WHY RACE AND GENDER STILL MATTER:
AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH
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EDITED BY

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7 PURPOSEFUL NONSENSE, INTERSECTIONALITY AND THE MISSION TO SAVE BLACK BABIES

Melissa M. Kozma and Jeanine Weekes Schroer

nonsense | nənˌsens|
noun
1 spoken or written words that have no meaning or make no sense: he was talking absolute nonsense.
   • [as exclamation] used to show strong disagreement: ‘Nonsense! No one can do that.’
   • [as modifier] denoting verse or other writing intended to be amusing by virtue of its absurd or whimsical language: nonsense poetry.
2 foolish or unacceptable behavior: put a stop to that nonsense, will you?

Introduction

Outrage arose when Representative Todd Akin of Missouri argued against making exceptions to abortion restriction for rape victims on the grounds that due to a woman’s physiology ‘legitimate rape’ was unlikely to result in pregnancy. Although thoroughly denounced, the claim that there is some feature of biology that prevents rapes from resulting in pregnancy has taken root in the political and popular imagination. This falsehood has proven so irrepressible that one reporter at Slate.com has written repeatedly about the ultimate source of this idea: a confabulated Nazi experiment. Discourse with these features – a ‘strange’ genealogy; bad reasoning; persistence despite, at best, specious proof; and exploitation for what are, to some minds, malicious purposes – has become increasingly common in political discourse, the press and even the arguments made by ordinary folk.

Such discourse is often criticized for its falsehood or its hurtfulness; these critiques – aimed at singular features of this discourse – tend to miss its pernicious potential. This essay endeavours to characterize this insidious trend and expose its real impact. Unravelling the complexity of this rhetoric and characterizing the danger it poses, however, is only possible in the context of analysis founded

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upon and informed by feminist and black feminist theory. Of particular import to our project are the contributions feminist theory has made to understanding the complexity of oppression. In keeping with the theme of this volume, perhaps of most significance to our analysis is the notion of intersectionality. Our analysis benefits both from the work theorizing intersectionality and from prior intersectional research. We also rely upon and extend black feminist analysis by focusing on the unique oppression faced by black women whose objectification makes them at once invisible and hyper-visible.

Feminist theorizing of oppression – specifically, its focus on the details of the experience of gender oppression, its analysis of how seemingly benign phenomena function in concert, and its articulation of the ways that oppression is internalized and how that is used to disguise and deny its existence – both inspires and buttresses our case. We take for granted, to some degree, that a critical analysis of seemingly disparate phenomena – for instance, a falsified theory about rape and pregnancy cited by a Missouri congressman; a factual error in the rhetoric of an Arizona senator; an online article on a Christian Pregnancy Center in Kansas City; and a series of anti-abortion billboards posted in Atlanta, Arkansas, Austin, Los Angeles, Milwaukee and Texas – is essential to understanding the oppression of women in general and the unique oppression of black women, in particular. We presume that the claim that a message was well-intended (or even evidence that the message was delivered with neutral intentions or with no intentions at all) does not by itself exempt it from moral scrutiny. Among our starting assumptions is the idea that identifying and undermining oppressive ideology’s Trojan horses – such as claims that only make sense if certain negative stereotypes are presupposed – is a vital project.

Our analysis also owes a significant debt to black feminist thought. Following Patricia Hill Collins, our interest and focus is on the experiences of the women (and others) affected by this problematic discourse; we aim to develop an approach that takes the heterogeneity of experience into account while still aiming to disrupt social oppression. We briefly explore and attempt to build upon black feminist analysis of black women’s pursuit of reproductive justice. Our work here is indebted to Angela Davis’s analysis of the complexity of the relationship black women must have with mainstream feminism’s fight for reproductive rights. Also central to our analysis is a recognition that there are unique features of the way black women are subjected to gender oppression that distinguish it from the gender oppression imposed upon white women. Black women’s oppression stems from a very specific social history and exploits particular and distinct gender and race ideologies. We take for granted that it must be understood as a unique social location and not simply a blend of racial and gender oppression. Remarks like Akin’s, we argue, take advantage of the possibility of delivering distinct sexist messages to different social groups, using one communication. A clear analysis of such remarks is, thus, not possible without presupposing that the experience of black women is ‘greater than the sum of racism and sexism’.
The present essay brings the critical tools of intersectionality borne of black feminism to bear in a new way. Our contention is that Akin’s sort of discourse ordinarily functions to subvert and silence direct critical engagement, while feminist, black feminist and especially intersectional analysis exposes its complexity, potentially disrupting its harmful influence. We characterize this dangerous discourse as *purposeful nonsense*. Disguised as merely offensive or illogical, such arguments, epithets, memes and campaigns exploit vulnerabilities that facilitate and sustain oppression. Using the resources of feminist, black feminist and intersectional theory, we are poised to give a more sophisticated analysis of the discourse. We also characterize its unique features, including the threats it poses to the vulnerable populations that are its true targets.

We proceed, in the first section, by using a few additional examples to elucidate the notion of purposeful nonsense. The first example is Arizona Senator Jon Kyl’s remark on the Senate floor that ‘well over 90 per cent’ of Planned Parenthood’s services were dedicated to abortion provision. Later, in his apology for being so widely off the mark – only 3 per cent of Planned Parenthood services consist of abortion provision – Kyl said his remark ‘was not intended to be a factual statement’. Our second example concerns a thoughtful article examining the recent conservative mission to ‘save black babies’. In her very careful discussion of the way this phenomenon has manifested itself in Kansas City, MO, Akiba Solomon discusses an anti-abortion propaganda film called ‘Maafa 21: Black Genocide in the 21st Century’ in a way that does not clarify whether certain seemingly extreme claims made in the film are factual or not. The stark contrast between these examples clarifies the important features of purposeful nonsense – it is discourse that has problems with intelligibility, that seems disinterested in the truth and that employs inflammatory rhetoric – while also revealing its force and complexity as a lens of analysis.

Once the characteristics of the kind of discourse we have in mind are established, we articulate the unique harms of which it is capable. In the second section of the essay, we identify the unique moral analysis resulting from purposeful nonsense; specifically, we argue that purposeful nonsense is morally problematic regardless of the intentions of those who produce it. Because of how purposeful nonsense functions as part of a larger discourse, it has the potential to cause genuine harm to the material and social wellbeing of members of certain social groups.

Having established the character of this discourse and its potential dangers, we use the notion of purposeful nonsense to analyse a third example. In the third section, we marshal the resources of feminist and black feminist thought to offer an intersectional analysis of the harm inflicted by a recent anti-abortion billboard campaign by the Radiance Foundation, aimed, ostensibly, at reducing the number of abortions by African American women. The billboards show pictures of black infants and children and display the following slogans: ‘Black and Unwanted’, ‘Endangered Species’ and ‘The Most Dangerous Place for an African American is in the Womb’. In a brief concluding section, we suggest that pur-
poseful nonsense exploits vulnerabilities in a way that is akin to the function of a phenomenon known as stereotype threat. Stereotype threat occurs when negative stereotypes are made manifest to their ‘targets’ at crucial moments; for example, reminding women of their gender identity even in innocuous ways before they take a mathematics test negatively affects their test performance. We will suggest that research on stereotype threat, when combined with feminist, black feminist and intersectional analysis, offers compelling new avenues for research that would explore the depth and expanse of the injuries caused by social oppression.

Understanding the potential of purposeful nonsense to sustain and advance oppression requires both the insights and the methodological commitments of feminist and black feminist thought as a precursor. Furthermore, our analysis of the Radiance Foundation’s billboard campaign (and its mission to save black babies) relies upon intersectionality as a lens of analysis that is absolutely necessary to reveal its complexity and perniciousness.

Purposeful Nonsense

Purposeful Nonsense, Truthiness and Bullshit

We are not concerned here with run-of-the-mill nonsense. A made-up word is more likely to be nonsense (all things considered) than an established term in a shared vernacular. A sentence is more likely to be nonsense the further it is from satisfying the rules of grammar in the relevant language. Purposeful nonsense, by contrast, is not usually gibberish, nor does it necessarily violate grammar rules to the point of incoherence. The anti-abortion billboard campaign and remarks like those of Akin and Kyl are not literally incomprehensible. While unintelligibility is a standard criterion for ordinary nonsense, purposeful nonsense is characterized by a) questionable intelligibility combined with b) an apparent lack of concern with the truth and, finally, c) the use of inflammatory rhetoric.

Using our opening example and the examples cited above – Akin on ‘legitimate rape’, Kyl on Planned Parenthood and Solomon on black genocide and the mission to save black babies – we clarify the unique problem of intelligibility, the disinterest in truth and the inflammatory rhetoric that distinguishes purposeful nonsense from its ordinary counterpart.

We will return to the issue of the intelligibility of purposeful nonsense, and now proceed with a discussion of its disinterest in the truth. This type of disinterest is akin to what television persona Stephen Colbert calls ‘truthiness’ or philosopher Harry Frankfurt calls ‘bullshit’. Truthiness and bullshit are, on our reading, more or less positive and negative framings of the same judgement. In On Bullshit, Frankfurt argues that what typifies bullshit is that it is ‘unconnected
Bullshit, like lying, is a mode of misrepresentation; but whereas the liar is responding to the truth and ... to that extent respectful of it, the bullshitter is neither on the side of the true nor ... the false; instead, this person misrepresents what he is up to. Primarily, this person purports to be engaged in a truth-aimed enterprise, when, in fact, that is not the case. Colbert’s account of truthiness adds a folksy spin to this idea, offering plausible motives for someone who superficially appears to be, but ultimately is not, concerned with truth. Colbert suggests that rather than cede territory to those armed with ‘facts’ and ‘knowledge’, the ‘truthi-ful’ speak from the heart and reject the distinction between discourse that is aimed at truth and discourse that is not.

In an ironic twist, Arizona Senator Jon Kyl tries to explain away his misrepresentation of the facts about Planned Parenthood by claiming truthiness. In claiming that his statistical assertion was ‘not intended to be a factual statement’, he is backpedalling away from an earnest engagement with the truth. His apology is actually an admission of guilt: he was caught bullshitting and admitted it. His willingness to admit it, however, reflects that room has been made even in official political discourse for truthiness.

In addition to being truthi bullshit disengaged from the usual truth-telling practices, purposeful nonsense is also hurtful. Frankfurt is clear that some bullshit is innocuous, and it is possible that even truthi political rhetoric could be relatively anodyne. An essential feature of the phenomena that we are tracking is that it employs and relies upon inflammatory rhetoric or ideology. Recall the example of Todd Akin, Congressional Representative from Missouri, explaining away the need for a rape exception to abortion law because ‘legitimate rape’ is unlikely to result in pregnancy.

This assertion fails the bullshit test for multiple reasons: different versions of this claim each have different specious explanatory theories; medical experts deny the viability of any such theory; some evidence actually supports the opposite claim; and the ultimate source cited appears to be fabricated. The extent of the countervailing evidence against this claim justifies the suspicions about whether the claim was ever earnestly aimed at the truth.

In our view, however, this is not a sufficient critique; it fails to hold the speaker accountable for the potential harm done by the inflammatory nature of the rhetoric. This bit of rhetoric is galling only in part because of its bullshit rating. Our critique points to an additional criterion, the inflammatory nature of an assertion and the terrorizing circumstances it reflects and tacitly endorses. The notion of ‘legitimate rape’, for example, is a cruel reminder of the near impossibility of successfully using the judicial system to punish a rapist. It is a slap in the face of the many victims of rape.

The unintelligibility of ordinary nonsense becomes a slightly different problem in purposeful nonsense. As stated earlier, this type of discourse rarely descends into incoherence; nevertheless, there are concerns about its intelligibility. One of
the concerns about the statements made by Akin and Kyl is that they trigger ‘hidden’ messages that further aggravate its harmful effects. The notion of a ‘legitimate rape’ calls upon a distasteful set of narratives and presuppositions that it would not be in the interest of any candidate to lay out explicitly: that the majority of the women seeking an abortion resulting from rape must be liars or confused, that intimate partner rapes do not count, that rape victims are ‘good girls’ who have been viciously attacked and beaten by strangers. In short, a ‘legitimate’ rape requires the notion of ‘illegitimate’ rape in order to make any sense. The speaker of this nonsense need not provide this background, because to a large extent, purposeful nonsense draws upon ideas, beliefs and images that are already ‘in play’. While Akin’s notion of legitimate rape summons up tripe that the rest of us are forced to re-digest, Kyl launched a factoid that supporters of Planned Parenthood will now have to take time and energy to disprove, repeatedly. Both consequences are very problematic. Purposeful nonsense endures because it can take root in the popular imagination; some of its harms are disguised because it draws from that same imagination. We explore these processes in the next section.

**Purposeful Nonsense and the Social Imaginary**

In order to elucidate one of the key aspects of purposeful nonsense, it is useful to borrow a concept from sociology: the social imaginary. At its most basic, the social imaginary includes the stock of shared ideas, beliefs, principles, mores and so on in a given society or culture. Charles Taylor describes it as ‘the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations’. Of course, actual societies are quite complex: they may overlap, there may be subcultures. It is often difficult to distinguish one from another. Within these overlapping, partially integrated groups, not everyone will share the same ideas or experience them in the same way. Despite the obstacles, certain ideas or beliefs are shared by enough members of a society (in the sense of being familiar with, not necessarily endorsing) to characterize them as part of the social imaginary.

Purposeful nonsense relies on the social imaginary; it draws on assumptions, images and ideas that are already available in society and uses them in a novel way. Among the shared understandings that purposeful nonsense draws upon are stereotypes and other denigrating narratives that are already harmful to particular social groups. For example, Americans’ shared image of poor (especially poor black) women as sexually irresponsible lends credence to misperceptions of Planned Parenthood. Kyl’s error exploits this common misperception. By quantifying the misperception of Planned Parenthood as an abortion provider, Kyl takes advantage of the pre-existing stereotype of its clientele as poor, black and promiscuous. All the criticism heaped on Kyl has not led to the correction of the
misperception; that 97 per cent of Planned Parenthood’s province is health care unrelated to abortion remains hidden in a darkened corner of common perception. Meanwhile, the misperception remains as part of the social imaginary: a widely available, extensively shared, routinely reinforced falsehood. Even with the criticism, Kyl’s number, though false, reinforces the stereotype – after all, he was an authority speaking in his official capacity – fortifying it for its next use. That the stereotype was not made explicit, that it is not universally accepted (or even universally known) does not blunt its force. The stereotype functions problematically simply because it is available in the social imaginary. That purposeful nonsense exploits elements of the social imaginary – racist, sexist and otherwise hateful imagery and ideology – often without explicit reference to them allows it and its authors to occupy a kind of moral asylum, in multiple senses. In one sense, messages they deliver – by conjuring them from the social imaginary – without actually being uttered are those for which they are free to deny responsibility. In another sense, such nonsense is often characterized as merely hurtful or too aimless to bother criticizing; in other words, it is too ridiculous to even engage. We intend to revoke purposeful nonsense’s free pass. Regardless of how one interprets the intentions of the speakers, purposeful nonsense functions to sustain oppression.

The Purpose of Nonsense

A standard response to nonsense is to disregard it; after all, it does not make a useful contribution to the conversation, and time spent cataloguing and correcting factual errors in such rhetoric is a dangerous distraction. Identifying and criticizing the specious science behind the legitimate-rape-doesn’t-cause-pregnancy theory, for example, simply reinforces the notion of ‘legitimate rape’ and sustains the problematic framing of the abortion debate away from women’s authority over their bodies. At best we can focus on the offense – the implications are hurtful – and insist upon an apology or at least an acknowledgement of the affront. This seems to be the right response even to inflammatory nonsense, but it presumes that all nonsense is equally harmless or, at least, that its harm is fleeting. Furthermore, there are practical reasons to curb our responses to run-of-the-mill nonsense. The debates with which we are concerned – about race, sex, gender and identity more generally – are delicate to begin with. Accusations and nit-picking are more likely to derail such discussions than to advance them. Treating purposeful nonsense as harmless, however, would be a mistake. Though its impact is often mistakenly or misleadingly characterized as benign, this nonsense has an insidious function.

To further clarify our conception of purposeful nonsense, we contrast it with a different but natural reading: understanding nonsense as purposeful means that there must be direct intention behind it. Such discourse must be aimed at some
specifc goal, and its authors must be aware of that goal. On this reading, Kyl must have intended to trade on people’s classist, racist presuppositions about the communities served by Planned Parenthood in order to persuade them to believe the false claim that Planned Parenthood is primarily an abortion provider. As a bonus, he also succeeds in shaming the community Planned Parenthood serves. Alternatively, one can read Kyl as only intending to protect unborn children and exaggerating what he earnestly believes to be a true claim: that Planned Parenthood is primarily an abortion provider.

On this understanding, it is on the basis of some specific intention that we should judge Kyl’s (praise or) blameworthiness. If Kyl had the first intention (to deceive if not outright lie), we can take him to task for reinforcing stereotypes that oppress poor (and by extension minority) women. If his was the second intention, we may mitigate blame if we conclude that his well-intentioned (if misguided) action, nevertheless, brought about a disastrous result. However, this is not the conception of purposeful that we are using here; in our view, the ‘purposefulness’ of nonsense is not contingent upon intentions, good or bad. Even if purposeful nonsense involved neither lying nor deliberate deception, it would still function as a catalyst for social oppression. To view purposeful nonsense as merely a form of lying or deception (even though it may sometimes involve both) would be to miss key aspects of how such nonsense works – how, precisely, it perpetuates certain forms of social oppression.

A different example is helpful here: up to this point, we have focused on examples involving professional politicians whose motives and integrity may already be suspect. We want to explore an entirely different kind of example in order to make clear that the problems of purposeful nonsense go beyond the realm of professional politics into public discourse. In 2013 Akiba Solomon wrote a careful analysis of the development and opening of a Christian pregnancy crisis centre in Kansas City, MO, and the local political imbroglio swirling around it. The article was published on COLORLINES, a racial justice daily news blog that could not be accused of having a conservative agenda. In her article, Solomon discusses an anti-abortion propaganda film titled ‘Maafa 21: Black Genocide in the 21st Century’. She reports this claim from the film: targeting by abortion providers has resulted in ‘over 15 million black lives eliminated’. While Solomon is careful throughout the article to correct misinformation with cited statistics, in this instance she does not. She talks about the difficulty in determining rates of abortion by race, but she neither confirms nor denies this particular claim.

In our view, this is purposeful nonsense; perhaps the most well-intentioned instance of such, but purposeful nonsense nonetheless. First, Solomon has reproduced a factoid that she has neither confirmed nor denied (thus, truthiness). When a progressive author in a progressive venue fails to dispute such a claim, this lends it an air of credibility. Second, the quantity involved makes the claim
inflammatory. Fifteen million is certainly a number that legitimates use of the term ‘genocide’, but talk of genocide is inflammatory. The final criterion is intelligibility. The claim itself is intelligible, but the context raises questions. In most instances, she states explicitly when claims she is reporting are false, but in this one she does not. This raises questions about how this particular claim should be interpreted: is it true? Is she just trying to convey the ideology of this group? If so, why not verify (or falsify) it? One would be at great pains to find fault with Solomon’s intentions; however, the context allows the claim to be read in multiple ways. Thus another bit of inflammatory rhetoric has been reinforced in the social imaginary: repeated, not clearly denounced, and ready to be absorbed or exploited as needed by politicians, the press and the public at large.

Purposeful nonsense is what it does. The moral significance of purposeful nonsense has to be located in its function, its role. When viewed in isolation and abstracted from the social context that is necessary to make sense of such statements, the reporting of this factoid might benign; when viewed as purposeful nonsense, it appears more problematic. These two sections have allowed us to give a full account of purposeful nonsense. Our goal has been to a) identify the features typical to purposeful nonsense and b) characterize the unique way that purposeful nonsense harms and the kinds of injuries it might impose. Purposeful nonsense is characterized by problems with intelligibility, a disinterest or orientation away from the truth, and the use of inflammatory rhetoric. These three features in combination have the capacity to allow harmful and denigrating narratives (including stereotypes) to be invoked as subtext, thus conveying hidden injurious messages that are challenging to critique. This also allows superficially innocent or well-meaning speech to subtly reinforce these stereotypes, again while minimizing their exposure to criticism.

The Most Dangerous Discourse

Having characterized and clarified the powerful lens of analysis that the notion of purposeful nonsense offers, we now turn that lens onto the Radiance Foundation’s anti-abortion billboard campaign. The Radiance Foundation’s cofounders, Ryan and Lisa Bomberger, have made it their mission to work towards ending ‘the black genocide’ and exposing the campaign of misinformation that has tricked the black community into believing that Planned Parenthood is their ally rather than their enemy. This campaign is especially interesting from our point of view, as it highlights a number of the complexities of purposeful nonsense: its messages are not easily categorized as lies or even as deception; and the messages are nonetheless harmful. This is important to keep in mind, as we argue that these aspects of purposeful nonsense are key to mapping out an effective response to its harms.
Many of the Bombergers’ claims are not mistaken: for example, that the abortion rate among black women is higher than that of their white counterparts and that there is a persistent racial gap in infant and maternal mortality rates. Association with racist eugenics does taint Planned Parenthood’s history. There is a case to be made for racism in the bureaucracy of adoption, including continued unwillingness to place children of one race into families of another. Critics of the Radiance Foundation may very well agree that structural racism is at the heart of these issues while disagreeing with the conclusions and general message set forth in the Foundation’s anti-abortion campaign. Consider the Foundation’s use of the word ‘genocide’ to describe these facts of life for black women and children in the United States. Genocide is a very strong characterization, evocative of mass killing (or ‘letting die’) or rape, and, more specifically, a planned campaign of destroying a racial, ethnic, national or other cultural group. A common reaction to this description of the situation would be one of surprise and chagrin, perhaps especially from those who consider access to adequate reproductive health services a basic right for all women. How could the existence of Planned Parenthood clinics in black neighbourhoods possibly be considered at all harmful, much less genocide?

The answer to this question is complex and should be considered in light of the history of the treatment of black women in the United States: forced sterilization of black women, often without their knowledge; the rape of black women not being considered a crime; children of black women born into slavery, taken away and sold. Understanding these events and the different social locations created by them is crucial to understanding the ways different people will engage with and understand the Bombergers’ mission. Black women, historically and to this day, struggle to have healthy pregnancies, to give birth, to be allowed to parent their children and to manage interlopers well-meaning and otherwise. Though we reject the Bombergers’ messages as purposeful nonsense, it is not because their claims are outrageously false. Instead, we think that because of the already oppressive context in which these messages are delivered, they ultimately harm black women.

The Radiance Foundation’s anti-abortion campaign employs purposeful nonsense both in its general rhetorical strategy (e.g. the invocation of ‘black genocide’) and its specific execution (the billboards). The selective use of facts, and the context (or lack of context) in which they are placed, lend this campaign the air of truthiness or bullshit. For example, while the history of Planned Parenthood may have included blatant racism on the part of its founders, it stands today as a valuable source of health care, serving many low-income women and families. Whatever the sources of the current racial disparity in the quality of health care for women and children, the services of Planned Parenthood clinics are not among them. Implying otherwise has the function of misleading or
deceiving. Another main reason we argue that the campaign is a prime example of purposeful nonsense is that it serves to tangibly harm black women.

In the following sections, we take a closer look at the recent series of anti-abortion billboards sponsored by the Radiance Foundation. We contend that the messages of these billboards rely on racist and sexist narratives already present in the social imaginary, mislead through ‘truthiness’, and contribute to the oppression of black women, thereby helping to maintain an unjust society. In other words, these billboards are a prime example of purposeful nonsense at work.

Black Children as ‘Endangered Species’

The first billboard features a photo of a young black child with the caption ‘Endangered Species’. One apparent connotation of this message is that black children are akin to non-human animals. The primary context in which we hear the phrase ‘endangered species’ is in reference to animals in danger of going extinct. Given the ongoing association of blacks with animals – apes or other primates in particular – this serves to remind black women of their historical status as less than human. In this sense, the use of ‘endangered species’ is inflammatory; it conjures up negative racial stereotypes that are almost impossible to miss. This message relies on racist narratives and stereotypes that are already present in our society.

Perhaps the representation of black children as an endangered species is only meant to convey the issue’s importance or tug on the heartstrings. However, this charitable reading only makes sense against a background of shared knowledge that is inherently racist. Without the underlying racist association between blacks and non-human animals, the billboards would not make nearly as much sense. A billboard reading simply ‘Endangered Species’ above the picture of a white infant would far less comprehensible: what does it mean to say, that babies in general are in danger? This is a good example of the sort of misrepresentation Frankfurt refers to: racially charged inflaming of the ‘abortion wars’ disguised as concern for black children. As we will see, all three of the billboard messages fit with our conception of purposeful nonsense and cause harm to a specific group. In these cases, the harm consists in a reinforcement of black women’s subordinate status.

‘The Most Dangerous Place for an African American is in the Womb’

The second billboard seems less directed at eliciting concern or pity and more directed at producing surprise or shock. Once again, this slogan draws on certain ‘facts’ or ‘knowledge’ already available in the social imaginary: that blacks are violent, especially among themselves (e.g. ‘black-on-black violence’); that they do not share ‘our’ values; that they are often poor, on welfare, under-educated; that neighbourhoods where they live are especially dangerous. In this
context, it is quite provocative to say that black children may be in more danger before they are even born into such circumstances. Again, this message invokes racist stereotypes, serving to fuel anti-choice rhetoric while at the same time shaming a specific social group.

The billboard’s message relies on stereotypes based not only on race but on gender as well; any analysis of this case should be intersectional. It takes aim specifically at black women but in that peculiarly roundabout way characteristic of purposeful nonsense. Note that there is no direct mention of black women and motherhood; there is simply a reference to the womb, as if it were simply a place where children lie in incubation, unconnected to the black mother’s body. A message is conveyed to these women: you are only the site of a battle, of a possible campaign of genocide against your offspring. The billboard also conjures up the intersectional stereotypes of the ‘welfare queen’ – lazy, dependent on the government, careless of her own and others’ well-being – and the ‘jezebel’ – sexually wanton, perhaps susceptible to the ‘easy way out’ offered by abortion. Black women are not being seen as responsible autonomous agents, neither literally nor figuratively. It is the lack of recognition, the diminishment, which contributes to the subordination of black women. Such billboards offer a concrete illustration of the harm of purposeful nonsense, a glimpse of oppression at work.

‘Black and Unwanted’

The message of the final billboard in the series also works on at least two levels. At one level, it is meant to elicit indignation: why should some children be unwanted simply because they are black? At the same time, on another level, we see racial stereotypes being called upon to exploit real concerns and anxieties; the billboards use inflammatory rhetoric masquerading as concern for black children, the billboard serves to remind blacks that there is a real sense in which they are unwanted or ignored in US society. For example, blacks earn 40 per cent less, have one-tenth the net worth, pay 35 per cent more for homes, and are overrepresented among the arrested, prosecuted, incarcerated and executed populations. Here again, messages of this sort have a common thread: they serve to reinforce and maintain social oppression by invoking harmful stereotypes already available in the social imaginary. In the billboard examples, we see messages of purposeful nonsense playing on both gender and racial stereotypes. Melissa Harris-Perry, in *Sister Citizen*, explores the complicated relationship between these sorts of stereotypes and African American women’s experience of themselves as political actors:

I conducted focus groups with forty-three African American women in Chicago, New York, and Oakland. As a warm-up task, I asked participants to think about black women as a group and list the stereotypes or myths about them that other people
may hold. I then asked them to write down the ‘facts’ about black women as they saw them ... Although these women lived in different cities, were of several generations and had different economic and family circumstances, their discussions formed a coherent picture. They independently arrived at the same three stereotypes that many researchers of African American women’s experience also identify: Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire.46

While further analysis of these intersectional stereotypes is not possible here, we do want to highlight the ready availability of these harmful stereotypes. You don’t have to dig deep to access them; they are always there, lurking in the background of people’s experience. What purposeful nonsense does is trigger these harmful stereotypes; it brings them to the foreground. Purposeful nonsense thereby actively participates in creating, recreating and maintaining oppression, contributing to an unjust society.

Again, the Radiance Foundation may or may not be deliberately intending to mislead, deceive or harm. That is not relevant to the argument we make here. The point is that the harm results from the way that purposeful nonsense functions; the harm stems from its role in the reproduction of oppression. Furthermore, its harm is not merely that it personally offends members of subordinate groups; it may do that but that is not our main point, and responding to purposeful nonsense as such would not alleviate its most serious harm. The main point is that it has tangible effects on (in this case) black women’s lives: for example, it may contribute to less funding for crucial, affordable health care.

Conclusion

Purposeful nonsense is a name for a routine way in which oppression is accomplished in everyday life. Feminist, black feminist and intersectional analyses have been integral to understanding this phenomenon. Feminist analyses of oppression are an important source of the initial intuition that the rhetoric in purposeful nonsense requires attention, despite how ridiculous and beyond relevance it may seem at first; the same literature provides continuing analysis of the direct harms of oppressive ideology.47 Feminist and black feminist theorists are among the first to collect and document damaging racist and sexist stereotypes, thus providing a database against which this rhetoric can be compared.48 Feminist and black feminist theorists routinely theorize the significance of background social structure and context as fundamental to the function of social oppression, positioning something like a ‘social imaginary’ as part of that context.49 They lead the way in cataloguing the complexity and variety of the ways that racism and sexism – in particular the intersection of the two – undermine the material well-being, psychological well-being and agency of its victims.50 Feminists and black feminist theorists make important contributions to ethical theory in this vein, identify-
ing and criticizing the subtler forms of moral failure stemming from racism and sexism. Absent these vital contributions, purposeful nonsense and its role in social oppression would remain veiled. Feminist and black feminist thought is key to identifying avenues for further research of this phenomenon; in particular, it can serve as an excellent resource for further exploration of the concept of stereotype threat.

Feminist theorists have taken great pains to try to connect the experience of oppression to the material consequences of oppression, but there is still more work to be done in this area. An already robust and still-growing body of studies on stereotype threat have shown that when reminded of a social group identity, stereotyped as performing poorly in some arena – from mathematics, to athletics, to social sensitivity – members of that social group do in fact perform less well in that arena. The risk this creates – that one will confirm a negative stereotype about one’s social group – is called stereotype threat. The variety and extent of the confirmation of stereotype threat offers a deeper understanding of stereotypes and their impact. Characterizing the performance failures provoked by a combination of long-term awareness of and immediate exposure to oppressive stereotypes is an important first step, but there may be more direct effects that can be quantified by similar research.

Research on stereotype threat focuses on measurable results of the effects of these negative stereotypes, under extremely controlled conditions. The effects of purposeful nonsense, however, are significantly more subtle and wide-ranging and, therefore, potentially more detrimental to performance across a broader spectrum of life situations. We argue that purposeful nonsense, disguised as merely ‘bad’ or logically confused discourse, is a key factor in creating and maintaining an oppressive and unjust society, and that it does so, in part, by provoking stereotype threat-type reactions in vulnerable populations that are subjected to it. Although purposeful nonsense calls upon similar stereotypes across far less controlled circumstances, we suggest that there may be a fruitful line of inquiry that blends some of the crucial insights of stereotype threat research with analysis of the workings of purposeful nonsense. For example, one could take a closer look at the way in which particular stereotypes perpetuate the oppression of some social groups. Here we have in mind Harris-Perry’s work on the enduring harm of the intersectional stereotypes of the Jezebel, the Sapphire and the Mammy. These are the sorts of stereotypes regularly invoked by purposeful nonsense; it would be interesting to investigate connections between such invocations and the precise way in which stereotype threat is triggered.

Given the important role that the social imaginary plays in both the effectiveness of purposeful nonsense as communication and its effectiveness as oppression, mapping the social imaginary – in particular racist, sexist and other discriminatory ideologies – is a necessary next step in undermining purpose-
ful nonsense directly, and social oppression more generally. Purposeful nonsense analysis could be used to track gaps between people’s awareness of discriminatory ideology and their acknowledged awareness, because it often requires hearers to avail themselves of stereotypes and other denigrating narratives that they would ordinarily disavow in order to make the discourse intelligible. Tracking the ability to interpret this discourse would be useful in tracing the reach of relevant particular stereotypes. Anti-racist and anti-sexist educational strategies would benefit from data about different people’s exposure to, critical engagement with and interpretation of this kind of problematic discourse. For example, certain stereotypes might be easier to evoke in one region of the country, or in one age group, or in one socio-economic group as opposed to another. Discussing the ability to interpret messages that rely on racist and sexist stereotypes would also be a useful inroad for getting people to engage with their own unconscious or covert biases.

Stereotype threat demonstrates that the harm of stereotyping endures. More specifically, robust stereotypes create a vulnerability that people have to manage, that threatens them even when no agent is intentionally applying these stereotypes. The poignant irony revealed by the study of stereotype threat is that stereotypes inflict ongoing, serious harm without need of a malicious agent, and then, ultimately, erase their tracks. Much in the same way, purposeful nonsense employs harmful stereotypes without ever having to make them explicit. Our central interest is in exposing purposeful nonsense and its role in maintaining an unjust society. Our analysis identifies important avenues for further research into the epistemology of social oppression, and the complicated ways in which such oppression works. Crucial to our investigation are a host of indispensable tools developed and sustained by feminists and black feminist theorists. With these same tools, progress can be made in the ongoing struggle against social oppression.
NOTES

Goswami, O’Donovan and Yount, ‘Introduction to Why Race and Gender Still Matter: An Intersectional Analysis’


7. Ibid., p. 149.

8. Ibid.


10. Ibid., p. 1245.

11. Ibid., p. 1252.

12. Ibid.


14. Ibid.


16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., p. 1296.
18. Cho et al., ’Toward a Field’, p. 807.
19. Ibid., p. 785.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., p. 792.
22. Ibid., p. 785.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., p. 786.
27. Cho et al., ’Toward a Field’, p. 787.
29. For instance, in the case of the field of law in the 1980s and 1990s, ‘material circumstances that occasioned the emergence of intersectionality were shaped by social transformations that were playing out within the profession and within law itself. The legal academy, for instance, began to diversify itself in terms of race and gender’. See Cho et al., ’Toward a Field’, pp. 789–90.
30. Ibid., p. 791.
31. Ibid., p. 793.
32. Ibid., p. 789.
34. Ibid., p. 995.
35. Ibid., p. 997.
38. Such as feminist philosophy, critical race theory, queer theory, post-colonial studies, disability studies, etc.
In law, recent titles include: E. Grabham, D. Cooper, J. Krishnadass and D. Herman (eds), Intersectionality and Beyond: Law, Power and the Politics of Location (New York: Routledge-Cavendish, 2008); and G. MacDonald and R. Osborne (eds), Feminism, Law,


44. This is why she proposes what she calls a return to the project of generating a ‘universal theory in feminism’. See N. Zack, Inclusive Feminism: A Third Wave of Women’s Commonality (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).
46. Ibid., p. 200.
47. Cho et al., ‘Toward a Field’, p. 796.

1 Gines, ‘Race Women, Race Men and Early Expressions of Proto-Intersectionality, 1830s–1930s’

3. Ibid.
5. While this framing places some limitations on my analysis by focusing on a black/white binary (as well as a male/female binary, for that matter), several of these figures push beyond these binaries in their analyses, as is noted when relevant. Furthermore, this notion of proto-intersectionality could be expanded to include other women of colour confronting similar issues. Thus it is important to highlight other women of colour contributors to the theoretical framework of intersectionality. See, for example, G. C. Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in L. Grossberg and C. Nelson (eds), Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988); M. Cherrie and G. Anzaldúa (eds), This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1984); C. T. Mohanty, A. Russo and L. Tores (eds), Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991); A. Huratok, The Color of Privilege: Three Blasphemies on Race and Gender (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997);
6. Several books, essays and articles have taken up the ‘cult of true womanhood’ (emphasizing piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity) and debates about the ways in which early black feminists conformed to and/or challenged prominent white constructions of womanhood and femininity. While it is important to acknowledge that there are debates in the literature on this issue, this debate is not central to this chapter, which takes as its focal point what I call ‘proto-intersectionality’ emerging in the writings and speeches of these early black feminist theorists and activists. Some examples of the literature on the cult of true womanhood include: B. Welter, ‘The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–60’, American Quarterly, 18:2 (Summer 1966), pp. 151–74; R. Bogin and B. J. Lowenberg (eds), Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life: Their Thoughts, their Words, their Feelings (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1976); M. Stewart, Maria W. Stewart, America’s First Black Political Writer: Essays and Speeches, ed. and intro. M. Richardson (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987); J. James, ‘Profeminism and Gender Elites: W. E. B. Du Bois, Anna Julia Cooper, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett’, in Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectuals (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 35–60; and C. B. Conaway and K. Waters, Black Women’s Intellectual Traditions: Speaking Their Minds (Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Press, 2007).

7. This is certainly not an exhaustive list of black feminists between 1830 and 1930, which would be impossible to cover in one chapter. Rather, these are a few of the many significant activists and thinkers in whose speeches and writings we find a proto-intersectional framework.

8. Again, this is clearly not an exhaustive list of black nationalists. I am using this term because it pairs well with later analyses of intersectionality that point out how black nationalist agendas of black men frequently underexamined and at times altogether ignored the situatedness of black women (see Crenshaw, ‘Demarginalizing’/Mapping the Margins[?] and Collins, ‘Piecing Together a Genealogical Puzzle’). I selected these particular men because they have focused on issues of race and racism as well as politics and freedom in their activism and scholarship while also making strong claims about the situation of black women.


10. Lowenberg and Bogin (eds), Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life, p. 5. This is an earlier collection of works by black women. More recent collections that have made similar claims are cited throughout this chapter.

11. See Maria W. Stewart, Essays and Speeches, ed. Richardson, and Conaway and Waters, Black Women’s Intellectual Traditions. Richardson asserts: ‘In September of 1832, in Boston, Massachusetts, Maria M. Stewart, a black woman, did what no American-born woman, black or white, before her is recorded having done. She mounted a lecture platform and raised a political argument before a “promiscuous” audience, that is, one composed of both men and women’; Maria W. Stewart, Essays and Speeches, ed. Richardson, p. xiii.

13. Stewart asks, ‘How long shall a mean set of men flatter us with their smiles, and enrich themselves with our hard earnings, their wives’ fingers sparkling with rings, and they themselves laugh at our folly?’ She replies, ‘Until we begin to promote and patronize each other’; Maria W. Stewart, *Essays and Speeches*, ed. Richardson, p. 38.

14. Ibid., p. 38. We find even more diverse roles and expectations for women, especially black women, outlined in her 1833 ‘Farewell Address to her Friends in Boston’; O’fering examples of women in the Bible as well as women from various cultures (Greek, Roman, Jewish, Ethiopian and even ‘barbarous nations’), Stewart makes the case for black women to be able to make a public demand for their rights; ibid., pp. 68–9. Richardson has identified the full source of Stewart’s citations as John Adams’s *Woman, Sketches of the History, Genius, Disposition, Accomplishments, Employments, Customs and Importance of the Fair Sex in All Parts of the World Interspersed with Many Singular and Entertaining Anecdotes by a Friend of the Sex* (London, 1790); ibid., p. 24.

15. Ibid., p. 48.


17. Maria W. Stewart, *Essays and Speeches*, ed. Richardson, p. 58. Valerie Cooper has noted, ‘Stewart’s speaking career ended when she was hounded from Boston because of the controversy arising from the fact that she was a woman who had criticized men in her public speeches’; Cooper, *Word, Like Fire*, p. 120. See also J. O. Horton, *Free People of Color: Inside the African American Community* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993).


27. Ibid.
31. In spite of (or perhaps because of) the positive impact Wells had in bringing international attention to white terrorism in the form of lynching, she was harshly criticized by black men who thought she should not be so out front on the issue.
34. Ibid., p. 73.
37. Ibid., pp. 97–8. Alexander is among the first four black women to earn a doctorate degree in the United States. The other three are Eva Dykes, Georgiana Simpson and Anna Julia Cooper (discussed earlier).
39. Ibid., p. 103.
40. R. P. Byrd and B. Guy-Sheftall (eds), *Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001). The editors describe the text as the ‘first anthology that historicizes the writings by African American men who have examined the meanings of the overlapping categories of race, gender, and sexuality, and who have theorized these categories in the most expansive and progressive terms’; ibid., p. xiii.
42. F. Douglass, ‘The Rights of Women’, in Byrd and Guy-Sheftall (eds), *Traps*, pp. 27–8, on p. 28. Despite his strong support of women’s political rights, he would eventually part ways with white feminists due to disagreements about the order of priorities regarding race and gender. Davis has noted that Susan B. Anthony ‘pushed Douglass aside for the sake of recruiting white Southern women into the movement for woman suffrage’ and ‘she refused to support the efforts of several Black women who wanted to form a branch of the suffrage association’; Davis, ‘Woman Suffrage at the Turn of the Century’, p. 111. Davis later asks, ‘How could Susan B. Anthony claim to believe in human rights and political equality and at the same time counsel the members of her organization to remain silent on the issue of racism?'; ibid., p. 121.


44. Ibid.


48. F. Douglass, quoted in Lowenberg and Bogin (eds), *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life*, p. 279; my emphasis.


50. Ibid., p. 48.

51. Ibid., p. 47.

52. Ibid., p. 50.

53. Ibid., p. 53.

54. Ibid., p. 49.

55. W. E. B. Du Bois, ‘The Damnation of Women’, in Byrd and Guy-Sheftall (eds), *Traps*, pp. 58–70, on p. 59: ‘Only at the sacrifice of intelligence and a chance to do their best work can the majority of modern women bear children. This is the damnation of women’.

56. Ibid., p. 62.

57. Ibid.; Du Bois is quoting Crummell here.

58. Ibid., p. 63.

59. Ibid., p. 67.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid., p. 63.


63. James, ‘Profeminism and Gender Elites’, p. 44. James describes Du Bois as presenting a ‘masculinist world view’ that adversely influences his writing and ‘diminish[es] his gender progressivism’; ibid., p. 35. Du Bois’s non-fictional writings minimize black female agency and naturalize the dominance of black males in African American political discourse; ibid., p. 36.

64. Ibid., p. 54.

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2 Waters, ‘Past as Prologue: Intersectional Analysis from the Nineteenth Century to the Twenty-First’


2. Attention to appropriate measures for race and gender inclusion in scientific and social scientific studies was spurred largely by the work of many Second Wave feminists, for example, in psychology by C. Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), which was in part a critique of the exclusion of women from psychological studies in past research by Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. Critiques of lack of racial diversity or inappropriate use of race soon followed. For an example of recent guidelines, see M. Lamont and P. White, ‘Workshop for Interdisciplinary Standards for Systematic Qualitative Research’, at http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/ses/soc/ISSQR_workshop_rpt.pdf [accessed 000].

3. In a related line of argument, Lewis Gordon closely examines the idea of bad faith in an existential and phenomenological account of the ways that perpetrators of racism evade agency and responsibility. See L. R. Gordon, Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1995), for an account of these concepts.


9. It is easy today to dismiss both socialist and radical feminists as naive, unsophisticated theorizers; yet many brilliant works produced in political philosophy, feminist philosophy and philosophy of race were based on these and revisions of these theories. For a comprehensive view, see A. M. Jagger, Feminist Politics and Human Nature (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1988).
16. In her earlier writing, P. H. Collins uses this terminology. With the hindsight of postmodern criticism, Collins and many feminists of the Second Wave incorporated theoretical innovations acknowledging the idea of multiple consciousnesses and many feminisms (plural). See Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.
19. *Maria W. Stewart, Essays and Speeches*, ed. Richardson. Others have made the case for acknowledging earlier black women public speakers, but Stewart remains the foremost of these.
20. D. Walker, *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, ed. P. P. Hinks (1829; University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000). Walker and Stewart may be considered post-colonial theorists in that they both identify global systems of oppression and base their analyses on the race-based differential US foreign policies – on one hand, in the abominable treatment of Haiti during and after their revolution, and on the other, in the policies towards white liberation struggles in Ireland, Greece and Poland in the early nineteenth century.
23. Frederick Douglass, quoted in ibid., p. 271.
27. See Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association, 6:4 (2013). At APA meetings the topics related to race and gender are often relegated to sessions at the less prestigious group meetings.


29. For work by these authors, see their chapters in S. Sullivan and N. Tuana (eds), Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007).


35. Maria W. Stewart, Essays and Speeches, ed. Richardson, p. 40.


38. Ibid., pp. 58–9.

39. Ibid., pp. 60–3.

40. Marcano, 'The Difference that Difference Makes', p. 64.


42. Mann, 'Race and Feminist Standpoint Theory'.

43. Collins, Fighting Words, p. 231.
44. Alcoff, ‘Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types’, p. 44.
45. Ibid., pp. 43–4, 48.
46. Maria W. Stewart, Essays and Speeches, ed. Richardson, p. 46.
49. Yancy, Black Bodies, White Gazes, p. 220.
51. Ibid., p. 220.
52. Young, On Female Body Experience, p. 11.
53. Ibid., p. 13.
55. While explicitly eschewing a Universalist, humanist account, Young ascribes general practical truth to her reflexive observations. In a challenge begging to be addressed, she identifies herself as a ‘white Anglo heterosexual middle-class woman’, but states, ‘I refuse to circumscribe these descriptions within this string of identities. I believe that these descriptions can resonate, at least in some aspects, with the experiences of differently identifying women, but I cannot know without their saying so’; ibid., pp. 16–17.

3 Dotson, ‘Making Sense: The Multistability of Oppression and the Importance of Intersectionality’

4. Ibid., p. 785.
5. It is important to note that failures to outline one’s use of intersectionality and one’s inquiry demonstrate poor scholarship, at best, and a profound disrespect for women of colour scholarship, at worse. Intersectionality has grown out of women of colour scholarship in North America to extend to discourses around the globe. However, it is shocking how little care is taken with the women of colour work that has produced the idea of intersectionality. See G. Yancy and J. Jones, Pursuing Trayvon Martin: Contexts and Contemporary Manifestations of Racial Dynamics (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012).


12. Open-ended here simply refers to the fact that one needs to be creative, i.e. daring to think outside of what one generally considers reasonable, to uncover what has been rendered theoretically invisible by our own socio-epistemic orientations.


23. To be clear, I neither advocate for either of these conceptions of oppression nor for the importance of considering either of these conceptions of oppression. Rather, my aim is to highlight what the deployment of clashing conceptions of oppression indicates about an understanding of oppression itself. This understanding, in my estimation, would hold no matter one’s favoured conception(s) of oppression.


28. Ibid., p. 234.

33. Ibid., p. 235.
34. Ibid., p. 234.
35. Ibid., p. 235.
38. Ibid., p. 12.
40. Cooper, ‘Woman Versus the Indian’.
41. Williams, ‘The Colored Girl’.
42. Beale, ‘Double Jeopardy’.
45. King, ‘Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness’.
46. Crenshaw, ‘Demarginalizing the Intersection’.
50. Smith, Not Just Race, Not Just Gender.
53. G. Hull, P. Bell-Scott and B. Smith, All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave (New York: Feminist Press, 1982).
54. It is important to note that this ‘overdetermining’ does not necessarily have an embodied component. It is not unusual to find black women who only consider themselves black and do not see, some until much later in life, gendered/raced dimensions of their experiences of oppression. The kind of epistemic oppression that singular analytics impose on populations who have greater ranges of jeopardization than singular analytics identify is only beginning to be realized. This, however, also underwrites intersectionality’s call for open-ended consolidation. See Carastathis, ‘Basements and Intersections’; and May, “Speaking into the Void”.
56. Ibid.
57. See Yancy and Jones, Pursuing Trayvon Martin.

59. One should tread carefully here with respect to Jeantel’s testimony concerning Martin and the threat of rape. It should be cited with a great deal of ambivalence. Jeantel’s interview on Piers Morgan seems to imply that same-sex-loving men can’t be raped. She seems to indicate that being followed by a man when one is not ‘that kind of way’ is somehow especially threatening. There are implications of this kind of framing that are patently absurd. The risk of sexual violence among male youth of colour increases rather than decreases according to one being LGBTQ. This, however, does not take away from the fact that Jeantel does reveal that Martin was aware on some level that Zimmerman may have been a sexual predator. See CNN, ‘Piers Morgan Live: Interview with Rachel Jeantel’, CNN (2013), at http://www.cnn.com/video/data/2.0/video/bestoftv/2013/07/16/exp-newday-piers-jeantel-pkg.cnn.html [accessed 10 September 2013].


4 Carastathis, ‘Reinvigorating Intersectionality as a Provisional Concept’


13. I refer to Crenshaw’s article ‘Demarginalizing the Intersection’.
16. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p. 570.
20. Ibid., p. 6.
24. Sirma Bilge defines ‘queer’ as ‘a political metaphor without a predetermined referent that serves to challenge institutional forces normalizing and commodifying difference’; S. Bilge, ‘Developing Intersectional Solidarities: A Plea for Queer Intersectionality’, in M. Smith and F. Jaffer (eds), *Beyond the Queer Alphabet: Conversations on Gender, Sexuality and Intersectionality* (Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2012), pp. 19–23, on p. 23. See also S. Douglas et al., ‘Liabilities of Queer Antiracist Critique’, *Feminist Legal Studies*, 19:2 (2011), pp. 107–18, on which Bilge draws to make this ‘plea’ – see especially p. 108 n. 4, where, in clarifying their own usage of the term, they argue for the importance of ‘queerness’ as experienced by particular bodies (e.g., gender non-conforming or sexually-dissident subjects).
26. Ibid., p. 1245.
27. Ibid., p. 1252.
29. Ibid., p. 588.
30. Ibid., p. 592.
31. Ibid., p. 595.
32. Ibid., p. 592.
33. Ibid.
36. Ibid., pp. 585, 589, 605–6.
41. King, ‘Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness’, p. 43.
42. Ibid., p. 52.
44. Nash, ‘Rethinking Intersectionality’, p. 4.
45. Ibid., p. 8.
46. Ibid.
47. Three other commonly imputed analytic benefits are simultaneity, irreducibility and inclusivity. See A. Carastathis, ‘The Concept ofIntersectionality in Feminist Theory’, *Philosophy Compass* (forthcoming).
52. Ibid., p. 259.
56. Ibid., p. 135, quoting K. Barad.
57. Ibid., p. 134.
58. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
64. Non-racism may be defined as a power-evasive ‘liberal discourse of equality that denies the systemic nature of racism and its presence in our everyday language and practices’; S. Srivastava, ‘“You’re Calling Me a Racist?” The Moral and Emotional Regulation of Antiracism and Feminism’, *Signs*, 31:1 (2005), pp. 29–62, on p. 35.
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65. Ibid., p. 33.
66. Ibid., p. 31.
67. Ibid., p. 40.
68. Ibid., p. 42.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid., p. 40.
73. Ibid.
76. Ibid., p. 24.
77. Ibid., p. 23.

5 Chanter, “Big Red Sun Blues”: Intersectionality, Temporality and the Police Order of Identity Politics

3. In Book I of the Politics, in a passage to which Rancière is fond of referring, Aristotle distinguishes between speech and voice, the latter of which is shared by all animals, and expresses ‘pain or pleasure’, while the former indicates ‘what is useful and what is harmful … just … and … unjust … good and evil’. By ‘sharing a common view in these matters’, we make ‘a household and a state’; J. Rancière, Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy, tr. J. Rose (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 1999), p. 1. Considering these two distinctions – between those who can comprehend but not understand, and between voice (phone) and speech (logos) – with Plato’s designation in Book VI of the Republic of the people as a ‘large and powerful animal’ (ibid., p. 21), Rancière reduces Aristotel’s distinction to the prevailing idea that there are those who have logos, and those who lack logos, between ‘those who really speak and those whose voice merely mimics the articulate voice to express pleasure and pain’ (ibid., p. 22). Essentially, there are those who count as human, and those who don’t. There are those who count as community, as the whole, and there are the rest – the mob, the people, who are governed by animal appetites, and whose speech is not heard as speech, but as animal noise, as a clamour of unintelligible voices. Rancière emphasizes that ‘Politics exists because the logos is never simply speech, because it is always indissolubly the account that is made of this speech’ (ibid., pp. 22–3). That is, those who endow themselves with the capacity for logos also render judgements about what counts as legitimate speech, and what does not, delegating the latter to ‘noise signaling pleasure or pain, consent or revolt’ (ibid., p. 23).
4. Those who have no part, the people who Plato confines with a lie about the nature of their souls, are discounted (see ibid., p. 16). They are the ‘constitutive wrong ... of politics as such’ (ibid., p. 14). Hence Rancière concerns himself with the ‘founding wrong of politics’, a wrong before which, he says, ‘Quite simply, parties do not exist’ (ibid., p. 39). They do not exist due to the fundamental ‘miscount of that demos that is both part and whole’ (ibid., p. 58). Politics is the deployment of this wrong, this dispute (ibid., p. 13), while the rich indulge in a negation of politics by denying that those who have no part should have a part (see ibid., p. 14).


7. Ibid., pp. 211–22.


11. May, ‘Rancière in South Carolina’, p. 104. In distinction to May, I have suggested that police orders can be more or less benign.

12. Since different sectors of society occupy vastly different strata with regard to recognizing the humanity and equality of individuals in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality and ability, there are not one but many temporal logics that cut across one.

13. While both Chambers and May acknowledge that identity politics are necessary, they do not spell out the temporal logic of how identities emerge as legitimate through political dissensus, only to become caught up police orders, which effect a false consensus, which in its turn is subjected to critique by those who have no part, who insist on taking part, in effecting a new political dissensus.


6 Jusová, ‘Continental Feminist Philosophy Meets Intersectionality: Rosi Braidotti’s Work’

2. Ibid.
5. Nina Lykke adopts the concept of intra-action from the feminist philosopher of particle physics, Karen Barad. Where the more common term ‘interaction’ refers to the type of contact that happens between bounded objects and which generally does not result in a fundamental transformation of the objects, ‘intra-action’ refers to a mutually transformative interplay between permeable, non-bounded phenomena. Lykke’s preference for the latter term in the context of discussions about intersectionality thus highlights the mutual transformation and co-production of the intersecting categories and/or interacting subjects; see N. Lykke, ‘Intersectional Analysis: Black Box or Useful Critical Feminist Thinking Technology?’ in H. Lutz, M. Vivar and L. Supik, Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 207–20, on p. 208.
11. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. While officially the Dutch term 'allochtoon' refers to first- or second-generation immigrants (of any racial or ethnic background) to the Netherlands, in practice, the term is consistently applied to persons of colour (and not to whites), however long they or their families might have resided in the country.
18. Davis, 'Intersectionality in Transatlantic Perspective'.
22. Evans, 'Preface', p. xii.
23. R. Braidotti, 'On Flexible Citizenship', presentation at Basis voor Actuele Kunst (BAK) and Center for Humanities (CFH), Utrecht, the Netherlands, 1 November 2007.
30. Ibid., p. 255; El-Tayeb, 'Gays Who Cannot Properly Be Gay', p. 84.
31. Jusová, 'Hirsi Ali and van Gogh's Submission'.
32. Ibid., p. 153. See also M. de Leeuw and S. van Wichelen, "Please, Go Wake Up! Submission, Hirsi Ali and the "War on Terror" in the Netherlands', Feminist Media Studies, 5 (2005), pp. 325–40; Bracke, 'From Saving Women'.
34. Ibid.
35. Fitna (film), distributed by Ruder Finn PR Company (Scarlet Pimpernel Production, 2008).
37. Ibid., p. 187.
45. Ibid.
46. Braidotti rejects the limited Hegelian understanding of power as only repressive and negative – *potestas* – and she highlights, with Foucault, the positive aspect of power – *as potentia* – in forming subjects. See R. Braidotti, Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), p. 86.
47. Braidotti, ‘Response to Dick Pels’, p. 89.
50. Ibid., p. 208.
57. Braidotti, Transpositions, p. 87.
62. Ibid., p. 2.
64. Ibid.

7 Kozma and Schroer, ‘Purposeful Nonsense, Intersectionality and the Mission to Save Black Babies’

4. This notion has been resurfacing in conservative talking points for forty years. See P. Levy, “God’s Little Shield”: A Short History of the False No-Pregnancy-from-Rape Theory, TPM (20 August 2012), at http://2012.talkingpointsmemo.com/2012/08/


9. The methodologies of black feminism – the focus on particular experience as the root of theory and by extension resistance, the commitment to modelling and defending this way of engagement – are crucial to our project. See Collins, Black Feminist Thought, pp. 21–44.


13. Ibid.


19. Ibid., p. 12.

20. Ibid., pp. 21–2.


23. Ibid.


27. Bazelon, ‘Myth that Rape Rarely Causes Pregnancy Based on a Nazi Experiment that Never Happened’.


29. There is reason to believe that it isn’t just a figurative slap, either. Rape is the leading cause of post-traumatic stress disorder in women; see L. M. Cortina and S. P. Kubisiak, ‘Gender and Posttraumatic Stress: Sexual Violence as an Explanation for Women’s Increased Risk’, Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 115:4 (November 2006), pp. 753–9, on p. 754. Having a prominent figure put air quotes around your rape is a potential trigger for serious stress responses.


32. Solomon, ‘The Missionary Movement to “Save” Black Babies – COLORLINES.’
35. The infant mortality rate in the US for black babies is almost 2.5 times higher than for white babies; the maternal mortality rate for black women is more than three times that of white women; see Bridges, Reproducing Race, (pp.) locs. 2185 and 2200, and Pérez, “Past and Present Collide as the Black Anti-Abortion Movement Grows” – COLORLINES.
38. The UN definition of genocide is broader than this, and includes such acts as causing serious physical or mental harm to members of a group, and forcefully transferring the children of one group to another. See United Nations, ‘Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide’ (9 December 1948), at http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/260 (III) [accessed 29 July 2013].
40. See Bridges, Reproducing Race, and Davis, Women, Race and Class.
43. This message also has the ring of truthness about it. Is the claim that the most dangerous place for black babies is in the womb meant to be a fact, an opinion, or neither of these in particular? Is it merely a statement of feeling, meant to be immune to standards of truth and falsity? There is no attempt to provide evidence for the claim. Again, it seems to work because it trades on already available elements of the social imaginary.
47. See Bartky, Feminist and Domination, pp. 22–32, for example.

52. Again, Steele’s *Whistling Vivaldi* provides the most substantial overview of the phenomenon, while ReducingStereotypeThreat.org, at http://reducingstereotypethreat.org/bibliography.html [accessed 29 July 2013], offers a significant bibliography of stereotype threat research to date.

8 Draz, ‘Transitional Subjects: Gender, Race and the Biopolitics of the Real’


2. For a recent overview of this history, see Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, especially ch. 4.

3. For an overview of this phenomenon and an attempt to account for why sexual reassignment surgery has become such a lightning rod in feminist theory, see D. Valentine, ‘Sue E. Generous: Toward a Theory of Non-transsexuality’, *Feminist Studies*, 38 (2012), pp. 185–211.


5. For an overview of commonly accepted definitions of these terms, including trans, transgender, transsexual and cisgender, see Stryker, *Transgender History*. I use ‘transgender’ and ‘trans’ here as umbrella terms that have emerged in recent years to indicate a wide variety of ways in which one moves away from the gender assigned at birth. I also draw on texts that use the term ‘transsexuality’ to refer explicitly to people who change their bodily morphology through means like surgery or hormone therapy. While many of these terms tend to universalize ‘trans’ experience in ways that deserve critique, I use them here cautiously in order to speak to a specific US context in which transgender studies have developed in conversation with queer and feminist theory.


13. There is rarely a focus in these accounts on how cisgender people’s gender identities are also complicit in gender norms; the focus instead tends to be on how transgender people are appealing to problematic categories of gender and overly individualizing what should be a social, political issue. The ways that a cisgender perspective has become naturalized in accounts of identity and embodiment will become increasingly important as we turn to the question of what happens to gender at the level of the population.


15. Ibid.

16. See Valentine, *Sue E. Generous*, p. 186. Valentine follows the convention of spelling transsexual with one ‘s’ to symbolize a split from the medicalization of the category of transsexuality.


18. Ibid., p. 215.

19. For one account of how this production of identity works through the production of homosexuality, see L. McWhorter, Bodies and Pleasures: *Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).


23. For a longer account of Foucault’s conception of the body, see McWhorter, Bodies and Pleasures, especially ch. 5.


31. The distinction between these two forms of power is increasingly apparent in the late 1970s, as Foucault uses the language of biopower to refer explicitly to a power that targets populations. See M. Foucault, 'Society Must Be Defended': Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976 (New York: Picador, 2003).
32. Foucault, Discipline and Punish, p. 139.
33. Ibid., p. 136.
35. Ibid.
36. Puar emphasizes that these are tendencies and provides examples of work that goes against this general trend. See J. Puar, Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 34.
37. While I am focusing here on Spade’s use of Foucault in Normal Life, he also draws widely on women of colour feminism, disability studies, critical race theory and many other areas of inquiry. I do not mean to imply that his use of Foucault is more important than his use of these other areas; but given my interest in using Foucault’s theories of power as a way to think about the need for an intersectional framework attentive to biopolitical population management in queer feminist philosophy, his use in this regard is especially instructive.
38. Spade, Normal Life, p. 142.
46. Ibid., p. 230.
47. See Currah and Moore, ‘We Won’t Know Who You Are’, p. 117.

9 Jones, ‘Caster Semenya: Reasoning Up Front with Race’

1. By sex-gender identity or race identity, I do not mean to signal an individual’s psychological understanding of her identity, but rather public understandings of an individual’s (or a group’s) identity. Sex pertains to the property of being male or female. But it could pertain to some non-additive combination of the two. Gender pertains to the property of being a boy/man/masculinity or a girl/woman/femininity. It’s possible for it to pertain to some non-additive combination of these constituents. We can also speak about the concepts of male or female or the concepts of boy/man/masculinity or girl/woman/femininity.

2. As stated, my view is neutral with respect to whether the material body plays a role in the construction of sex. On the other hand, I find persuasive arguments given by Linda Alcoff that the body does indeed play such a role. See L. Alcoff, ‘The Metaphysics of Gender and Sexual Difference’, in Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 151–76.

4. The following discussion will make it clear why I speak of an intersectional, interlocking analysis.


9. Arguably, Africans were first conceived or thought of as black through Western travelogues and various practices associated with the slave trade of Africans by Europeans. Such conceptions influenced the perception of Africans as black, which, in turn, reinforced conceptions about their blackness. The criterion used initially – in the historical sense and at birth – to categorize someone as female was, arguably, the vagina.

10. See M. Lugones, 'Toward a Decolonial Feminism', *Hypatia*, 25:4 (2010), pp. 742–59. Statements made by Hortense Spillers may be viewed as supporting the view that African women were ungendered. Spillers describes the 'diaporic plight' of New World enslaved Africans as 'marked by a theft of the body – a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire. Under these conditions, we lose at least gender difference in the outcome, and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific'; see H. Spillers, 'Mama’s Baby Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book', *Diacritics* (1987), pp. 64–81, on p. 000. According to some, e.g. Namita Goswami, the ungendering occurs only on board the slave ship 'where we see an internecine flesh and blood entity ungendered' and then regendered in the New World [personal communication?].

11. In the case of slavery, the outcomes to be achieved may have been disparate, but they intersected with and were compatible with each other. The black female body could be used to mark a difference between us (white people) and them (black people). This goal intersected with the goal of justifying the use of slave labour; i.e. what makes these slaves not us is also that which makes them morally unworthy of the consideration and treatment we bear to each other; their essential difference makes it morally permissible, indeed, morally praiseworthy, to use them as slaves. See C. W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

12. The notion of hyperfemininity has to do with the idea of a type of excess of femininity. Such excess was perceived as being possessed by Sarah Baartman by a white, Western imaginary. In particular, Baartman's buttocks were perceived as being excessively feminine.
13. I understand humanity as a construction. In Western normative constructions of humanity (and perhaps in many non-normative, non-Western constructions of humanity), sex-gender identity is constructed as an essential component of humanity. According to such a construction, all sexed beings are animals. But only gendered animals (or beings) are genuine human beings. Only they are morally due the treatment accorded to human beings. Beings not constructed as possessing gender or as possessing a degenerate gender will be treated, in varying degrees depending on the conception and perception of their degenerate gender or lack thereof, as less than human.

14. How Semenya looks may include how fast she runs, just has how a black slave woman looked may have included her masculine ‘performance’ in the field, just as part of Michelle Obama’s looks includes that she could possibly take on Mike Tyson (see below). Such things are not, however, included in Munro’s understanding of how Semenya looks.


18. Epstein, as we see, does introduce race obliquely and powerfully. He does so wittingly or unwittingly.

19. Similarly, it is very much a black Serena Williams is described by Rolling Stone as black and beautiful, but is also perceived and therefore described as built like one of those ‘monster trucks that crushes Volkswagons as sports arenas’; see J. Wilson, ‘Serena Williams Rolling Stone Magazine: Compares Athlete to Monster Truck, They Can’t Be Serious’, Huffington Post (19 June 2013), at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/19/serena-williams-rolling-stone-monster-truck-comparison_n_3464707.html?utm_hp_ref=mostpopular [accessed 20 June 2013].


21. The domain of elite female sport, a topic beyond the scope of this essay, provides a further framework required for understanding the specificity of Semenya’s situation. Even within the area of sport, the particular sport in question matters. For example, the perception of masculinity in women’s tennis – historically cast as a sport for ladies – signals a different type of transgression than does the perception of masculinity in women’s track and field, which has been understood traditionally as a masculine sport, thereby undermining the sex-gendered identities of any women participating in it. This raises the interesting question as to where the white Savinova gets the special authority to say with respect to Semenya, ‘Just look at her!’ Why should we not just look at Savinova? I would like to thank independent scholar Delia Douglas for working with me in thinking about the problems for black women in sport, many stemming from the fact that black women cannot satisfy criteria of white femininity operative even in sports deemed as traditionally masculine.

22. Someone’s being or appearing masculine or feminine, as opposed to someone’s being male or female, is a matter of degree. This is why we can speak of someone’s being somewhat masculine or feminine. Sex identity, on the other hand, has been traditionally thought to be a digital affair: you are either male or you are female.


25. See M. Wayne, ‘Who Is the Most Feminine, Barack or Michelle Obama?’, Sodahead (22 August 2009), at http://www.sodahead.com/united-states/who-is-the-most-feminine-barack-or-michelle-obama/question-580617/?link=ibaf&q=michelle%20obama%20as%20masculine [accessed 18 February 2013]. Anita Brady wrote, in reference to Florence Griffith-Joyner and Jackie Joyner-Kersee being described respectively as looking like a man and looking like a gorilla, that ‘while the excessive muscularity of any female sporting body may be interpreted as a transgression of the line between male and female, what is clear is that it is only the black female sporting body that can be imagined to simultaneously blur the boundaries between human and animal. Perhaps she should have added that this is grounded in the fact the black female non-sporting body, e.g. Michelle Obama, can also be so described. See A. Brady, ‘Could This Women’s World Champ Be a Man?’ (2011), p. 11, at http://www.victoria.ac.nz/atp/articles/pdf/Brady-2011.pdf [accessed 18 February 2013].

26. P. A. Goff, M. A. Thomas and M. C. Jackson, “Ain’t I a Woman?: Towards an Intersectional Approach to Person Perception and Group-based Harms’, Sex Roles, 59:5–6 (2008), pp. 392–403, on pp. 400–1. In this part of the text, ‘Black’ and ‘White’ are capitalized to reflect the manner in which Goff et al. reported their findings.

27. Ibid., p. 402.

28. Ibid.; emphasis added. The US is a very visible and dominant purveyor of racialized representations of sex-gender identities. Further research is required to see to what extent such findings are replicated in other parts of the world.


30. Ibid.; emphasis added.

31. This will depend on other factors. Suppose the pedal is sustained over a sequence of notes (sounds) so that the other notes are still heard when the note in question is struck. If the sound of that note is affected by the sustained sounds around it, then it could be it is not the same sound when played in the different voices. This is a matter for empirical investigation. So in the example above, we will suppose that a pedal is not sustained. We will suppose that before a note is struck, the sound of the preceding note has died out.

32. Perhaps Razack is not distinguishing content from the meaning of the content, which plays a role in how strong her claim appears to be. I will maintain such a distinction in my discussion.

33. I’m not claiming that everyone would have the experience I had. For example, a man I know told me that he can only see the phallus, regardless of the new conceptual learning! How one sees it may also depend on whether one is looking at the statue itself, the colour of the statue, the angle in which it appears in the photograph. And such is the case with perceiving race-gender identity. Myriad factors may be involved. There is no algorithm to determine this. That being said, we possess very good reasons – of a genealogical nature – that explain why, for example, black women are miscategorized as men.

34. Materialized meanings of concepts renders content in this example.

35. Razack may also work with a notion of one content adhering in another. This notion must be distinguished from that of one content being another.

Haslanger develops the idea of gender as the social meaning of sex and colour as the social meaning of race in ways that accommodate different contexts and various problems that arise. She does so by locating or defining the social meaning of race and gender in relation to the positionality of raced or gendered groups in terms of oppression.

37. Ibid., p. 277.
38. Ibid.
39. This example was proposed and described to me by philosopher and mathematician Daniel Andler, who teaches philosophy of science and theory of knowledge at the Sorbonne, Paris IV.
42. The context in question associates masculinity and hypermasculinity with huge muscles, the ability to lift heavy loads, and with facial configurations that express anger or the effort required to engage in activities requiring a great deal of physical strength.
43. N. Goswami, personal communication, 5 June 2013.
44. And indeed a dead Sarah Baartman was displayed in the Museum of Natural History in Paris, France until 1974. Her remains were returned to South Africa in 2002, after Nelson Mandela requested in 1994 that they be returned.
46. So we must ask, whose community matters in constructing sex-gender identity? Does race, in the form of the power of whiteness, in cahoots with science once again, simply get to ignore what Semenya’s community’s norms for understanding sex-gender identities have to say about the matter? 
47. While it is true that the white students in the Goff et al. study were told to just look at white and black men, an instruction that refers back to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century objectification in scientific studies, black women are subject to such objectification outside of the context of science. She’s running: ‘Just look at her!’ She’s playing tennis: ‘Just look at her!’ She’s singing: ‘Just look at her!’ She’s a politician: ‘Just look at her.’ Recently, Roberto Calderoli, an Italian senator, compared Cecile Kyenge, the country’s first black Cabinet minister, to an orang-utan. He stated: ‘I love animals – bears and wolves, as everyone knows – but when I see the pictures of Kyenge, I cannot but think of, even if I’m not saying she is one, the features of an orangutan.’ He then said ‘I apologize’ after his comments became public. But this is not a successful speech act, for as I argued above, you cannot apologize to a specimen, even if you take it to be (or just look like) an orang-utan. She looks like an orang-utan! This statement indirectly issues the directive, ‘Just look at her!’ And the list goes on. ’She’s the president’s wife. Just look at her!’ All the world’s a laboratory, and all the black women ontological specimens. See S. Scherer, ‘Roberto Calderoli, Italian Politian, Compares First Black Prime Minister Cecile Kyenge to Orangutan’, Huffington Post (17 July 2013), at http://www.huffington-
50. Before we rush to say, 'Well, Semenya can run so much faster than anyone else; this is the criterion that provides the distinction,' we shouldn't forget that it would have been claimed, and with as much authority, that those slave women in the fields could work so much harder!

51. While the real-world understandings of race vary by region and time period, and it is important to study the differences, these understandings continue to bear the stamp of the arrangements of slavery, colonialism and imperialism. In fact, slavery, colonialism and imperialism exist in new forms, carrying with them understandings of race that were brought into being and configured during their previous versions.

52. See Munro, 'Caster Semenya: Gods and Monsters,' p. 383.

53. Anne Fausto-Sterling, quoted in ibid., p. 388.

54. Alice Dreger, quoted in ibid.

55. Judith Butler, quoted in ibid.


57. Even today black women’s progeny are conceived as antithetical to the goals of civilisation. In the words of William Bennett, former US Education Secretary and drug czar, ‘I do know that it’s true that if you wanted to reduce crime, you could – if that were your sole purpose … abort every black baby in this country, and your crime rate would go down’; in Bennett: Black Abortions Would Lower Crime, National Journal: Multiculturalism (2005), at http://globalfire.tv/nj/05en/race/black_abortions.htm [accessed 22 February 2013]. Arguably, such thinking, or some variant of it, is thought to apply to black people throughout the world.


59. In J. Morgan, Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 82–3, Jennifer Morgan discusses increase, a term referring to the possible (including possible unconceived) future offspring of slave women. Increase was taken into account when drafting wills and selling female slaves because it could be used to augment the monetary value of a slave woman.

60. A black slave woman would also fail to satisfy the maternity criterion if she were not married, if she had to carry out the sexual duties of an unpaid prostitute, and if she was being used to breed offspring.


62. We know, for example, about Serena’s menstrual pain, which she felt compelled to speak about publicly. This provides some evidence. Incidentally, though she came out with this, she also said it disadvantaged her for her competition to know about this.

63. J. Morgan, personal communication, 4 October 2012; emphasis added.

64. Other works Morgan had in mind include Thavolia Glymph’s research on antebellum domestic spaces and Marisa Fuentes’s research on slave-owning and enslaved women in colonial Barbados. J. Morgan, personal communication, 4 October 2012.


66. A similar problem arises with respect to the black male body.
68. See F. C. Holloway's discussion of the problem of containing behaviours that would be disruptive or disturbing to conceptions of whiteness, in F. C. Holloway, *Private Bodies, Public Texts: Race, Gender, and a Cultural Bioethics* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2011), Kindle edn, locs. 599–672. Also see T. Willoughby-Herals, 'South Africa's Poor Whites and Whiteness Studies: Afrikaner Ethnicity, Scientific Racism, and White Misery', *New Political Science*, 29:4 (2007), pp. 479–500, for a discussion of how poor white people were racialized under Apartheid. Their poverty, illiteracy and 'degenerate' ways of living gave the lie to the idea of white people as superior. They were racialized so that the concept of whiteness would no longer pertain to them.


71. See Brady, 'Could This Women's World Champ Be a Man?', p. 13.

72. Munro speaks of *our* categories. I am repeating her language. What she means, I suppose, are the categories constructed by a white Western imaginary. That being said, she is not wrong to say that these categories are ours, because we live in a shared world. We share these hegemonic categories whether we want to or not. And some of us try to resist them.

73. Here, I am not using the expression 'hidden testes' interchangeably with 'internal testes'. Although Semenya was not accused of intentionally trying to hide something, as a black 'woman' she is the kind of thing that is hiding something. Consider this statement about Sarah Baartman written by K. Perkov, 'To Know a Hottentot Venus: Feminist Epistemology and the Artworks Surrounding Sarah Baartman', *Aleph Journal: UCLA's Official Undergraduate Research Journal in Social Sciences and Humanities*, at http://alephjournal.wordpress.com/2010/01/01/to-know-a-hottentot-venus-feminist-epistemology-and-the-artworks-surrounding-sarah-baartman/ [accessed 29 September 2013]: 'Baartman would not allow the men to examine her genitals. Cuvier writes 'she kept her apron concealed ... either between her thighs or still more deeply.' Baartman died in the winter of 1815, just five years after she left South Africa. Less than a month after her death, Cuvier dissected her body over a number of days. In death Baartman could not stop Cuvier in his desires, and during the dissection Cuvier paid special attention to her genitals, which contained *signs* of physical difference Cuvier had hoped to ascertain.' Baartman *did* seek to hide her genitals from the men of science. But the genitals themselves, signs, hid and contained sexual difference. Black women, in the Western imaginary, like nature – like the nature they are – are imagined as concealing something significant, something of which it is the job of science to read, interpret and uncover. My use of 'hidden' signals the Western imaginary's view of Caster Semenya, and what her *signs* are hiding.

10 Rakes, 'Philosophical Happiness and the Relational Production of Philosophical Space'

1. I will use the gender neutral pronouns 'sie' and 'hir' to designate a general subject. These pronouns correspond grammatically to the nouns *she/her* (sie) and the possessive or object forms *his/her* (hir). These pronouns indicate a general subject while recognizing that there are more than two genders, as s/he doesn't. I prefer them to a universal 'she/her' because of their inclusivity of all possible genders.
2. As I was working on this piece, Linda Martín Alcoff’s Presidential Address to the 2012 Eastern Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association made a similar appeal: in the US, philosophy’s demographic problems are entirely wrapped up in its philosophical problems – its enforcement of the boundaries of what counts as philosophy.


8. See Alcoff’s piece to which my section title points, ‘Who’s Afraid of Identity Politics?’

9. Cisgender is a relatively recent term used by transgender and genderqueer communities and transgender studies academics to mark the privilege that attends the identities of those who do not cross gender in ways that transgender subjects do. I insist on a very broad understanding of trans and genderqueer crossings of gender that are not relegated to the need for any particular surgeries, hormones or medical procedures at all to authorize a subject as trans. See A. F. Enke, ‘The Education of Little Cis: Cisgender and the Discipline of Opposing Bodies’, in A. F. Enke (ed.), *Transfeminist Perspectives: In and Beyond Transgender and Gender Studies* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2012), pp. 60–77, for a thorough genealogy of the term cisgender and its limitations/reifications. I intend here to address multiple forms of privileged identities that imbricate together in ‘the Subject’. This is to implicitly respond to Enke’s concern that cis privilege is too often considered as in a vacuum, without attention to other forms of privilege.

10. See Alcoff, *Visible Identities*.


14. Ibid., p. 16.
16. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. In particular, the anger of white, cisgender, heterosexual, abled, Global North, secular or (secularized) Christian men has long been permitted in many spaces and modes wherein others lack the luxury of the expression: as fathers, supervisors, military officers, union organizers, and teachers and principals, for some examples. Bad affect in other subjects is good or at least ok in this Subject. Because colonial heteropatriarchy promotes the leadership of this subject through the trope of the father, his anger is often seen as righteous, for our own good, rather than misplaced, unwarranted or bullying.
24. Ibid., p. 143.
25. Ibid., p. 144.
30. Ibid., p. 2.
31. Ibid., p. 142.
32. I use ‘private’ and ‘public’ as shorthand terms here, to indicate what is meant, normatively, by the terms, and to expose the uneven distributions of what we think privacy is. Knowing full well that the private and the public function as binary concepts that feminisms have long contested, I use them as tropes to help us understand precisely their fluidity as terms and to imply their deconstruction.
33. I use scare quotes for the term ‘single’ to mark it as the institutional binary opposite of ‘married’. Most institutions and official forms give only these two options; thus ‘single’ obfuscates a multitude of other romantic, partnership and shared parenting relationships.
34. The historical context and changes regarding divorce are worth noting, particularly because of the historical amnesia of heteronormativity. Divorce is far more common than it was forty years ago, but heterosexual marriage is still defended for its presumed stability. We have feminists to thank, many of whom were lesbians, many of whom were women of colour, for the ability of some women to escape abusive marriages, as well as the entitlement to half of the assets for full-time moms.
36. Ibid., p. 126.
37. Ibid., p. 144.
40. Ibid., p. 9.
11 Scuro, ’Theory Can Heal: Constructing an Ethos of Intervention’


3. Ibid., pp. 129, 132.

4. Emmanuel Levinas describes alterity as ‘the very heart of the relationship with the other that characterizes our social life, alterity appears as a nonreciprocal relationship – that is, as contrasting strongly with contemporaneousness. The Other as Other is not only an alter ego: the Other is what I myself am not. The Other is this ... because of the Other’s very alterity. The Other is, for example, the weak, the poor, “the widow and the orphan,” whereas I am the rich or the powerful. It can be said that intersubjective space is not symmetrical ... The relationship with alterity is neither spatial nor conceptual’; E. Levinas, Time and the Other (and Additional Essays) (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987), pp. 83–4; emphasis added.

5. hooks, Teaching to Transgress, p. 61.

6. Ibid., p. 67.


9. These questions are paraphrased from Arendt’s Preface to The Human Condition. These are questions that she argues are necessary to counter the alienations and thoughtlessness specific to (by her definition) the modern world (distinct from the ‘Modern Age’). Robin May Schott also utilizes Arendt as a ‘background figure’ in defining philosophy on the border; see R. M. Schott, ‘Introduction’, in R. M. Schott and K. Klercke (eds), Philosophy on the Border (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2007), pp. 7–23, on p. 10.


12. This ‘thinking through’ is what I want to suggest is at the centre of theory-building, what I hope can also be read as therapeutic to the harms of exclusion. Dotson has a parallel recommendation: ‘professional philosophy is not an attractive working environment for
many diverse practitioners ... [a downside] of the culture of justification that pervades professional philosophy.' Dotson calls for 'a shift to a culture of praxis' and 'sees a difference between processes of legitimation and processes of validation'; Dotson, ‘How is this Paper Philosophy?’ p. 3, p. 7 n. 3. Worth noting here, Dotson also outlines two forms of exclusion, ‘exclusion via exceptionalism and exclusion via a sense of incongruence’; incongruence ‘refers to an unequal acceptance of justifying norms’; ibid., p. 11, p. 13.

13. My use of tender here — as a ‘tending to’/‘tendering’/‘tenderness’ — is invoking both hooks’s notion of healing (she references P. T. Krocker’s idea of ‘communities of care’ and N. Wirzba’s essay ‘An Economy of Gratitude;’ see b. hooks, Belonging: A Culture of Place (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 227–8) and Levinas’s idea of non-indifference as a “tendency” distinct from erotic tendencies and without ‘the model of fulfillment’. To tender in this way is the work of ‘ethical substitution’, a position of an ‘impoverished knowledge’. See E. Levinas, God, Death, and Time (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 112, 114. Ethical substitution is exemplified by the giving of the bread out of one's own mouth to another’s. It signifies a tearing up of jouissance, of enjoyment in the self-same, and, for Levinas, ‘is openness, not only of one's own pocketbook, but the doors of one’s own home, a “sharing of your bread with the famished,” a “welcoming of the wretched into your house”’ (Isaiah 58); E. Levinas, Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1981), p. 74.


16. Here, although my essay is about healing, there already have been remarkable efforts to triage the situation through the Women in Philosophy Task Force (19 October 2010), at http://web.mit.edu/wphtf/Welcome.html [accessed 000]. Initiatives like the Gendered Conference Campaign, from the Feminist Philosophers blog (10 December 2009), at http://feministphilosophers.wordpress.com/gendered-conference-campaign/ [accessed 11 July 2013], and ‘What It is Like to be a Woman in Philosophy’ (and its sister blog, ‘What We are Doing about What it is Like’) was an immediate and timely response to Haslanger’s alarm.


18. Dotson quotes a ‘College Guidance Counselor at a Historically Black College’ in 2009; Dotson, ‘How is this Paper Philosophy?’ p. 3.


21. Warren cites Charlotte Bunch as naming the problem (‘You can’t just add women and stir’), but then Warren narrates the difficulty of inclusion as a ‘misnamed’ problem; ibid., pp. 8–10.


23. Warren describes McIntosh’s five-phase model for inclusion and how she tried to ‘figure out what her five-phase model had to do with philosophy. All her explanations used examples from art, biology, history, psychology – never philosophy’; Warren, ‘Lead Essay’, p. 9.

24. ‘The History of Philosophy with Ordinary Women’ was ‘Phase 3’ of McIntosh’s five-phase model. This model would lead up to the fifth phase: ‘Philosophy that includes us
all. Warren notes that the McIntosh model was still problematic when applied to the
question of philosophical integration because it still neglects ‘claims about identity-
formative traits [such] as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, affectional orientation,
dominant/subordinate, and colonizer/colonized status’; ibid., pp. 8–9, p. 25 n. 10.
26. Ibid., pp. 13, 15.
27. Minnich’s idea of philosophical fieldwork is (as quoted by Warren): ‘thinking with others
out and about in the agora ... is about listening and hearing, looking and seeing, taking in
and trying to comprehend without rushing to interpret, to translate into familiar terms,
to explain ... it is about being attentive’; ibid., pp. 12–3.
(1987), pp. 3–19. Andrea Nye also references Lugones as one of the essential readings
for feminist philosophy yet also dismissed as ‘not philosophy’; see Nye, ‘It’s Not Philo-
29. Goswami, ‘Thinking Problems’, p. 192. The latter quote is cited from the external review-
er’s letter by Charles Mills in the promotion and tenure case of Namita Goswami, 3
January 2010.
30. hooks quotes Chandra Mohanty in describing a politicized resistance to ‘dominant
discourses and representations’ at the conclusion of her Introduction to Teaching to
Transgress. Mohanty states, ‘Uncovering and reclaiming subjugated knowledge is one
way to lay claims to alternative histories. But these need to be understood pedagogically,
as questions of strategy and practice as well as scholarship, in order to transform educa-
tional institutions radically’; found in b. hooks, Teaching to Transgress, p. 22.
31. Ibid., p. 168.
32. Frye, Politics of Reality, pp. 52, 67.
33. Ibid., pp. 75–6.
34. The case of Colin McGinn is worth mentioning here as an example of the gap between
professional reputation and professional practice when position is exercised with the lens
of an ‘arrogant eye’. In this case, the professor took advantage of the student to satisfy
personal desire and ideology – of what ‘genius’ means, of what ‘taboo-breaking’ practices
require, etc. Academic philosophy instruction must always be the work of decoding and
translation if it is to be expansive and inclusive; there is already too much ableism and
gatekeeping in our profession. Persistent attention, enthusiasm and consideration for
the work of our students, and not just a promotion of ourselves and our own thinking,
empowers both the future professionals and the reputation of the profession in general.
See J. Schuessler, ‘A Star Philosopher Falls and a Debate over Sexism is Set Off’, New York
35. hooks, Teaching to Transgress, p. 63.
36. I gave a paper in 2008 on miscarriage on a panel including interdisciplinary perspectives
on miscarriage – including in my paper hook’s suggestion about theory as healing – and
was questioned by an audience member about the validity of miscarriage as a philo-
sophical topic. I was the only philosopher on the panel. This audience member, another
philosopher, devalued the arguments as more ‘therapy’ than philosophy.
38. hooks gives insight here: ‘When I imagine the terror of Africans on board slave ships,
on auction blocks, inhabiting the unfamiliar architecture of plantations, I consider that
this terror extended beyond the fear of punishment, that it resided also in the anguish of
hearing a language they could not comprehend. The very sound of English had to terrify
... yet I imagine them also realizing that this language would need to be possessed, taken, claimed as a space of resistance'; hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, p. 169.


40. Jackson Durkee argues that while design engineering is well known and widely practised, construction engineering 'is not as well understood and hardly ever discussed'. Durkee argues that the work of getting the structure 'up in the air' is as critical to the fabrication of the bridge as the design engineering role because construction engineering addresses the real-world conditions while dealing in the most hazardous and risky elements of bridge-building. When it comes to fabrication, the design engineer for the most part 'should stand clear of actual approval'; J. Durkee, 'Steel Bridge Construction', in W. Chen and L. Duan (eds), *Bridge Engineering Handbook* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2000), §45.2–3, p. 10. I find an important analogy between purely speculative and abstract philosophical practices with design engineering, while also siding with Durkee's account of the status of construction engineering with the labour and standing of much of the border(line/marginalized) philosophy and philosophical thinking described in this essay.

41. This was in reference to the building of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge in Maryland, a steel suspension bridge. The traditional procedure was a 'sag-survey' method. In a letter to the design engineers, the chief construction engineer argued that calculating sag according to a formula made for much error in the field conditions and could not account for many of the construction variables like sag, stress and temperature. If they 'set to mark' guide strand suspension cables, they could reduce the conditions that led to the errors. In this context, the 'marks' are the saddles of the bridge. See ibid., §45.16; in the context of this essay, the harms voiced by exclusions and invalidation are the 'marks' for a theory-building that can remedy and validate in new ways.

42. Ibid., §45.15.

43. Ibid., §45.10.

44. H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1971), pp. 109–10. Arendt does not use the term 'bridge' but does describe metaphorical thinking as 'the most plausible delusion' in which 'Language, by lending itself to metaphorical usage, enables us to think, that is to have traffic with non-sensory matters, because it permits a carrying-over, *metapherein*, of our sense experiences. There are not two worlds because metaphor unites them'; ibid., p. 110. She later discusses the 'rainbow bridge of concepts' of German idealism in *Willing*. Arendt is suspicious of the bridge, stating, 'I did not want to cross the ... bridge, perhaps because I am not homesick enough, in any event because I believe in a world ... in which man's mind ... could or should ever be comfortably at home'; ibid., pp. 157–8.

45. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 139. I am more neutral in my reading of Arendt's *homo faber*. I am using the idea of work through fabrication not in the context of the *vita activa* as she describes it. In the context of the *vita activa, homo faber* is not free in his fabrications: '[i]t thought ... is by no means his prerogative'. She does concede, 'Cognition [distinct from thought] ... belongs to all ... whose usefulness can be tested, and which, if it produces no results, has failed. The cognitive processes in the sciences are basically not different from the function of cognition in fabrication ... added to the human artifice like all other things'; ibid., p. 171.

46. Ibid., p. 171.

about quality of academic philosophy in content and style, excluding and delegitimizing (read here: disabling) styles and authors of theory that he finds to be 'fake' or 'hacks'.

48. Jenny Saul makes a similar injunction: 'My final suggestion may actually be the most difficult to implement: it's to stop talking about “who's smart,” a widespread vice of philosophers in my experience … Smartness claims are also remarkably immune to counter-evidence (“He’s smart, he just doesn’t work very hard”; “She’s not really smart, she just works very hard”). Moreover, smartness judgments are deeply tied to the notion that there is such a thing as smartness, of which some people are lucky enough to have a big dose while the unlucky get less. And this view of intelligence, Carol Dweck has shown, makes it easier for stereotype threat and implicit bias to do their nasty work'; J. Saul, 'Women in Philosophy', Philosophy Magazine (16 October 2012), at http://philosophy-press.co.uk/?p=1079 [accessed 000].

49. I want Butler to be able to respond here, although indirectly. She states in her reading of Levinas, 'Suffering can yield an experience of humility, of vulnerability … and these can become resources … if we do not "resolve" them too quickly ... It is as much a matter of wrestling ethically with one's own murderous impulses ... as it is a matter of apprehending the suffering of others and taking stock of the suffering one has inflicted' ; J. Butler, 'Precarious Life', in P. Atterton and M. Callarco (eds), Radicalizing Levinas (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010), pp. 3–20: on p. 17. hooks also describes the 'magic of redemptive suffering' in hooks, Belonging, p. 201.


51. Langton, 'Feminism in Epistemology', p. 128. Langton goes on to describe the other feminist arguments that align philosophical thinking with feminist thinking – that there could be a 'philosophical remedy' (including Mary Astell, Miranda Fricker and Michèle Le Dœuff) in which ‘doxastic shock is supposed to have the therapeutic effect Descartes ascribed to it ... Perhaps oppression is a help to knowledge'. Langton also notes that 'Viewed this way, epistemology is a friend to feminism, in its ability to uproot "the habit of holding on to old opinions" and to reveal women as rational knowers'; ibid., pp. 128–9, 143 n. 3.


54. Ibid., p. 40.


58. hooks, Belonging, p. 185.

59. hooks states specifically that 'Collective healing for black folk in the diaspora can happen only as we remember in ways that move us to ... our agrarian past. Individual black folk who live in rural communities ... who are committed to living simply, must make our voices heard'; ibid., p. 47.

60. Ibid., p. 194. hooks makes a most important point prior to this: ‘For white folk who see certain kinds of work beneath them, there has to always be a subordinated class to do the dirty work ... Sadly, many disenfranchised black and white poor people buy into this same logic and feel that they are too good for certain forms of labor'; ibid., p. 193. I think it is worth remarking on my earlier distinction between the knowledge of the bridge construction engineer in relation to the design engineer. The material risk and labour of
construction falls onto a perceived lower class compared to the architect who might wear the hard hat but does not get his hands dirty.

62. hooks, Belonging, p. 196.
Why Race and Gender Still Matter