

**RECONCEPTUALIZING WOMEN FOR INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM**

By

Youjin Kong

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Philosophy—Doctor of Philosophy

2019

## ABSTRACT

### RECONCEPTUALIZING WOMEN FOR INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM

By

Youjin Kong

This dissertation addresses the question of how to reconceptualize “women” in order to do a more intersectional feminism. Intersectionality—the idea that gender, race, class, sexuality, and so on operate not as separate entities but as mutually constructing phenomena—has become a gold standard in contemporary feminist scholarship. In particular, intersectionality has achieved success in showing that the *old* conception of women as a single, uniform concept marginalizes women and others who exist at the intersecting axes of multiple oppressions (e.g., women of color, women in the global South, working-class women, and/or queer and trans people), and thus, demonstrating the need to develop a *new* way of conceptualizing women. However, the question of *what* such a new conception would be remains unanswered. Specifically, if feminist theory today is to destabilize the old notion of “women” that relegates multiply oppressed women to the margin of feminism, and yet still needs to use some notion of “women” to critically analyze how the social structure of sexist oppression operates to subordinate women and to dismantle this oppression, how should the concept “women” be reformulated?

In this dissertation, I argue that we need to understand women as a concept that is open to constant *redefinition*, which is socio-historically *situated* in the actualities of oppression. This is what I refer to as the “situated redefinition” model of women, which is formulated in more detail as follows:

### **The situated redefinition model of women (SR)**

The concept “women” should be always open to being redefined in a way that it could better serve political goals grounded in the actual, daily lives of the marginalized.

That is, “women” should be always open to new meanings and provisional definitions that the marginalized would find more useful to achieve political goals, which grow out of their concrete experiences in the current intersecting structures of oppression.

My central argument is that we need to understand the concept “women” according to the situated redefinition model, in order to employ this concept for doing intersectional feminism.

To support this thesis, the dissertation is divided into two main parts. By engaging with the intersectionality literature, critical race feminisms, Asian/American feminisms, and recent critiques of intersectionality, the first part of the dissertation elucidates what exactly it means for feminism to be more “intersectional.” The second part develops the situated redefinition model and articulates why this model is needed to do intersectional feminism, drawing on the social/political philosophy literature on non-ideal theory, postmodern discussions of universality, and feminist discussions of identity politics.

Broadly, this dissertation seeks to shed new light on how we understand and use the concept women for feminist ends. My conceptual model offers a way for feminist scholar-activists to subvert the essentialist/exclusionary notion of “women” without abandoning altogether feminist-political deployments of the concept “women” for the purpose of ending sexist and intersecting oppressions.

Copyright by  
YOUJIN KONG  
2019

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my advisor, Lisa Schwartzman, for her unparalleled guidance and support throughout my PhD studies. I am extremely grateful for all the time she spent reading and discussing various drafts of this dissertation with me, and also for her enthusiasm for my work.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the other members of my committee, Todd Hedrick, Robyn Bluhm, and Christian Lotz, for their belief in my work and their invaluable advice. Working with my committee has contributed immensely to my growth as a scholar.

I also had great pleasure of working with the faculty and fellow graduate students of the Department of Philosophy at Michigan State University. In particular, I would like to extend my gratitude to Jamie Nelson, Kyle Whyte, and Sean Valles, for their helpful insight into my research, teaching, and job search. Thanks should also go to Ben Kenofer and Mladjo Ivanovic for their friendship and encouragement.

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the support and nurturing of my family. I would like to thank my mom, dad, and sister for always believing in me and cheering me up. Finally, I am grateful to Minsuk Kahng, my life partner, for his unwavering support, love, and encouragement. I could not ask for a better partner and friend.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Chapter 1 Why Reconceptualize Women?</b>	1
1. Intersectionality: History and Present Status	2
2. Why Feminism Needs the Concept “Women”	7
3. Situating the Dissertation Project in Feminist Literature and Practice	10
4. Main Argument and Chapter Outline	12
<b>Chapter 2 Intersectional Feminist Theory as a Non-Ideal Theory</b>	16
1. Critiques of Intersectionality: Incommensurability, Infinite Regress, and Fragmentation	17
2. Cases: How Asian/American Women Experience Asian Identity	21
3. Intersectional Feminist Theory as an Experience-Centered Non-Ideal Theory	25
<b>Chapter 3 “Non-Idealizing Abstraction” as Ideology: or, How to Do Social Theory in a Less Ideological Way</b>	31
1. Ideal Theory, Non-Ideal Theory, and Ideology	33
2. Mills’s Argument for Non-Idealizing Abstraction	36
3. Non-Idealizing Abstraction as Ideology: The Colonialist Concept of Patriarchy and Intersectional Oppression	38
4. Toward a Less Ideological Social Theory: Protecting Resignifiability	46
<b>Chapter 4 Toward a New Conception of Women: Identity Politics, Intersectional Oppression, and “Situated Redefinition” of Identity</b>	52
1. Identity Politics: Exclusionary Practice or Resistance Strategy?	52
2. Feminist Critiques of Identity Politics	57
2.1. Apolitical vs. Political Conceptions of Identity	57
2.2. Ahistorical vs. Historical Conceptions of Identity	60
2.3. Identity-as-Finished-Product vs. Identity-in-Progress	64
3. A New Conception of Identity: Situated Redefinition Model	67
3.1. Model and Cases	67
3.2. The Redefinability of Identity	72
3.3. The Situated Redefinability of Identity	75
<b>Concluding Remarks</b>	77
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	81

# Chapter 1

## Why Reconceptualize Women?

Over the past three decades, there has been a move to make feminism more “intersectional.” Intersectionality, or the idea that “race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities” (Collins, 2015, p. 2) has become a “gold standard” (Nash, 2008, p. 2) or “buzzword” (K. Davis, 2008, p. 75) in feminist scholarship. Intersectionality is even acclaimed as “the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far” (McCall, 2005, p. 1771).

As I will explain below, intersectionality has achieved particular success in criticizing the “old” conception of women as a single, uniform concept and showing the need to develop a “new” way of conceptualizing women. However, the question of what such a new conception would be remains unanswered. Specifically, if we are to do a more intersectional feminism and use the concept “women” for doing this type of feminism, how should we understand women?<sup>1</sup> This is the question that my dissertation seeks to answer. As a main thesis, I will propose what I refer to as the “situated redefinition” model of women.

In this first chapter, I provide an overview of the dissertation project. This chapter is divided into four parts. After examining some of the current feminist literature (section 1) and practice (section 2), I discuss how my dissertation project is related to this literature and practice

---

<sup>1</sup> I leave the term “we” intentionally vague in this dissertation. Who “we” are varies according to diverse factors, such as what social and political contexts “we” are situated in and what kind of liberatory goals “we” are committed to.

(section 3). I conclude the chapter with a brief outline of the main argument and chapters of the dissertation (section 4).

## **1. Intersectionality: History and Present Status**

The term intersectionality was coined thirty years ago by Black feminist legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw.<sup>2</sup> In her article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex” (1989), Crenshaw draws attention to the centrality of race-privileged women and gender-privileged Blacks in the antidiscrimination law’s understanding of gender and race: “women’s” experiences of gender discrimination are defined in terms of the experiences of white women, and “Blacks” experiences of race discrimination are defined in terms of those of Black men. Thus, Black women’s experiences of compound gender and race discrimination are ignored (pp. 143-148, 151). Black women’s marginalization is aggravated by the “single-axis framework” of feminist theory and antiracist politics, which views gender and race as discrete categories of analysis. This tendency to view (white-centered) gender analysis and (male-centered) race analysis as mutually exclusive distorts the multidimensionality of Black women’s experiences (pp. 139-140). Based on these considerations, Crenshaw suggests the analogy to traffic in an *intersection*: Black women stand in the intersection where sexism and racism intersect, so they experience oppression flowing from both directions (pp. 149-150).

Crenshaw developed this idea of intersectionality in another groundbreaking article titled “Mapping the Margins” (1991) by applying it to her analysis of violence against women of color.

---

<sup>2</sup> Other pioneering scholars of intersectionality include Mari J. Matsuda and Patricia Hill Collins. To elucidate the interconnection of oppressions, Matsuda suggested an innovative method that she called “ask the other question.” Matsuda writes: “When I see something that looks racist, I ask, ‘Where is the patriarchy in this?’ When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, ‘Where is the heterosexism in this?’ When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, ‘Where are the class interests in this?’” (Matsuda, 1991, p. 1189). Collins’s works on intersectionality will be referred to throughout the dissertation.



For example, she explores how Black women's experiences of rape are erased by both antiracist and feminist critiques of rape. Antiracist discourses, which focus on the racist portrayal of Black men as rapists of white women, vilify Black women who raise rape claims against Black men as betrayers of the Black community (pp. 1272-1273). On the other hand, feminist discourses criticize the rape law for reinforcing the patriarchal dichotomy between the good, innocent woman whose rape claim is believable and the bad, promiscuous woman whose rape claim is not believable. What these critiques fail to take into account is the racist-patriarchal context in which Black women suffer rape. As the sexualized images of Blacks as "more sexual, more earthy, more gratification-oriented" intersect with the patriarchal norm of women's sexual behavior, Black women tend to be treated as falling into the category of bad women who cannot be raped (pp. 1265-1270). "In the absence of a direct attempt to address the racial dimensions of rape," Crenshaw writes, "Black women are simply presumed to be represented in and benefitted by prevailing feminist critiques" (p. 1271).

In short, Crenshaw's intersectional analysis of feminist theory and politics highlighted two related points: the term intersectionality was used to (i) criticize the marginalization of women of color within feminism and to (ii) demand a better recognition of particular contexts in which women of color experience sexism, which differ from those of white women.

Although the term intersectionality was invented by Crenshaw, these two main ideas, which I refer to as (i) *anti-marginalization* and (ii) *difference-recognition*, were not completely new. It is more correct to say that, as much of the recent intersectionality literature points out,<sup>3</sup> the term intersectionality gave a name to a fundamental, pre-existing concern within feminist scholarship. Numerous feminist authors have emphasized that the concept of woman is used in dominant Western feminist discourses in a way that falsely generalizes the perspective of white,

---

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Anthias (2013, p. 5); Collins (2015, p. 10); Davis (2008, pp. 70-72); McCall (2005, pp. 1779-1780); Nash (2008, pp. 2-3); and Ruiz (2018, pp. 336-337).

middle-class, heterosexual, Western women, while relegating women of color, working-class women, queers, and Two-Thirds World women as the “Other” (Heyes, 2000, p. 54).

Black feminists (e.g., Combahee River Collective, 1977; A. Y. Davis, 1981; Hull, Bell-Scott, & Smith, 1982; King, 1988; Lorde, 1984) are among those who first brought up this problem to feminist scholarship. For example, bell hooks made a well-known criticism of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, a classic of the second-wave feminism, which argued that women should stop being bored housewives and have careers instead. Friedan writes, “We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: ‘I want something more than my husband and my children and my house’” (Friedan, 1963, p. 32). Hooks notes that Friedan identified the plight of middle-class, college-educated, married white women with that of all women in the United States. In fact, many women of color were already in the work force when Friedan wrote her book. Friedan did not discuss “the needs of women without men, without children, without homes. ... She did not tell readers whether it was more fulfilling to be a maid, a babysitter, a factory worker, a clerk, or a prostitute, than to be a leisure class housewife” (hooks, 1984, pp. 1-2).

Other critical race/decolonial/anti-imperialist feminists (e.g., Glenn, 1992; Lugones & Spelman, 1983; Mohanty, 1988) were also critical of talking about “*the woman*” or “*women as women*.” Elizabeth Spelman and María Lugones, among many others, developed the notions that are now frequently mentioned in the intersectionality literature: the “additive analysis” and the “logic of purity,” respectively. Spelman investigates how the *additive analysis* prevalent in dominant Western feminist thought leads to its privileged focus on white women and the exclusion of Black women. The additive analysis—which Spelman also refers to as the “pop-bead” or “tootsie roll” logic—takes a woman’s identity to be a sum of neatly separable parts, such as gender, race, and class. According to this logic, no matter whether women are Black or

Latina or white, poor or rich, their being “woman” is divisible from their racial and class identities, and thus, all of them share the same “womanness” (Spelman, 1988, pp. 122-125, 136-137). What it means to be oppressed as woman is, then, explained simply by looking at “women who are not subject to any other forms of oppression than sexism, that is, women who are white and middle-class,” since differences among women lie in their non-woman parts (p. 166). In a similar vein, Lugones criticizes the *logic of purity*, by which the multiplicity of identity is reduced to a false unity. Lacking a notion of the “enmeshing of race, gender, culture, class, and other differences that affect and constitute the identity of the group’s members” (Lugones, 2003 [1994], pp. 141-142), modern political theory has fragmented the multiplicitous subject such as Latina lesbians and Black women into “pure” racial, gender, and sexual categories—the category that does not allow a non-fragmented multiplicity or “impurity” in it (pp. 127-128, 140-143).

To sum up, hooks, Spelman, and Lugones are all among the authors who “destabilized the notion of a universal ‘woman’ without explicitly mobilizing the term ‘intersectionality’” (Nash, 2008, p. 3). They critically analyzed how the term woman used in dominant feminist theory failed to take account of differences among women and marginalized multiply oppressed women, just as Crenshaw did with the neologism of intersectionality. Thus, these critical race feminists could be called antecedents to intersectionality, or intersectional feminists broadly construed, if we define “intersectional feminism” as a feminism whose focal points reside in anti-marginalization and difference-recognition.

These two focal points are the threads that tie together more recent literature on/in intersectional feminism as well. Since Crenshaw’s influential articles, there has been a proliferation of feminist scholarly publications on the topic of intersectionality, including

articles,<sup>4</sup> books,<sup>5</sup> edited volumes,<sup>6</sup> and special issues of journals devoted to this topic.<sup>7</sup> In particular, there has been a growing trend to apply an “intersectional analysis” or “intersectional approach” to the research problem: a great number of feminist studies have adopted intersectionality as an “analytical strategy” (Collins, 2015, pp. 11-13) for shedding new light on problems of social injustice, inequality, and oppression that they investigate.<sup>8</sup>

In many of these studies, intersectionality has been used as a theoretical tool to convey two key critical insights, which are in accordance with those of critical race feminists and Crenshaw. (i) First, intersectionality has elucidated the problem of conceptualizing women as a *single-axis, pure* notion, which is separated from other factors of identity and oppression of women (e.g., race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, dis/ability). This way of conceptualization serves only privileged women who can be “just” women without consideration of, for example, race and sexuality, while reinforcing the marginalization of “Others” from feminism. (ii) On a related point, intersectionality has also shown that the conceptualization of women as a *unitary, universal* notion and its deployment for feminist discourse and practice ignores differences among women, including power differences between more-privileged and less-privileged groups of women and different contexts in which they experience sexism.

As intersectionality has become a primary theoretical and methodological framework of contemporary feminist scholarship, feminist theorists now share this criticism of understanding women as a single, uniform concept, and agree that we need a more pluralistic, multidimensional, and flexible concept of women. Yet despite this general agreement, there has

---

<sup>4</sup> Some widely cited articles include: Brah & Phoenix (2004); Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall (2013b); Choo & Ferree (2010); K. Davis (2008); McCall (2005); Nash (2008); Yuval-Davis (2006).

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Carastathis (2016); Collins & Bilge (2016); Crenshaw (2020) [forthcoming]; Hancock (2016); May (2015).

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Berger & Guidroz (2009); Goswami, O'Donovan, & Yount (2014); Vaz & Lemons (2012).

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall (2013a); Frieze & Dittrich (2013); Kantola & Nousiainen (2009); Phoenix & Pattynama (2006).

<sup>8</sup> Among the substantial number of recent papers that explicitly adopt an intersectional analysis/approach/perspective/framework, some papers that I will cite or engage with in this dissertation are: Bilge (2010); Chun, Lipsitz, & Shin (2013); Luna (2016); Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach (2008); Pyke (2010).

been a lack of detailed account on *what* such a concept would be. Thus, the objective of my dissertation is to provide an account of how we should reconceptualize women in order to do a more intersectional feminism. If feminist theory today is to destabilize the exclusionary notion of “women” that relegates multiply oppressed women to the margin of feminism, but it is also to employ some notion of “women” for feminist ends, how should this concept “women” be reformulated?

## 2. Why Feminism Needs the Concept “Women”

Before explaining the dissertation project in more detail, it is important to discuss why, in the first place, we should reconceptualize “women.” Given that the concept of women has been used in problematic ways that marginalize multiply oppressed women, wouldn’t it be better “to thoroughly deconstruct and dismantle gender, to move into the future by creating something new, rather than settling for reworking the old identity of women?” (Weir, 2013, p. 92) In other words, wouldn’t it be more liberatory to do feminist theory and practice *without* drawing on the concept women?<sup>9</sup>

I argue that our task as feminist theorists is to develop an alternative, anti-marginalizing way of conceptualizing “women” instead of thoroughly dismantling and doing away with it, since feminism needs at least some concept of “women” in order to achieve its political aims of ending sexism. Let me exemplify this point with a concrete case of feminist activism: Korean women’s rallies against spycam pornography.

---

<sup>9</sup> Leslie McCall terms this approach “anticategorical.” On the anticategorical approach, “the deconstruction of master categories is understood as part and parcel of the deconstruction of inequality itself” (McCall, 2005, p. 1777). For example, Nancy Fraser claims that, if we are to redress gender injustice, we have to dismantle the existing gender identities of “women” and “men,” and aim for “a culture in which ever-new constructions of identity and difference are freely elaborated and then swiftly deconstructed” (Fraser, 1997, pp. 28-30).

Spy cameras—installed in public spaces like bathrooms and changing rooms for filming women without their knowledge, and then posting and selling footages online as pornographic materials—are a widespread problem in South Korea. Over 6,000 spycam cases were reported to the police each year between 2013 and 2017, and yet the real number would be much larger, considering that many victims are not aware that they have been filmed (Hasunuma & Shin, 2019, p. 99; Kang, 2018). As South Korean President Moon Jae-In stated, spycams are now a “part of daily life” and “everyday concern” for women (S. H. Lee & Park, 2017; McCurry & Kim, 2018). Living in constant fear of being secretly filmed, some women even carry their own silicon sealants called “emergency kits” to cover suspicious holes in public bathroom stalls. Nevertheless, the spycam crime goes unpunished in most cases. According to police data, only about 3 percent of the perpetrators of illegal filming were arrested between 2012 and 2017, and 98 percent of them were male. There are a wide array of misogynist websites and online platforms for sharing spycam footages, but sharers, buyers and watchers get away with punishment (Gong & Sullivan, 2018; McCurry & Kim, 2018).

In response to this frustrating situation, Korean women took the streets of central Seoul, holding signs that said, “Our lives are not your porn.” Six women-only rallies were held from May to December 2018, which were the biggest women’s demonstration in the country’s history. A minimum of 10,000 women (the first rally) and a maximum of 110,000 women (the last rally) gathered to protest the prevalence of spycam pornography and to create a safer society for women (Jung, 2018; S.-y. Lee, 2018).<sup>10</sup> The women’s rage was not only about individual perpetrators, but it was directed at, as the organizers noted, “structural sexism” of Korean

---

<sup>10</sup> The rallies were also prompted by outrage over the police’s exceptionally fast response to a case in May 2018, where a female perpetrator illicitly took a picture of a male nude model during a college art class and posted it online. The perpetrator was quickly arrested and made to stand in front of the media. As one commentator encapsulates it, “this was perceived by many women as a case demonstrating police bias. Why was this case handled so swiftly, while so many others perpetrated by men aren’t? Why did police parade the female perpetrator, while so many male perpetrators escape public scrutiny?” (Kang, 2018).

society. What the women cried out against is the social system of sexism, which includes the sexist culture that consumes illegally recorded videos of women as pornography, the online market that sells these videos for financial gain, and the justice system that does not take enough effort to stop the crime (Kang, 2018; S.-y. Lee, 2018).

This case demonstrates that, first of all, there are many people who actually suffer oppression *as women*. Within the sexist structure of Korean society, women's daily lives cannot be separated from their being "women": every time women go to the public bathroom, they keep being reminded that they are, by being women, always vulnerable to illicit recording and need "emergency kits" just to do everyday things like going to the bathroom. This indicates that women are oppressed as women, not due to a biological essence or fixed characteristic that all women share, but due to the current *structure* or *system* of societies that is sexist. One of the first philosophers who elaborated this idea of sexist oppression as a structure of society is Marilyn Frye. Frye famously analogizes the experience of oppressed groups with the experience of living in a "birdcage," where forces and barriers are not accidental but systemically related to each other to shape a structure that immobilizes a bird. Frye notes:

If you look very closely at just one wire in the cage, you cannot see the other wires ... and be unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire any time it wanted to go somewhere. ... It is only when you step back, stop looking at the wires one by one, microscopically, and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere. ... the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers (Frye, 1983, pp. 4-5).

In the case at hand, Korean women are surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers—such as misogynistic cultural context, pornography market, and inactive law enforcement—which together form a society where women feel unsafe on a daily basis.

In that women are actually oppressed as women within the current sexist structure, the concept women is significant, if not necessary, in reaching feminist goals of undermining this structure. Adopting bell hooks's definition of feminism as a "struggle to end sexist oppression"

(hooks, 1984, pp. 24-26), I view ending sexism as one of the main goals that people try to accomplish by engaging in feminism. Hooks opposes apolitical types of feminism that focus only on increasing women's individual freedom while leaving the existing system of sexism unchallenged. What makes feminism feminism is, according to hooks, the political aim to "transform that system, to bring an end to patriarchy and sexism" (hooks, 1984, pp. 19-28, 2000, pp. 4-6).

For this political aim, I argue, feminist theory and practice have to employ some concept of "women." Feminists need this concept so that they can critically describe "women's" lives under structural sexism and analyze how the social structure operates to oppress "women" (e.g., what it is like to live *as women* in South Korea; how judicial, economic, cultural, and other systems of Korean society function together to make *women* live in constant fear of unknowingly videotaped). Furthermore, those who engage in feminist practice have actually utilized the concept "women" to create resistance, solidarity, and empowerment of women. The women in South Korea, for instance, organized and participated in the *women*-only rallies so as to fight against the injustice that they suffer as women and to change society into a place where women's lives are no more pornography. In short, the concept "women" is being used, and needs to be used, as a tool for feminist liberatory purposes of dismantling sexism.

### **3. Situating the Dissertation Project in Feminist Literature and Practice**

Taken together, discussions thus far suggest why reconceptualizing "women" is a pressing task for feminist theorists today. As explained in section 1, intersectionality has made it clear that feminism should stop conceptualizing women as a single homogeneous category. In light of intersectionality, it is important for feminist theory to destabilize this *old* conception of



women that has marginalized the multiply oppressed, such as women of color, women in the global South, working-class women, and/or queer and trans people. And yet, we should not throw away the entire notion of women. As exemplified in section 2, feminism needs *some* conception of women, insofar as its goal is to end sexist oppression and being women is central to women's daily experiences of sexist oppression.

Therefore, my dissertation project aims to develop a *new* conception of women that could meet both ends—one that can be used in the service of feminist aims of ending sexism, while at the same time challenges the marginalization of intersectionally-oppressed women and addresses racist, classist, heterosexist, and other contexts in which women experience sexism. I want to point out that this project is primarily political: my dissertation examines a *politically motivated* question of what conception of women would best serve the goal of implementing feminism in a more intersectional way, rather than a metaphysical question of what women truly are. Here I draw on what Sally Haslanger calls an “ameliorative” analysis of gender. This type of analysis is less concerned with “what is gender, really?”, and more with how we could usefully revise what we mean by gender “for our purposes” (Haslanger, 2012, pp. 223-224, 246, 376).<sup>11</sup> My dissertation applies this analysis to the purpose of doing intersectional feminism. That is, I will focus on developing an account of women that will be an “effective tool” (p. 226) to serve the goal of tackling sexism in its relation to, e.g., racism, colonialism, and cisgenderism and ending this interrelated structure of oppressions—as opposed to tackling sexism as a pure, single-axis oppression detached from these other forms of oppression.

---

<sup>11</sup> Haslanger is not alone in carrying out a politically motivated analysis of the concept of women. For instance, Cressida Heyes aptly points out that what has been at stake is in feminist discussions on essentialism about women is “politically motivated arguments about how best to do feminist theory or practice, rather than truth-claims about the realities of sex and gender or claims about the nature of linguistic categorization per se” (Heyes, 2000, p. 43). Allison Weir also argues for a shift from a “metaphysical” to an “ethical-political” understanding of women's identity (Weir, 2013, pp. 63, 71).

In this regard, the dissertation will refer to the term women as a concept. “The concept women” will be used in its broadest sense to encompass diverse accounts and metaphysical statuses of the term women, such as women as an identity, category, social position, and subject of feminism. I am less committed to making a sharp distinction among them, not because such metaphysical inquiry has no importance, but because the dissertation project of reconceptualizing women starts from the fact that this term/concept women—whatever its true nature or meaning is—is actually being used for our social practice to resist sexist oppression. In order to do this practice in a better, more intersectional way, then, how should we reformulate the concept women? Which way of reconceptualizing women could be most helpful for the aim of ending the intersecting system of sexism and other oppressions?

#### **4. Main Argument and Chapter Outline**

My dissertation provides an answer to these questions. I maintain that we need to understand “women” as a concept that is open to constant *redefinition*, which is socio-historically *situated* in the actualities of oppression. This is what I refer to as the “situated redefinition” model of women, which is formulated in more detail as follows:

##### **The situated redefinition model of women (SR)**

The concept “women” should be always open to being redefined in a way that it could better serve political goals grounded in the actual, daily lives of the marginalized.

That is, “women” should be always open to new meanings and provisional definitions that the marginalized would find more useful to achieve political goals, which grow out of their concrete experiences in the current intersecting structures of oppression.

My central argument is that we need to understand the concept “women” according to the situated redefinition model, in order to employ this concept for doing intersectional feminism. To support this thesis, the dissertation takes the form of two parts.

The first half of the dissertation elucidates what intersectional feminism is. Despite the proliferation of feminist studies claiming to adopt intersectional approaches, there is a lack of accounts of what exactly it means for feminist theory to be more “intersectional.” In Chapters 1 and 2, I propose three guiding definitions of intersectional feminism.

Engaging with the history of intersectionality, this chapter has identified two critical insights that connect the works of Crenshaw to those of earlier critical race feminists. I define intersectional feminist theory as a theory that has these critical insights at its core: a theory that (i) challenges marginalization within feminism (anti-marginalization) and (ii) pays attention to differences among women, especially power differences between more-privileged and less-privileged groups of women and different contexts in which they experience sexism (difference-recognition).

Chapter 2 presents my own account of intersectional feminist theory by engaging with some of the recent critiques of intersectionality. Briefly, critics claim that intersectionality would “fragment” women along racial and class lines. I argue that the critics are so preoccupied with the abstract inquiry of how women would be fragmented by the intersection of identities that they neglect what women who exist at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression are actually doing with their identities. Based on analysis of how Asian/American women navigate the relation between Asian identity and oppressive power in their everyday lives, I advance my account of intersectional feminist theory as a (iii) non-ideal theory that foregrounds the *actual lived experiences* of the multiply oppressed.

In the second half of the dissertation, I develop the situated redefinition model of women through two steps: Chapter 3 discusses the idea of “redefinability,” and Chapter 4 refines it into “situated” redefinability. In so doing, I elaborate why the situated redefinition model is needed to do intersectional feminism, i.e., a feminism that is (i), (ii), and (iii).

In Chapter 3, I claim that the concept “women” and concepts that generalize women’s oppression (such as “patriarchy”) should remain open to continual redefinition, if we are (i) to minimize the risk of marginalization and (ii) to better address power differences between women when doing feminist theory. I make this argument by taking a closer look at the link between intersectionality and non-ideal theory. In particular, I critically examine how Charles Mills’s influential notion of “non-idealizing abstractions” might fall into ideology, which abstracts away from the experiences of less-privileged minorities (e.g., Third World women) and reflects only those of more-privileged minorities (e.g., First World women). Drawing on Judith Butler’s postmodern feminist account of universality, I maintain that the concept women must be *always left redefinable*, in order not to hinder less-privileged/multiply-oppressed women from redefining this concept so that it could better reflect their realities.

The fourth and final chapter presents my main model. I develop the *situated* redefinition model as opposed to what I call the mere redefinition model, which conceptualizes women solely as a redefinable concept. To this end, I investigate the widespread feminist critique that identity politics of women exclude the multiply oppressed. Analyzing four representative critical works—by Bernice Johnson Reagon, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Amy Allen, and Susan Hekman—I point out that these critiques do not actually reject the entire practice of identity politics, but only certain versions of identity politics that rely on preconstructed, apolitical, and ahistorical conceptions of women’s identity. Building onto this idea, I suggest reformulating women as an in-progress, political, and historical concept, one that is continually redefinable

according to political goals rooted in the actual lives of the multiply oppressed. In particular, I propose a materialist adjustment to the Butlerian notion of redefinability presented in the previous chapter: according to my situated redefinition model, “women” is to be redefined in a way that allows it to better realize liberatory goals, where the goal itself is *born out of the concrete realities of oppression faced everyday by marginalized subjects*. To show how this model could work in practice, I discuss cases in which “women” is redefined in its relation with the goals of trans people, which arise in response to trans people’s day-to-day experiences of misgendering and violence. These examples illustrate that, when “women” is conceived according to the situated redefinition model, feminist identity politics of “women” could be practiced (*iii*) in a way that centers on, rather than excludes, the experiences of the multiply oppressed (e.g., trans people) in the intersecting structure of oppressions (e.g., sexism, cisgenderism).

## Chapter 2

### Intersectional Feminist Theory as a Non-Ideal Theory

In the previous chapter, I defined intersectional feminist theory as an anti-marginalizing and difference-recognizing theory, in line with the two key ideas that link critical race feminism and the earlier and recent intersectionality literature. In this chapter, I advance my own account of intersectional feminist theory by addressing some of the feminist critiques of intersectionality. While intersectionality has become tremendously popular since Crenshaw and is now the gold standard in feminist scholarship, there has also been a “mushrooming intersectionality critique industry” more recently (May, 2015, p. 98; see also Carastathis, 2016, p.125).<sup>12</sup> The current situation could be summarized as follows: although there is a widespread agreement among feminist scholars with the intersectional way of thinking—or “intersectional framework” (Garry, 2011, p. 830)—that feminist theory should pay attention to multiple interrelated forms of oppression, there is controversy over whether “intersectionality” is a suitable conceptual tool to do this job. One possible reason for this situation is that there is little consensus about what intersectionality is or does for feminist theory. What exactly does it mean for feminist theory to be more intersectional? What kind of work should feminist philosophers engage in, in order to implement theory in a more intersectional way? The aim of this chapter is to propose one answer to these questions, thereby contributing to untangling the controversy surrounding the notion of intersectionality and to the efforts to make feminist theory more intersectional.

---

<sup>12</sup> For helpful overviews of the critiques of intersectionality, see Carastathis (2016), chap. 4; Carbado (2013), pp. 812-16; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall (2013b), pp. 787-788; Collins & Blige (2016), pp. 123-129; Tomlinson (2013).

To this end, I start by discussing two major types of critique of intersectionality: the incommensurability critique (intersectionality leads to multiple, mutually exclusive identities of women) and the infinite regress critique (intersectionality endlessly breaks women into smaller subgroups). Underlying these critiques, I argue, is the static view that identity has a fixed singular meaning. By exploring how Asian/American women<sup>13</sup> experience Asian identity in diverse ways, I will show that the critiques cannot hold when examining the *actual, everyday lives* of multiply oppressed women, where these women navigate power dynamics and the relation between power and identity. In so doing, I will present and elaborate on my account of intersectional feminist theory as a *non-ideal theory* that foregrounds the actual lived experiences of women and others who exist at the intersecting axes of multiple oppressions.

## **1. Critiques of Intersectionality: Incommensurability, Infinite Regress, and Fragmentation**

The first type of critique sees intersectionality as resulting in the increase of *incommensurable* identities. For example, Naomi Zack contends in her often-cited critique that intersectionality does not help to make feminism inclusive but rather fragments women into multiple discrete identities. According to Zack's interpretation of intersectionality, each specific intersection of race and class represents a distinct kind of gender identity, mainly because intersectionality rejects the additive analysis: poor Black women, for example, are not merely women in the white feminist sense, who are in addition Black and in addition poor. Instead, Zack claims, intersectionality construes poor Black women as having their own gender identity, which

---

<sup>13</sup> In this chapter, the terms "Asian/American women" and "Asian women (in the US)" are used interchangeably. I use these terms in their broadest sense to encompass immigrant women in the US who identify themselves as "Asians" rather than as "Asian-Americans," as well as American-born and immigrant Asian women who do identify themselves as "Asian-Americans."

is distinguished from those of women of other races and classes, such as white middle-class women's gender identity. In this way, different intersections are reified as "different kinds of female gender [that] may be perceived to be so distinctive as to be virtually incommensurable" (Zack, 2005, pp. 7-8).

Zack continues to argue that the multiplication of women's discrete identities reinforces the exclusion of women of color: once women of color's identities become incommensurable with white women's identity, life situations of women of color are understood as the problem belonging only to their own identities rather than the problem "women" are faced with. For instance, "most of feminist anthologies are still either about gender, in which the subjects are white women, or about race, in which the subjects are black women, Latinas, or other women of color" (p. 16), which suggests that, according to Zack, there is no real change that the feminist attention to intersectionality has made to the hegemony of "white women *as women*." Zack concludes that intersectionality causes the "de facto racial segregation," which fixes women of color at their specific intersection and merely allows them to create their own feminisms, while retaining intact the status quo dominance of white feminism (pp. 2-3, 7-8).

Nancy Ehrenreich also makes an argument that falls under the umbrella of the incommensurability critique. According to Ehrenreich, intersectionality precludes meaningful group-based analyses of oppression (e.g., women, a racial/ethnic group) because it constructs the subgroups' interests as "mutually exclusive." In the case of women, for example, the intersection of race and gender subordinations makes the interests of women of color "fundamentally different" from the interests of racially privileged white women. Similarly, conflicts between the interests of poor and affluent women, lesbian and heterosexual women become inevitable, which undermine the viability of meaningful advocacy on behalf of "women" (Ehrenreich, 2002, pp.



266-269). Ehrenreich calls this the “zero sum” problem—“it is not possible to simultaneously further the interests of all the various subgroups within a particular group” (p. 267).

Ehrenreich articulates another reason why intersectionality purportedly makes group-based analyses of subordination impossible: intersectionality incurs an *infinite regress*, i.e., “the tendency of all identity groups to split into ever-smaller subgroups” (p. 267). The association of intersectionality with infinite regress has become so influential that it has been examined by many intersectional scholars (e.g., Carastathis, 2016, pp. 131-134; Collins & Bilge, 2016, pp. 127-128). This strand of criticism interprets intersectionality as impeding generalizations about group interests (of, e.g., women) or even about subgroup interests (of, e.g., women of color, Black women), since there is “a potentially endless list of hybrid positions or cross-cutting groupings that can be yielded (such as black working class, lesbian, young, poor, rural, disabled and so on)” (Anthias, 2013, pp. 5-6). As the regress goes on, there would be no group, and the individual would become the only cohesive unit of analysis (Ehrenreich, 2002, p. 270).

The infinite regress problem is closely linked to the “dilemmas of difference” that feminist theory has confronted from its beginnings (Warnke, 1995, p. 247, quoting Christine Di Stefano 1990). Georgia Warnke describes the dilemma as follows. Once feminist theory starts recognizing differences between European and non-European women or between rich and poor women, it is:

led to still further differences between rich European women and poor European women or between middle-class American women and middle-class Argentinean women and so on. ... [If so,] can there be any identity to the category of woman so that women as a group can form the locus of feminist interests and political practice? If there are only rich and poor women, European and non-European women, and if these groups themselves *break down into smaller groups* depending on race, class, ethnicity, and age, what happens to a specifically feminist or women’s perspective? (Warnke, 1995, pp. 248-249, emphasis added)

In sum, in both types of critique reviewed here, intersectionality is interpreted as a matter of division or fragmentation. The infinite regress critique is the claim that every time different

identity categories (such as race, class, sexuality, etc.) are factored in, women are *fragmented* into even finer subgroups. The incommensurability critique is the claim that these subgroups end up having irreconcilably different identities. Because each specific intersection of race and gender (e.g., Black women, white women) or of class and gender (e.g. working-class women, middle-class women) is reified as a distinct identity, the critics argue, women are *fragmented* along the lines of race and class.

The interpretation of intersectionality as fragmentation, however, relies on a problematic understanding of the meaning of identity. Intersections of gender with other identities would fragment women only when such identity is like a *fixed thing*, whose meaning remains the same across different people, occasions, and contexts. For instance, when the critics claim that the intersection of race and gender would fragment women along racial lines, they seem to have the following assumption: there is *the* “Black” identity with a fixed, singular meaning, so there is only one specific intersection of the Black race and female gender; likewise, there is *the* “Asian” identity assigned to all Asian people, so all Asian women—who have the intersectional identity of the Asian race and female gender—are located in the exactly identical intersection; and the same goes for “white,” “Latinx,” and other racial identities.<sup>14</sup> If this understanding of identity is true, then the critics might be right that, when race is factored in and intersects with gender, each particular intersection is reified as a discrete identity and women break into mutually exclusive subgroups.

Yet this is far from how identity is actually lived. In reality, as I will exemplify below, identities do not exist as static entities but are experienced in fluid, flexible processes. I agree with Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge that critics of intersectionality often adopt a limited

---

<sup>14</sup> Some critics contend that intersectionality studies assume a static view of identity (Prins, 2006; Staunæs, 2003), and yet it seems to be a straw man argument. For, as I argue in this chapter, it is the critiques of intersectionality, not the intersectionality studies, that presuppose the static view of identity.

understanding of intersectionality merely as a form of “abstract inquiry” while overlooking intersectional praxis (Collins, 2015, pp. 15-17; Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 129). In particular, I argue that the critics are so preoccupied with the abstract inquiry of how women would be *divided by the intersection of identities* that they neglect what women who exist at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression, such as women of color, are actually *doing with their identities*. In the following sections, I explore three types of concrete cases of how Asian women experience Asian identity. By doing so, I will show that the criticism of intersectionality for fragmenting women, which is based on the understanding of identity as a static, fixed entity, does not hold when examining the lived experiences of multiply oppressed women.

## **2. Cases: How Asian/American Women Experience Asian Identity**

a. I will begin this analysis with a reference to *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), the first Asian-led Hollywood movie in 25 years that portrays a type of tension that Asian/American women face with regard to their identities as “Asians,” “Americans,” and “women.” When Rachel Chu, a Chinese-American economics professor, meets her co-ethnic boyfriend’s mother, Eleanor, for the first time in Singapore, Rachel talks about how passionate she is about her career. Eleanor quickly dismisses Rachel by saying, “Pursuing one’s passion... how American.” Eleanor speaks about how she has been sacrificing herself for the family, or committing herself to “Asian” values. In the words of one of Rachel’s friends, Eleanor thinks Rachel is a kind of “banana—yellow on the outside, white on the inside.”

Karen Pyke and Denise Johnson discern a similar pattern in their interviews with young Asian/American women: whether an Asian/American woman is family-oriented or career-oriented, or whether she has a quiet and reserved personality or an outgoing and outspoken

personality, tends to be translated as whether she is an Asian or a whitewashed American. Being Asian is often perceived, by both Asians and non-Asians, as inherently serving patriarchal values, which is diametrically opposed to whiteness—a designation that is considered to be more progressive in terms of gender. This opposition between Asian and white identities leads some Asian/American women to feel pressured to comply with the stereotype of Asian femininity in co-ethnic settings, because otherwise their racial/ethnic identity would be challenged (Pyke & Johnson, 2003, pp. 47-49), just like Rachel is treated as a banana. For instance, a Korean-American girl named Lisa was worried that, if she spoke up in classes with many Asian peers, she would be considered no longer Asian—a designation linked with the image of a shy and quiet, and passive girl. Lisa described: “I think they would think that I’m not really Asian. Like I’m whitewashed ... like I’m forgetting my race. I’m going against my roots and adapting to the American way. And I’m just neglecting my race” (Pyke & Johnson, 2003, p. 48). This experience illustrates the dilemma that Asian women confront: they either have to conform to gender-discriminatory norms of femininity in order to retain their racial identity, or risk their racial identity in order to pursue gender-egalitarian values.

b. In other words, there is this binary between the “Asian-as-gender-oppressive vs. white-as-gender-progressive” identities. While some Asian women choose (or feel pressured to choose) the former, others opt for the latter. In particular, Nadia Kim tracks one strategy that Asian women use to “distance themselves from stereotypes of Asian femininity and forge a gender-egalitarian identity” (Pyke, 2010, p. 92): acclaiming white masculinity and denigrating Asian masculinity. In Kim’s interviews with Korean immigrant women in the US, the women used “the ideal of gender progressive white American man as the bar against which they challenge Korean men as patriarchal, hence backwards in ‘third world’ sense” (Kim, 2006, p. 532). For example, Heesu, who had dated a white American man in an attempt to live a life

unburdened by Confucian patriarchy but ended up marrying a Korean man, said that Korean men should “give up things that are too Korean in a way... [My husband] wants to Koreanize the American’s way of thinking... but I think the opposite, that you should be Americanized if you’re living here in America.” Heesu thinks that Korean traditions are at odds with white America, so her husband needs to be culturally Americanized/whitewashed (Kim, 2006, p. 529).<sup>15</sup>

Taken together, both (a) Lisa’s and (b) Heesu’s narratives pertain to the stereotypical dilemma that one cannot have Asian identity and resist patriarchy at the same time. Whereas Lisa shows conformity (at least on the surface) to patriarchal feminine traits so as to avoid being regarded as whitewashed, Heesu endorses whitewashing and assimilation to America in order to challenge Confucian patriarchy. However, this pro-assimilation stance is, as Karen Pyke maintains, a double-edged sword, since it reinforces the image of Asians as inferior to white. The fact that resistance to (co-ethnic) male dominance is connected to the reinforcement of white (male) dominance (Pyke, 2010, pp. 90-92), or more precisely, that Asian women are in a social position wherein they cannot employ a “magic bullet” resistance strategy (Kim, 2006, p. 533), demonstrates how dense the interlocking web of sexism and racism is.<sup>16</sup>

c. Nevertheless, Asian women are not stuck forever in this lose-lose situation. Instead, there has been a growing recognition among Asian women that it is the interlocking pattern of oppressions that places them in the lose-lose situation. With this recognition, Asian women have been building feminist movements to challenge this entire pattern of oppressions. For example, the mission statement of the Asian American Feminist Collective clearly expresses their refusal

---

<sup>15</sup> Kim also finds a pattern that the women conflate “America” and “white” when they reflect on gender (Kim, 2006, pp. 525, 530).

<sup>16</sup> Speaking about pro-assimilationism, I would have to make it clear that my discussion is not to blame *individual* women who prefer white masculinity over Asian masculinity in an attempt to resist Asian patriarchy. Rather, my point is that it is the intersectional *system* of white supremacy (both in the US context and Asian contexts) and patriarchy that places these women in the lose-lose situation in the first place.

to be incorporated into whiteness as the standard. They seek to “think and act critically through [their] own positionalities [as Asian/Americans] to address how systems of global racial capitalism, anti-Black racism, settler colonialism, and xenophobia impact [their] communities” (Asian American Feminist Collective, pp. 1, 4). The point is that, for the members of this kind of feminist movement groups, Asian/American women are no longer restricted to the dilemma that characterizes the two cases above. Instead of choosing between (a) staying in the Asian-as-gender-oppressive identity and (b) assimilating into the white-as-gender-progressive identity, Asian/American feminisms question this binary opposition itself. In particular, they challenge the intersecting systems of race, gender, and other oppressions underlying the opposition.

This is evident in the case of immigrant women workers’ movements. Documenting life stories of Asian women garment workers, Miriam Ching Yoon Louie’s important book *Sweatshop Warriors* discusses how these women “changed from being sweatshop industry workers to sweatshop warriors, ... from women exploited by the subcontractors and elites to women who clearly understood where they fit into the ‘big picture,’” i.e., the intersecting structure of race, gender, and class oppressions (Louie, 2001, p. 13). Recognizing the big picture of how these oppressions operate to exploit them, Asian women workers also build solidarity with women of other races/ethnicities who are situated similarly in the oppressive structure. For example, a case study of Asian Immigrant Women Advocates, an organization that works to empower immigrant women workers employed in the Bay Area’s low-wage industries, chronicles grassroots workshops in which Asian and Latina women workers “savored the new recognition of what they had in common as limited-English-speaking, low-wage, immigrant women workers” (Chun et al., 2013, pp. 934-935).

What I want to show with these examples is that Asian women workers do not give up or deny their Asian identity to resist oppressions; rather, they resist *as Asians*. According to “the

Asian-Backward/US-Progressive binary” (Fujiwara & Roshanravan, 2018, p. 24) that functions in the cases (a) and (b), Asian identity means patriarchal, regressive, and inferior to white identity, and thus, the only option that Asian women could choose for resistance seems to be distancing from their Asianness. By contrast, in the case at hand, Asian women workers have changed the meaning of being Asian from “backward” to “progressive.” That is, what it means to be Asian is not fixed at what has been defined by the white-dominated gender hegemony. As Asian/American feminisms grow, “Asian” is redefined as an identity with transformative potentials to challenge intersecting systems of oppression, as a “center of meaningful social change” and cross-racial solidarity for empowerment (Chun et al., 2013, p. 920).

### **3. Intersectional Feminist Theory as an Experience-Centered Non-Ideal Theory**

As discussed earlier, the incommensurability critique claims that the intersection of race and gender would fragment women along racial lines (e.g., Asian women, Latina women, white women, etc.), and the infinite regress critique claims that each of the racial groups of women would break down into ever smaller groups when intersecting with other identities (e.g., Asian queer women, Asian queer women with disabilities, and so on). The underlying assumption of these critiques is that there is such a thing as a fixed, static “Asian” identity—that can break the identity of “women” into a smaller unified piece of identity “Asian women,” which can be broken again by other fixed identities of “queer,” “heterosexual,” “disabled,” “able-bodied,” and so on.

However, this view of identity is incorrect. The concrete cases of Asian women’s experiences demonstrate that identity is not a static entity. What it means to be Asian is not fixed but changing according to how this identity is related to the power dynamics of structural

oppression. Here I have identified three characteristic types of relation between identity and oppressive power<sup>17</sup>:

- a. Manifestation of power: Intersecting gender and race ideologies are *manifested* in shaping the Asian-as-patriarchal identity. In other words, what it means to be Asian is constructed by the white-dominated gender hegemony, which disparages Asian/nonwhite expressions of gender and provides privilege to white expressions of gender (Pyke & Johnson, 2003, pp. 35-36; Kim, 2006, p. 520).
- b. Limited resistance to power: Some Asian women, by preferring white masculinity over Asian masculinity, try to escape their Asian gender identity that is defined by patriarchal hegemony. In this way, they rearrange the relation between their identity and hegemonic power. However, this is a *limited* resistance strategy, since it reaffirms white supremacist hegemony that establishes whiteness as the norm. The women fall into an ironic situation in which their resistance to one form of oppression reproduces another (Kim, 2006, pp. 533-534; Pyke & Johnson, 2003, pp. 51-52; see also Espiritu, 2001).
- c. Transformative resistance to power: Recognizing that, as Audre Lorde said, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 1984, pp. 110-113), Asian women move beyond assimilationism and engage in feminist politics to dismantle the intersecting structure of oppressions. They recreate their Asian identity so that it can be an important starting point of the *transformation* of an oppressive society.

---

<sup>17</sup> Amy Allen (1999) distinguishes three types of power that are important to feminist theory: domination, resistance, and solidarity. In this chapter, I use the term “power” to refer to power as domination/oppression, unless otherwise specified as resistance or as solidarity.



Taken together, these cases show that identity is “fluid and changing, always in the process of *creating* and *being created* by dynamics of power” (Cho et al., 2013b, p. 795, emphasis added). In (a), the meaning of Asian identity (Asian-as-patriarchal) is created by the intersecting dynamics of gender and race oppression. In (c), by redefining Asian identity (Asian-as-having-liberatory-potentials), Asian women affect these power dynamics of oppression, and create new positive forms of power such as resistance and solidarity. Finally, in (b), Asian identity is in the process of creating as well as being created by power: Asian women create resistant power by destabilizing the association of Asian womanhood with patriarchy, and yet, the negative connotation of Asian (Asian-as-inferior-to-white) is still created and maintained by hegemonic power.

This fluid and dynamic character of identity, I argue, suggests that the critiques of intersectionality’s alleged fragmentation are misleading. Insofar as Asian identity is not a fixed thing but is in the fluid process of meaning change, that Asian race and female gender are “intersecting” indicates that race and gender are experienced together as an interrelated, multilayered process in Asian women’s lives, rather than that Asian women are reified into one fixed intersectional location.

Moreover, the cases illustrate that Asian women do not passively hold or possess their identity. In contrast, they navigate power dynamics and negotiate the relation between power and identity in at least three different ways, by affecting as well as being affected by intersecting systems of oppression. Then, Asian women’s actual lived experiences could be understood as the *site* at which they negotiate between power and identity. (a) Asian women’s experiences of being treated as “bananas” and (b) those of falling into a lose-lose situation are structural experiences (as opposed to only individual experiences) that demonstrate how structural oppressions work—

i.e., how the system of white-dominated sexism works by constructing and perpetuating the Asian-as-gender-oppressive identity. As Crenshaw emphasizes with the notion of “structural intersectionality,” it is in the women of color’s lives where multilayered structures of race and gender oppression converge (Crenshaw, 1991, pp. 1245-1251). (c) Asian/American feminisms, which reconstruct what it means to be Asian, do not come from nowhere, but grow out of these very experiences of tension and irony that Asian women have to encounter every day.

Collectively, these examples suggest the conceptual importance of the lives of women and others facing multiple oppressions in doing intersectional theory: the everyday lives of the multiply oppressed are the *spaces* in which the power dynamics of intersecting oppressions are manifested and resisted through (re)construction of identity.

Therefore, I propose defining intersectional feminist theory as a theory that foregrounds the *actual, everyday lives* of the multiply oppressed. The *raison d’être* of contemporary feminist scholarship is that feminist theory should address how sexism works in mutually supporting ways with other forms of oppression rather than as a singular, pure form of oppression (see McCall, 2005, pp. 1779-1790; Collins, 2015, pp. 2-3). In order for a theory to help us understand and challenge the workings of multiple, intersecting oppressions, it must pay attention to the space in which oppressions are actually working—i.e. the daily lives of women of color, working-class women, women in the global South, queers, trans and gender non-confirming people, and other multiply oppressed groups.

In this regard, I suggest that intersectional feminist theory is a *non-ideal theory*. Both intersectionality and non-ideal theory are much discussed topics in feminist social and political philosophy, but the connection between the two has been less examined. Exploring to what extent feminist social/political philosophy theorizes the non-ideal (in the sense of unjust), Lisa Tessman defines non-ideal theory as a theory that “focus[es] on the lives of those who live under

conditions that are particularly distant from the ideal (in the sense of perfect),” a distance generated not by mere bad luck but by the systemic injustices of oppression (Tessman, 2009, p. xviii, emphasis omitted). Tessman’s definition echoes Charles Mills, whose article prompted the recent development of non-ideal theory in the area of social/political philosophy. Mills notes that, whereas ideal theory “abstain[s] from theorizing about oppression and its consequences,” non-ideal theory “does make the dynamic of oppression central and theory guiding” (Mills, 2004, pp. 170, 177). By centering on, rather than setting aside, non-ideal/oppressive realities, non-ideal theory facilitates a clearer understanding of the structure of oppression that underlies the current social order. In this way, non-ideal theory could aid in challenging structural oppression and changing the social order to be closer to the ideal/non-oppressive (p. 180).

Drawing on Tessman and Mills, I propose an account of intersectional feminist theory as a non-ideal theory: it is a theory that, by focusing on the lives of the multiply oppressed, presents the dynamic of multiple oppressions as central and theory-guiding. Feminist theory that claims to consider multiple oppressions merely in the abstract and fails to attend to the lived experience in which oppressions are manifested and resisted may be considered ideal theory. The critiques of intersectionality examined in this chapter could count as this kind of ideal theory, in that they focus too much on the abstract inquiry of how the intersection of race and gender would divide women along racial lines and too little on how race and gender oppressions are actually experienced in women of color’s lives. By contrast, implementing feminist theory in an intersectional way indicates doing non-ideal theory, which makes empirical input from multiply oppressed women’s experiences crucial and theory-guiding. When feminist theory foregrounds the actual locus at which the dynamic of intersecting oppressions is executed, navigated, and negotiated, it could better assist the comprehension of and resistance against oppressive dynamics.

Thus far this dissertation has elucidated what intersectional feminism is. This chapter, in particular, has articulated the account of intersectional feminist theory as a non-ideal theory. In the next chapter, I will take a closer look at this link between intersectionality and non-ideal theory, specifically by examining Mills's works on non-ideal theory. In so doing, I will investigate the main research question of the dissertation: How should we reconceptualize "women" in order to do a more intersectional feminism?

## Chapter 3

### “Non-Idealizing Abstraction” as Ideology: or, How to Do Social Theory in a Less Ideological Way \*

This dissertation is, broadly speaking, an effort to search for methodologies that may help us do anti-oppression social theory in a more intersectional and inclusive way. Drawing on Judith Butler, the present chapter proposes one such methodology: protecting the “resignifiability” of abstract concepts used for social theory. Specifically, this chapter aims to show the following. The concept of “women” and concepts that generalize women’s situations (such as “patriarchy”) must be always left *resignifiable*, if we are to do a more intersectional feminist theory, that is, to minimize the risk of marginalization and better address power differences between more-privileged and less-privileged groups of women when doing feminist theory (see Chapter 1 for this definition of intersectional feminism). The practice of protecting resignifiability can be seen as the opposite of *assertion*. When a certain way of conceptualizing women’s experiences is asserted or taken for granted as if it were the “right” one, this would, I argue, reinforce the current hegemonic way of describing women and the marginalization of multiply-oppressed women and others.

To this end, I give a more in-depth examination of Charles Mills’s works on non-ideal theory, which were briefly mentioned in the previous chapter. Mills invokes the notion of “non-idealizing abstractions” and claims that these are helpful when applying non-ideal theory. In particular, he contends that “patriarchy” is a non-idealizing abstraction, i.e., an abstraction that accurately maps crucial realities of (gender) oppression and reflects the experience of the

---

\* An earlier version of this chapter has been published in the journal *Social Philosophy Today* (Kong, 2017).

oppressed (“women”). In contrast, I examine cases in which the concept of patriarchy functions as what I refer to as the Colonialist Concept of Patriarchy, which marginalizes Third World women’s experiences of gender oppression as intersecting with racism, cultural imperialism, and economic exploitation in the global South. I suspect that Mills pays insufficient attention to the power dynamics of intersectional oppression, which significantly influence judgments about whose experiences and interests are worth being reflected by an abstraction and whose are okay to be omitted. Failing to take account of the power differences among the oppressed, what Mills takes for granted as non-idealizing abstractions falls into ideology, which cannot reflect the experiences or interests of less-privileged minorities (e.g., Third World women), and only concerns those of more-privileged minorities (e.g., First World women).

I maintain that a more suitable and less ideological way to apply non-ideal theory should avoid asserting that an abstraction is non-idealizing and should, instead, protect resignifiability of the abstraction. It is important that there can always be (sub)groups that are invisible or less visible from a certain abstraction about an oppressed group. Even when we devise a seemingly most inclusive conceptualization of what it means to be “women” or to be subordinated by “patriarchy,” it is still impossible to say that *no* social group is marginalized from this conceptualization. I will exemplify this point by discussing how “racial patriarchy,” a concept devised to resolve the problem of marginalization of nonwhite women from the concept of “patriarchy,” may also function to marginalize less-privileged/multiply-oppressed nonwhite women (e.g., trans women of color). Insofar as gender oppression could always intersect with other axes of oppression, it is always possible that *some* aspects of gender oppression remain uncovered of certain conceptualizations of “women’s” experiences of “patriarchy.” Thus, I will argue that concepts such as “women” and “patriarchy” must remain open-ended, in order not to

hinder the thus-far-invisible group of women and others from resignifying the concept in a way that it could better reflect their experiences.

## **1. Ideal Theory, Non-Ideal Theory, and Ideology**

Ideal and non-ideal theories have been much disputed in contemporary social and political philosophy since John Rawls distinguished between them in his famous book, *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Rawls notes that ideal theory deals with the principles of justice in a perfectly just society, where “everyone is presumed to act justly and to do his [sic] part in upholding just institutions.” Rawls admits that an actual, non-ideal society does not exist under such favorable circumstances and that the problems of non-ideal theory, such as the principles for tackling injustice, are “the pressing and urgent matters . . . that we are faced with in everyday life.” Nevertheless, Rawls gives priority to ideal theory, arguing that “[ideal theory] provides . . . the only basis for the systematic grasp of these more pressing problems” (Rawls, 1971, pp. 8-9, 245-246).

One distinctive feature of Rawls’s ideal theory is that it revives the tradition of the social contract. As is well known, Rawls supposes a hypothetical contractual situation termed the “original position,” and characterizes it as fair and equal in that everyone in this situation wears the “veil of ignorance” and knows nothing about race, gender, class, and so on. Rawls’s basic idea is that principles, which would be agreed to in this supposedly fair bargaining situation, are principles of justice that regulate the perfectly just society. Here, the hypothetical social contract is used as a theoretical apparatus to derive the principles of the ideally just society (pp. 11-17).

Rawls’s work is one of the most influential texts in contemporary social and political philosophy, and thus the majority of philosophers in this field have tended to concentrate their

work on ideal rather than non-ideal theory. Among the few exceptions are Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* (1988) and Charles Mills's *The Racial Contract* (1997), which paved the way for a recent increase in non-ideal theory. Whereas Rawls's hypothetical contract is made for the ideal society, Pateman and Mills diverted attention to the contracts actually made in the non-ideal society. Specifically, Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* sheds light on the ways that patriarchal oppression is constituted, not as opposed to the social contract, but through the particular social contract that excludes women (Pateman, 1988, chap. 1). Mills's *The Racial Contract*, influenced by Pateman's work, examines the ways that racial oppression and white supremacy are created through the contract, which is not among all of the people, but is only among white people (Mills, 1997, pp. 3-4). In sum, it is Pateman's and Mills's attentions to actual *oppression* that distinguish their contract theories from Rawls's contract theory and characterize their theories as non-ideal.<sup>18</sup>

The topic of oppression is carefully developed in Mills's influential essay, "'Ideal Theory' as Ideology" (2004). Illuminating the fact that ideal theory ignores oppression in the actual non-ideal world, Mills's essay sparked critiques of ideal theory. As a result, a considerable amount of recent literature has addressed various problems with ideal theory and the importance of non-ideal theory.<sup>19</sup> Among the many problems, Mills emphasizes that ideal theory "abstracts

---

<sup>18</sup> As for the pre-Rawlsian tradition of social contract, though, Mills and Pateman take different positions. Mills characterizes the classic contract theories by, e.g., Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant as the "nonideal/naturalized contract" and contrasts that with the "ideal contract" of the modern Rawlsian contract theories. Mills notes: "Whereas the ideal contract explains how a just society would be formed, ruled by a moral government, and regulated by a defensible moral code, this nonideal/naturalized contract explains how an unjust, *exploitative* society, ruled by an *oppressive* government and regulated by an *immoral* code, comes into existence" (Mills, 1997, p. 5). Pateman, on the other hand, notes that she is more critical than Mills of the enterprise of social contract theory (Pateman & Mills, 2007, chap. 1).

<sup>19</sup> As philosophers have approached the problems of ideal theory from various perspectives, the "ideal vs. non-ideal theory" distinction itself has come to have diverse meanings. For example, Laura Valentini (2012) capsulizes three different meanings of this distinction: (1) full compliance vs. partial compliance theory, (2) utopian vs. realistic theory, and (3) end-state vs. transitional theory. Alan Hamlin and Zofia Stemplowska (2012) employ a similar but slightly different typology. They identify four distinctions between ideal and non-ideal theories often used: (1) full compliance vs. partial compliance, (2) idealization vs. abstraction, (3) fact-insensitivity vs. fact-sensitivity, and (4) perfect justice vs. local improvement justice. Among these various factors that distinguish between ideal and non-ideal theories, I particularly focus on *oppression*, echoing Mills's critique of ideal theory. As is being discussed



away” from the ways in which oppression shapes human beings because it theorizes human beings as undifferentiated and equivalent individuals (e.g., race- and gender-neutral individuals in Rawls’s original position) (Mills, 2004, pp. 166-167). Insofar as ideal theory is silent about the actual workings of oppression, it cannot reflect the experiences of oppressed groups, such as women, nonwhites, the poor and the working class, and thus cannot serve their interests. It can only serve the interests of privileged groups, such as middle- or upper-class white males, who experience the least cognitive dissonance between the ideal world (which exists apart from oppression) and the non-ideal world (in which oppression prevails). Briefly, Mills’s argument is that *ideal theory* is an *ideology* that, by disregarding the actual workings of oppression, reflects only the experiences and interests of the privileged.

In this chapter, I adopt Mills’s definition of “ideology,” i.e., “a set of group ideas that reflect and contribute to perpetuating illicit group privilege” (2004, pp. 164, 170). Mills notes that, in contrast to ideal/ideological theory, non-ideal theory is a theory that “make[s] the dynamic of oppression central and theory guiding” (2004, pp. 173, 177). By doing so, non-ideal theory helps us to clearly recognize the underlying structures that (re)produce oppression, and, thus, to challenge the existing systems of oppression. Therefore, non-ideal theory is relatively better able to elicit an “ideal” (or non-oppressive) society (1997, pp. 5-6, 2004, p. 180).

I fully agree with Mills regarding the problems of ideal theory and the significance of non-ideal theory. Nevertheless, I disagree with Mills on methods for doing non-ideal theory. In other words, my critique is not directed against non-ideal theory per se, but instead, it concerns Mills’s particular application of non-ideal theory. In several of his works, Mills invokes the notion of “non-idealizing abstractions” and endorses it as a valuable tool for applying non-ideal theory (section 2). In contrast, I maintain that Mills’s notion of non-idealizing abstractions is not

---

in the current section, “ideal theory” is as a theory that ignores and thereby perpetuates oppression. By contrast, “non-ideal theory” is a theory that helps to undermine oppression by centering on it.

a suitable theoretical tool for non-ideal theory because it runs a high risk of being another ideology (section 3). I suggest that a better way of doing non-ideal theory is to protect “resignifiability” of abstractions (section 4).

## **2. Mills’s Argument for Non-Idealizing Abstraction**

To understand Mills’s argument for “non-idealizing abstractions,” it is important to first discuss what he means by “abstractions” and “idealizing abstractions.” Mills uses the term “abstractions” to refer to abstract *concepts* or words used for (social) theory, ones that generalize and offer a simplified picture of (social) phenomena. Mills draws a distinction between idealizing abstractions and non-idealizing abstractions. Recall that Mills criticizes ideal theory for abstracting away from oppression in the actual, non-ideal world. What Mills refers to by “idealizing abstractions” is exactly this, which “in ignoring the effects of gender and race differentiation[,] abstracts away from the concrete specifics of social oppression” (Mills, 1997, pp. 76, 130; Pateman & Mills, 2007, p. 176). Here, questions about abstractions arise. For Mills, it is idealizing abstractions that make ideal theory an ideology and contribute to perpetuating oppression. Does it then follow that non-ideal theory, which is to challenge such ideologies and oppression, should avoid abstractions altogether? Mills answers “no” to this question. He contends that the problem of ideal theory is that it involves “deficient” abstractions, not that it involves abstractions per se. His solution is to reject idealizing abstractions and, instead, opt for “non-idealizing abstractions,” i.e., abstractions that *do not idealize* (Mills, 2004, pp. 170-174; Pateman & Mills, 2007, p. 176).

The abstract concepts of “patriarchy,” “white supremacy,” and “capitalism” are representative examples of what Mills views as non-idealizing abstractions. Mills writes:

What one wants are abstractions ... that capture the essentials of the situation of women and nonwhites, not abstract away from them. ... These terms ["patriarchy," "white supremacy," and "capitalism"] are abstractions that *do* reflect the specificities of group experience, thereby potentially generating categories and principles that illuminate rather than obfuscate the reality of different kinds of subordination. ... These are all global, high-level concepts, undeniable abstractions. But they map accurately (at least arguably) crucial realities that differentiate the statuses of human beings within the systems they describe; so while they *abstract*, they do not *idealize* (Mills, 2004, pp. 172, 174).

This quotation illustrates the types of abstractions that Mills considers "non-idealizing."

I isolate and focus on two main characteristics of Mills's non-idealizing abstractions: (1) non-idealizing abstractions, such as patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism, are abstractions that *accurately map* and reveal crucial realities of oppression, whereas idealizing abstractions abstract away from them (Mills, 1997, p. 76; Pateman & Mills, 2007, pp. 131, 176), and (2) relatedly, non-idealizing abstractions are abstractions that reflect the experiences and interests of *the oppressed*, such as women, people of color, and the working class, whereas idealizing abstractions reflect only those of the privileged (Mills, 2004, pp. 161, 171-174).

Mills's notion of non-idealizing abstractions largely depends on Onora O'Neill's idea of "abstraction without idealization" (O'Neill, 1987, 1993; 1996, chap. 2). O'Neill makes a sharp distinction between idealization and abstraction. According to O'Neill, idealization is likely to incur falsehoods because it ascribes augmented predicates that deny true predicates. In contrast, abstraction does not lead to falsehood because it is about "detaching from" or "bracketing" true predicates instead of denying them (1993, p. 309, 1996, pp. 40-41). Therefore, O'Neill contends that abstractions can be constructed with "at least adequate accuracy," and they can and should offer a starting point for ethical reasoning (1996, p. 44). Drawing upon O'Neill's view that abstraction brackets, instead of denies, true predicates, Mills supposes that "bracketing" abstractions can provide, first, accurate mapping of crucial realities of social oppression, similar to O'Neill's position on abstractions' adequate accuracy. Mills also supposes that these abstractions can, second, thereby reflect the experiences of the oppressed under social

subordination. Based on these considerations, Mills argues that non-idealizing abstractions are effective tools for non-ideal theory, whose theoretical centrality is laid on actual oppression. In contrast, I argue in the following section that what Mills asserts to be non-idealizing abstractions are prone to functioning as ideologies.

### **3. Non-Idealizing Abstraction as Ideology: The Colonialist Concept of Patriarchy and Intersectional Oppression**

To elucidate how the abstractions that allegedly “do not idealize” operate as ideologies, I return to Mills’s claim that the concepts of patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism are “non-idealizing” in two respects: (1) they accurately map crucial realities of oppression, and (2) they reflect the experiences of the oppressed. Assuming these concepts are abstractions that fulfill (1) and (2), Mills, however, fails to seriously consider some important questions. First, regarding (1), which realities of oppression should be included as “crucial social realities that need to be mapped” (Pateman & Mills, 2007, p. 176) is arguable. Depending on that, it is also arguable whether an abstract concept “accurately” maps crucial realities. Mills seems to be aware of the arguability when he writes that the concepts he alleges to be non-idealizing abstractions “map accurately (at least *arguably*) crucial realities” (Mills, 2004, p. 174, emphasis added). Nevertheless, Mills parenthesizes and quickly sets aside the fact that there are serious disagreements about what comprises crucial realities. In contrast to Mills’s assumption that concepts, e.g., patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism, can provide accurate mapping despite these disagreements, I maintain that the fact that such disagreements are present matters. In particular, I highlight differences among social groups. The question of what is a crucial reality of oppression relates to the question of *whose* experiences of oppression are valid as

crucial, a question on which oppressed groups can have conflicting views. This brings up another question regarding (2): Mills supposes that the purportedly non-idealizing abstractions reflect the experiences of the oppressed, but *which oppressed group's* experiences are reflected by these abstractions?

The concept of patriarchy clearly illustrates this point. When compared to the concept of undifferentiated human beings free of gender oppression, the idea of patriarchy better describes women's experiences under gender oppression. In this respect, it might be *less* idealizing of an abstraction than the former. However, one should not simply assume that "patriarchy" is an abstraction that is *non*-idealizing or does *not* idealize. That is, it should not be taken for granted that the concept of patriarchy accurately maps crucial realities about gender oppression and reflects women's situations. What must be asked instead is: Which women's situations does the concept of patriarchy reflect?

Consider a definition of patriarchy that reflects the situations of women in the so-called "First World" and yet abstracts away from the oppressions of women in the so-called "Third World."<sup>20</sup> This definition is not invented; it is real and widespread, as has been rightly pointed out by women of color feminists, decolonial feminists, and intersectionality theorists. I refer to this specific concept of patriarchy, which excludes and marginalizes experiences of Third World women, as the "Colonialist Concept of Patriarchy." Although the Colonialist Concept of Patriarchy might adequately express the experiences of First World women, it does not adequately expose the experiences of Third World women. Is the Colonialist Concept of

---

<sup>20</sup> Echoing Chandra Talpade Mohanty, I use the term "Third World" in a critical sense. As Mohanty aptly points out: "Terms like 'third' and 'first' world are very problematical both in suggesting over-simplified similarities between and amongst countries labeled 'third' or 'first' world, as well as implicitly reinforcing existing economic, cultural, and ideological hierarchies" (Mohanty, 1988, pp. 82-83 n2). Recognizing this problem, however, Mohanty retains the term Third World, in order to critically analyze the ways in which Western feminist discourses project women in the so-called Third World as a uniform and powerless group, and thereby create an image of a singular, average "Third-World Woman."

Patriarchy a non-idealizing abstraction or is it an idealizing abstraction? It might operate as a non-idealizing abstraction for First World women, or those who regard those women's experiences as representative of all women. However, for Third World women, the same concept operates as an idealizing abstraction.

One example of the Colonialist Concept of Patriarchy is found in Mills's own essay. Mills notes that Third World women are stuck in the middle of two "rival" ethical claims: on the one hand, there is the claim that Third World women are obviously subordinated, and on the other hand, there is the claim that "their subordination is not subordination at all, but a cultural tradition whose condemnation by First Worlders is imperialist and racist" (Mills, 2004, p. 172). For instance, as Sirma Bilge point out, two dominant readings of veiled Muslim women interpret the Muslim veil as women's subordination to men or as resistance to Western hegemony (Bilge, 2010).<sup>21</sup> Mills claims that these "clashes" of rival claims on Third World women cannot be adjudicated without a universalist, non-incommensurable measure of rights or well-being (Mills, 2004, p. 172).

However, I emphasize that this clash is a false binary that implies the Colonialist Concept of Patriarchy. According to Mills's reading, which is also in line with the dominant reading, Third World women are either experiencing severe gender oppression, or falsely accused of suffering gender oppression by the cultural imperialism of the First World. Here, gender oppression is conceptualized as separate from, rather than interlocked with, cultural imperialism. This concept of gender oppression exemplifies the Colonialist Concept of Patriarchy because it depicts gender oppression as though it could be disconnected from imperialist and racist

---

<sup>21</sup> Serene Khader's recent book, *Decolonizing Universalism*, names the opposition between these claims "the anti-imperialism/normativity dilemma." This dilemma suggests that feminism necessarily goes hand in hand with imperialism, so we have to choose either anti-imperialism or feminism. That is, "we have a choice between abandoning feminism on the grounds that it is an imperialist imposition or biting the bullet and accepting that, if feminism is an extension of Western chauvinism, so be it" (Khader, 2018, p. 7). Khader explores a way out of this dilemma and argues that an anti-imperialist feminism is possible.

oppression to be a “pure” type of gender oppression, and it, thereby, abstracts away from Third World women’s experiences of gender oppression as *intersecting* with these other types of oppression.

As discussed in Chapter 1, María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman illuminate how the supposition of pure, single-axis gender oppression actually reflects and preserves white middle-class women’s privilege (Lugones, 2003; Spelman, 1988, chaps. 5-7). The pure notion of gender oppression directs its focus on “women who are not subject to any other form of oppression than sexism,” namely, according to Spelman, “women who are white and middle-class” (Spelman, 1988, pp. 164-167). This position means that it is not enough to claim that the concept of patriarchy accurately maps realities of gender oppression. Insofar as patriarchy maps “pure” gender oppression, whose privileged focus is, for example, white women of the First World, it abstracts away from gender oppression’s intersections with racism, cultural imperialism, and colonialism, which clearly are crucial realities of gender oppression.

The Colonialist Concept of Patriarchy also can be found in more concrete cases. One case I analyze is the increase in female-headed households in the United States and in Latin America, which is described in Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s groundbreaking article “Under Western Eyes” (1988). Mohanty cites this specific case to argue as follows. Concepts such as household, marriage, and sexual division of labor are often used as if they describe a universal oppression of women; however, situations that appear similar might have vastly different meanings in different contexts, and thus, they cannot be used to substantiate women’s universal status. To illustrate her point, Mohanty compares different contexts of the United States and Latin America:

[T]he rise of female-headed households in middle-class America might be construed as indicating women’s independence and progress, whereby women are considered to have *chosen* to be single parents, there are increasing numbers of lesbian mothers, etc. However, the recent increase in female-headed households in Latin America, where women might be seen to have more decision-making power, is concentrated among the

poorest strata, where life choices are the most constrained economically.<sup>22</sup> ... Thus, while it is possible to state that there is a rise in female-headed households in the US and in Latin America, this rise cannot be discussed as a universal indicator of women's independence, nor can it be discussed as a universal indicator of women's impoverishment (Mohanty, 1988, pp. 75-76).

I argue that, insofar as this rise is construed as a universal indicator of women's independence or of women's impoverishment, it involves the Colonialist Concept of Patriarchy. On the one hand, if the increase is assumed to indicate women's independence from gender subordination, such as economic dependence on men and patriarchal family systems in which men have authority, the notion of gender subordination does not reflect the situations of women heads of households in Latin America. It abstracts away from these women's experiences of gender subordination, which are interwoven with poverty and class exploitation. On the other hand, if the increase is interpreted as demonstrating women's universal impoverishment, it dismisses the existing power discrepancy between middle-class women in the United States and poor, working-class women in Latin America. In particular, if all women were construed as subject to impoverishment, the oppressive structures that contribute to Latin American women's impoverishment (e.g., a global economy that benefits the First World while exploiting the cheap labor of Third World women) are not taken into account. As shown in this case, the concepts of patriarchy and gender subordination do not necessarily serve all women's interests, but instead often function as the Colonialist Concept of Patriarchy, which marginalizes Third World women's interests and experiences of gender subordination.

Similar arguments can be developed about the concepts of capitalism and white supremacy. Early definitions of capitalism almost exclusively dealt with men's experiences of class exploitation, which marginalized women's experiences. Furthermore, definitions of white

---

<sup>22</sup> There are different interpretations of the increase in female headship in Latin America. For example, a recent article suggests that this rise reflects female empowerment rather than poor living conditions (Liu, Esteve, & Treviño, 2017).



supremacy have often been accused of reflecting only nonwhite men's experiences of racial subordination by identifying their experiences as those of "people" of color, which disregards women of color.

In summary, what Mills considers a non-idealizing abstraction does not embrace all of the members of the oppressed group that it intends to include. Mills argues that the concepts of patriarchy and white supremacy "capture the essentials of the situation of women and nonwhites" (2004, p. 172), but what these concepts are more likely to capture is limited to the circumstances of relatively more privileged women and nonwhites.

My argument is not that the terms "patriarchy," "capitalism," and "white supremacy" should not be used, nor that there should be no attempt to make abstractions about oppression. Instead, I highlight the fact that any abstraction necessarily prioritizes what is to be abstracted. An abstraction of phenomenon *P* cannot exhaustively capture the entirety of the features of *P* because, if it were to contain all of the details, it would be *P* in its entirety, and not an abstraction of *P*. An abstraction of *P* would necessarily "abstract away from certain features of *P*," while capturing only the features to which high priority is given. As Mills writes, "one will make simplifying assumptions, based on what one takes the most important features of *P* to be, and include certain features while omitting others: this will produce a schematized picture of the actual workings and actual nature of *P*" (2004, pp. 164-165). One example of these "simplifying assumptions" is Mills's *The Racial Contract* (1997). Mills assumes that race is the most important factor in systems of domination, and he omits gender and class. He claims that "white racial identity has generally triumphed over all others; it is race that (transgender, transclass) has generally determined the social world and loyalties, the lifeworld, of whites" (1997, p. 138 n3).<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> One criticism raised against Mills is that he suppresses gender and class oppression. Mills responds to this criticism by saying that "I'm not denying that they exist; I'm just not focusing on them in the book" (Pateman & Mills, 2007, p. 239). Mills's response, expressed in O'Neill's terms (see section 2), is that he is just "bracketing" and "detaching from" gender and class, not denying them. However, I do not think this response is sufficient. Even if

This example illustrates that, to formulate an abstraction of a phenomenon (e.g., systematic domination), one must make *judgments* about which features of it represent its actual workings and nature and thus must be included in the abstraction, and which features are less important.<sup>24</sup> (In *The Racial Contract*, Mills qualifies racial domination or “white supremacy” as the former and gender and class domination as the latter.)

However, these judgments are not neutral but, instead, are largely influenced by power dynamics. Gender and class domination that prevails among the victims of racial domination, which is exemplified by the power differences between middle-class men of color and working-class women of color, might have led Mills to define gender and class domination as less salient features that could be omitted. Similarly, the power differences between First World women and Third World women, which indicate that women’s subordination cooperates with Third World subordination, encourage First World women (and many non-minority people) to think that their experiences are the most important aspects of gender subordination. Thus, they may believe that their experiences should be central to the concept of patriarchy and that Third World women’s experiences can be rendered as the exception or the Other.

In short, the existing power differences among oppressed groups (not only between the privileged and the oppressed) hugely influence value judgments in formulating abstractions. Therefore, even abstractions such as patriarchy and capitalism, which are intended to theorize on oppression, often reflect only the experiences of more-privileged minorities. Abstracting away

---

Mills is simply bracketing gender and class oppression, not denying them, he has to offer more compelling justification for why he is doing so. Insofar as Mills detaches from gender and class oppression without adequate justification, what he is doing would be the idealizing abstraction, which inadequately abstracts away from social oppression.

<sup>24</sup> This idea is indebted to Lisa Schwartzman’s criticism of O’Neill’s “abstraction without idealization.” As mentioned in section 2, O’Neill argues for the use of abstraction by asserting that it is a matter of “bracketing” and “detaching from” certain predicates, not of denying those predicates. However, Schwartzman notes that if abstraction is to “focus on certain predicates rather than others, decisions must be made about what should be bracketed and what should be included,” but O’Neill does not deal with the details of abstraction (Schwartzman, 2006, p. 81).

from the experiences of less-privileged, intersectionally-oppressed minority groups, such as Third World women oppressed by intersecting colonialism, racism, and sexism, creates abstractions that fail to provide accurate mapping of actual marginalization.

It is for this reason that I argue what Mills asserts as non-idealizing abstractions are likely to be ideologies. The definition of “ideology” used here is the same one that Mills uses to criticize ideal theory. Mills maintains that ideal theory is an *ideology* that, by ignoring the actual workings of oppression, cannot reflect the experiences and interests of the oppressed, but only those of the privileged (see section 1). Similarly, what Mills asserts as non-idealizing abstractions falls into an *ideology* that, by ignoring the actual power dynamics of oppression and power differences among oppressed groups, can reflect only the experiences and interests of the more-privileged minorities. Although Mills strongly criticizes the fact that ideal theory abstracts away from actual oppression, arguing that doing so leads to ideology, he is less attentive to the possibility that what he specifies as non-idealizing abstractions also could become ideologies. I do not believe that Mills willfully ignored less-privileged minorities when he was writing on this topic. However, I believe that, insofar as Mills was doing non-ideal theory, he should have been more consistent with his own guideline for non-ideal theory, which is to centrally locate the actual dynamics of oppression.

Mills might, of course, contend that any concept that abstracts away from the experiences of less-privileged minorities, such as the Colonialist Concept of Patriarchy, fails to be a truly non-idealizing abstraction. He might attempt, instead, to identify an alternative concept that more accurately captures Third World women’s experiences of intersecting oppressions. I have no objection to an attempt to find a new, less-idealizing concept to better theorize oppression. What concerns me is an assertion that such new concept is a truly non-idealizing abstraction, that is, we have finally found a concept that does not idealize. In the following section, I argue that

asserting that a particular concept is non-idealizing does not help less-privileged minorities, and it is not an effective way to do non-ideal theory. I conclude this chapter with a suggestion for doing non-ideal theory in a more effective and less ideological way.

#### **4. Toward a Less Ideological Social Theory: Protecting Resignifiability**

This section suggests some ways to lessen the risk of falling into ideology when devising an abstraction to do non-ideal theory. One starting point towards a less ideological theory is, I argue, to avoid asserting that an abstract concept is non-idealizing. That is, it should not be assumed at the outset that an abstract concept is (1) accurately mapping the realities of oppression or (2) reflecting the experiences of the oppressed. When concepts are affirmed to fulfill (1) and (2), further discussions about which oppressed groups' experiences are accurately mapped and reflected by concepts and which oppressed groups' experiences are excluded will be closed off.

Let me illustrate this point using Mills's new concept of "racial patriarchy." The previous section explained that white supremacy and patriarchy, the concepts that Mills endorses as non-idealizing abstractions, tend to exclude women of color oppressed by intersecting racism, colonialism, and sexism. In a recent work, *Contract and Domination*, co-authored with Carole Pateman, Mills recognizes this issue of intersectional oppression that women of color experience, and he tries to tackle it by introducing the concept of "racial patriarchy" (Pateman & Mills, 2007, chap. 6). This hybrid concept, which combines racism and patriarchy, might partly embrace nonwhite women's experiences. However, I doubt that the new concept can fully address the problems, since there always are less-privileged subgroups in the category of nonwhite women

(such as trans, lesbian, disabled, and/or undocumented immigrant women of color) with experiences that tend to be marginalized even using the concept of racial patriarchy.

Again, this is not to argue that the term “racial patriarchy” should not be used. What I problematize is not the concept of racial patriarchy itself, but the *assertion* or *automatic assumption* that this concept is non-idealizing just because it theorizes on oppression.

Idealization is not a matter of all-or-nothing. Insofar as the power dynamics of intersectional oppressions influence judgments about what to omit from an abstraction about oppression (e.g., “racial patriarchy”), there is always a possibility that these omissions favor relatively more-privileged minorities (e.g., cis women of color), and that the abstraction turns out to be an idealizing concept that marginalizes less-privileged, intersectionally-oppressed minorities (e.g., trans women of color). If the concept of racial patriarchy were asserted as non-idealizing from the outset (that is, presumed to accurately map the crucial realities of intersectional oppression and to reflect the distinctive experiences of “nonwhite women”), then examinations of which particular nonwhite women are included would seem unnecessary. When such critical examinations are regarded as pointless, the risk increases that “racial patriarchy” will become an idealizing/ideological concept that excludes less-privileged nonwhite women’s experiences. Moreover, less-privileged nonwhite women would have difficulty revealing that their experiences are marginalized through the concept of racial patriarchy because their problematizations would seem to be unimportant, “further complications” (Pateman & Mills, 2007, p. 178) of the already non-idealizing, already adequate concept. In sum, asserting that an abstract concept is non-idealizing hinders further discussion on whose experiences are reflected by or abstracted away from this concept, which thereby hinders less-privileged minorities from revealing that their experiences are among those abstracted away.

Therefore, I suggest avoiding the assertion that an abstraction is non-idealizing. Such avoidance could be a good starting point toward a less ideological and more intersectional theory, in that it creates a space for further questions about the given abstraction. I draw this suggestion from Judith Butler's critique of terms such as "universality," "women," and "subject" (Butler, 1990, 1994, 2000). Butler notes the contested character of these terms, which indicates that what it means to be universal and what should be included in the description of women and subject (of, e.g., feminism) have been politically contested. According to Butler, assuming substantive notions of the universal, women, and subject from the start is an authoritarian ruse that shuts down the political contest over these terms and imposes hegemonic notions. By shielding the hegemonic notion of the term "universal" (for example) from further political scrutiny, this authoritarian ruse prevents unanticipated claims from being made under the banner of the universal (Butler, 1994, pp. 154, 158-159). For a similar reason, I refuse to assume from the start that abstract concepts, such as "patriarchy" and "racial patriarchy," are non-idealizing. Such an assumption forecloses further contests and inquiries about the concept, including those about whose experiences are actually being reflected.

I propose, instead, that *resignifiability* of concepts should be protected (henceforth referred to as the resignifiability proposal). Butler argues that the term "universal" (and so on) must be left "permanently open, permanently contested, permanently contingent, in order not to foreclose future claims for inclusion." That is, the term *per se* must be "a site of permanent openness and resignifiability," where unanticipated meanings can appear and resignify the term in ways that have not been traditionally authorized (pp. 159, 165-166).<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, Mills seems to end up hindering resignifiability. When Mills makes statements as if "patriarchy" were always already a non-idealizing abstraction that accurately

---

<sup>25</sup> The terms "resignifiability" and "redefinability" are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation. Chapter 4 will discuss in more detail Butler's postmodern account of universality as a resignifiable/redefinable concept.

mapped the realities of gender oppression, he fails to seriously consider that Third World women's experiences have been abstracted away from this concept, and thus, he hinders this concept from being resignified from the perspectives of Third World women. Likewise, if Mills's new concept of "racial patriarchy" were asserted as a non-idealizing abstraction that accurately reflects the distinctive experiences of nonwhite women, the resignifiability of this concept from the perspectives of less-privileged nonwhite women would be hindered.

When these possibilities of resignification and of further contests are left open, I argue, social theories can better avoid the pitfalls of marginalization. A clear case of this is found in the history of feminist and intersectionality theories. Diverse feminist theories have resignified concepts such as "women," "patriarchy," "feminism," "gender," and "sexist oppression" in different ways, and they have contested ways of resignification as more or less accurate and as better or worse at representing marginalized women's experiences. Early Black feminist critiques and early discussions on intersectionality successfully resignified the concept of "women" from the perspectives of Black women that had been excluded from mainstream, white-dominant feminist scholarship (see Chapter 1, section 1). More recent scholarship in intersectionality, however, points out the need to resignify the concept of "Black women" as well, arguing that the concept has been less attentive to differences between privileged and marginalized Black women. For example, Jennifer Nash writes: "In painting black women ... as wholly oppressed and marginalized, intersectional theory cannot attend to variations within black women's experiences that afford some black women with greater privilege, autonomy, and freedom" (Nash, 2008, p. 12). The message from this academic history is that the continued contests about how to better resignify the concept of (Black) women have not obstructed but actually have helped feminist and intersectionality scholarship progress. In other words, when it is possible for diverse ways of resignifying abstract concepts to emerge from different perspectives and to

challenge each other when some of them exclude less-privileged minority groups, social theory could have less ideological concepts.

I acknowledge, however, that the resignifiability proposal is not without problems. The following objections may be raised:

1. The resignifiability proposal may incur relativism. The suggestion that the concept “women” (for example) must be a permanently open site seems to entail that *any* new meanings that appear in this site, or *any* traditionally undeployed ways of signifying the concept, are acceptable. Lacking criteria to distinguish between better and worse ways of resignification, this process would open the door to relativism.
2. The resignifiability proposal may disregard actual, material realities in which concepts are situated. For instance, it is an actual fact that there is a substantial number of people who identify as “women” and they experience structural injustice that may be referred to as “patriarchy” (see Chapter 1, section 2). The proposal that “women,” “patriarchy,” and so on can always have new meanings—even meanings that have little to do with these actualities of women’s lives—fails to consider that identity and oppression are not mere terms, but something experienced by real people in the material conditions of current society.
3. Relatedly, this proposal may undermine anti-oppression solidarity and resistance. If concepts like “women” and “patriarchy” are constantly resignifiable, wouldn’t it mean that women have nothing stable in common? And if there is no commonality among women in terms of their identity or experience of oppression, what would be the ground for feminist solidarity, if any?



These objections indicate that the resignifiability proposal needs some modification. My position is as follows: I argue that protecting resignifiability is a better way to do social theory than asserting that a concept does not idealize; and yet I do not believe that *merely* opening the concept to resignifiability is enough. In the next and final chapter of the dissertation, I will articulate my main model, which incorporates insights from the Butlerian resignifiability proposal while resolving its problems pointed out by the above objections. Specifically, the first objection indicates that we need some criteria for how the concept “women” (and so on) *should* be resignified, not only saying that it *can* be resignified. The second and third objections hint at what such criteria might be: “women” should be resignified in a way that foregrounds (rather than disregards) the actualities of women’s lives and oppression, and that can empower (rather than undermines) solidarity and resistance. Based on these considerations, the following chapter elaborates what I refer to as the “situated redefinition” model, according to which “women” should be always open to being resignified—not in any way, but in a way that allows it to better serve liberatory goals born out of the realities of structural oppression.

## Chapter 4

### Toward a New Conception of Women: Identity Politics, Intersectional Oppression, and “Situated Redefinition” of Identity

The purpose of this chapter is to propose an understanding of identity that could enable feminist identity politics that challenge, rather than reproduce, intersectional oppressions. Identity politics (of, e.g., “women”) have been criticized for excluding and marginalizing multiply oppressed subjects (e.g., queers, women of color). Analyzing feminist critiques of identity politics, I point out that these critiques do not actually reject the entire practice of identity politics, but only those that invoke a preconstructed, apolitical, and ahistorical conception of identity. In contrast to such a conception, I develop the “situated redefinition” model of identity, which reformulates identity as a concept that is continually redefinable according to political goals rooted in the actual lives of the multiply oppressed. By discussing two cases in which the identity “women” is redefined in its relation with the experience-rooted goals of trans people, I show how this new model could contribute to a more inclusive and intersectionality-sensitive identity politics.

#### **1. Identity Politics: Exclusionary Practice or Resistance Strategy?**

Identity politics, especially those appealing to a shared gender identity (e.g., women) or to a shared racial/ethnic identity (e.g., Blacks, Asians, Latinx), have long been criticized in feminist scholarship for excluding those who face multiple axes of oppression, such as women of color and queers of color. For example, Kimberle Crenshaw’s groundbreaking work on

intersectionality illustrates how Black women are marginalized from both the feminist identity politics of “women” and the antiracist identity politics of “Blacks.” As the identity of women is defined in terms of the experiences of race-privileged women (i.e., white women) and the identity of Blacks is defined in terms of those of sex-privileged Blacks (i.e., Black men), Black women’s experiences of intersecting sexism and racism are erased by both identity politics (Crenshaw, 1989, pp. 149-151, 1991, pp. 1266-1273). In a similar vein, intersectionality scholars have also draw attention to the exclusion of queers of color. For instance, Latino gay men are relegated to the margins of both the “Latino” identity which is constituted as heterosexual men and the “gay” identity which is constituted as white (Carbado, 2013; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). In short, the key point of intersectional critiques of identity politics is that the purportedly “shared” oppressed-group identity is in fact “constructed using an essentialist logic that abstracts the experiences of relatively privileged members of oppressed groups and, falsely universalizing them, renders them representative of all members of the groups in question” (Carastathis, 2013, p. 961). Using this essentialist/falsely-universalizing identity as the basis of political organizing, they argue, identity politics reproduce rather than challenge the intersectional oppression and exclusion of the multiply oppressed.<sup>26</sup>

As this perspective of intersectionality has become widespread, there is a tendency in feminist scholarship to avoid the appeal to the shared identity of “women.” Some critics, as will be discussed in the next section, even reject any appeal to identity. Identities such as “women,” they claim, have been almost always associated with false universalization and marginalization,

---

<sup>26</sup> I use the terms “multiply oppressed” and “marginalized” interchangeably to refer to groups or individuals, who experience interlocking patterns of multiple forms of oppression and, as María Lugones puts it, whose identities cannot be fragmented into “pure” gender, racial, and other categories (see Chapter 1, section 1). According to Lugones, multiply oppressed and marginalized members are “thick” with respect to their constituent group identities, unlike dominant group members who are “transparent” to their groups. Lugones writes: “White women are transparent as women; black men are transparent as black. [As thick,] black women are erased and fighting against erasure” (Lugones, 2003, pp. 139-141).

why don't we do politics without identities? Against this tendency, I maintain that identity politics can be implemented in the service of intersectional feminism. In Chapters 1 and 2 of the dissertation, I have developed the account of intersectional feminism as a feminism that (i) challenges marginalization within feminism, (ii) recognizes differences among women, including power differences between more-privileged and less-privileged groups of women, and (iii) foregrounds the actual lived experiences of the multiply oppressed. I argue that the task for feminist theory is to rethink what identity is so that we can do an identity politics befitting of these insights of intersectional feminism, instead of removing the language of shared identity from politics altogether.

To make this argument, it is necessary first to clarify what "identity politics" is. Identity politics can broadly be defined as a type of politics that makes a connection between at least three kinds of sharedness: shared oppressed-group *identity*, shared *experience* of oppression, and shared *resistance* to oppression. I will focus primarily on feminist identity politics of "women," which can be defined as a politics that builds a link between the ideas that we are "women" and we share this identity "women"; that we share some experiences in current sexist social arrangements; and that we can build solidarity to resist sexism. What must be noted here is the sharedness does not mean the sameness, and the link drawn between sharednesses is not necessarily automatic. As I will analyze in the following section, feminist critics of identity politics often interpret the identity politics of women to contend that, because we are women, we have the same experience of oppression and we automatically attain feminist solidarity. Although they are right in criticizing this type of identity politics, not all identity politics are like this. What is at the core of identity politics is the idea that we can appeal to a shared identity in order to invoke a shared commitment to liberatory politics, because *identity does actually matter in our experiences of oppression, and thus in our political efforts to dismantle oppression.*

This idea explains why we should not remove the language of shared identities from politics completely. Our being “women,” “Blacks,” “Black women,” and so on is relevant to our “fleshy, material existence” in a sexist/racist society (Alcoff, 2006, p. 147). Consider, to name just a few examples, sexual violence against women, police violence against Black people, and the anti-Semitic attack on Jews at a Pittsburgh synagogue last year. Iris Marion Young claims that these types of violence are systemic phenomena of oppression (as against mere individual wrongs) because they are “directed at members of a group simply because they are members of that group.” Even when they are not directly victimized, members of oppressed groups share “the daily knowledge ... that they are liable to violation, solely on account of their group identity” (Young, 1990, p. 62, emphasis omitted). For instance, Black people in the US know that they have, *by being Black*, an extra reason to fear when stopped by police. As Chapter 1 described, women in South Korea know that they are, *by being women*, not safe in public bathrooms. As “spycam porn” has become a national epidemic, Korean women live with this daily knowledge that they might be secretly videotaped by cameras hidden in the wall of women’s bathroom. In this way, our everyday lives under structural oppression cannot be isolated from our identities. Then, mobilizing around these identities is not inherently problematic, but can be a useful strategy of resistance and survival, as exemplified Black Lives Matter, Women’s Marches, and #MeToo.

“The Combahee River Collective Statement” (1977), one of the first texts that used the term identity politics, is another graphic illustration of the deployment of identity politics as a resistance strategy. Proposing Black women’s identity politics, members of the Combahee River Collective note: “We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced

simultaneously. ... This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression" (Combahee River Collective, 2000 [1977], p. 267). The members use the concept of identity politics to claim that (1) their being "Black women" is significant in their lives, where they experience racial, class, and sexual oppression simultaneously, and therefore, (2) this identity of "Black women" is also significant in their liberatory politics to dismantle the racial-class-sexual oppression and to empower themselves. In this regard, the point of the identity politics of "*x*" (e.g., "Black women," "Blacks," "women") is that we are organizing *as x* so as to resist oppression that we are experiencing *by virtue of being x*.

Considering that identity politics have been a vital strategy for resistance, survival, and empowerment, it is more fruitful to reformulate the concept of identity used in identity politics than to give up identity politics entirely. The question is, then, how to reformulate identity. How should we reconceptualize identity in order to keep using identity politics for liberatory purposes while avoiding the exclusionary type of identity politics? It is especially pressing for feminist theorists to reformulate the identity "women," such that we can organize as "women" for the feminist purpose of ending sexism which we experience as "women," and that we can do this organizing of "women" not in a way that serves only privileged women's interests but in a way that challenges the intersectional oppression and marginalization of queers, women of color, and so on. The purpose of this chapter is to propose such a new conception of women's identity. To this end, I will start by analyzing feminist critiques of identity politics for being exclusionary (section 2). Building on this analysis, I will articulate a new conception of identity, which I refer to as the "situated redefinition" model (section 3).

## 2. Feminist Critiques of Identity Politics

In this section, I explore four representative feminist texts that criticize identity politics for being exclusionary and suggest alternatives to identity politics. I argue that these critiques do not actually reject the entire practice of identity politics, but only certain versions of identity politics that rely on apolitical, ahistorical, and preconstructed conceptions of identity.

### *2.1. Apolitical vs. Political Conceptions of Identity*

One of the most explicit rejections of feminist identity politics is made by Susan Hekman. Hekman claims that identity politics reproduce the modernist/liberal politics' mechanism for exclusion. Ostensibly, all people could participate in the modernist/liberal politics on an equal footing, since the subject of this politics, i.e., "citizen," was told to be the Enlightenment tradition's independent, disembodied, and raceless/genderless/classless subject. However, in reality, the particular identity of white male property owners was converted into that of universal "citizen"; and as a result, women, people of color, and poor people were relegated as the Other of the political realm (Hekman, 2000, pp. 291, 303). Hekman contends that feminist identity politics of "woman" also conform to this exclusionary logic: they smuggle the particular identity of privileged women (e.g., white middle-class heterosexual women) into the universal category "woman," and marginalize other women by making this falsely universalized category a prerequisite for participation in feminist politics (pp. 302-303).

Based on this critical analysis, Hekman advocates removing the language of identity entirely from the sphere of feminist politics. As an alternative, she suggests a politics of identification, i.e., "a politics in which political actors identify with particular political causes and mobilize to achieve particular goals ... The political conclusion for feminism must be a

non-identity politics that defines politics in terms of pragmatic political action and accomplishing concrete political goals.” In short, feminist politics should be about identification with political goals, not about identities of women (pp. 303-304).

I agree that concrete political goals should be valued in feminist politics. Nevertheless, the focus on political goals does not involve the removal of identity from politics. I argue that undergirding Hekman’s criticism is an *apolitical* conception of identity, which views identities as mutually exclusive with political goals. When Hekman defines identity politics as “the organization of political movements around specific identities ... *instead of* around political ideology or particular political issues” and claims that “feminists should focus on concrete political goals rather than the identity of the political actors pursuing these goals” (p. 305, emphasis added), she assumes that feminists cannot focus on the identity and the political goal at the same time. Identity politics is conceptualized as something incompatible with, or precluding political actors from, focusing on political goals. Conversely, this indicates that if identity is reconceptualized as a *political* concept—something defined in terms of, thus reflecting, political goals—such that we could practice identity politics that are simultaneously politics of identification, Hekman would not reject them.

This choosing of goal-based politics over identity-based politics has been a trend in feminist theory in recent years. As Cressida Heyes notes, many feminists have been quick to dismiss identity politics for fear of essentialism and exclusion, and to endorse goal-based politics as a less essentialist form of political organizing (Heyes, 2000, pp. 53, 60). Amy Allen’s essay on feminist solidarity is a graphic illustration of this trend. Allen argues that we need to revisit the concept of solidarity in such a way that “it can account for the power that feminists wield when we act in concert, and yet do so in a way that avoids the problem of exclusion that plagues identity politics” (Allen, 1999, p. 104). Allen’s reformulated notion is that solidarity is



something emerging out of a shared goal. What is important here is that she contrasts this notion with something emerging out of a shared identity. Solidarity is, according to Allen, achieved “not by a shared identity but by the mutual promises of distinct individuals to work together for the attainment of a common political goal” (p. 109): we should understand solidarity as collective power growing out of action in concert for “the agreed-upon end of challenging, subverting, and, ultimately, overturning a system of domination,” and no longer as an automatic sisterhood resulting from the sharing of identity (p. 127).

Underlying Allen’s discussion is the apolitical conception of identity. Although Allen notes that it is a “false antithesis” that we have to choose between uncritically accepting the falsely universalized identity and refusing to talk about identity altogether (p. 104), it seems that she still assumes a binary when reformulating solidarity. Allen writes, like Hekman, as if we have only two incompatible bases for feminist solidarity: either the political goal of liberation, which we identify with and act together to realize, or the apolitical identity “women,” which incurs the exclusionary sisterhood.

There is, however, a third option: the identity “women” constituted *through*, not opposed to, our identification with political goals. This understanding of identity is suggested by Allison Weir. Weir distinguishes two dimensions of identity—what she calls “identity as category” and “identity as identification-with”—and notes that feminist literature’s overemphasis on the former has obscured the latter (Weir, 2013, p. 62). According to Weir, identity as category does not provide satisfactory answers to questions regarding women’s identity, such as: What constitutes us as women? What does it mean that, if at all, we share the identity as women and organize around this identity? For, women in very different situations (e.g., “the American career woman needing access to child care and the immigrant nanny who is denied access to her own children and the mother struggling to feed and shelter her family on the streets of Manila”) do not feel

solidarity just because they belong to the same *category*. This does not, however, mean that women have nothing in common. We can still say that women have something in common—some shared interests around issues like child care. The point is that women’s shared interests are not simply given as an effect of belonging to the same category, but constructed through our *identification with* feminist goals and orientation toward feminist solidarity. For example, we have to learn that “if the issue of child care is something we share, it is shared in very different ways ... and we are related through global care chains in which some of us must take responsibility for the exploitation and oppression of others.” This learning is possible only when we identify with social justice ideals that we identify as feminist, identify with each other, and in so doing, identify with ourselves as a resistant/feminist “we.” In brief, the understanding that diverse groups of women share a position as “women” is reached only through these identifications-with (pp. 66-68).

Thus, Weir shows that the identity “women” can be conceived as a political concept, not necessarily as an apolitical concept that Hekman and Allen are worried about: in that women in disparate life situations could constitute themselves as “women” through identifying with social justice/feminist goals, identification with these goals is not incompatible with, but is itself an important aspect of, constructing an identity “women.” In section 3 of this chapter, I will develop a model of identity that incorporates this conception of identity as a political concept.

## *2.2. Ahistorical vs. Historical Conceptions of Identity*

“Coalition politics” is a type of politics that many feminists now regard as a proper alternative to identity politics. Bernice Johnson Reagon’s essay, which is based on her presentation at a Women’s Music Festival in 1981, is one of the first texts that popularized the term coalition politics. Reagon warns against the exclusionary identity politics that use the word

“women” as a code that keeps “our” barred room safe from those who are different from “us.”

Instead of looking for a “home,” which is internally homogenous and offers a comfortable feeling, feminist politics should seek a coalition among heterogeneous women, which would bring about a feeling of strain. Reagon notes:

Now if we are in the same women from the same people in this barred room, we never notice it ... until somebody walks into the room who happens to be a woman but really is also somebody else. And then comes out who we really are. And at that point you are not a woman. You are Black or you are Chicana or you are Disabled or you are Racist or you are White. ... Today wherever women gather together it is not necessarily nurturing. It is coalition building. And if you feel strain, you may be doing some good work (Reagon, 2000 [1983], pp. 348-349).

For Reagon, the identity politics of women is a politics that ignores all these differences among women but just emphasizes the (false) commonality of women, insisting that “there is some common experience that comes just cause you’re women. And they’re throwing all these festivals and these concerts happen” (p. 347). In other words, Reagon interprets identity politics as a kind of politics that draws an *automatic* link between identity, experience, and resistance: our being women (or sharing the identity “women”) automatically leads to our having common experience, which, again, automatically leads to our common commitment to feminist ends.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty presents a similar understanding of identity politics. In a chapter in her collection of essays, *Feminism without Borders*, Mohanty develops her reading of Reagon to criticize the narrow identity politics and to advocate coalition politics. In particular, she charges identity politics with being what she calls the “politics of experience,” whose logic is that:

The politics of being “woman” or “lesbian” are deduced from the experience of being woman or lesbian. Being female is thus seen as naturally related to being feminist, where the experience of being female transforms us into feminists through osmosis. ... What binds women together is an ahistorical notion of the sameness of their oppression and, consequently, the sameness of their struggles ... we are all oppressed and hence we all resist (Mohanty, 2003, pp. 109, 112).

So, for Mohanty, identity politics is a type of politics that conflates three distinct factors of politics, i.e., being female/woman, having the same experience of oppression, and having the same feminist struggle. It is a politics assuming an automatic sisterhood: our being women necessarily indicates that we all have the same experience of oppression, and thus, it brings us a necessary feminist unity to fight against such oppression.

I argue that, in Reagon and Mohanty's critiques, the identity "women" is conceptualized as an *ahistorical* concept, in that the creation of this identity has nothing or little to do with women's lives in concrete historical contexts. This is so because, in Reagon and Mohanty's interpretation of identity politics as automatic sisterhood, feminist unity is pre-given. Insofar as the link between the sharing of identity, experience, and resistance is always already there, we do not need to take additional effort to build a link between them: we attain feminist solidarity just because we are "women." This indicates that "women" is already constituted as a united group identity, without having to attend to what kind of specific experiences we have in the current context of oppression, what kind of work we do in order to build solidarity across our differences and similarities. Since the identity of "women" is constituted "prior to [women's] entry into the arena of social relations" and "concrete historical and political praxis" (Mohanty, 1988, pp. 67-68), it is not affected by what women are actually experiencing in particular socio-historical contexts or systems.

Mohanty and Reagon are right in rejecting the ahistorical conception of identity (and the identity politics based thereupon). However, I want to point out that this is not the only conception available. Identity can be reformulated as a *historical* concept, one that is rooted in our actual lives in historically specific systems of oppression, and can be utilized for the liberatory purpose of undermining this oppression.

In fact, it is Mohanty herself who envisions such historical conception of identity. In another essay in *Feminism without Borders*, Mohanty claims that Third World women workers can forge political solidarity across racial and national boundaries, based on their shared identity as “Third World women.” She writes: “the commonalities of experiences, histories, and *identity* [can serve] as the basis for solidarity and in organizing Third World women transnationally” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 167, emphasis added). A number of critics charge Mohanty with contradicting her own argument against identity politics (Gunnarsson, 2011, p. 28; Scholz, 2008, p. 38). In contrast, I maintain that Mohanty’s claims are cohesive, since her criticism is actually targeted at the specific conception of identity as an apolitical concept, whereas in this essay, she argues for political organizing around the identity “Third World women” conceptualized as a historical identity.

To what extent, then, is “Third World women” a historical identity? To address this issue, it is important to take a look at the examples discussed by Mohanty. Mohanty explores three case studies of poor women of color’s daily lives as workers: the lives of women homeworkers in the lacemaking industry in India, Asian immigrant women workers in electronics factories in the Silicon Valley, and Black women workers in family businesses in Britain. In each of these cases, women’s work is regarded socially and ideologically as something that is not (real) work—e.g., “leisure time activity,” “supplementary activity for women whose main tasks were mothering and housework,” or “a ‘natural extension’ of their familial duties”—and their identity as workers is replaced by their identity as housewives, mothers, or wives. According to Mohanty, there are multiple dimensions of stereotype that construct this definition of women’s work as “non-work” and women as “non-workers.” Specifically, sexist (women as housewives who are dependent on male laborers/breadwinners), heterosexist (women defined in relation to heterosexual marriage and family), and racist (e.g., Asian women as more suited to “tedious” work in the electronics

factory in the Silicon Valley) ideologies operate together to incorporate these women into global capitalist economy in a way that defines them as nonworkers and thereby exploits their cheap labor (Mohanty, 2003, pp. 145-160). It is on the basis of this analysis that Mohanty concludes that the poor women of color workers can be bound together as “Third World women” across geographical and cultural boundaries. “Third World women” are a group that shares a similar social location in the structure of oppression at this particular historical moment, i.e., the intersecting structure of sexism, heterosexism, racism, and class exploitation (pp. 148-149, 158-159).

Thus, when Mohanty speaks about the shared identity of “Third World women,” it is not an ahistorical identity constituted *regardless of*, or *prior to*, the women’s actual lives at this historical juncture. One cannot know if the three groups of women discussed above (i.e., women workers of different races, nations, and industries) have an identity in common, until one looks into their actual lives that indicate the ideological commonalities of their exploitation (pp. 159-161). That is, *only when* attending to the concrete experiences of the women of color workers, these women can be constituted as “Third World women” who share a similar social positioning in today’s system of intersecting gender, race, class, and sexuality oppressions. In sum, “Third World women” is a historical identity, since these women’s actual experiences in the historically-specific system of oppressions are central to the formation of this identity. Extending this insight, the final section of this chapter will develop a historical conception of the identity “women” as well, which is “grounded in the concrete realities of women’s lives” (p. 144).

### *2.3. Identity-as-Finished-Product vs. Identity-in-Progress*

As I have discussed thus far, Reagon and Mohanty’s critiques are directed at the ahistorical identity “women,” which is constructed already as a unified group irrespective of

women's actual lives. The ahistorical identity can also be called the notion of identity as a *finished product*, in that the identity's construction is finished prior to our concrete experience and praxis. According to this notion, the identity of "women" is just given and assigned to us, as if it were a finished product. Because the identity "women" is already determined to provide automatic sisterhood, how we actually engage with this identity—e.g., how we live as "women," experience injustice as "women," and work to create solidarity as "women" with women who are in very different situations—could not make any significant change to this identity. Insofar as "there is some common experience that comes just cause you're women" (Reagon, 2000 [1983], p. 347), what we can do with this preconstructed/predetermined identity "women" is just taking it, rather than changing or (re)creating what it means to be "women."

Again, Reagon and Mohanty are right in rejecting this specific notion of identity-as-finished-product. Yet, not all versions of identity politics insist "the sister-feeling that automatically results from the sharing of a pre-given, fixed, and hence, repressive, identity" (Allen, 1999, p. 104). Instead, we can do another type of identity politics with what I refer to as *identity-in-progress*: identity that is in the constant process of being constructed and recreated. For example, doing women of color's identity politics does not mean that there is a pre-given, fixed "women of color" identity and we attain automatic sisterhood simply by taking this identity-as-finished-product. Rather, it means that we actively participate in and become committed to an ongoing process of creating and producing a collective identity of "women of color."

Zakiya Luna's research of a women of color organization (SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective) exemplifies this point. Since there exist both commonalities and differences between women of color, the identity politics of women of color does not operate by emphasizing either commonalities or differences. Many women of color share some "experience

of having been excluded from various ‘tables’ in previous feminist organizing,” so the focus on this common distinction from non-women of color works toward building an alliance among women of color (Luna, 2016, p. 778). However, the emphasis on commonality alone does not enable the identity politics of women of color, since intragroup differences along the axes of oppression besides race and gender (e.g., immigration status, dis/ability) also place “very real material barriers” (p. 785). Therefore, in order to create a collective identity of “women of color” and organize around this identity, members need to continually balance their commonalities and differences: emphasizing the shared experience but not so much that it ignores other axes of oppression, and attending to questions about differences but not so much that they could never take any collective political action fearing marginalization. In this respect, Luna claims that constructing the identity and alliance of “women of color” is “an iterative, never-ending process.” The “women of color” identity that “truly” represents all its members cannot be gained once and for all, but we are in the process of continually creating this identity by negotiating between commonalities and differences (pp. 785-787).

What I want to highlight is that this recognition that the identity of “women of color” is always in the process of construction does not hinder us from organizing as “women of color.” On the contrary, we can still appeal to our shared identity as “women of color” *at the same time* that we participate in the ongoing process of creating this identity. This shows that the notion of identity-as-finished-product is not a prerequisite for identity politics. If we utilize a more flexible concept of identity whose construction is always in progress, just like this “women of color” identity that is continually being produced, critics who fear the preconstructed/automatic sisterhood (such as Allen, Reagon, and Mohanty) would not need to reject this type of identity politics-in-progress.



### 3. A New Conception of Identity: Situated Redefinition Model

#### 3.1. Model and Cases

Feminist critiques of identity politics examined in the previous section have shown the problem of understanding identity as a preconstructed, apolitical, and ahistorical concept. In this regard, what the critiques actually suggest is that we need to develop a new conception of identity as an (1) in-progress, (2) political, and (3) historical concept. Building onto this idea, I propose reformulating identity as a concept that is (1) continually redefinable (2) according to political goals<sup>27</sup> (3) rooted in the actual lives of the multiply oppressed. More specifically, the conception that I endorse is as follows:

#### **The situated redefinition model of identity (SR)**

Identity should be always open to being redefined in a way that it could better serve political goals grounded in the actual, daily lives of the marginalized.

That is, identity should be always open to new meanings and provisional definitions that the marginalized would find more useful to achieve political goals, which grow out of their concrete experiences in the current intersecting structures of oppression.

I call it the “situated redefinition” model (hereafter SR) to emphasize that identity must be open to constant *redefinition*, and such redefinition must be socio-historically *situated* in the actualities of oppression. My thesis is that, when identity is reconceptualized according to this

---

<sup>27</sup> By using the term “political goals,” I refer to “social justice goals” as explained by Sally Scholz, i.e., the ends of “liberation of the oppressed, cessation of injustice, or protection against social vulnerabilities; it simultaneously fosters individual self-determination, empowerment, cooperative action, collective vision, and social criticism among those in solidarity” (Scholz, 2008, p. 58). That being said, when the situated redefinition model argues for identity’s redefinition according to political goals, it does not embrace goals against social justice, for instance, the ends of perpetuating oppression and reinforcing privilege.

model, it could enable identity politics that do not perpetuate but resist intersectional oppressions. In particular, I argue that this model provides a way to subvert the essentialist notion of “women” without abandoning feminist-political deployments of “women” altogether. SR could help us keep appealing to our shared identity as “women” (in order to end sexist oppression that we are experiencing by virtue of being “women”), while simultaneously challenging the exclusion of multiply oppressed women and others (such as women of color, queer people, working-class women, women with disabilities, and/or women in the global South).

To illustrate this point, I compare two cases in which the identity “women” is redefined in its relation with the experience-rooted goals of trans people:

*Case A.* Trans people are frequently misgendered in their daily lives: the terminology that they use to describe their gender identities is often ignored, and they are misperceived as the gender assigned at birth. A political goal, which is grounded in these concrete realities of trans people’s lives, would entail a challenge to this type of misgendering and the insistence on respect for their own gender identifications. According to SR, then, the identity “women” would be redefined as a concept that *includes trans women, while not including trans men*. The reasoning proceeds as follows: SR argues for the identity’s redefinition according to social justice goals—goals rooted in everyday experiences of structural injustice. The very goal relevant here is to respect trans women’s own gender identification as “women” and trans men as “men,” and to undermine the violent, cisgenderist categorization of trans men as “women” and of trans women as “men.” Thus, the way of redefining “women” that would better serve this goal would be the one that does not include trans men.

*Case B.* There is, however, a case in which a collective identity “women” might have to provisionally include trans men as well. Here I explore a “women-only” Reclaim the Night march discussed by Katherine Jenkins. Reclaim the Night is a protest against violence targeted at women, especially sexual violence. Having been involved in organizing the march, Jenkins explains that the organizing committee wanted to make the march *women-only*:

due to the symbolic value of conspicuously violating the social norm that a woman ought to be accompanied by a man when walking after dark—a norm that substantially limits women’s freedom and is often invoked in the context of victim blaming. But who counts as a woman for this purpose? In other words, what did we really mean when we said that we wanted the march to be ‘women-only’? (Jenkins, 2016, p. 419)

This quote poses some important questions on identity politics: Who can and should be the members of this organized group of “women”? How should the identity “women” be defined, in order to effectively serve the goal of this particular instance of organizing as “women” (i.e., protesting against and ending gender-based violence), while not illegitimately excluding those who ought to be included?

According to Jenkins, the organizing committee agreed that the identity of “women” should embrace (1) all self-defining women, including trans women.<sup>28</sup> But they also recognized that (2) “there might be some people who did not identify as women but who were, in a very real sense, targets of the kind of violence and threat of violence against which [their] protest was directed,” such as trans men who were often misperceived as female and nonbinary people who had been assigned female at birth. In the end, the committee decided to open the march to both groups (1) and (2). That is, “women” for this women-only march was defined to include trans men as well as trans women (pp. 419-420).

---

<sup>28</sup> Recently, transphobic feminists, such as “trans-exclusive radical feminists” (TERFs), have insisted on excluding trans women from women’s spaces, e.g., women’s music festivals (for a useful critical analysis of this transphobic position, see Bettcher (2017)). By contrast, when the organizers of the Reclaim the Night march wanted to make the march “women-only,” according to Jenkins, “there was unanimous agreement that the sense of ‘woman’ [they] had in mind included all trans women. [They] decided to use the term ‘self-defining women’ to highlight explicitly that this was the case” (p. 419).

The committee's decision seems to reflect a similar idea with SR. Trans men are located in the overlapping systems of cisgenderism and sexism, which is manifested in their day-to-day experience of being misgendered as women and thereby targeted for violence against women. In response to this lived experience of intersecting oppressions, trans men might build and commit to a political goal of ending violence. Then, according to SR, the identity "women" would be redefined as a concept *including trans men (as well as trans women)*, or more precisely, as an organized group in which trans men could "legitimately expect to be included" (p. 420). It would better aid trans men in achieving the goal of ending violence when they could, if they would like to do so, join the women-only protest against violence, than when they could not.

With regard to Case B, two important questions could be raised: Does my model of identity suggest that *trans men* must, for some purposes, count as "women"? Does it suggest that *cis men* can also count as "women" when they are committed to the same goal?<sup>29</sup> It seems that both questions are based on the misinterpretation of SR as a (merely) goal-based redefinition model. By addressing to what extent my answer to both questions is "no," I will clarify and provide a more detailed account of SR. It is true that SR argues for identity's redefinition according to political goals, but at the core of SR is the idea that these goals are *rooted in experiences of oppression*.

First, SR by no means claims that trans men must deny their gender identification and be "women" in order to challenge violence. (This is a claim that reproduces the misgendering of trans people). It is rather to argue that, when trans men find the women-only march useful for their resistance, it is unfair to exclude them. To be sure, the women-only march is not the only method that trans men could choose to protest against violence, and there are other resistance strategies such as joining trans movements. Yet, some trans men might consider this march to be

---

<sup>29</sup> These are the two main questions that were asked by some conference attendees when I presented earlier versions of this chapter.

another good strategy of resistance. When this is the case, I argue that the definition of “women” used for the women-only march should be able to be flexibly adjusted so that trans men could also legitimately join this protest which they find useful, instead of remaining as a fixed category that denotes only (1) cis women (and trans women) and does not allow (2) trans men (and nonbinary people) to join. Trans men should also be able to, like cis women, legitimately expect to join the women-only protest, not simply because the two groups share the goal of ending violence, but rather because this goal is rooted in their similar experiences of systemic oppression. Both trans men and cis women, who are willing to participate in the Reclaim the Night march, do not come to commit to this anti-violence goal for no reason. Instead, their political commitment arises in response to their very experience of being susceptible to women-targeted violence.<sup>30</sup> Even when violence is not directly inflicted, cis women and trans men share the daily knowledge that they could be targets of this kind of violence just because they are perceived as “women” (Young, 1990, p. 62). Insofar as both groups share this everyday mode of being in the sexist society and the anti-violence goal growing out of this experience, it is unfair that only one group (cis women) could participate in the women-only protest while the other group (trans men) could not.

This may lead to the second question: If cis men also share the anti-violence goal, does this mean that they fall under the category of “women” as well? Although I have no opposition to cis men’s participation in feminist movements (echoing bell hooks’s (2000) point that feminism is anti-sexist, not anti-male), I do not think—and SR does not suggest—that cis men can count as “women” who can join the specifically women-only march. My response is twofold. First, nowhere in the formulation of SR is suggested that all those who *share* or *commit* to the

---

<sup>30</sup> This is not to say that the experience of oppression necessarily leads to the anti-oppression goal. What I argue here is that when an oppressed subject has a heightened consciousness about their oppression and gets committed to the anti-oppression goal, their commitment is closely related to their own experience of oppression.

same goal fall under the same identity. SR argues that identity's meaning should be changeable in a way that allows it to *better realize* the goal. Moreover, according to SR, the new meaning of an identity should be something that better serves the goal which is grounded in the actual lives of the marginalized. As discussed above, when cis women, trans people, and nonbinary people assigned female at birth come to have a heightened political awareness and identify with the goal of ending violence, this goal does not come from nowhere but is born out of their lived experience of being liable to violence. Then, the question that SR asks is what new definition of "women" would better serve this *experience-rooted* goal of ending violence. Does redefining "women" as a concept that also includes cis men (so that cis men can legitimately expect their space in the women-only march) aid in ending the kind of violence that cis women, trans people, and nonbinary people are susceptible to? Would such a new definition be useful to symbolically violate the social norm that a woman should be accompanied by a man when walking at night and to reclaim the night? Since the answer would be "no," there is no reason to believe that SR would lead to the cis-men-inclusive definition of "women."

### *3.2. The Redefinability of Identity*

Having discussed how SR might work in practice, I will now take a closer look at how SR could lead to identity politics that challenge intragroup marginalization. How does SR enable us to continue utilizing the identity politics of "women" as a strategy of resistance, and also to destabilize the falsely universalized definition of "women" that captures only privileged women's experiences? I examine this question through two steps: after discussing why it is helpful to understand identity as a "redefinable" concept, I will refine this concept of redefinability into "situated" redefinability.

I use the term “redefinability” as a synonym for Judith Butler’s notion of “resignifiability.” As I have discussed in Chapter 3 of the dissertation, Butler develops her postmodern feminist account that concepts such as “universality,” “gender,” and the “subject” of feminism must be left resignifiable (Butler, 1990, 1994, 2000). I particularly focus on her discussion of universality as a resignifiable concept.

Butler argues, along with other feminist and decolonial critics, that the “universal” that Western traditions of universalist philosophy have attempted to establish is in fact a disguised form of ethnocentric/imperialistic biases of Western society. What is particularly problematic is that, by disguising itself as “universal” normativity to which different cultures could recourse when they clash, ethnocentrism places itself in the position beyond power. That is, the culturally imperialistic content of universality frees itself from political contest over the content of universality, by authorizing itself as the meta-political foundation for negotiating power relations. In sum, Butler is critical of the attempt to assign a substantive content to universality from the outset, since it is a ruse to smuggle a hegemonic notion and to protect it from additional political scrutiny, and thereby to protect it from the possibility that other claims could be made under the name of the universal (Butler, 1994, pp. 157-159). It is for this reason that Butler maintains that “the term ‘universality’ would have to be left permanently open, permanently contested, permanently contingent, in order not to foreclose in advance future claims for inclusion” (p. 159). Butler suggests questioning the authorized way of signifying the term universal and opening this term to the possibility of being signified in a way that has yet to be authorized. The term universal itself should become “a site of permanent openness and resignifiability,” where unanticipated and unauthorized definitions of the universal could come up and denaturalize the hegemonic use of the term (pp. 165-166).

In line with Butler's argument, I advocate conceptualizing identity as *continually redefinable*. The criticism of exclusionary identity politics could be rephrased as the fear that political mobilization around identities might naturalize and perpetuate their current hegemonic definitions. Then, if identities are open to continual changes and updates with non-hegemonic definitions, it would be possible to organize around a common oppressed-group identity while more effectively avoiding the exclusion. For instance, for those who took for granted the dominant cisgenderist definition of the identity "women," a claim for the inclusion of trans women in the identity would be an unauthorized application of the term "women" (Case A). On the other hand, even for those who accept this "trans-inclusive" definition of women, another definition in the case of Reclaim the Night march—i.e., "women" as an organized group including trans men as well—might be a relatively new, unanticipated meaning of the term (Case B). Both of these unanticipated redefinitions are helpful, if not necessary, in ensuring that the feminist identity politics of "women" challenge the marginalization of trans people and become more substantially trans-inclusive.

The redefinability of identities can be understood as a contrast to the "add-and-stir" approach. Simply adding and stirring trans people (or women of color or queers or working-class women) to the current category of "women" (read: white, cis, heterosexual, middle-class, Western, able-bodied women), with no real change of this dominant meaning that has marginalized multiply-oppressed women and others, is tokenistic inclusion. More substantial inclusion of the multiply oppressed involves a significant or even radical rethinking of what it means to be "women." That is, trans people and other multiply-oppressed women should be able to redefine the meaning of being "women" in ways that cisgenderist/heterosexist/racist/classist hegemonies have not authorized. The understanding of identity as a continually redefinable



concept allows identity to be an open space, wherein such previously-unauthorized meanings could always appear and undermine the hegemonic meaning.

### *3.3. The Situated Redefinability of Identity*

Therefore, I believe that the Butlerian notion of redefinability has a liberatory potential to facilitate a more inclusive identity politics. Yet I do not argue that the notion of redefinability *alone* is sufficient to do so. Identities such as “women,” “Jews,” “Latinx,” and “Black women” are not only terms that can be redefined but also social phenomena that are experienced by actual people in racist and sexist social structures. Conceptualizing identity solely as a redefinable concept (which I call the *mere* redefinition model of identity) runs the risk of drawing attention away from these actualities of oppression in which identity is lived, since it gives a false impression that identity is just a word that can be redefined as one pleases.

My problematization of the mere redefinition model is in line with one of the most prominent critiques of Butler’s postmodernist feminism. Critics have argued that Butler’s project to “resignify” terms such as universality, gender, subject, and so on is distanced from the material realities of women’s lives (K. Davis, 2008, p. 74). For example, in their introduction to the edited book *Materialist Feminism*, Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham note that materialist feminism refuses postmodern feminism’s preoccupation with changing words or discourses, since the exclusive focus on the purely discursive/terminological matter of changing the word’s meaning has ignored “the material reality of capitalism’s class system in women’s lives” (Hennessy & Ingraham, 1997, pp. 2-3, 9). Also, in her critical analysis of Butler’s claim that words—even injurious words used in hate speech—could be resignified in unanticipated ways (Butler, 1997), Lisa Schwartzman points out that Butler does not say much about how those words actually work in the empirical world. According to Schwartzman, Butler emphasizes

only the possibility that hate speech could be signified otherwise, failing to take account of current racist/sexist structures that actually enable hate speech to work (Schwartzman, 2006, pp. 146-149). Taken together, these critiques indicate the problem of focusing solely on the (possibility of) resignifying/redefining the word. As long as the term “women” is redefined in a way that is detached from the structure of racism, sexism, and class oppression in which this identity is actually located, such mere redefinition is not likely to have a liberatory effect of dismantling oppression.

This is why I propose a materialist adjustment to the Butlerian concept of redefinability. I put forward the “situated” redefinition model (SR) as opposed to the mere redefinition model. In addition to letting identity open to new definitions, SR also argues these new definitions should be something *situated* in the actualities of oppression, rather than some random definitions produced in a vacuum or from pure word play. Specifically, according to SR, identity is to be redefined in a way that allows it to better serve the political goal, where the goal itself is *born out of* the concrete realities of oppression faced everyday by marginalized subjects. For example, in Cases A and B, what becomes criteria for redefining the identity “women” is the goals arising in response to trans people’s daily lives in cisgenderist/sexist structures. In Case A, it is trans people’s actual experience of being misgendered and the anti-misgendering goal rooted in this experience that redefines “women” as not inclusive of trans men. “Women” is redefined as inclusive of trans men in Case B, so as to better serve the anti-violence goal rooted in their experience of being misgendered as women and thereby targeted for violence. These examples illustrate that, when “women” is conceived according to SR, the identity politics of “women” could be practiced in a way that centers on, rather than marginalizes, the experiences of the multiply oppressed in the current intersecting structures of oppression.

## Concluding Remarks

The aim of this dissertation was to reconceptualize “women” such that we could do feminist theory and politics in a more intersectional way.

To this end, the dissertation started by elaborating what exactly it means for feminism to be more intersectional. In Chapters 1 and 2, I have provided three guiding definitions of intersectional feminism. Chapter 1 has defined intersectional feminism as a feminism whose focal points are *anti-marginalization* and *difference-recognition*, which are two ideas weaving the classic and more recent literature on intersectionality with critical race feminisms. Specifically, doing feminism in a more intersectional way indicates (i) resisting the marginalization of multiply oppressed women from feminism and (ii) attending to differences among women, especially differences in privilege.

Chapter 2 has advanced my account of intersectional feminism as an *experience-centered* feminism. In particular, I have drawn a connection between intersectionality and non-ideal theory, by critically analyzing the recent critique that intersectionality purportedly fragments women. Such critique could be considered an ideal theory, in that it considers multiple oppressions only in the abstract while abstracting away from what multiply oppressed women (e.g., women of color) are actually doing at the intersection of oppressions (e.g., racism and sexism). By contrast, intersectional feminist theory is a non-ideal theory that presents the dynamics of multiple oppressions as theory-guiding by (iii) focusing on the actual, concrete experiences of the multiply oppressed—which are the locus where these dynamics of oppressions are manifested, navigated, and resisted.

Having defined what is meant by intersectional feminism, Chapters 3 and 4 moved on to developing a new conception of women that is needed to do intersectional feminism, i.e., an

(i) anti-marginalizing, (ii) difference-recognizing, and (iii) experience-centered feminism. My central argument has been that the “situated redefinition” model—according to which the concept women should be always open to *new definitions*, where such new definitions are *situated* in the actualities of intersectional oppression—qualifies as such a conception.

To begin with, Chapter 3 has argued that, in order to do feminist theory that better (i) resists the marginalization of less-privileged/multiply oppressed women and (ii) addresses power differences among women, we have to leave the concept “women” (and abstract concepts that make generalization about women’s oppression, such as “patriarchy”) always open to redefinition. I have contrasted the Butler-inspired notion of redefinability with Mills’s assertion that “patriarchy” is an abstraction that accurately maps the crucial realities of gender oppression and reflects the experiences of “women.” This kind of assertion is problematic for two reasons. First, abstraction/conceptualization is not a value-neutral process but involves a judgment about what to include in and what to omit from an abstraction, which is affected by the power dynamics of intersecting oppressions that give more privilege to, e.g., white women over women of color, and to middle-class women of color over working-class women of color, and so on. Second, therefore, even from an abstraction about women that appears to “accurately” map and reflect the experiences of “all” women, there could *always* be some groups of women whose experiences are marginalized from the current conceptualization about women. Then, in order not to preclude these marginalized groups from coming up with new definitions of what it means to be and experience oppression as “women,” which could better reflect their experiences, “women” should remain as a continually redefinable concept.

Chapter 4 has developed the “situated” redefinition model, by further elaborating this idea of women as a redefinable concept and incorporating it with materialist feminist insights. To do so, I have examined feminist critiques of identity politics, which contend that feminist politics

should avoid appealing to the shared identity of women because it leads to the exclusion of the multiply oppressed. I have argued that a solution to exclusionary identity politics is not the wholesale rejection of identity politics, but the development of a conception of women's identity that would enable anti-exclusionary identity politics. In line with such a conception, I have proposed the situated redefinition model (SR), which argues: "women" should be always open to being redefined in a way that it could better serve political goals grounded in the actual, daily lives of the marginalized. I have adopted a two-step approach to show how this model could help us organize around a shared identity of women while avoiding exclusionary pitfalls. First, by formulating women as a *redefinable* concept which is always open to the possibility of having new meanings, SR aids in destabilizing the current hegemonic, falsely-universalized meaning of women. In addition, according to SR, the concept women is to be redefined not in any way, but in a way that allows it to better serve social justice goals—goals that grow out of the concrete experiences of injustice faced everyday by the multiply oppressed. By formulating women as a concept which is to be redefined in a way that is *situated* in the daily lives of the multiply oppressed, this model aids in doing identity politics of women that do not marginalize but (iii) foreground the experiences of the multiply oppressed.

In sum, this dissertation makes several contributions to the current feminist literature and practice, especially to the effort to make feminism more intersectional. First, by proposing new guiding definitions of intersectional feminism, this dissertation has illuminated what kind of work feminist philosophers should engage in, in order to implement theory in a more intersectional way. In this regard, the present dissertation lays groundwork for a broader research into methodologies for social theory—what types of theorization are required to do social theory that can better reflect, and thus help to resist, the non-ideal realities of intersectional oppression.

The primary contribution of this dissertation is that it has provided an alternative model of “women” that can be used for intersectional feminism. The two positions regarding the concept women, which have been dominant in feminist theory and politics thus far, do not suit intersectional feminism: on the one hand, the uncritical usage of falsely universalized definitions of “women” has reproduced the marginalization of intersectionally oppressed women and others; on the other hand, the proposal to completely remove the language of “women” from feminism leaves us deprived of the conceptual-political tool to analyze and resist intersecting structures of oppression that subordinate women. The situated redefinition model developed in this dissertation could be a solution to both problems. SR enables us to keep utilizing the language of “women” for resistance to oppression that we suffer as women, in a way that also resists the marginalization of intersectionally oppressed women and others. This will, I hope, generate fresh insight as to how we understand and use the concept women for feminist ends of ending sexist and intersecting oppressions.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alcoff, L. M. (2006). *Visible identities: Race, gender, and the self*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Allen, A. (1999). *The power of feminist theory: domination, resistance, solidarity*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.
- Anthias, F. (2013). Intersectional what? Social divisions, intersectionality and levels of analysis. *Ethnicities*, 13(1), 3-19.
- Asian American Feminist Collective. Building an Asian American Feminist Movement. *Zine*. Retrieved from <https://www.asianamfeminism.org/resources>
- Asian Immigrant Women Advocates. Retrieved from <https://www.aiwa.org/>
- Berger, M. T., & Guidroz, K. (Eds.). (2009). *The intersectional approach: transforming the academy through race, class, and gender*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Bettcher, T. M. (2017). Trans Feminism: Recent Philosophical Developments. *Philosophy Compass*, 12(11), e12438.
- Bilge, S. (2010). Beyond subordination vs. resistance: An intersectional approach to the agency of veiled Muslim women. *Journal of intercultural studies*, 31(1), 9-28.
- Brah, A., & Phoenix, A. (2004). Ain't I a woman? Revisiting intersectionality. *Journal of international women's studies*, 5(3), 75-86.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1994). Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism'. In S. Seidman (Ed.), *The Postmodern Turn: New Perspectives on Social Theory* (pp. 153-170). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable speech: a politics of the performative*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2000). Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Formalism. In J. Butler, E. Laclau, & S. Žižek (Eds.), *Contingency, hegemony, universality: contemporary dialogues on the left* (pp. 11-43). New York: Verso.
- Carastathis, A. (2013). Identity Categories as Potential Coalitions. *Signs*, 38(4), 941-965.



- Carastathis, A. (2016). *Intersectionality: origins, contestations, horizons*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Carbado, D. W. (2013). Colorblind Intersectionality. *Signs*, 38(4), 811-845.
- Cho, S., Crenshaw, K. W., & McCall, L. (Eds.). (2013a). Intersectionality: Theorizing Power, Empowering Theory [Special issue]. *Signs*, 38(4).
- Cho, S., Crenshaw, K. W., & McCall, L. (2013b). Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis. *Signs*, 38(4), 785-810.
- Choo, H. Y., & Ferree, M. M. (2010). Practicing intersectionality in sociological research: A critical analysis of inclusions, interactions, and institutions in the study of inequalities. *Sociological theory*, 28(2), 129-149.
- Chu, J. M. (Director). (2018). *Crazy Rich Asians*.
- Chun, J. J., Lipsitz, G., & Shin, Y. (2013). Intersectionality as a Social Movement Strategy: Asian Immigrant Women Advocates. *Signs*, 38(4), 917-940.
- Collins, P. H. (1991). *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. (2015). Intersectionality's definitional dilemmas. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41, 1-20.
- Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2016). *Intersectionality*. Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Combahee River Collective. (2000). The Combahee River Statement [1977]. In B. Smith (Ed.), *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (pp. 264-274). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 139-167.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.
- Crenshaw, K. (2020). *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings* [forthcoming]. New York City: The New Press.
- Davis, A. Y. (1981). *Women, race & class* (First ed.). New York: Random House.
- Davis, K. (2008). Intersectionality as buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful. *Feminist Theory*, 9(1), 67-85.

- Ehrenreich, N. (2002). Subordination and symbiosis: Mechanisms of mutual support between subordinating systems. *UMKC L. Rev.*, 71, 251.
- Espiritu, Y. L. (2001). "We don't sleep around like white girls do": Family, culture, and gender in Filipina American lives. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 26(2), 415-440.
- Fraser, N. (1997). From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a "Postsocialist" Age. In *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition*. New York: Routledge.
- Friedan, B. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Norton.
- Frieze, I. H., & Dittrich, S. (Eds.). (2013). Intersections of LGBT, Racial/Ethnic Minority, and Gender Identities [Special issue]. *Sex Roles*, 68(11-12).
- Frye, M. (1983). *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Freedom, California: Crossing Press.
- Fujiwara, L., & Roshanravan, S. (Eds.). (2018). *Asian American feminisms and women of color politics*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Garry, A. (2011). Intersectionality, metaphors, and the multiplicity of gender. *Hypatia*, 26(4), 826-850.
- Glenn, E. N. (1992). From servitude to service work: Historical continuities in the racial division of paid reproductive labor. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 18(1), 1-43.
- Gong, S. E., & Sullivan, M. (2018, October 19). South Korean Women Fight Back Against Spy Cams In Public Bathrooms. *NPR*. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2018/10/19/648720360/south-korean-women-fight-back-against-spy-cams-in-public-bathrooms>
- Goswami, N., O'Donovan, M., & Yount, L. (Eds.). (2014). *Why Race and Gender Still Matter: An Intersectional Approach*. London: Pickering and Chatto.
- Gunnarsson, L. (2011). A defence of the category 'women'. *Feminist theory*, 12(1), 23-37.
- Hamlin, A., & Stemplowska, Z. (2012). Theory, ideal theory and the theory of ideals. *Political Studies Review*, 10(1), 48-62.
- Hancock, A.-M. (2016). *Intersectionality: an intellectual history*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Haslanger, S. A. (2012). *Resisting reality: essays on social construction and social critique*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Hasunuma, L., & Shin, K.-y. (2019). #MeToo in Japan and South Korea: #WeToo, #WithYou. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 40(1), 97-111.
- Hekman, S. (2000). Beyond identity: Feminism, identity and identity politics. *Feminist Theory*, 1(3), 289-308.
- Hennessy, R., & Ingraham, C. (Eds.). (1997). *Materialist feminism: a reader in class, difference, and women's lives*. New York: Routledge.
- Heyes, C. (2000). *Line drawings: defining women through feminist practice*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- hooks, b. (1984). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- hooks, b. (2000). *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Hull, A. G., Bell-Scott, P., & Smith, B. (1982). *All the women are White, all the Blacks are men, but some of us are brave: Black women's studies*. Old Westbury, N.Y: Feminist Press.
- Jenkins, K. (2016). Amelioration and Inclusion: Gender Identity and the Concept of Woman. *Ethics*, 126(2), 394-421.
- Jung, H.-m. (2018, December 24). Largest anti-gender discrimination rally held. *The Korea Times*. Retrieved from [https://koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2019/09/251\\_260845.html](https://koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2019/09/251_260845.html)
- Kang, H. (2018, June 9). My Life Isn't Your Porn: Why South Korean Women Protest. *Korea Exposé*. Retrieved from <https://www.koreaexpose.com/south-koreas-biggest-womens-protest-in-history-is-against-spycam-porn/>
- Kantola, J., & Nousiainen, K. (Eds.). (2009). Institutionalizing Intersectionality [Special issue]. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 11.
- Khader, S. J. (2018). *Decolonizing Universalism: A Transnational Feminist Ethic*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kim, N. Y. (2006). "Patriarchy is so third world": Korean immigrant women and "migrating" white western masculinity. *Social Problems*, 53(4), 519-536.
- King, D. K. (1988). Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology. *Signs*, 14(1), 42-72.
- Kong, Y. (2017). 'Non-Idealizing Abstraction' as Ideology: Non-Ideal Theory, Intersectionality, and the Power Dynamics of Oppression. *Social Philosophy Today*, 33, 155-171.

- Lee, S.-y. (2018, August 7). 'Our lives are not your porn': South Korean women cry out against 'spycam porn'. *The Korea Times*. Retrieved from [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/08/281\\_253388.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/08/281_253388.html)
- Lee, S. H., & Park, K. J. (2017, August 8). President Moon calls for harsher punishment for spycam crimes and protection of victims. *Yonhap News Agency*. Retrieved from <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20170808077000001>
- Liu, C., Esteve, A., & Treviño, R. (2017). Female-Headed Households and Living Conditions in Latin America. *World Development*, 90, 311-328.
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press.
- Louie, M. C. Y. (2001). *Sweatshop warriors: immigrant women workers take on the global factory*. Cambridge, Mass: South End Press.
- Lugones, M. (2003). Purity, Impurity, and Separation [1994]. In *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: theorizing coalition against multiple oppressions* (pp. 121-150). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Lugones, M., & Spelman, E. (1983). Have we got a theory for you! Feminist theory, cultural imperialism and the demand for 'the woman's voice'. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 6(6), 573-581.
- Luna, Z. (2016). "Truly a Women of Color Organization": Negotiating Sameness and Difference in Pursuit of Intersectionality. *Gender & Society*, 30(5), 769-790.
- Matsuda, M. J. (1991). Beside My Sister, Facing the Enemy: Legal Theory out of Coalition. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1183-1192.
- May, V. M. (2015). *Pursuing intersectionality, unsettling dominant imaginaries*. New York: Routledge.
- McCall, L. (2005). The Complexity of Intersectionality. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(3), 1771-1800.
- McCurry, J., & Kim, N. (2018, July 3). 'A part of daily life': South Korea confronts its voyeurism epidemic. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/03/a-part-of-daily-life-south-korea-confronts-its-voyeurism-epidemic-sexual-harassment>
- Mills, C. W. (1997). *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Mills, C. W. (2004). 'Ideal Theory' As Ideology. In P. DesAutels & M. U. Walker (Eds.), *Moral Psychology: Feminist Ethics and Social Theory* (pp. 163-181). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

- Mohanty, C. T. (1988). Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. *Feminist Review*, 30, 61-88.
- Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders: decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Nash, J. C. (2008). Re-thinking intersectionality. *Feminist Review*, 89, 1-15.
- O'Neill, O. (1987). Abstraction, Idealization and Ideology in Ethics. In J. D. G. Evans (Ed.), *Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Problems* (pp. 55-69). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Neill, O. (1993). Justice, Gender, and International Boundaries. In M. Nussbaum & A. Sen (Eds.), *The Quality of Life* (pp. 303-323). Oxford: Clarendon.
- O'Neill, O. (1996). *Towards Justice and Virtue: A Constructive Account of Practical Reasoning*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Pateman, C. (1988). *The Sexual Contract*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Pateman, C., & Mills, C. W. (2007). *Contract and Domination*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Phoenix, A., & Pattynama, P. (Eds.). (2006). Intersectionality [Special issue]. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(3).
- Prins, B. (2006). Narrative accounts of origins: a blind spot in the intersectional approach? *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(3), 277-290.
- Purdie-Vaughns, V., & Eibach, R. P. (2008). Intersectional Invisibility: The Distinctive Advantages and Disadvantages of Multiple Subordinate-Group Identities. *Sex Roles*, 59(5), 377-391.
- Pyke, K. (2010). An Intersectional Approach to Resistance and Complicity: The Case of Racialised Desire among Asian American Women. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 31(1), 81-94.
- Pyke, K., & Johnson, D. (2003). Asian American Women And Racialized Femininities. *Gender & Society*, 17(1), 33-53.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice* (Original ed.). Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Reagon, B. J. (2000). Coalition Politics: Turning the Century [1983]. In B. Smith (Ed.), *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (pp. 343-355). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

- Ruíz, E. (2018). Framing Intersectionality. In P. C. Taylor, L. M. Alcoff, & L. Anderson (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Race* (pp. 335-348). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Scholz, S. J. (2008). *Political solidarity*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Schwartzman, L. H. (2006). *Challenging Liberalism: Feminism as Political Critique*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Spelman, E. V. (1988). *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Staunæs, D. (2003). Where have all the subjects gone? Bringing together the concepts of intersectionality and subjectification. *NORA: Nordic journal of women's studies*, 11(2), 101-110.
- Tessman, L. (Ed.) (2009). *Feminist Ethics and Social and Political Philosophy: Theorizing the Non-Ideal*. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Tomlinson, B. (2013). To tell the truth and not get trapped: Desire, distance, and intersectionality at the scene of argument. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 38(4), 993-1017.
- Valentini, L. (2012). Ideal vs. Non-ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map. *Philosophy Compass*, 7(9), 654-664.
- Vaz, K. M., & Lemons, G. L. (Eds.). (2012). *Feminist solidarity at the crossroads: intersectional women's studies for transracial alliance* (Vol. 31.). New York: Routledge.
- Warnke, G. (1995). Discourse Ethics and Feminist Dilemmas of Difference. In J. Meehan (Ed.), *Feminists Read Habermas* (pp. 247-262). New York: Routledge.
- Weir, A. (2013). *Identities and freedom: Feminist theory between power and connection*. Oxford University Press.
- Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Intersectionality and feminist politics. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(3), 193-209.
- Zack, N. (2005). *Inclusive feminism: A third wave theory of women's commonality*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.