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Abstract: This discussion of Sally Haslanger's recent book, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (Oxford 2012), investigates how her theory of race and gender handles the problem of intersectionality; that is, the problem of how to understand the ways in which one's location in multiple socially constructed categories affects one's lived experiences, social roles, and relative privilege or disadvantage. Haslanger defines race and gender as locations within hierarchical social structures. This high-level structural analysis allows her to find commonality without claiming that, for example, all women share social roles or psychological characteristics. However, race-based oppression seems sometimes to cancel out gender-based privilege; thus raising the question of how, on Haslanger's model, we are to understand race and gender working together.

Keywords: Race, gender, feminism, Haslanger, intersectionality.

You must read *Resisting Reality* even if you are independently familiar with many or even almost all of the essays gathered here. The book has the kind of thematic overlap and development between the essays that makes for a collection that is greater than the sum of its parts. Read them together and you will get a much clearer understanding of Sally Haslanger's position in all its complexity than you are likely to get from having read them one at a time as they (all but one) originally appeared.

What I find especially exciting about the book is the way in which it brings into focus just how deeply social our world is: how individual agents act within a complex social matrix; how much of what we do is the result not, or not only, of our conscious deliberation, but also of our embodied routines, unconscious scripts, and social schemas. The social embeddedness of all that we do comes to the fore in Part Three, in which Sally develops the notion of a social structure and applies it to understanding race and gender relations. The notion is borrowed from sociologists and historians, but Sally sharpens it and makes that interdisciplinary work available for philosophical use in a way that it has not been before. Sally's task is to understand what ideology is and how it undergirds and maintains social practices, for better or for worse. (Her conception of ideology is the broad and non-perjorative one.) She argues against accounts of ideology that render the notion too cognitive, too much a matter of our explicit or tacit beliefs, and so locate its functioning too shallowly, as if by just getting our beliefs in order through reflective processes we could get to escape its influence, or make its influence our own (Haslanger 2012, 412-13).

Social structures are sets of *interconnected social practices* that are embedded in the material world. We enact social structures – they are as they are because of our agency, but our agency is as it is on account of the social structures in which it operates. Social structures are comprised of schemas and resources, which are mutually co-constituting (Haslanger 2012, 20-23; 413-418). Schemas are conventions, scripts, ways of going on, and so on. They are

public and shareable, so the notion is not quite the same as one that is operating in social psychology, but they are related: these public schemas get into our individual heads when we come to have the relevant dispositions in our perception, thinking, feeling, and behavior. Schemas give meaning to material objects as well as shaping those objects and contributing to their form (Haslanger 2012, 463). The simplest example is public toilets divided by gender. Schemas allow for apparently seamless interaction with material things: you see a crossing light, you stop (that thing is a crossing light because of the role it plays in street crossing conventions, you know the conventions, the rest comes automatically); you see “women” or the triangular skirt symbol in a toilet door and you choose that door, unless you are a butch woman who is routinely told “this is the women’s toilet”, in which case you hope that you can make it home. People who do not fit current social practices cannot be quite at home in a material world constructed to reflect and reproduce them.

This picture of human agency as existing in a context of shared practices *made material* offers a richer framework for understanding human – that is finite, social, and embodied – rationality than that currently offered by social, cognitive, or evolutionary psychology which focus solely on the mind. For this reason, even those without an antecedent interest in questions of race and gender should be interested in the story, developed and defended in this book, of the “background” which provides the social fabric in which human thought, deliberation, and action occurs.

Since in an author meets critics session it is customary to raise some possible problems for the author’s views, their development, or support, let me turn to doing that. I want to explore Sally’s handling of the problem of *intersectionality*. One is never merely a woman, but a woman of a particular race, class, age, sexuality, and so forth. The problem of intersectionality is the problem of how to understand the ways in which one’s location in multiple socially constructed categories affects one’s lived experiences, social roles, and

relative privilege or disadvantage. Sally focuses on race and gender only, but if her theory works with respect to these two central identity categories then we can theorize additional categories by increasing complexity while keeping the basic structure of the model intact. If it works here, there is reason to believe it will work everywhere.

Sally's analysis of gender and race gets us closer to understanding the problem of intersectionality than any other account I know. But I am not sure we are quite there, yet, or at any rate, I do not fully understand how Sally's model of intersectionality is supposed to work. An analysis of gender and race given at a high-level of abstraction in terms of location within relations of dominance and subordination promises to help us find commonality when a less abstract analysis might have recorded only difference, but concerns remain regarding whether it is in fact possible to separate out those axes along which a given agent is privileged from those along which they are disadvantaged in the way the model seems to require. I say, "seems," however, because I am not certain that the model is applied in quite the same way across all of the essays in the collection and I would like to get clearer about that. To keep the discussion grounded, I am going to ask a very concrete question, "Are most adult male Indigenous Australians men, and do we care?"

In order to get purchase on my question, I first need to back up and give a brief overview of Sally's definitions of race and gender and of the methodology that lies behind them. I side with Sally in thinking that when it comes to offering an analysis of concepts like race, gender, or knowledge, the point is not to analyze our concepts as they actually are, nor to inquire into the properties, if any, that paradigm cases of the application of the concept share. Instead it is to inquire what conceptual work we need doing and what concept, or concepts, is best able to serve that theoretical purpose. Sally calls this last enterprise, variously, "analytical" (Haslanger 2012, 223-25) and "ameliorative" (Haslanger 2012, 376) analyses. Defending an ameliorative analysis requires making explicit the values that shape

the inquiry and practices in which the concept will be deployed and showing that drawing the concept in the way proposed gives us the right conceptual tools for the intellectual and, perhaps, practical task at hand. Other intellectual projects might require the concepts to be drawn in somewhat different ways, so there is reasonable pluralism and limited relativism in how concepts are best drawn. Sally is explicit that her task is to come up with analyses of race and gender fit for work in feminist and anti-racist social theory. For critical theorists, the point of understanding the social world is to change it and so they require concepts that make visible social injustices that otherwise might have been masked. Her definition of what it is to be a woman or a man is as follows:

S is a woman iff:

- (i) S is regularly and for the most part observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction;
- (ii) that S has these features marks S within the dominant ideology of S's society as someone who ought to occupy certain kinds of social position that are in fact subordinate (and so motivates and justifies S's occupying such a position); and
- (iii) the fact that S satisfies (i) and (ii) plays a role in S's systematic subordination, that is, *along some dimension*, S's social position is oppressive, and S's satisfying (i) and (ii) plays a role in that dimension of subordination.

S is a man iff:

- (i) S is regularly and for the most part observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a male's biological role in reproduction;

(ii) that S has these features marks S within the dominant ideology of S's society as someone who ought to occupy certain kinds of social position that are in fact privileged (and so motivates and justifies S's occupying such a position); and
(iii) the fact that S satisfies (i) and (ii) plays a role in S's systematic privilege, that is, *along some dimension*, S's social position is privileged, and S's satisfying (i) and (ii) plays a role in that dimension of privilege. (Haslanger 2012, 234.)

Gender is taken out of the head. To be gendered (in the current hierarchical gender system) is to occupy a social position of dominance or subordination on the basis of the presumed sex of one's body. To share a gender is not to have a certain set of psychological traits, or attitudes towards one's gender identity, or lived bodily experiences, or even commonality in social role. Social position is a *location* in a hierarchy, not a social *role*. Social position can be manifested in different roles, psychological traits, and so on in different historical and cultural contexts and, within a social context, can manifest itself differently as it interacts with other dimensions of relations of dominance and subordination. Adopting a focal analysis of gender (and race), Sally claims that gender power relations are the core of the concept of gender – gender is a type of *social class* – but it is also correct to describe roles, norms, identities and symbols as gendered in so far as they are complexly related to the social positionings constitutive of gender (Haslanger 2012, 9-11). The relevant relations include “fitting one for (in a context),” “making for excellence with respect to,” “reinforcing,” “justifying” and so on.

By going high-level and abstract in her characterization of gender, Sally is able to avoid the problems that beset accounts of gender in terms of psychological characteristics, lived experiences, or common roles. Attempts to describe what all women have in common typically describe only what a small subset of women – usually those similar to the defending theorist in terms of race, social class, and sexual identity – have in common. Faced with so

much difference, and lacking a description of the hoped-for commonality, one might think that we have to back off from the kind of identity politics that is feminist politics. If women lack a shared identity then perhaps the best politics we can do comprises guerilla interventions around highly localized and contingently shared interests: about this issue (e.g. stranger attack) White women and Black women might share common interest; about that (e.g. single parent benefits) the interests of working class women and lesbians might converge, only to diverge again when context changes ever so slightly. By finding commonality at a structural level the model is able both to avoid false generalizing about gender and to explain why the response that “being a man/woman doesn’t look/feel like that to me, so you must have changed the subject” is inappropriate. These definitions are offered as theoretical proposals, assessable by how well they enable us to understand and change the relevant parts of the social world. For that role they seem an ideal fit; while acknowledging the importance of difference, they are able nonetheless to find a commonality, and a commonality defined in the kind of normative terms (co-location on an axis of dominance and subordination) that reveals the common interest all women share in making gender (as we know it) history.

The ameliorative analysis of race is as follows:

A group G is *racialized* relative to context C iff_{df} members of G are (all and only) those:

(i) who are observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed in C to be evidence of ancestral links to a certain geographical region (or regions).

(ii) whose having (or being imagined to have) these features marks them within the context of the background ideology in C as appropriately occupying certain kinds of social position that are in fact either subordinate or privileged (and so motivates and justifies their occupying such a position); and

(iii) whose satisfying (i) and (ii) plays (or would play) a role in their systematic subordination or privilege in C, that is, who are along some dimension systematically subordinated or privileges when in S, and satisfying (i) and (ii) plays (or would play) a role in that dimension of privilege or subordination. (Haslanger 2012, 236-37)

The parallels with the analysis of gender are obvious: as with gender, race is primarily understood as location in social relations of dominance and subordination and applies secondarily to roles, norms, identities and symbols in so far as they are complexly related to the social hierarchies constitutive of belonging to racialized groups. The question to ask next is, how do you put race and gender together, and so start to model intersectionality? Sally offers us a metaphor and two summary diagrams illustrating the relationship between the hierarchical relations at the core of gender and race and the roles, norms, symbols, and identities that relate to them (Haslanger 2012, 8). A metaphor is not a theory, but a good metaphor goes a long way in theory construction. To understand intersectionality, we are supposed to overlay the two diagrams. The metaphor is of overlaying gels in stage lights: “the light shines blue and a red gel is added, and the light shines purple; if a yellow gel is added instead of the red, the light shines green” (Haslanger 2012, 9). Hence the complex observed variability in, for example, women’s lived experience, but also the prospect of being able to understand that variability in terms of the different social vectors that go into producing it and the prospect, too, of finding sameness among difference.

With this background in hand, we can now ask my question: Are most adult male Indigenous Australians men, and do we care? The question could be posed as a mere hypothetical: suppose there is some group of males who suffer such systematic disadvantage that there is no dimension along which they count as privileged, are they men and do we care? However, the question has extra interest if posed non-hypothetically and there is considerable

empirical evidence that this may be the actual social position of some Indigenous men.¹ To the familiar problems of generalizing about a group, must be added the warning that pre-colonial Indigenous cultures were diverse, with different groups exhibiting all possible combinations of matrilineal/patrilineal and matriloca/patriloca social organization, so that pre-colonial male privilege differed in both form and extent. Colonization appears to have differentially impacted male and female Indigenous Australians, with some males experiencing loss of the traditional structures that formerly constituted their male advantage, while being excluded from gaining access to advantaged positions within the new cultural order. Indigenous adult females can, in certain contexts, find more wriggle room within the new structures in part by exploiting space at the intersection of traditional and contemporary gender roles. One is thus hard put to find *any* dimension along which, at least some groups of, adult male Indigenous Australians can count as privileged relative to *anybody* in Australia (and arguably beyond, given the prevalence of third-world diseases among Indigenous Australians). So, are they men and do we care?

The question can be sharpened by drawing on Sally's notion of functioning as a woman/man in a context:

S functions as a [man] in context C iff_{df}

- (i) S is observed or imagined in C to have certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a [male's] biological role in reproduction;
- (ii) that S has these features marks S within the background ideology of C as someone who ought to occupy certain kinds of social position that are in fact [privileged] (and so motivates and justifies S's occupying such a position); and

¹ A statistical overview of Indigenous disadvantage can be found on the Australian Human Rights Commission homepage, available at: <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/statistical-overview-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-australia-social>.

(iii) the fact that S satisfies (i) and (ii) plays a role in S's systematic [privilege] in C, that is, *along some dimension*, S's social position in C is [privileged], and S's satisfying (i) and (ii) plays a role in that dimension of [privilege]. (Modified from Haslanger 2012, 235, by replacing "man" for "woman" and "privilege" for "subordination".)

The notion of functioning as a man or a woman in a context is introduced to account for the way privilege may be granted or revoked. Going more fine-grained here is motivated by thinking about violence against Black men: "when systems of White supremacy and male dominance collide, a Black man's male privilege may be seen as so threatening that it must be violently wrested from him" (Haslanger 2012, 234). From which it would seem to follow that, in those contexts, Black men are not functioning as men. However, if the contexts frequent enough, and central enough, as I have claimed is actually the case for Indigenous males, it seems that they will not count as men. Sally is happy to concede that if there are any adult females, actual or merely hypothetical, who suffer no disadvantage whatsoever, then they are not women (Haslanger 2012, 239). The whole point of feminist politics is to make it the case that there are no women. If an adult female escapes subordination on the basis of her assumed sex, then we do not need a theory to help us understand how liberation is possible for her, for she stands in no need of liberation. She is not in the target group we need to understand, given the liberatory values that shape our inquiry.

It is open to us to say the same thing about Indigenous males, given the extent, and multiple dimensions of their social disadvantage. They appear to be men, but, on deeper understanding, we can see that they are not. While I am happy to follow Sally in denying that the hypothetical non-disadvantaged female is not a woman – given our purposes, we need not mind about them – I am not happy to treat this case (even as a hypothetical) in parallel and yet it seems, given what we have on the table so far, it should be treated in parallel. It seems to

me that the kind of understanding of Indigenous male social disadvantage that those of us who care about social justice need must make specific reference to their maleness and to the ways in which they are constructed as *Indigenous men*. Their problem is precisely that they are functioning as (Indigenous) men, in these contexts. We want to be able to theorize how it is possible to turn advantage into disadvantage and understand the confluence of forces needed to pull this off. If we can understand this, perhaps we can also understand the ways in which disadvantage be neutralized (in a context, but then multiply contexts and make sure some of them are central and we are well on the way to achieving liberatory goals).

I am unclear, however, that this is Sally's final word on whether one's functioning as a man can consist in one's being disadvantaged (in a context), because she takes up a related issue in her "Oppressions: Racial and Other" (Haslanger 2012, 311-338) and there she seems to give a different answer. Her chief task in that paper is to explain what it is to be oppressed as a member of a social group. Her central example concerns the question of whether poor Blacks are oppressed by US child welfare policy and practice as Blacks, or whether that oppression targets them in virtue of their class alone. She argues that, given certain well-supported, but not entirely uncontroversial, assumptions about the history of those practices and the history of Black over-representation among the poor, it is indeed the case that they are oppressed as Black.

Sally offers the following example as illustrative of her account of what it is to be oppressed as a member of a group:

x is oppressed as an F by an institution I in context C iff_{df} x is an F in C and in

$C(\exists R)((\text{being an } F \text{ nonaccidentally correlates with being disadvantaged by standing in an unjust relation } R \text{ to others}) \text{ and } I \text{ creates, perpetuates, or reinforces } R.)$

Further examples would include:

- Tyrone is oppressed as a Black man by race/gender-profiling in the United States in the early twenty-first century iff Tyrone is a Black man in the United States in the early twenty-first century and in that context being a Black man nonaccidentally correlates with being subjected to police harassment and brutality; and race/gender-profiling creates, perpetuates, or reinforced the police harassment and brutality.
(Haslanger 2012, 327)

Here the oppression is analyzed as applying to Tyrone in virtue of his being a man, namely a Black one. Nor is it the case that, in contexts where there are (socially constructed) races, one can be just a man, one must always be a man of some particular race or other. So we seem to have two different answers to my question – or we would on the supposition that we multiply contexts in which maleness functions as disadvantage. One answer is offered at a more fine-grained level than the other. However, what we say at the fine-grained level ought not conflict with what we say at the coarser level of grain and a theory must be able to give systematic answers to these kinds of questions if it is successfully to address the problem of intersectionality. For this reason, I would like to hear Sally say some more about the problem of intersectionality and help me get more traction on the metaphor that underlies her approach to it.

Let me conclude by making a friendly suggestion about a way of further fleshing out Sally's analysis of what it takes to be oppressed as a group, but by coming at the problem from the opposite question: what is it to be privileged as a member of a group? An account of group oppression has as its flip side an account of group privilege, inasmuch as oppression and privilege are opposite ways of standing within relations of dominance and subordination. So we can easily transform the above account of group oppression into an account of group privilege simply by substituting "privileged" for "disadvantaged" in the definitions. My question is: is so-called middle class welfare White welfare? To keep the discussion

grounded, let's ask a concrete question: are direct tax payer funded subsidies for Australian private high schools White welfare? Private schools, many of which have very high fees, function as preparatory schools for Australia's elite public universities. The educational advantage private high schools confer is a major mechanism by which class privilege is reproduced down generations. It is also true that for non-accidental reasons owing to historical (and continuing) racism, the Australian middle class is overwhelmingly White. Just as poor Blacks are oppressed, as Black, by the welfare system *secondarily*, owing to their non-accidental over-representation among the poor, it would seem that Whites enjoy *secondary* advantage when they are the beneficiaries of middle-class welfare, so middle class welfare is also White welfare. I am not sure this is the right answer to give to our case. That is because the private school system has recently become an important means by which Asian Australians can secure advantages they previously did not enjoy. This demographic shift is going on with no apparent pressure to revisit the policy of subsidizing private schools. This leads me to think that this particular case of middle class welfare is just that: it benefits those it benefits in virtue of their class membership. The examples Sally discusses in depth get us to look backwards to history. Sometimes that is exactly the right direction to look. But sometimes we need also to look forwards to the trajectory (actual or hypothetical) of an institution to understand whether it meets the nonaccidentally clause. Since Sally's list of ways in which that condition could be met was illustrative only, this is elaboration and extension, rather than challenge. I think the framework she provides is every bit as useful in understanding privilege as it is in understanding oppression, and that is a good thing, because if we care about justice, we need to understand how privilege is reproduced every bit as much as we need to understand how oppression is reproduced.

References

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