of empirical fact, Anderson's characterization is incorrect. Multiple studies have shown that Black male CEO's who demonstrate intelligence or other agentic behaviors are perceived as being dangerous threats to whites.<sup>16</sup> Black male sounding names regardless of the actual size of Black men in a white person's immediate environment triggers whites into thinking that the imagined Black male would be bigger, taller, and more aggressive than comparable white men.<sup>17</sup> In job interviews, Black males despite education are thought to lack soft skills and be less intelligent than their female counterparts.<sup>18</sup> All Black men are affected by misandric stereotypes despite their actual education or demeanor.<sup>19</sup> Black males' income has not improved since segregation. On average Black men make roughly 51 cents to every dollar white men make.<sup>20</sup> Recent studies by economists have shown that unlike other race/sex groups, Black males have higher downward mobility and lower wages due to unemployment and mass incarceration.<sup>21</sup> These dynamics cannot be intuited or abstracted from our perceptions of Black males as a group. They are crucial facts

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16 Robert W. Livingston and Nicholas A. Pearce, "The Teddy Bear Effect: Does Having a Baby-Face Benefit Chief Executive Officers?," *Psychological Science* 20.10 (2009): 1229-1236.

17 Colin Holbrook, Daniel Fessler, and Carlos David Navarrete, "Looming Large: Racial Stereotypes Illuminate Dual Adaptations for Representing Threat Versus Prestige as Physical Size," *Evolution and Human Behavior* 37 (2016): 67-78.

18 Phillip Moss & Charles Tilly, *Stories Employers Tell: Race, Skill, and Hiring in America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001).

19 Tommy J. Curry, *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017).

20 David Leonhardt, "The Black-white Wage Gap is as Big as It was in 1950," *The New York Times*, June 25, 2020.

21 Patrick Bayer & Kerwin Kofi Charles, "Divergent Paths: A New Perspective on Earnings Differences between Black and white Men since 1940," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 133.3 (2018), 1459-1501; and Raj Chetty et al., "Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States: An Intergenerational Perspective," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 135.2 (2020): 711-783.

about the matter than are external to the observable tendencies of the group observed. If non-idealizations cannot acquire such information through observation, what confidence can the philosopher have in their explanation of cause, correlation, or basic descriptions?

Anderson's characterization is not surprising at all given what we know about racial categories and the assumptions many whites make about negative racial stereotypes. Multiple studies have shown that negative racial stereotypes are primarily formed by the negative perceptions whites have about the men of the racial group being stereotyped.<sup>22</sup> This indicates that stereotypes of racial groups as violent, lazy, or unintelligent are the stigmas whites have of the men of that racial group as violent, lazy, or unintelligent. Regarding Black men specifically, it has been shown that while white Americans do believe that Blacks are more dangerous than whites, they primarily associated that racist characterization with Black men since they simultaneously believe that Black women may be more dangerous than white women, but are not more dangerous than white men.<sup>23</sup>

Describing a group by negative stereotypes shows that racial categories, the general descriptions of groups championed by non-ideal theorists, can not only misperceive racial-gender populations but have no way of actually recognizing the categories responsible for the perceptions of racially subordinate groups by dominant gender groups. Non-ideal theory may produce descriptions of group subordination as Mills says, but these descriptions themselves are subsequently idealized-as-causes or imagined to be capable of explaining the psychology and behavior of the subordinate group as well as the avarice of dominant groups towards them. In many cases, these idealized-as-cause abstractions merely reflect personal bias or the ideological commitments imposed on the construction of the group relationship. As in Anderson's work, one can assert that "black disadvantage is caused not simply by lack of material resources but by lack of social and cultural capital, which can be acquired only through interracial interaction. Blacks need experience in integrated settings to acquire the skills needed to manage and lead racially integrated, majority-white institutions."<sup>24</sup> Ideal theory may limit the ability of philosophy to render effective descriptions of racial subordination, but non-ideal theory

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22 Negin Ghavami & Letitia Anne Peplau, "An Intersectional Analysis of Gender & Ethnic Stereotypes Testing Three Hypotheses," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 37.1 (2013):113-137

23 Corinne McConaughy and Ishmael White, "Racial Politics Complicated: The Work of Gendered Race Cues in American Politics," *New Research on Gender in Political Psychology Conference* (2011): unpublished.

24 Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration*, 186. The descriptions of Black disadvantage become the property of the racial group, not only the social circumstance.

cannot guarantee accurate and non-racist accounts of Black disadvantage and group behavior. To suggest that Black people cannot thrive in a white society without white cultural capital is deficit model thinking, yet the non-idealist approach used to construct and explain Black inequality did not stop the use of these tropes.

Because non-ideal frameworks operate primarily through political ideology (beliefs sustained by power and communities vying to determine their meanings), the most powerful interpretive group determines the salience and relevance of the categories deployed. The call for more rigorous analysis of racism and white supremacy however has not been embraced by other white scholars who have championed non-ideal theory as their framework of choice because, in a world where the method, the rules of inquiry, are established by subordinate communities excluded from the ideal's ideology, racialized subjects do not have the power to determine the specific beliefs that should govern interpretation.

Racism is thought to be an obvious and intuitively grasped phenomenon. Contemporary analytic theories of racism concern themselves primarily with discrimination and social inequality, rarely addressing racism's *most extreme forms* such as segregation, enslavement, or genocide. Often debates among analytically trained philosophers suggest that racism is best thought of as "a set of misleading beliefs and implicit attitudes about 'races' or race relations," or "an interconnected web of unjust social practices that unjustly disadvantage certain groups."<sup>25</sup> Even in the more radical definitions of racism among American race theorists tend towards understanding racism as the basis of a "racial contract" that sustains concepts such as whiteness and Europe by designating indigenous or colonized peoples as sub-persons.<sup>26</sup> These definitions concern themselves with social inequality and rarely discuss the dehumanization and death of Black people and other racialized groups as the foundation of racism. When the *most extreme forms* of racism are discussed they are often separated from forms of dehumanization discussed throughout Holocaust and genocide studies literature.<sup>27</sup> Despite mountains of evidence showing that anti-Black racism in the U.S. and Europe has similarities with the initial stages of genocides, these phenomena are never be attended to in the non-ideal theory literature. It seems that non-ideal theory operates under ideological constraint and not allowed to capture certain actions

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25 Tommie Shelby, "Racism, Moralism, and Social Criticism," *DuBois Review* 11.1 (2014): 57-74; and Sally Haslanger, "Racism, Ideology, and Social Movements," *Res Philosophica* 94.1 (2017):1-22.

26 Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

27 Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust* (New York: The Free Press, 1979).

behaviors that exceed the ideological boundaries of grand theories or the political orientation of its white constituents.

For example, Charles Mills has insisted that white supremacy should be utilized and expanded to account for the seemingly endless forms of white domination and privilege found throughout the Western world.<sup>28</sup> In his view,

White supremacy as a concept thus registers a commitment to a radically different understanding of the political order, pointing us theoretically toward the centrality of racial domination and subordination. Within the discursive universe of white social theory on race, liberal or radical, it disrupts traditional framings, conceptualizations, and disciplinary divisions, effecting what is no less than a fundamental paradigm shift.<sup>29</sup>

White supremacy is meant to be a foundational idea that gives rise to new forms of analysis and relationships in Mills' work. "The virtue of using white supremacy as an overarching theoretical concept is that it enables us to pull together different phenomena and integrate these different levels: juridico-political, economic, cultural, cognitive-evaluative, somatic, metaphysical...race is best conceived of as not primarily ideational, but as embedded in material structures, sociopolitical institutions, and everyday social practices that so shape the world with which we interact so as to constitute an "objective" reality," writes Mills.<sup>30</sup>

However, other non-idealist theorists have insisted that white supremacy should not be used as a category of analysis to capture many of the interactions Blacks have with whites. Shannon Sullivan argues that white supremacy describes two interrelated things: legal white superiority and informal systems of white advantage. However, using white supremacy to describe white privilege makes it "easy for many white people to deny that white domination exists today in any kind of meaningful or prominent way."<sup>31</sup> Sullivan suggests that white supremacy should be reserved for Aryan hate groups and the like, not the inequalities and advantages exercised by everyday white people. Similarly, Elizabeth Anderson argues against applying the term racist to whites who may operate through racial stigmatization but lack truly malicious intent. To preserve discourse with whites, Anderson too believes the label of racist should be applied to

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28 Charles Mills, *Blackness Visible* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

29 Charles Mills, *From Class to Race: Essays in white Marxism and Black Radicalism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 184.

30 *Ibid.*, 193-194.

31 Shannon Sullivan, "white Privilege," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race*, ed. Naomi Zack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 331-342, 336.

deliberate racial stigmatizations such as the Neo-Nazi, not involuntary acts that harm racial groups. Racism “is a highly charged term, both morally and emotionally, which provokes unproductive, defensive reactions and shuts down urgently needed discussion. So let us reserve “racism” for judgments of serious vice, while observing that not all injustice is caused by a vicious character,” she writes.<sup>32</sup>

This analysis is not intended to refute the aims of non-ideal theory, but merely to show that while Mills celebrates the generalizable categories one can abstract to examine the subordination of real groups, other non-idealist theorists have completely different if not antagonistic accounts of the roles racism and white supremacy have in Black oppression. Philosophers are told to prefer non-ideal theory for its analysis of group subordination over idealist theory which ignores the centrality of race-gender subordination, but non-ideal theory offers no way to guarantee the quality and accuracy of the generalizations abstracted from the oppression of Black groups. Mills suggests that the most operative category for understanding Black oppression is white supremacy and racism, while Sullivan and Anderson believe that such terms are too broad and alienating for white people. I suggest these political considerations are proposed because there is *no method* being deployed that can justify or insist upon one description of racism more than the other within non-ideal theory.

Does non-ideal theory simply resolve down to whether or not the categories deployed in non-idealist analysis are politically efficacious and parallel to the aims of potential white allies? No author provides justifications as to why the generalizations produced by their perception of the groups are the correct generalizations that most accurately explain the subordinate position of the group in question. In fact, the concerns raised by Sullivan and Anderson do not attempt to justify their positions at all beyond implying that whites must be considered in theorizations of racism and wooed by scholarship on race. The unstated premise of such a claim is that whites have the power to end racism, so racial analyses must not alienate them. It is relevant to note that no such regulative idea is proposed towards other categories of analysis where the effectiveness of concepts are determined by the affectivity of the oppressor the concept names.

#### DISAGGREGATING GROUPS—EMPIRICALLY DIVERGENT DESCRIPTIONS OF RACIALIZED SUBJECTS

The descriptions of racialized subjects tend towards commonly accepted (liberal) beliefs. These philosophical analyses rarely result in any specialized knowledge or uncommon observations about the groups under

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32 Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration*, 48.

investigation. In fact, the descriptions of the group and the construction of the group's personality and tendencies tend to have very little basis in reality much less the actual behaviors such groups display throughout various social contexts. In philosophical analyses, white women are thought to be liberal, Black women are thought to be more liberal, both groups are thought to be victims of various forms of interpersonal and state violence, while men generally are less liberal and greater perpetrators of said violence. Racial, ethnic, and economic variations of violence as well as the victimization of specific groups that are well documented throughout the social sciences have very little effect on our theoretical conceptualizing of these groups in philosophy. The construction of group tendencies and the identification of group traits are bonded to the interpretive communities from which they originate.

The philosophical conceptualizations of group behaviors and interests simply cannot be sustained empirically or sociologically. For example, political scientists and sociologists have convincingly shown that white women are not politically liberal entities in the United States. While the world was shocked by the 52% white female majority voting for Trump, any empirically grounded account of white women's political behavior would have expected this result. Since 1952, white women have only voted for a democratic candidate twice.<sup>33</sup> Across the board, white voting behaviors, political attitudes, and gendered beliefs about leadership have failed to hold for Blacks and Latino/a groups in the U.S. Sexism simply could not explain gender gaps in the 2016 election in any racial or ethnic groups but white Americans.<sup>34</sup> Further disaggregation of American white women shows that heteropatriarchy holds a particular appeal to heterosexual married women.<sup>35</sup> Various studies have shown that in racist societies, sexism protects white women from the harshest forms of violence and that paternalism is a character trait white women desire in males.<sup>36</sup> Despite several decades of research confirming the role benevolent sexism

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33 Jane Junn, "The Trump Majority: white Womanhood and the Making of Female Voters in the United States," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 5.2 (2017):343-352, 345.

34 Ana Brancic, MacKenzie Israel-Trummell, & Allyson F. Shortle, "Is Sexism for white People? Gender Stereotypes, Race, and the 2016 Election," *Political Behavior* 41 (2019): 281-307.

35 Dara Z. Strolovitch, Janelle S. Wong & Andrew Proctor, "A Possessive Investment in white Heteropatriarchy? The 2016 Election and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Sexuality," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 5.2 (2017): 353-363.

36 Mary Jackson, *The Velvet Glove: Paternalism and Conflict in Gender, Class, and Race Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), and Pelin Gul & Tom R. Kupfer, "Benevolent Sexism and Mate Preferences: Why Do Women Prefer Benevolent Men Despite Recognizing That They Can Be Undermining?," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 45.1 (2019): 146-161.

plays in sustaining racism, race-gender theory does not often consider how white women utilized patriarchal violence.<sup>37</sup>

Like white men, white women have actively participated in the enslavement of Black people, the spectacle lynchings of Black males, the rape of Black men and boys during slavery and Jim Crow, and the domination of multiple racial groups throughout history.<sup>38</sup> Since the suffrage movements of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century white women have sought to unify the race under white patriarchy.<sup>39</sup> Early suffragettes such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony believed that allowing the educated white woman to rule alongside white men with the ballot would further evolve patriarchy and make it a more efficient colonial idea rather than a genocidal urge.<sup>40</sup> In 1892, Charlotte Gilman claimed that God gave white women a sacred duty to teach white men racial loyalty and groom white men to be imperial patriarchs.<sup>41</sup> Throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, white women started Ku Klux Klan organizations, joined citizens' councils, and launched massive campaigns to both disenfranchise Blacks and preserve segregation.<sup>42</sup> By the 1970s, white feminists had launched major academic and political campaigns to cast Black militancy as a terroristic threat to white womanhood and construct poor Black men as violent rapists who needed to be criminalized and incarcerated to protect American society.<sup>43</sup> Despite these verifiable historical facts that

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37 Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske, "The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating Hostile and Benevolent Sexism," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70.3 (1996): 491-512, and Jean M. McMahon & Kimberly Barsamian Kahn, "When Sexism Leads to Racism: Threat, Protecting Women, and Racial Bias," *Sex Roles* 78 (2018): 591-605.

38 See Thomas Foster, "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 3 (2011):445-464; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making [w]hiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998); and Stephanie Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

39 Louise Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

40 Tommy J. Curry "He Wasn't Man Enough: Black Male Studies and the Ethnological Targeting of Black Men in 19th Century Suffragist Thought," in *African-American Studies*, 2nd edition, ed. Jeanette Davidson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming).

41 Charlotte Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1900), 127.

42 Kathleen Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), and

43 Joyce E. Williams and Karen A. Holmes, *The Second Assault: Rape and Public Attitudes* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981).



mirror the exact same behaviors and patterns of violence we find among white American men, white women are conceptualized to be politically liberal, socially progressive, and peaceful. This ahistorical rendering of white women's history has been criticized since the 1960s to little effect.<sup>44</sup>

Conceptualizations of *the group* are based on presumptions of group tendencies that are the consequences of identity traits rather than actual patterns of group behavior. Often disproportionate rates of violent perpetration by individuals who can be identified by specific identity categories are taken to indicate the propensity that groups have for violence. Philosophers are well accustomed to recognizing that women are victims of intimate partner violence and sexual assault but rarely perceive males to be victims of these behaviors. In the U.S., sexual assault and rape/made to penetrate violence among men and women have been found to be practically equal.<sup>45</sup> Despite the changes to the Uniform Crime Reporting statues in 2013, philosophers have refused to accept that the changes to the definition of rape have resulted in a reclassifying of incidences previously understood to be sexual assault as made to penetrate violence. Over a 12-month period, Black men report the highest rates of contact sexual violence which includes rape, being made to penetrate, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual contact.<sup>46</sup> While males do still report lower rates of sexual violence in lifetime prevalence compared to their female counterparts, women are most of the perpetrators of sexual violence against men. Women are the majority of the perpetrators in: made to penetrate violence (79%), sexual coercion (82%), and unwanted sexual contact (53%).<sup>47</sup> These figures are not only ignored by philosophers but seen as antagonistic to feminist frameworks that see rape and sexual violence as a vulnerability specific to female positionality.<sup>48</sup>

We find the same patterns of perpetration and victimization in intimate partner violence. While Black women report disproportionate rates of IPV victimization over a 12-month period (9.6%), Black men report higher levels of domestic violence victimization (11.6%) among groups of

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44 Gerda Lerner, "New Approaches to the Study of Women in American History," *Journal of Social History* 3.1 (1969): 53-62.

45 Lara Stemple & Ilan Meyer, "The Sexual Victimization of Men in America: New Data Challenge Old Assumptions," *American Journal of Public Health* 104.6 (2014): e19-e26.

46 Sharon Smith et al., *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010-2012 State Report*, (Atlanta: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2017), 18, 21, & 28.

47 *Ibid.*, 32.

48 Lara Stemple, Andrew Flores & Ilan Meyer, "Sexual Victimization Perpetrated by Women: Federal Data Reveal Surprising Prevalence," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 34 (2017) 302-311.

men and most groups of women.<sup>49</sup> Previous research has not only shown that women, especially from lower socio-economic backgrounds or with histories of trauma or substance abuse, attack their male partners.<sup>50</sup> Among Black Americans that bidirectional violence and female initiated violence is more prevalent than in white groups.<sup>51</sup> Among other socially stigmatized groups, we also find higher levels of intimate partner violence. Among same-sex couples, rates of intimate partner violence are roughly equal to that of heterosexual couples, while lesbian relationships have a slightly higher rate overall.<sup>52</sup> Despite philosophers engaging the very same topics that epidemiologists, public health scholars, and sociologists do, the representation of the very same phenomena is practically irreconcilable. These data points not only illuminate unperceived perpetrators but ignored victims.

Additionally, the generalizations used to describe groups *philosophically* cannot account for group (meso) level interactions. Non-ideal theorists assume that the categories of subjugation: race, class, gender, are in fact the defining aspects of interactions between groups. There is no reason for this to be the case. One might assert that white groups interact with Black groups violently because of racism or white supremacy, but this does not tell us how various white groups interact with Black groups or specifically Black male or Black female groups. A philosopher somewhat familiar with the history of sexual violence against Black women during slavery and Jim Crow might reasonably assert that racial violence against Black women includes sexual assault and rape, but given a general ignorance to the history of racial violence including sexual violence against Black men not understand the history of racism including the rape of Black men and boys by white men and white women. Philosophical analyses of race and gender presuppose commonsensical views of oppression, not expertise.

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49 Sharon Smith, NISVS, 121, 128.

50 Denise Hines, "Intimate Terrorism by Women Towards Men: Does it Exist?," *Journal of Aggression, Conflict, and Peace Research* 2.3 (2010): 36-56; Denise Hines and Emily Douglas, "Predicting Potentially Life-Threatening Partner Violence by Women Toward Men: A Preliminary Analysis," *Violence and Victims* 28.5 (2013): 751-771.

51 Carolyn West, "Living in a Web of Trauma: An Ecological Examination of Violence among African Americans," in *The Wiley Handbook on the Psychology of Violence*, eds. Carlos A. Cuevas and Callie Marie Rennison (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 649-665; and Raul Caetano et al., "Unidirectional and Bidirectional Intimate partner violence among White, Black, and Hispanic couples in the United States," *Violence & Victims* 20 (2008): 393-396.

52 M.J. Breiding, J. Chen, & M.C. Black, *Intimate Partner Violence in the United States — 2010*. (Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014), 31-32, and Katie Edwards, Kateryna Sylaska, & Angela Neal, "Intimate Partner Violence Among Sexual Minority Populations: A Critical Review of the Literature and Agenda for Future Research," *Psychology of Violence* 5.2 (2015):112-121.

Consequently, the broad generalizations of phenomena such as racism or sexism are deployed in analyses as assumptions about group beliefs and motivations, not specific interactions. Without disaggregating groups and seeking to understand the specific relationships race-gender groups have to one another; the philosopher becomes incapable of perceiving any of the behaviors easily found throughout history and the social sciences. It is easily observable that sexual violence against males from racial and ethnic populations is common in war and genocides and perpetrated by men and women.<sup>53</sup> However, the grand theories of oppression simply do not disaggregate down to the specific behavior groups impose on other groups. The generalizations of description merely assert the respective dominant groups behave the same towards subordinate groups.

The disaggregation of groups poses three major problems for race-gender theory. First, there is an empirical problem where philosophical abstraction seems to be incapable of accurately representing the traits and patterns of behavior shown to be endemic to certain social locations and groups. When social scientific facts about group behavior contradict philosophical abstractions about the very same group, there is no justification to prefer the less accurate abstraction. Second, there seems to be an ad hoc selectivity or outright bias towards how some groups are defined by rates of individual violence while others are not. If white men and women have similar voting behaviors and political attitudes on race historically, why are white men theorized as conservative while white women are theorized to be liberal? If Black men report higher sexual victimization rates than their female counterparts, why are Black men not theorized as sexual victims, but multiple women with lower rates are? Lesbian groups have higher rates of IPV than many racial and ethnic male groups, yet the male groups are theorized as violent, while lesbian groups are not. Why? And third, generalized descriptions of groups cannot account for the specific interactions a dominant disaggregated group has with a subordinate disaggregated group. Group behaviors that fall outside of the historical or sociological scope of grand theories would have to be learned as historical or sociological facts external to the philosophical analysis, then generalized and applied to the groups being abstracted. There is nothing about creating generalizations from the groups themselves that would allow one to perceive specific interactions that are not ideologically

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53 Tommy J. Curry, "Thinking through the Silence: Theorizing the Rape of Jewish Males during the Holocaust through Survivor Testimonies," *Holocaust Studies* (Forthcoming); "He's a Rapist, Even when He's Not: Richard Wright's Man of All Work as an Analysis of the Rape of Willie McGee," *The Political Companion to Richard Wright*, eds. Jane Gordon and Cyrus Ernesto Zirakzadeh (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2018), 132-154; and "This Nigger's Broken: Hyper-Masculinity, the Buck, and the Impossibility of Physical Disability in the Black Male Body," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 48.3 (2017): 321-343.

situated in an ideological camp. These methodological problems—or problems showing there are no rules by which one can arrive a specific set of reproducible conclusions— demonstrates that the abstractions which come to describe race-gender groups reflect ideological worldviews and politically determined depictions of groups, not the group dynamics itself.

Some philosophers would no doubt maintain that this is why intersectionality is needed, yet these philosophers would be unable to explain why the data presented above has not appeared in any of the intersectional writings in philosophy over the last decade. Rather than refuting the gross generalizations of certain groups, intersectional theories have aided in confirming negative stereotypes about Black male violence while disregarding other forms of violence.<sup>54</sup> However, an important nuance must be made. Intersectional feminist analyses proceeding by abstraction in philosophy and the humanities more generally have rendered interpretations of Black men that mirror the writings of racist white criminologists and racist white feminist authors in the 1970s and 1980s, but intersectional feminists utilizing empirical methodologies in sociology and political science have substantiated that Black men hold gender attitudes that are just as progressive if not more progressive than their female counterpart.<sup>55</sup> However, even the intersectional empiricists have not yet offered any accounts or explanatory theories about female perpetrators of violence in cases of child abuse, spousal abuse, or the history of racism generally. Intersectionality still relies on somewhat static assumptions about race and gender categories, so while the theory does clarify various aspects of Black women’s lives, it has not done so for other groups. The disproportionate murder and sexual assault of racialized males by police and white vigilantes have simply not motivated any analyses within intersectionality.<sup>56</sup> Identity categories determine what the philosopher perceives as the vulnerability specific

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54 Tommy J. Curry, “Decolonizing the Intersection: Black Male Studies as a Critique of Intersectionality’s Indebtedness to Subculture of Violence Theory,” in *Critical Psychology Praxis: Psychosocial Non-Alignment to Modernity/Coloniality*, ed. Robert Beshara (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

55 Evelyn Simien, “A Black Gender Gap? Continuity and Change in Attitudes to Black Feminism,” in *African American Perspectives on Political Science*, ed. Rich Wilbur (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 130-150. Also see Catherine Harnois, “Complexity Within and Similarity Across: Interpreting Black Men’s Support of Gender Justice, amidst Cultural Representations that Suggest Otherwise,” in *Hyper Sexual, Hyper Masculine?: Gender, Race, and Sexuality in the Identities of Contemporary Black Men*, eds., Brittany C. Slatton and Kemesha Spates (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 85-102.

56 “He Never Mattered: Poor Black Males and the Dark Logic of Intersectional Invisibility,” in *The Movement for Black Lives: Philosophical Perspectives*, eds. Michael Cholbi, Alex Madva, Benjamin Yost, & Brandon Hogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), (forthcoming).

bodies have to violence as well as their capacity for violence. The sexual vulnerability of various groups of men or the perpetration of violence by women and other sexual minority groups are not revealed through intersectionality. Such knowledge is external to philosophical analysis--it must be acquired elsewhere.

The idea of the specific race-gender group being deployed in a philosophical analysis is a construction that appeals to the ideological community conducting the investigation. When empirically informed analyses of group behaviors contradict the abstractions the philosopher claims represent *specific groups*, the empirical evidence is rejected as not confirming the ideological belief of the community the group construct aims to serve. The groups constructed by theory are then used as ideal *composites* whose interactions within an imaginary can accurately predict and explain the actual predilections (for power, avarice, and violence) the group and the individuals of those groups pursue in the real world. Said differently, the political ideations that give rise to *the group* not only create consensus among scholars towards certain theories but dictates the state of the world that one considers to be real. It is important to grasp that the racialized subject is created to serve the web of beliefs that constitute philosophical communities. The theory of subjugation being used to animate how these groups interact has no actual method, consequently, a reaffirmation of one's ideology or *grand theory* is a necessary basis of philosophical interpretation.

#### CONCLUSION

Throughout history, Black philosophers have appealed to empirically rooted fields like sociology, psychology, and history to refute the negative descriptions and theories of Black and other racially oppressed groups across the world. From sociology to social dominance theory, empiricism has been used to reformulate how Black groups are represented throughout multiple disciplines.<sup>57</sup> Besides asserting that sociology is not philosophy, philosophers have provided no argument as to why sociologically verifiable facts about group behavior and interactions should be excluded, if not outright dismissed, from philosophical claims about the very same groups under inquiry. This article argues that non-ideal theory is a form of ideology that does not allow philosophers to understand oppression. I conclude that empirically informed theories of racialized subjects are necessary to understand how groups act and suffer under oppression.

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57 Liam Kofi Bright, "Du Bois' Democratic Defence of the Value Free Ideal," *Synthese* 195.5 (2018): 2227-2245, and Jim Sidanius and Felecia Pratto, *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

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