

## Gender and Race Constructions

### 1. Options

Gender naturalism (...is a physical/biol. kind)  
Gender constructivism (...only socially real)  
Gender eliminativism (...not real at all, only illusion)

Race naturalism (race is a physical/biol. kind)  
Race constructivism (...only socially real)  
Race eliminativism (...not real at all, only illusion)

### 2. Method

Different disciplines, & different communities, likely to give different answers.  
Answers should depend on the point of asking the question: why do you want to know?  
My purpose: devise theoretical tools to aid the quest for social justice.

#### *Commonality problem*

Is there *anything* social that all and only women (or men) have in common?

#### *Normativity problem*

Do all efforts to define what it is to be a woman *problematically marginalize* some women?  
And by taking the category of woman to be meaningful, do we *reinforce sexual oppression*?

### 3. Gender: *Gender is the social meaning of sex.*

Sex ('males'/'females'...on a continuum with the intersexed): anatomical differences assumed to be relevant to different roles in reproduction.

Gender ('men'/'women'): the--contextually variable--social implications of observed or imagined sex.

*S is a woman* if and only if S is systematically *subordinated* along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.), and S is "marked" for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a *female's* biological role in reproduction.

*S is a man* iff S is systematically *privileged* along some dimension...and S is "marked" by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a *male's* biological role in reproduction.

Re Normativity: Since our primary concern is to eliminate racial and sexual oppression, it is permissible to "marginalize" those who are not oppressed. We cannot be responsive to the harms of oppression without being able to identify those who have suffered its effects.

Re Commonality: Abstraction from difference allows us to acknowledge difference without losing the analytical value of the concept of gender.

### 4. Race: *Race is the social meaning of "color"*

"Color": physical "markers" such as skin tone, eye, nose, and lip shape, hair texture, physique, etc. assumed to be inherited from those who occupy a specific geographical region or regions.

Race: the (contextually variable) social implications of observed or imagined "color".

#### *Commonality problem*

Is there *anything* social that all and only Whites, Blacks, Latino(a)s...have in common?  
Consider "marking" and social position.

### *Normativity problem*

Do all efforts to define what it is to be member of a race *problematically marginalize* some individuals? And by taking the category of woman to be meaningful, do we *reinforce racism*?

Consider our legitimate goals in inquiry.

A group is *racialized* (in context C) if and only if its members are socially positioned as subordinate or privileged along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.) (in C), and the group is "marked" as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of ancestral links to a certain geographical region.

### **5. Moving forward...**

Can the continuum of sex differences be ignored in an ideally just society?

Can the continuum of "color" differences be ignored in an ideally just society?

- Reproductive differences should not be ignored.
- Accessibility/health should not be ignored.
- History should not be ignored.
- Cultural differences and traditions should not be ignored.
- "Color" should be ignored...???

Sex/Gender Options?

"Sex" naturalism – though not binary and contextually variable

~~Gender naturalism (a natural/physical kind)~~

Gender constructivism (only socially real)

~~Gender eliminativism (not real, only an illusion)~~

- Sex classification should not be binary, but marking reproductive/sexual difference is potentially legitimate.
- Gender categories of *men* and *women* are socially real, but we should work to eliminate them.
- Because sex will have social consequences as long as we reproduce biologically, we should create new, more equitable, genders.

A group G is a *gender* (in context C) if and only if its members are similarly positioned as along some social dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.) (in C), and the members are "marked" as appropriately in this position by bodily features that are good evidence of reproductive capacities or function.

- Eliminate men and women; allow new (non-hierarchical, "minimal") genders.

"Color"/Race options?

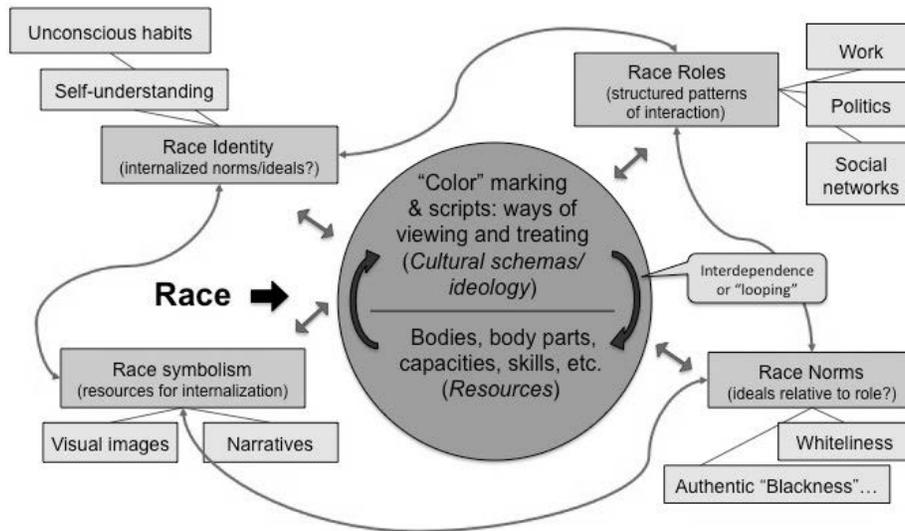
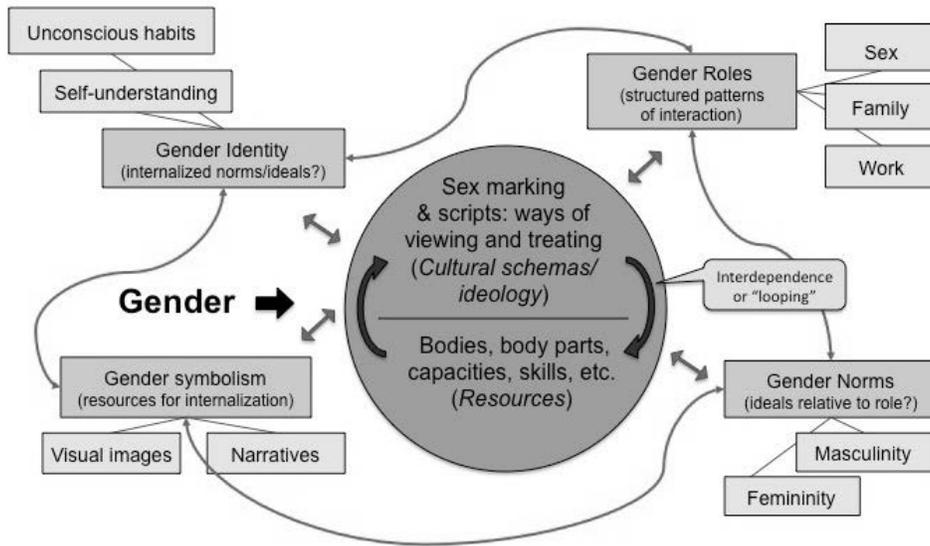
~~"Color" naturalism~~

~~Race naturalism (a natural/physical kind)~~

Race constructivism (only socially real)

~~Race eliminativism (not real, only an illusion)~~ – though elimination of race is a goal

- Current racial categories are socially real, but we should work to eliminate them.
- Because "color" is not a morally legitimate basis for social organization, we should prevent the creation of new races, and encourage ethnic and cultural mixing.



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