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Feminism, Gender, and Race

The concerns of contemporary philosophical feminism have extended from the oppression of white middle-class women to **gender**, which includes heterosexual males and those of **LGBTQ** sexualities. However, all of these subjects do not peacefully coexist under the same umbrella of feminism, partly for historical reasons and partly due to ongoing tensions between feminists who are presently divided by their racial identities and experience.

Feminist philosophy, like philosophy of race, is a new addition to philosophy, with subjects of analyses that include the history of philosophy, neglected and reclaimed authors, contemporary social injustice, oppression, and identity. By the mid-nineteenth century, suffragists and abolitionists seemed to be natural allies. But following the Civil War, some educated suffragists resented freed black men for having attained the vote before they did. Black women were excluded from white women's political projects, as well as their club networks. (Social and activist clubs were an important institution at that time.) But black women organized on their own—they protested lynching and sought educational opportunities for black women; they vigorously corrected racist stereotypes of sexual immorality and sexual assaults on black women by white men; they created their own social organizations (Sterling 1997).

However, in spite of the eloquence and leadership from scholars and activists such as Ida B. Wells, Mary McLlyod Bethune, Sojourner Truth, Julia A. Cooper, Ella Baker, and Fannie Lou Hammer (Hine 2005), black women's issues were never center stage in general progressive action pertaining to race or gender. Even during the twentieth century Civil Rights

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Movement, black women did not share leadership with black men in activist and political organizations (Brown 1992; Barnett 1993; Collier-Thomas and Franklin 2001). Indeed, as black women began to find their political and activist voices after the civil rights movement, the prominence of men in that movement has increasingly been contrasted with the subordinate roles of women (Blumberg 1990). Black women may thus face a double oppression: racism from white women and men and sexism from black men.

Issues of the exclusion and oppression of women of color are an important part of contemporary philosophy of race. Philosophy of race has until the early twenty-first century had male leaders and male public intellectuals. White feminist philosophers have been more welcoming of philosophy of race and supported a focus on the work of female scholars of color, but this is not an easy alliance, either. In 1988, Elizabeth Spelman's *Inessential Woman* contributed to growing awareness within feminism of its assumptions that white middle-class women were its major subject, thus leaving out the problems faced by women of color and poor women of all races (Spelman 1998). This led to a strengthening of identity politics. More recently, the concept of *intersectionality* has been extensively used to explain differences in gendered experience, but it has not served to unite those who live with those differences (Zack 2017, pp. 598–600). In short, there are significant tensions among feminism, gender, and race and this concluding chapter will aim to examine several of the more pressing issues in contemporary life and scholarship: identity politics and intersectionality; black feminism and black feminist philosophy; black male philosophy; Representation and Theoretical Problems with Race and Gender.

Identity Politics and Intersectionality

In order to understand intersectionality, it is necessary to understand identity politics. The core idea behind **identity politics** and activism based on identities is that there are groups of people with broadly known characteristics that disadvantage them and progress should be sought by members of those groups, under the name or banner of their identities: women, black women, LGBTQ people, poor white people, and so forth. For instance, imagine a single mother who has difficulty keeping a job because her workplace commute takes two hours on three busses from where she lives. Not having a car, she has to rely on public transport, which is not reliable. A woman in that situation might struggle with issues of self-discipline, such as getting up at 5 a.m., or dependence on neighbors to take her children to

school, as though these were her own individual problems. But in reality, the broader problems are a lack of adequate public transport or affordable housing close to her workplace (Puentes and Roberto 2008). For another example, a woman of color might suffer from overhearing racist jokes in her workplace and try not to be "too sensitive," when her problem is not her own emotionality but an implicitly racist culture or lack of training in her work environment. In both cases, organizing or banding together based on identities of low income or nonwhite race could result in solutions such as car-pooling, shared child care, or employee complaints and demands for change in workplace attitudes toward minorities. More broadly, people of color may become stuck in low-wage jobs due to both hearts-and-minds and institutional racism. They may be prevented from voting, voting may be made more difficult for them, or their votes may be discarded, because they are members of a racial group identified as unlikely to support candidates of a party dominant in their districts. (Minorities throughout the United States did not have full protection of the Voting Rights Act during the 2016 presidential election (Berman 2016)). Addressing problems tied to identities requires political solutions based on those identities, e.g., the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Fryer et al. 2013). However, as Mary Bernstein points out, one of the biggest problems with identity politics is that the identities forged for the sake of resistance are the same identities that are the targets of oppression (Bernstein 2005).

The leading insight behind **intersectionality** as a method of analysis and way for describing social reality is that real human beings cannot be categorized in just one way. For instance, almost all individuals can be categorized by race, sex, social class, age, and ability. Intersectionality also takes into account the awkwardness of considering race and gender side by side as classificatory schemes: Anyone who has a race is likely to have a gender, but within the category of gender (males, females, nonbinary), there are different racial identities and within any one racial identity (among the census categories, at least) there are different genders.

Intersectionality in US feminism was begun by Kimberlé Crenshaw through her 1989 article, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." Her aim was to show how black women are marginalized when feminists and others think about them in a "single-axis framework," as just one type of person. Crenshaw introduced the example of lack of legal remedies for workplace discrimination against black women who were the first to be fired: as women, there was no evidence of discrimination against them if there was no evidence of discrimination against

women—because white women were not discriminated against; as black people, there was no evidence of discrimination against them if there was no evidence of discrimination against black people—because black men were not discriminated against. In legal terms, black women thus fell through the cracks as the combination of their race and gender resulted in discrimination unique to them (Crenshaw 1989).

In her 1991 *Stanford Law Review* article, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," Crenshaw observed that identity politics allowed for understanding and action that was group-based and to some extent external to individual struggles and suffering; she recognized that the problems often encountered by women as individuals are the result of wider practices in society. Crenshaw was specifically aware of the importance of identity politics for addressing problems shared by women of color. But she thought there were *homogenizing* problems with fitting people into the categories that identity politics requires—everyone in a recognized identity group was considered to have the same problems. Her example of immigrant women who are the victims of domestic violence shows how poverty, cultural barriers, lack of access to bureaucratic protections, and fears of deportation compound their plight. Crenshaw's point is that it is not just one thing about these women that oppresses them. More generally within communities of color, a desire to protect the community may stifle efforts to alleviate the plight of battered women (Crenshaw 1991).

In the abstract of a 2013 paper cowritten by Crenshaw there is a call for the development of *intersectionality studies*:

> Intersectional insights and frameworks are put into practice in a multitude of highly contested, complex, and unpredictable ways. We group such engagements with intersectionality into three loosely defined sets of practices: applications of an intersectional framework or investigations of intersectional dynamics; debates about the scope and content of intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological paradigm; and political interventions employing an intersectional lens. We propose a template for fusing these three levels of engagement with intersectionality into a field of intersectional studies that emphasizes collaboration and literacy rather than unity. Our objective here is not to offer pat resolutions to all questions about intersectional approaches but to spark further inquiry into the dynamics of intersectionality both as an academic frame and as a practical intervention in a world characterized by extreme inequalities. At the same time, we wish to zero in on some issues that we believe have occupied a privileged place in the field from the very start, as

> well as on key questions that will define the field in the future. To that end, we foreground the social dynamics and relations that constitute subjects, displacing what often seems like an undue emphasis on the subjects (and categories) themselves as the starting point of inquiry. We also situate the development and contestation of these focal points of intersectional studies within the politics of academic and social movements—which, we argue, are themselves deeply intersectional in nature and therefore must continually be interrogated as part of the intersectional project. (Cho et al. 2013, p. 785)

In other words, intersectionality is theoretically self-reflective, with a core commitment to focusing on wider social factors that make up individual subjects and oppress them.

Intersectionality has not been without its critics. One problem is that there is no limit to possible intersections, so that there is an **ad hoc** quality to any newly discovered intersection. A second issue is that "intersection" is a metaphor, so it is not clear to what extent different identities add up to, or result in, new identities. A third issue is that intersectionality depends on the same kind of identities that motivate identity politics, as in Crenshaw's initial example of black women in the workplace, who would be both black and women (Zack 2005, pp. 1–22). Jennifer Nash has noted that the primary subject of intersectionality seems to have been black women, to the exclusion of other "intersections" (Nash 2008). If Nash is correct, intersectionality may be viewed as a subfield of identity politics. One could speculate further and claim that when any given project of intersectionality is successful, the result is new identities with political motivations, e.g., black working-class women who seek to further their rights in the workplace. In this sense, intersectionality faces the same strategic problem as identity politics: the intersections around which people organize to resist oppression are also the targets of oppression. However, the important contribution of intersectionality studies is that the oppression of women of color is situational and complex, so that understanding and analyzing that oppression requires extensive understanding of its contexts.

Black Feminism and Black Feminist Philosophy

Black feminism is not new in reality. African-American women's rights activist and abolitionist Sojourner Truth (1797–1883) delivered her famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech to the Women's Convention in Acron, Ohio, in 1851:

> That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman? (Truth 1851)

Intersectional theory would show that as a black woman, Truth experienced both the oppression of slavery and unrecognized oppression against her gender—"thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery." When Truth spoke out against the general idea that women needed to be protected by speaking of her own strengths, she was implicitly drawing a distinction between herself and white women—they were protected, while she wasn't—but nonetheless asserting her female identity.

Twentieth-century feminist scholars of female gender identity have emphasized how women's roles as compliant, decorous, fragile, and nurturing were socially constructed for the benefit of men, but described as determined by nature. This literature often leaves out how such traditional roles were assigned to white women, while different theories of gender were used for describing the gender of women of color, particularly black women, during and after slavery.

An emphasis on the nuclear family structure resulted from the industrial revolution when workplaces were relocated outside of the home and white middle-class men, although not white middle-class women, left their homes for the workday. Cultures of domestic economy, community service, child rearing, and women's proper comportment, including sexual fidelity and/or chastity, structured female gender norms, which were assumed to be racially white. Widely circulated manuals on interior decoration and home management, such as *The American Woman's Home, Or Principles of Domestic Science*: *Being a Guide to the Formation and Maintenance of Economical, Beautiful and Christian Homes*, first published in 1869 by Harriet Beecher Stowe and her sister Catherine E. Beecher, simply assumed a white readership. The same can be said about the 1939 *Delineator Cookbook*, later known as the *American Woman's Cookbook* (Stowe and Beecher 1869; Berholtzheimer 1939). During and after slavery, black women worked agriculturally and domestically in the homes of white women and their gender identity did not have the same status or protection as that of white women. Their work roles were limited to laborers, nurturers, and servants, and their sexuality

was not viewed as a value to be protected, but rather as a free resource to be exploited: it was not unusual for white male slave owners to "breed" their female slaves or during Jim Crow, for white men to assume that they had an unrestrained right to black women's bodies. Anti-miscegenation laws, prohibiting interracial marriage and sex were primarily enforced against black men (Zack 1997; Robinson 2003).

Differences in aesthetic evaluations have also been related to race. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, written between 1781 and 1787, Thomas Jefferson insisted on a fundamental difference in beauty, based on skin color. He wrote:

> The first difference which strikes us is that of colour. Whether the black of the negro resides in the reticular membrane between the skin and scarf-skin, or in the scarf-skin itself; whether it proceeds from the colour of the blood, the colour of the bile, or from that of some other secretion, the difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us. And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race? Add to these, flowing hair, a more elegant symmetry of form, their own judgment in favour of the whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is the preference of the Oranootan for the black women over those of his own species. The circumstance of superior beauty, is thought worthy attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs, and other domestic animals; why not in that of man? (Jefferson 1785, p. 145)

Jefferson here not only claims the aesthetic superiority of whites over blacks, from a white perspective, but also attributes to blacks an aesthetic preference for whites.

Black women, in particular, have been oppressed by, and themselves internalized, beauty ideals for white women. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Sarah Breedlove (1867–1919), known as "Madame Walker," made a fortune and became a philanthropist for African American causes, through her line of hair products with grooming instructions for black women. Breedlove's products were more gentle to the skin and scalp than those containing lye, which were in wide use at the time. However, the subtext of "beauty culturists" who sold the "Walker System" door-to-door was not only relief from damaging products, but closer approximation to white beauty ideals. Walker invented the first hair-straightening formula

and her advertisements typically featured light-skinned African American women with flowing hair (Walker 2007). (In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye,* Pecola shares her last name (see Chapter 6).)

Many African American women continue to be sensitive to the tyranny of white beauty ideals, perhaps because in US history, aesthetic disparagement of black people has been deeply linked to issues of self-regard and racial progress. Tommy Curry has traced the connection of racial aesthetics to nineteenth-century theories of gender which held that "inferior races," particularly Africans, did not have gender distinctions. Self-help racial uplift practices for African Americans included "feminizing" personal beauty and hygiene routines, as well as housekeeping standards, which disproportionately became the obligations of black women (Curry 2017a).

The influence of Thomas Jefferson's racist aesthetics has been taken up by T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting in relation to the misogyny of gangsta rap music. Sharpley-Whiting argues that such devaluation and stereotyping is reproduced in white entertainment; at the same time, white women appropriate selected aspects of black women's physical appearances, such as hairstyles and skin tones (Sharpley-Whiting 2017).

In general, black feminist scholarship has sought to center black women by focusing on their agency, political power, and knowledge production. Patricia Hill Collins has questioned official constructions of knowledge that exclude the experience of black women. Her theoretical standpoint in sociological theory of knowledge, has been inspiring to black feminist philosophers (Collins 1986, 1989, 1990, 1998). However, the concerns of black feminism across disciplines do not in themselves constitute black feminist philosophy. Although philosophers have been inspired by voices from related disciplines, many believe it is important to self-consciously develop black feminist philosophy as a subfield in the academic discipline of philosophy. Thus, V. Denise James writes:

> Although some might say the idiosyncratic quotes that eccentric philosophy professors choose to post on their doors mean little in the greater scheme of things, I thought long and hard before deciding to greet students, colleagues, and other visitors with words from a black feminist statement and not a quote from one of the canonical philosophical thinkers. The quote makes a declaration.
>
> I am a black feminist philosopher.
>
> I want to work on projects that will contribute to understanding the lived experiences of black women and girls. I believe that philosophy done from

> a black feminist standpoint can help to define, clarify, assess, and suggest changes in our social world that would greatly improve the lives of all people. I am happy to admit that commitment to this standpoint is a rejection of the supposed neutrality and universalist claims made by other philosophers.
>
> I am a black feminist philosopher. (James 2014, p. 189)

That James wrote this for 2014 publication indicates that black feminist philosophy is a (very) new academic subfield. But even in its beginnings, there is room for diversity of opinion. Kristie Dotson, speaking as a black feminist philosopher in 2013, defines black feminist philosophy as "radical love for the lives and cultural artifacts of black women" (Dotson 2013, p. 38). The focus on history through black feminist philosophy leads to the reclamation of black feminist thinkers and activists, through analysis of their core ideas and principles, as well as their relevance to problems still faced by black women. For example, Joy James considers the political persona of Ida B. Wells in her opposition to lynching. James relates how Wells called for black self-defense against racial terrorization and insisted that white women did enter into voluntary sexual relationships with black men, contrary to received mythology that demonized black men as rapists. James relates Wells's insights to principles of the contemporary resistance movements, Black Lives Matter, and the Black Women's Blueprint (James 2017).

It is reasonable to expect that as the number of black feminist academic philosophers increase, they will both ply philosophical methodology to subjects of interest to and about black women and illuminate the distinctively philosophical aspects of thought developed in other disciplines. It is also to be expected that black feminist philosophy will continue to show concern about philosophical methodology more generally, as in the 2010 anthology *Convergences*, edited by Maria del Guadalupe Davidson, Kathryn T. Gines, and Donna-Dale L. Marcano. The editors' aim was to provide a forum to explore issues of agency, identity, alienation, and power shared by black feminist thought and continental philosophy. And in another direction of disciplinary unification, V. Denise James has written about connections between black feminist concerns and the pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey. Others are taking up issues of contemporary concern to black women, for instance Camisha Russell's *The Assisted Reproduction of Race: Thinking through Race as a Reproductive Technology*, philosophically examines how race is used in assisted reproduction and to determine kinship (Russell 2018).

Black Male Philosophy

There are two kinds of black male philosophy. The first is simply philosophy done by black men. Black men were the first to introduce African American thought to philosophy in the 1970s, as well as philosophy of race. Their assumption that scholarship about race was inclusive of all members of "the race" implicitly centered their own gender. To that extent, black male philosophy, as philosophy conducted by black men, has been antithetical to feminism as generally understood to be resistance to male dominance. However, as black women have entered the field of academic philosophy, there have been anecdotal accounts of their reaction against this professional dominance of black men. Quayshawn Spencer reports on the results of a 2014 demographic study of black graduate students and professors in philosophy that most respondents declared their AOS (Area of Specialization) as Africana Philosophy (including African American Philosophy) or Philosophy of Race. However, Africana Philosophy was male-dominated, whereas Philosophy of Race was gender-neutral (Botts et al. 2014.)

The second kind of black male philosophy is an explicit focus on the experience of black men, conducted by black male philosophers. Strictly speaking, black male philosophy as philosophy by and about black men should be broadly accepted as part of the same feminist philosophy that includes black feminism, because feminism, as now broadly understood, includes gender. However, it is not clear that is always the case, insofar as black feminist philosophers may not agree with some of the conclusions of black male philosophers. We can begin with this last source of tension through the main ideas in Tommy T. Curry's 2017 book, *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood*, which introduces Black Male Studies to philosophy.

Curry refers to demographic and sociological data and theory to develop a view that black males have been unjustly portrayed by academic progressives, as well as white racists in the outside public. He notes that counter to white trends, black men have not progressed in undergraduate and graduate enrollment compared to black women and receive only 40% of the degrees awarded to African Americans; black male compared to black female representation among professors in higher education is 48,000–70,000. Moreover, Curry charges that contemporary theorists portray black men as sexist, homophobic, and misogynistic, counter to evidence that they are more progressive about gender than white men, white women, and black women. He claims that black feminist theorists have portrayed black men as lacking agency and seeking to emulate the masculinity of white men, through the oppression and abuse of black women. According to Curry,

such views ignore studies of social class within patriarchal capitalistic societies, which are structured to valorize dominant males while oppressing those from subordinate groups and viewing them as biological and cultural threats to the high-status group, in the US case, whites. Curry calls for **Black Male Studies** as a philosophical research program that will incorporate dominance theory into gender studies of patriarchy and include accounts of their own experience by black men (Curry 2017b).

Curry's views are novel in criticism of attitudes toward black men by black feminist theorists. However, the ways that black men have been deprived of respect and honorific rewards compared to white men have long been discussed and expressed in African American literature, film, and political aspirations. In philosophy, Leonard Harris in "Honor, Eunuchs, and the Postcolonial Subject," claims that no "eunuch, slave, serf, or peasant, can be recognized as having the traits of courage, temperance, or sagacity that would result in their being honored—the subject of exalted deference or regard—as a eunuch, slave, serf, or peasant. Instead, if a member of such a group is honored, it is in spite of that identity" (Harris 1997). About 20 years earlier, Harris had written about how William Fontaine was honored:

> In 1936, Fontaine was the first Black to receive a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania. His doctoral dissertation, *Fortune, Matter and Providence: A Study of Ancius Severinus Boethius and Giordano Bruno* envoked favorable reviews. In 1947, he joined the philosophy faculty at the University of Pennsylvania after teaching at Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Morgan State University, Baltimore, Maryland. In the course of his career, he published several critiques of C. I. Lewis, C. L. Stevenson, and Ruth Benedict in respectable philosophy journals. Fontaine was well known for his concern with racial issues. As the first Black professor of philosophy at Penn, he was frequently queried on race relation problems of his day. Fontaine's *Segregation, Desegregation, and the Power of Morals* (1967) is seen by former colleagues and students as his principal statement on racial issues. According to those same persons, Fontaine was an excellent teacher. A rare honor was posthumously accorded Fontaine in 1969; Penn established an ongoing graduate fellowship program in his name, the Fontaine Fellows. The university community recognized Fontaine as an accomplished philosopher, and this, in spite of being Black. (Harris 1978, p. 417)

Harris does not explicitly mention gender in his account of Fontaine, but this omission is contextual. Almost all academic philosophers were male at the time of Fontaine's career, so that the main demographic basis for comparing Fontaine with his colleagues would have been race, by default.

It, therefore, seems important not to view history anachronistically from a feminist perspective. Overall, the male dominance in specific historical periods and contexts cannot be read into contexts that were predominantly male, but needs to be understood as more general and external to such contexts. Within all-male contexts, where "no eunuch, slave, serf, or peasant" is honored, as such, gender is not a factor, although race and status are.

However, in his accounts of reclaiming the neglected philosophical contributions of Alain Locke—who was honored for his contributions to black culture during the Harlem Renaissance—Harris does focus on gender as part of the reason for Locke's decades-long oblivion:

> Not one paper on Locke, besides mine, was presented at any of the seven queer theory conferences I attended between 2000, at the graduate Center of the City of New York, to 2007 at UCLA: he had no story of being uncomfortable with his homosexuality and no drawer of pictures at the New York Public Library full of nude Black males with particular attention to their penises like Carl van Vechten. Besides a few stories of flirtation, his story was not a source of inspiration. Without a story like James Baldwin's, author of *Giovanni's Room*, (1953), who was alienated from his American homeland and lived openly abroad, Locke was boring. He was not an alienated wounded being that overcame or openly advocated; and nothing titillating. Locke critiqued what he termed 'proprietorship' as a source of heterosexual prejudice – ownership of mates – and an array of prejudices against difference. His normality, self-confidence, counseling of gays from Bruce Nugent to Countée Cullen, wonderful relationship with his mother and his steadfast effort to infuse a respect for difference simply made him unfit as a hero.
>
> Locke has been buried beneath a mountain of books that needed a Negro type to talk about – bourgeois, uncle-tom, white lackey, gentile, closeted gay, professional, middle-class non-threatening or just 'niggeratti'. He is usually described as a gentile scholar that used verbose language. Yet, whether Harold Cruse's *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967), where he is pictured as the white man's lackey and delusional romantic, Anna Pochmara's *The Making of the New Negro* (2011), where he is pictured as a paternal patronizing gay homophobe or Barbara Foley's *Spectres of 1919* (2008), where he is pictured as a ruling class puppet, Locke is pictured as an agent for an agenda not of his making.
>
> Locke is never an agent. (Harris 2017, pp. 128–9)

There are interesting intersections implied by Harris's claim that Locke was ignored because he did not dramatize his homosexuality—Locke did not fit into stereotypes of black male homosexuals. This claim highlights the

intersection of race with sexual preference, which itself intersects with an inability to be categorized (Harris 2017).

George Yancy gives a different contemporary account of both the lack of black male agency and the demonization of black males. In "The Violent Weight of Whiteness: The Existential and Psychic Price Paid by Black Male Bodies," he begins by describing an experience at a philosophy conference, when white philosophers congratulated another black philosopher who did not resemble him, for a plenary talk he (Yancy) had given on Franz Fanon. Yancy writes:

> When the other Black philosopher shared his experiences with me, I could feel the existential weight of being any Black male. Being thanked for a talk that he had not given was just one register of the burden. He had to endure the process of dis-identifying himself from me, of being mistaken. In absentia, I endured the burden of being where I wasn't, of being "the Black." Imagine the mantra, "A Black man did it!" And then watch as whites engage in hysterics and fanatic insularity, where all Black men begin to look alike ("criminals," "aggressors," "rapists") and thus needing to be stopped, and, indeed, in so many cases, stopped dead. Susan Smith, a white woman who in 1994 drowned her two children and blamed it on a Black man, and Charles Stuart, a white man who in 1998 shot and killed his pregnant wife and blamed it on a Black man, were not only guilty of murder, but guilty of invoking the white racist historical sedimentation of the white imago of the Black male body as inherently and unconscionably violent and cruel, which is a form of death by racist semiosis, one that can and does easily translate into an actual killing of Black men who "fit the description." …
>
> I wanted to move lithe in that conference space, to move with effortless grace, but my individual embodiment's meaning had been confiscated and I was returned as racially static. … Within another context, I would have been lynched because some white woman said that a Black man had accosted and raped her, though I was nowhere close to the alleged act. Lynching any Black male body that "fit the description" would have been sufficient; indeed, within the context of North American white supremacy, any Black body would have served the larger purpose of white nation building, of performing what it meant not to be Black. (Yancy 2017, 589–91)

This interchangeability of black bodies in the imaginations of white people becomes dangerous for black males when otherwise rational and benevolent white people experience fear at the sight of a black man. In the first chapter of his *Black Bodies/White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race*, Yancy relates a stressful ride in an elevator with a white woman, who he realizes,

regardless that he is well-dressed, "sees" his black body, as a threat. She reacts to this perceived threat by almost imperceptibly cowering, trembling, receding, and clutching her purse. Her apparent fear is a threat to Yancy, because if she falsely accuses him of assaulting her when they both get out of the elevator, her word will be more readily accepted than his. Yancy also describes his experience in walking down a street with people sitting in their cars and hearing a series of "clicks" as they lock their car doors (Yancy 2008, pp. 4–8; xix–xx).

The alienation Yancy describes in the conference experience, riding the elevator with the white woman, and hearing the car doors click, occurs in relatively safe social contexts. But Yancy also relates an earlier experience in which the stereotype of black males as dangerous was life-threatening to him:

> "Man, I almost blew you away!"
>
> Those were the terrifying words of a white police officer — one of those who policed black bodies in low income areas in North Philadelphia in the late 1970s — who caught sight of me carrying the new telescope my mother had just purchased for me.
>
> "I thought you had a weapon," he said.
>
> The words made me tremble and pause; I felt the sort of bodily stress and deep existential anguish that no teenager should have to endure.
>
> . . .
>
> This officer had already inherited those poisonous assumptions and bodily perceptual practices that make up what I call the "white gaze." He had already come to "see" the black male body as different, deviant, ersatz. He failed to conceive, or perhaps could not conceive, that a black teenage boy living in the Richard Allen Project Homes for very low income families would own a telescope and enjoyed looking at the moons of Jupiter and the rings of Saturn.
>
> A black boy carrying a telescope wasn't conceivable — unless he had stolen it — given the white racist horizons within which my black body was policed as dangerous. To the officer, I was something (not someone) patently foolish, perhaps monstrous or even fictional. My telescope, for him, was a weapon.
>
> In retrospect, I can see the headlines: "Black Boy Shot and Killed While Searching the Cosmos."
>
> That was more than 30 years ago. Only last week, our actual headlines were full of reflections on the 1963 March on Washington, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, and President Obama's own speech at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to commemorate it 50 years on. As the many accounts from that long ago day will tell you, much has changed

> for the better. But some things — those perhaps more deeply embedded in the American psyche — haven't. In fact, we should recall a speech given by Malcolm X in 1964 in which he said, "For the 20 million of us in America who are of African descent, it is not an American dream; it's an American nightmare." (Yancy 2013)

These writings in black male philosophy by Curry, Harris, and Yancy, altogether leave us with a puzzling question: How can members of a group believed to lack agency, who would thereby be passive, nonetheless be viewed as dangerous? One could answer this question by claiming that stereotypes and myths need not be consistent, because they do not come from rational thought. Alternatively, we could return to the concept of a widely shared white imaginary or what a large number of white people all imagine to be true, and have sufficient dominance and power to make true in reality. In an enigmatic 1997 article, "Sex, Race, and Matrices of Desire in an Anti-Black World," Lewis Gordon analyzes gender in terms of race. In an antiblack world, the ultimate object of desire is white and the ultimate object of rejection is black. Desire is evaluative as well as erotic, so in an antiblack world, the phallus (symbol of male power) is actually white skin. The result, according to Gordon is that "the logic of gender in an antiblack world can be demonstrated to converge with the logic of race in ways that question the very meaning of sex" (Gordon 1997, pp. 129–30).

For Gordon, racism is racial desire. White women are "coded" with the helplessness of their femaleness, which is black, given the white-skin color phallus; and black women occupy the lowest position of helplessness and passivity, so that they are doubly black, that is, black because they are female and black because they are racially black. Black men, on the other hand, are simply female in being black. However, many theorists of race and gender would consider that Gordon's analysis takes race as a leading concept to an extreme (Zack 2017, p. 603). This underscores radical differences in perspectives within racial gender theory. And those kinds of differences can influence how ideas and proposals are received within a pluralistic audience in philosophy of race, as we will now see in our final section of this chapter and book.

Representation and Theoretical Problems with Race and Gender: The Tuvel Affair

In one sense, the 2017 "Tuvel Affair" was a tempest in a teapot, but it raised issues about feminist scholarship that swirled around the question, "How and by whom should the subjects of race and gender be researched?"

The "how" part of the question concerns the race or gender of the authors of sources used by the researcher; the "who" part concerns the race or gender of the researcher. The "facts" here were mainly of interest to academic philosophers, but the issues extend more broadly into representation in the sense of who can speak for whom, and the ethics of scholarship and race.

On March 29, 2017, *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* published an article by Rebecca Tuvel, "In Defense of Transracialism." (The article had been subjected to Hypatia's review process, which many in philosophical feminism regard as extremely rigorous.) Tuvel suggested that it should be morally permissible for people to change their racial identities, analogously to why it is morally permissible for people to change their gender identities. Angry and accusatory reactions by self-called "marginalized" scholars immediately followed. Because of the public abuse of Tuvel on social media, few defended her according to the standards of professional philosophy that were upheld in her writing—her article was well-reasoned and scholarly. However, Kelly Oliver and Jesse Sengal did step up (Oliver 2017; Sengal 2017). The Associate Editors of Hypatia issued a statement and another was signed by more than 800 people, both stating that Tuvel's article should not have been published because it did not seriously refer to work by women of color and/or transgender people (Schuessler 2017). More recently, the Board of *Hypatia* and its editor, Sally Sholtz, disavowed the associate editors' statement and stood by Tuvel's article, because it had been peer-reviewed according to *Hypatia's* procedures. Sholtz and Shelley Wilcox, editor of *Hypatia Reviews Online* subsequently resigned. The Hypatia Board of Directors disbanded the associate editors and basically declared an emergency situation for Hypatia, the leading feminist journal of philosophy (Weinberg 2017; McKenzie et al. 2017).

Tuvel became well known and has been viewed as unprofessionally, if not unjustly, attacked. Tuvel is white and her self-proclaimed marginalized critics are feminist women of color. The controversy raises a number of questions: Is racial identity analogous to gender identity? Why are some people incensed at the idea that racial identities are chosen? Who has the right to decide which identities others may choose and what are the criteria for such decisions? Do white philosophers who write about race and gender have an obligation to refer to the work of philosophers who may be marginalized because they are people of color and/or LBGTQ? These questions raise issues in professional ethics, which are neither legal nor empirical, although they are important for collegiality, reputation, and the atmosphere of the discipline of academic philosophy. To answer them is not to advocate any particular public or institutional policy and neither do answers constitute

magic wands for changing how people think and behave in reality. But considering such questions is an intellectual choice that many philosophers would think they have a right, if not an obligation, to make.

Tuvel based her suggestion that people may change their racial identities on an analogy to the reasoning behind the widespread progressive consensus that changing gender identities is morally permissible. It's not self-evident that such analogical reasoning is valid, because racial identities and gender identities are different kinds of social identities, even though both require choice. Usually, these choices are not evident because most people comply with both the racial and gender identities others assume are theirs or attribute to them. But racial identities have genealogical connections within families—people tend to be the same race as their family members. By contrast, gender identities, while also assigned and constructed within families and communities, are applied to individuals as separate units. This suggests that racial identities are overall more communal, whereas gender identities are more individualistic. Thus, individuals already have more social freedom in choosing their gender identities than their racial identities. Therefore, Tuvel's analogy may not be apt, apart from the facts and possibilities of choice, in both cases. Also, progressives might be skeptical of treating race and gender as analogues in moral reasoning. White males have left an uncomfortable history of lumping nonwhites, straight women, and LGBTQ people together in one nontraditional category, particularly within institutional structures, as in the expression, "women and minorities" or the term "diversity." That alone is reason to insist that these identity types be treated separately, out of respect for the autonomy of their members.

Some people have always been incensed at the idea that racial identities can be chosen. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was widespread white public hysteria about people with black ancestry passing for white. But now, there is agitation among blacks about whites passing for black. (This attitude surfaced when Rachel Dolezal, a white NAACP official who presented herself as black, was revealed to be white (La Ganga and Pearce 2015)). Part of such reaction may be due to perceived "unearned" advantages of having a racial identity other than one's birth race, part may be the result of people feeling that the racial identities they possess include a right to assess the claims of others to possess them. And this leads to the third question: Who does have the right to decide what racial identities others may have?

Racial identities are not now imposed by law in the United States, although they are recorded for legal and institutional purposes. The US Census is based on voluntary self-reporting of respondents' racial categories. Contemporary biological science provides no system, independent of

social divisions, for racial categories. Race in society is attributed to people and claimed by them, based on known ancestry and appearance. There is nothing compelling or necessary about how individuals are racially categorized—custom is king. People do not easily change their birth race identities because members of the group they were born into, who they usually know, do not approve of such changes. For example, many mixed black and white people in the United States claim black identity and are claimed by black family members, especially if they "look" black (whatever this may mean). But many others identify as multiracial or claim stand-alone identities, based on their life circumstances and experiences, gender, religion, and social class (Davenporta 2016). The choices of such mixed black and white people, as well as others who are mixed, when they make their choices known, have been broadly recognized and respected. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 6 in 1993, psychologist Maria P.P. Root published a "Bill of Rights for People of Mixed Heritage," which claimed a right to choose and change one's racial identity (Root 1993). Root was neither excoriated or vilified for that proclamation, which was embraced by scholars of mixed race. Apart from the fact that mixed race may be a better analogue for thinking about "transracialism" than is transgender, what else does the recognition of mixed-race choice tell us? Such choice arises at the boundary between custom and individualism; but it may be tolerated only because mixed race, although uncommon but not rare, is a small exception to the American racial system.

Many blacks, and to some degree whites, have tolerated the fact that some black Americans have "passed" into the white group. Are Americans ready for exceptions to custom in the form of white people passing as black? Apparently not, although there are no laws against it. However, to put it this way is only to *describe* a social situation. *Morally*, we should ask why such choices and those who advocate them are intolerable to some black people. This question of tolerance is important because it entails limiting the freedom of other people, for which there needs to be a good reason(s). It is not self-evident that if a white person advocates a choice to be black made by other white people, that her white identity disqualifies her advocacy. If that choice is a matter of communal moral consensus, it belongs to everyone in the racial community, which in this case includes both whites and blacks. But, black scholars who are intolerant of such choices also have their principled reasons, which can be buried in the aftermath of controversial cases, such as Tuvel's article. We can expect further discussion about such choices in the future of philosophy of race.

Here is the final question: Do white, heterosexual philosophers who write about race and gender have an obligation to refer to the work of philosophers who may be marginalized because they are people of color

and/or LBGTQ? There cannot be a good argument for personal diversity in choice of research sources, because research is broadly presumed to stand on its own. But a very good argument can be made for seeking out the best work in any subfield that one engages. Some of the best work on race and gender has been done by philosophers who are nonwhite, nonmale, or LGBTQ. When those philosophers and their work are simply ignored by white philosophers interested in these subfields, it is very understandable, especially when it happens repeatedly, that those who have been marginalized in that way will be very hurt, very angry, and very frustrated. Nevertheless, the response as philosophers to inadequate, shallow, or even opportunistic philosophy should always be a civil, reasoned, unemotional response that is the result of the best intellectual work the person responding can put forth. Philosophy is, after all, a cold and dry intellectual discipline!

Conclusion

Gender as a subject has its roots in feminism. During the nineteenth century, black abolitionists and white suffragists were allies. But after freed black men received suffrage and educated white women did not, there was a rift that to this day has not fully healed. The wave of feminism that began in the middle of the twentieth century came to be criticized for its focus on the concerns of white middle-class women. At the same time, identity politics developed, as a means for people to identify and organize based on disadvantaged identities. Some feminist theorists became critical of identity politics for its tendency to homogenize all members of a group sharing the same identity. The result was intersectionality as a method of analysis and basis for political action, which was more contextualized than identity politics because, in effect, multiple identities were conceived as constituting subjects. In philosophy, first white feminism and then African American philosophy became established academically. Black feminist philosophers proceed by reclaiming historical figures for philosophical analysis and inspiration, forging connections between different traditions in philosophy, and philosophizing contemporary concerns of black women. Black male philosophy is in one sense the result of the fact that when African American philosophy first entered a field that was dominated by men—the first black academic philosophers in the twentieth century were men. However, given the history of feminism, black male philosophy can also be understood as a philosophical focus on the experience of black men. Accounts of that experience have protested injustice against black men and shared the social and physical vulnerability of being falsely stereotyped as dangerous.

Gender studies by and about people of color have become well enough established in philosophy to raise questions about who has the authority to write about whom and whether there is a general obligation to include work by minority scholars in sources. A recent controversy involving whether people should be permitted to change their race as they have changed their gender focused on this issue.

Glossary

ad hoc—added or done for a specific purpose, only, and not following from a general principle previously agreed upon; arbitrary, in terms of theory.
philosophy—inquiry and advocacy for the well-being of black women and justice for them, undertaken with the methodology of academic philosophy.
black male studies—proposed philosophical research into the experience of black men as members of a subordinate, out-group under white-dominated patriarchal society.
black male philosophy—philosophy by and explicitly about the experience of black men.
feminism—thought and action about injustice toward women, with advocacy of improvement in their circumstances, based on general and specific analysis; now broadly includes gender.
gender—umbrella term for social aspects of human sexuality, including male, female, nonbinary, heterosexual, LGBTQ.
identity politics—group organization or identification for the sake of dealing with common problems for people with specific identities.
intersectionality—theoretical method and description of people who experience multiple oppressions based on multiple identities.
LGBTQ—acronym for people who identify as: Lesbian, Gay, BiSexual, Transgender, or Queer.

Discussion Questions

1. Explain a double or triple oppression experienced by black women.
2. How is identity politics different from the methodology of intersectionality?
3. Explain the identity politics in which you or people you know directly participate.
4. Provide some examples of intersectionality from your own experience.

5. How is black feminist philosophy different from black feminism?
6. Who do you think benefits from the demonization of black men in the United States?
7. How is the "unmanning" of black men related to their demonization?
8. Do you agree that people should be allowed to choose their gender?
9. Do you think that people should be allowed to choose their race? Who gets to decide and why?
10. Do you agree that even in matters of race and gender, philosophy should remain "cold" and "dry" in presentation? Give reasons for or against.

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