

Article

The Failure of White Male Privilege Theory and a Color/Gender-Blind Alternative (Part 1)

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PRELIMINARIES

Introduction

The contention of this article is that while White Male Privilege and related conceptual frameworks such as Critical Race Theory and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusiveness, have the honorable intention of attempting to overcome prejudice and discrimination against people on the basis of gender, race, and other factors, they are proving to be woefully inadequate in addressing the root causes of racism and sexism and, in fact, often end up promoting racist, sexist, and other biases of their own.

This intentionally provocative and iconoclastic article will attempt to document instances in which Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) fails to achieve its stated aims and in fact encourages the exact opposite: Divisiveness, Inequity, and Exclusion (DIE). The extent to which Critical Race Theory (CRT) is sufficiently “critical” will also be examined. The article will focus primarily, however, on White Male Privilege (WMP) theory, which has had a seminal influence on CRT and DEI, as well as the field of Intercultural Communication. The article will argue that WMP is based for the most part on shoddy scholarship, flawed research methodologies, an overreliance on anecdotal evidence, slanted interpretations of empirical data (confirmation bias), fallacious reasoning and logical inconsistencies, distorted analyses, fundamental misunderstandings and misapplications of sociological theory,

the promotion of overgeneralizations and stereotypes, ideological conformity rather than critical thinking (groupthink), ethical double standards, a not-so-hidden and polarizing political agenda which, despite its best intentions, exacerbates rather overcomes sexism and racism, and a naive understanding of “social change.”

In short, as presently constituted, WMP is not a valid field of inquiry, but a pseudoscience. If WMP, CRT, and DEI are to survive, they need to completely rethink their core ideas and develop an entirely new theoretical paradigm, which is consistently antiracist and antisexist. If the treatment in this article seems “one-sided” in presenting arguments *against* WMP, CRT, and DEI, this is simply because the article attempts to tell the other side of the story, which is patently not being told by WMP, CRT, and DEI supporters. Ultimately, of course, there is a need for a more judicious and balanced approach, which considers valid arguments on both sides and attempts to reconcile them in more comprehensive framework that both sides might be able to accept (thesis ↔ antithesis → synthesis). In their present configuration, however, many elements of WMP, CRT, and DEI are simply academically and morally bankrupt.

The topic really deserves a book so, given the space limitations, the treatment in this study is provisional (a “first draft” that requires further development and editing). Part 1, presented here, opens with a brief treatment of the historical context of and current controversies in WMP, CRT, and DEI (which also functions as an introductory literature review and suggested reading list for siloed activists and scholars on both sides of the debate seeking to get out of their echo chambers). The remainder focuses mainly on the empirical and theoretical claims made by WMP, specifically its tendencies (1) to frame privilege in sexist and racist terms; (2) to define privilege in an amorphous, undifferentiated way; (3) to lack academic rigor and be methodologically flawed; (4) to rig examples of privilege to support conclusions it favors; (5) to ignore empirical data which refutes its basic premises; (6) to promote racist and sexist stereotypes; and (7) to be based on an essentialist understanding of race and gender.

Subsequent installments, to be published separately, will deal with more normative issues related to WMP, including (1) its overt sexism and racism;

(2) its one-sided treatment of historical forms of oppression; (3) its tendency to suppress alternative perspectives and enforce ideological conformity; (4) its degenerate (mis)understanding of multiculturalism; (5) its unfamiliarity with basic key sociological concepts, such as *structure* and *agency*; and (6) its tendency to alienate poor and working class voters of all genders and races and thus to impede rather than promote a genuinely inclusive progressive politics. Finally a Color/Gender-Blind alternative will be presented which suggests that while we should *always* be blind to color and gender and treat people equally, we should *never* be blind to racism and sexism when people are not treated equally.

The methodological approach taken in this article is philosophical rather than social scientific. Arguments made for or against particular positions are supported on the basis of empirical evidence, interpretive evaluation, theoretical analysis, and rational argumentation (on transdisciplinary approaches in the field of Intercultural Communication which embrace both social scientific and philosophical methodologies, see Evanoff 2025, pp. 71–73). Testimonials from social media sources are presented not as authoritative but simply to illustrate points of view that are often overlooked or ignored by supporters of WMP, CRT, and DEI. In the interest of sound scholarship, the author will gladly respond to criticisms of any of the claims advanced in this study and make necessary revisions if and when presented with further evidence, interpretive evaluation, theoretical analysis, and rational argumentation which refute them. It can be hoped that WMP, CRT, and DEI theorists would hold to the same standards of academic integrity. Ad hominin arguments related to the author's race, gender, sexuality, or other irrelevant factors will be ignored.

Ethical assumptions

This article is premised on the following ethical assumptions: an uncompromising commitment to the *value judgement* that the ongoing history of prejudice and discrimination against racial and gender minorities is reprehensible; the *normative judgement* that racism and sexism in all their forms are morally wrong, regardless of the race or gender of the persons perpetuating them and the race or gender of those towards whom they are

directed; and the *ethical judgment* that measures should be taken by people of all races and genders to overcome all prejudicial attitudes, discriminatory behavior, and systemic forms of injustice as they affect people of all races, genders, sexual orientations, ethnicities, cultures, religions, class, and physical features, including but not limited to height, weight, attractiveness, age, and disability.

The norm against racism is succinctly expressed by David Pilgrim, Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion at Ferris State University and Curator of the Jim Crow Museum in Big Rapids, Michigan, as: “We oppose all forms of racism....We believe that prejudice and discrimination directed toward any group must be wrong” (Jim Crow Museum 2024). The norm against sexism is comprehensively expressed by International Gender Champions (2024) as “zero tolerance of gender-based violence, sexist attitudes, and behavior” and a commitment to breaking down “harmful gender stereotypes in all their forms,” including sexism and stereotypes directed at women/girls and men/boys. This norm has also been adopted by the United Nations Office at Geneva (2022) as part of its “I Say No to Sexism” campaign.

The author endorses Principle E of the American Psychological Association’s code of ethics and believes that these standards apply not only to psychologists but also to scholars, researchers, presenters, educators, and trainers in the fields of WMP, CRT, and DEI (as well as Intercultural Communication):

Psychologists are aware of and respect cultural, individual, and role differences, including those based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status, and consider these factors when working with members of such groups. Psychologists try to eliminate the effect on their work of biases based on those factors, and they do not knowingly participate in or condone activities of others based upon such prejudices. (American Psychological Association 2017)

The article contends that, despite claims to the contrary, some theorists and practitioners in WMP, CRT, and DEI (and Intercultural Communication)

violate this code by failing to be aware of and to respect cultural, individual, and role differences, by being highly biased in favor of so-called “minority” groups and by exhibiting manifest prejudice against so-called “majority” groups, specifically but not limited to individuals who are white, male, cisgender, Western, and Christian. In other words, WMP, CRT, and DEI are not consistently opposed to *all* forms of racism, sexism, prejudice, and discrimination but instead often promote the interests of *some* social groups on the basis of race, gender, and other factors while excluding and even openly denigrating others. Although programs vary and there is undoubtedly a wide range of orientations among both theorists and practitioners, there is a noticeable tendency among some in these fields to focus exclusive attention on racism and sexism against minority groups while practicing and condoning racism and sexism against members of majority groups.

Positionality

It has become fashionable for authors on racial and gender issues to identify their “positionality,” so here’s mine: I am originally from Massillon, Ohio in the United States. My ancestry is Bulgarian, Polish, German, and Welsh. My grandmother was an illegal immigrant from Poland who eventually acquired permanent residence status in the U.S. through an amnesty program. I come from a working class family in the steel industry. I have worked on a construction crew in the South. I have experienced living below the poverty line. I have benefited from scholarships and grants at each level of my higher education. I have lived in Japan for 45 years and qualify as an intersectional white male minority, although when I look in a mirror I self-identify as a “human being” and ask not to be referred to as a “white male.” I have no preferred pronouns. I am in an interracial marriage and have mixed-race children and grandchildren. I am a university professor with a background in philosophy, not the social sciences. My relations with Japanese students and people in general are respectful and cordial. About the only times I have been made to feel uncomfortable about my race and gender have been when attending academic conferences on Intercultural Communication and when talking with (a small minority of) scholars in the field. I am antiracist, antisexist, and above all nonviolent. I have been an environmental and political activist for most of my

adult life. My politics cannot be reduced to a single label since, as a fierce (not middle-of-the-road) independent, I draw on a variety of traditions, including conservatism, liberalism, socialism, Marxism, anarchism, libertarianism, and Green politics, while also selectively rejecting elements in each of them. I generally support third-party candidates whenever possible, Democrats when there are no viable third-party alternatives, and Republicans only in very rare exceptions. I favor and disfavor some of the policies advocated by all of these parties on a case-by-case basis. My impression is that one reason why WMP, CRT, and DEI supporters so poorly understand “white males” is because they have probably spent very little time actually hanging out with them, particularly those from the lower and underprivileged classes. In any case, WMP, CRT, and DEI theorists cannot and do not speak for me or my experience, nor can they presume to speak for other “white males” on the basis of the racist and sexist stereotypes they are apparently unable to transcend. Finally, my positionality is totally irrelevant to the arguments which follow, which must be judged solely on their merits.

HISTORIAL CONTEXT AND CURRENT CONTROVERSIES

The rise and fall of WMP, CRT, and DEI

The goals of WMP, CRT, and DEI overlap in many ways with those of *affirmative action*, a term first used by President John F. Kennedy in his Executive Order 10925, signed in 1961, which required nondiscrimination in government employment and “affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed, and that employees are treated during employment, without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin” (Kennedy 1961). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was subsequently passed, which insures equal voting rights for all citizens, outlaws racial segregation in public facilities and educational institutions, and prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in employment practices. The act can be seen as an extension of the original principles of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, namely “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the

pursuit of Happiness.” At the time of its writing these principles were thought to apply only to free white males but they are now regarded as applying to all citizens regardless of color and gender.

The ethical principle behind the Civil Rights Act was eloquently expressed by Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963) in his “I Have a Dream Speech” delivered a year earlier at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom as the vision of a society in which people “will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” Following his pilgrimage to Mecca and his recognition Islam’s “spirit of unity” which “encompasses all the races of mankind,” Malcolm X (1964) expressed his own universalist values by writing, “I am not a racist nor do I subscribe to the tenets of racism. I can state in all sincerity that I wish nothing but freedom, justice, and equality, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all people.”

While the Civil Rights Act guaranteed equal employment rights to women, it did not specifically grant women full equality before the law. In 1971 the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed in *Reed v. Reed* that the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteen Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees all citizens “equal protection of the laws,” prohibits differential treatment on the basis of sex. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), a proposed constitutional amendment, which included the clause “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex,” was approved by Congress in 1972 but not ratified by the necessary 38 states. Attempts to revive the amendment have been ongoing. A bill known as the Equality Act, which would expand the Civil Rights Act to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity has been introduced to the U.S. Congress but not yet passed into legislation.

Initially the intention of affirmative action was to ensure non-preferential treatment of any social group, but over time it was increasingly interpreted as allowing preferential treatment for historically oppressed or disadvantaged groups. The 1978 Supreme Court decision, *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, banned racial quotas but allowed universities to consider race as a factor in their admission policies. In 2023, however, affirmative action in admissions was rejected by the Supreme Court in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, on the ground that it violated the Equal Protection

Clause of the Fourteen Amendment. Interestingly, one of the questions raised in the case was whether Asian-American students were being discriminated against not because they were from a “historically oppressed group” but because their higher overall academic achievements would skewer Harvard’s effort to have a racially balanced student body (see Xu 2021).

Movements related to WMP, CRT, and DEI can be largely seen as efforts to extend the aims of affirmative action. Although there are various influences and antecedents, the contemporary concept of *White Male Privilege* was first formulated by Peggy McIntosh in 1988, while the terms *Critical Race Theory* and *intersectionality* were coined by Kimberly Crenshaw in 1989 (see the entries for McIntosh and Crenshaw in the References section below). These theories have affinities with ideas in the fields of Cultural Studies (Barker and Jane 2016) and Postcolonial Studies (Gandhi 2019), which draw heavily on Marxism, critical theory, postmodernism, post-structuralism, and feminist thought and have had a considerable influence in the fields of Gender Studies (Richardson and Robinson 2020), Ethnic Studies (Yoo, Grieman, and Black 2021), Black Studies (Jackson 2023), and Whiteness Studies (Hunter and van der Westhuizen 2022). They have also been enthusiastically (and uncritically) embraced in the field of Intercultural Communication by scholars such Makiko Deguchi (2021; 2023a; 2023b; 2023c), who is developing a theory of “Japanese privilege” in the context of Japanese society that aims to show how Japanese as the majority/dominant group in Japan enjoy privileges that may not be equally enjoyed by non-Japanese and other minority/non-dominant groups. Another Intercultural Communication scholar, Tara Harvey (2021), has proposed bridging the gap between Intercultural Studies and DEI by synergizing the former’s focus on how people from different cultures with different ways of thinking, values, and forms of behavior can successfully interact with each other with the latter’s attempt to address issues of “power, privilege, and systems of oppression.”

A unifying theme of WMP, CRT, and DEI is that the “color-blind” ethic of the early Civil Rights Movement is perceived as being inadequate to deal with ongoing forms of racism in the United States. The theorists are unable to distinguish between the normative claim of leaders such as Martin Luther King that “people should not be judged on the basis of their skin color” and

the empirical claim that “people are in fact judged on the basis of their skin color” (a typical confusion among empirical social scientists unfamiliar with the naturalistic fallacy, which conflates descriptive statements about “what is” with prescriptive statements about “what ought [or ought not] to be,” e.g., “cancer exists” vs. “cancer ought [or ought not] to exist”; i.e., the fact that racism exists as our present *reality* vs. King’s dream that it ought not exist as an *ideal* to strive for). CRT in particular presents a one-sided view of history which focuses exclusive attention on discrimination faced by minority groups while ignoring discrimination against majority groups (such as poor whites derogated as “white trash”) in the United States and against other groups (including white males) in other countries and throughout history (such as slavery in Africa and Asia). Prejudice and discrimination are regarded by CRT not as a matter of personal beliefs but as being embedded in social structures (also referred to as institutional/systemic discrimination), including organizations, laws, language, and culture, without acknowledging the extent to which unfair social structures negatively impact individuals from all racial and gender groups.

The liberal concept of meritocracy in the United States has been specifically criticized by WMP, CRT, and DEI (see Wildman 1996), not on the ground that it results in widening class differences between the rich and powerful vs. the poor and powerless, but rather on the ground that it advantages some specific racial and gender groups (whites and males) and disadvantages others (non-whites and females). Supporters of affirmative action thus believe that giving advantages to members of historically oppressed minority groups on the basis of race, sex, and other factors is “fair,” while opponents believe it is “unfair,” particularly when affirmative action and other policies intentionally disadvantage members of majority groups. The term *color-blind racism* is even used by some opponents of a color-blind ethic to refer to people who believe that all people should be treated equally regardless of race (and gender) (Carr 1997). In this view to be color-blind is to be racist.

With the election of Barack Obama as the first non-white president of the United States in 2008, there was hope that the country was moving towards a “post-racial” society. This notion was denigrated as a “myth” by a number of WMP, CRT, and DEI scholars on the ground that racism is still an ongoing problem in America (Brown et al. 2003; Bonilla-Silva 2014; Kendi

2019). Again, the empirical claim that “Color-blindness does not yet exist in American society” was trotted out in opposition to the normative claim that “Color-blindness should not exist in American society,” with the implication that Americans must continue to think about and treat each other on the basis of race rather than ignoring or trying to overcome their racial differences.

Such views, it can be plausibly argued, actually perpetuate racism and impede racial progress. Booker T. Washington, writing about people who do not want to lose their “grievances,” noted, “I am afraid that there is a certain class of race problem-solvers who don’t want the patient to get well, because as long as the disease holds out they have not only an easy means of making a living, but also an easy medium through which make themselves prominent before the public” (1911, pp. 118–120). The same basic insight might be applied to current power struggles over how to best to address the social and economic problems faced by people of all races and genders in our present society. While it is true that color-blindness may be used by some majority group members to ignore the problems of minority groups, it is also true that opposition to color-blindness may be used by some minority group members to gain preferential treatment at the expense of majority groups. The notion of a color-blind post-racial society can still be endorsed as an ethical *ideal* even if it does not describe our present *reality*. It is possible to be unequivocally color- and gender-blind and to judge individuals solely on the basis of their character rather than the color of their skin or gender, while simultaneously being wide-eyed about and unequivocally opposed to racism and sexism.

At the 2004 Democratic National Convention, Barack Obama declared, “There’s not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America; there’s the United States of America” (Obama 2004). As president, however, Obama signed an executive order to promote diversity and inclusion in the federal workforce (Obama 2011), effectively setting the stage, in practice if not in intent, for reinstating racial and ethnic divisions. Additional orders supporting racial equity and DEI were signed by President Joe Biden in 2021 (Biden 2021a; 2021b). In the interval, following the rise of the Me-Too and Black Lives Matter movements, there was a proliferation of DEI initiatives in education, business, the media and entertainment, sports, the military, health care, and NPOs, as more and more organizations jumped on the

DEI bandwagon. As of 2022, 35,246 people from the burgeoning DEI industry were employed by U.S. companies (Coresignal 2022). An estimated US\$10.9 billion was spent globally on DEI in 2023 and it has been projected that the market will grow to US\$24.4 billion by 2030 (Research and Markets 2024).

This latter figure may be grossly overoptimistic, however, given that American corporations and universities have recently been ditching DEI programs at an accelerating rate (Pandey 2024; Parks 2024; Barker 2025), a trend that is likely to increase in the future. On the legal front, the independent think tank, Movement Advancement Project (2024), records more than 440 anti-DEI bills having been introduced in the United States since 2023; 23 states having enacted at least one anti-DEI law; and anti-DEI bills having been introduced in 19 other states. Only 8 states plus the District of Columbia have not introduced any anti-DEI bills (for detailed state-by-state actions see Gretzinger et al. 2024). While support for DEI remains high among students, with 75% saying they are in favor of having DEI initiatives on their campuses (Bryant 2023), it is flagging among workers. The Pew Research Center reported that while 56% of employed adults said that DEI is “a good thing” in 2023, only 52% said so in 2024, a loss of four percentage points (Minkin 2024). Some scholars have blamed the Democrats’ loss in the 2024 election in part due to its embrace of DEI, arguing that the tide has turned and public opinion is increasingly opposed to policies which have explicitly “advanced the opposite of equality” (Lipson 2024).

In the case of corporations, the situation is mixed. While some are continuing or expanding their DEI programs, others have begun to cut back or eliminate them entirely (Crumley 2024; Kratz 2024) for a variety of reasons, including questions about their effectiveness and whether the high costs of DEI programs justify what are sometimes perceived to be minimal results. Companies are also fearful of lawsuits by employees who claim they are being discriminated against by policies that favor underrepresented groups; legal challenges on the ground that showing preference to employees on the basis of race and gender violates federal and state laws; backlash from the general public; and consumer boycotts of companies for either supporting or failing to support DEI initiatives. Social and political pressure are key determinants. A cynic might contend that some businesses initially embraced DEI not out of a

strong commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion but rather to avoid repercussions from DEI advocates, while those which are now abandoning DEI are equally afraid of repercussions from DEI opponents. Symbolic gestures and virtue signaling may nonetheless continue to be seen as “good business” by some corporate leaders. It is possible that diversity initiatives may continue but simply be renamed. While some DEI statements have added B—Belonging—to the acronym (→ DEIB), others have dropped DEI altogether and shifted to B exclusively or to other labels, such as McDonald’s changing the name of its diversity department to “Global Inclusion Team” (Meyersohn 2024; Goldman 2025). How terms such as *diversity targets* may simply be other labels for *quotas* in hiring, promotions, and dealing with suppliers is another issue that requires consideration. The legality of requiring employees to attend mandatory training programs in which they are told things such as “all white persons are racist, either consciously or unconsciously, and regardless of their individual actions and behavior towards non-whites” is also being challenged (Zatuchni 2023).

As for education, a Pew Research Center report based on a survey of 1,314 mission statements from K-12 schools in the United States indicates that 34% include DEI in their mission statements (Odabas and Aragao 2023). Based on an investigation of 248 colleges and universities throughout the United States, the advocacy group Speech First found that 165 (67%) of them require students to take DEI courses as part of their general education requirements (Trump 2024 [no relation to Donald Trump]; an example of curriculum guidelines can be found at California Community Colleges 2022). DEI is increasingly being included as a criterion for colleges and universities to receive accreditation (Brandon 2022). Studies also show that out of 999 university job postings examined, 19% require professors to submit a DEI statement as part of their application, indicating, for example, personal commitments to, previous experience with, and methods for integrating DEI into their work (Paul and Maranto 2021). Among four-year-institutions with a tenure system 21.5% include DEI criteria when considering professors for tenure (AAUP 2022). The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) has documented more than 1,000 campaigns calling for professors to be punished for exercising their academic freedom, often for expressing ideas

that conflict with “woke” or other ideologies; about 200 of these campaigns resulted in the professor being fired, more than twice the number fired during the McCarthy (Red Scare) period during the 1950s (Lukianoff 2023), though still less than the uncounted number of intellectuals who lost their jobs and sometimes more during China’s Cultural Revolution and in Kampuchea’s Killing Fields as a result of thought-control policies.

DEI programs at educational institutions have also come under attack, however, often on the ground that they are biased, particularly against whites and males in favor of people of color, women, and those having non-binary genders and/or identifying as LGBTQ+. More than 86 bills have been introduced in the United States targeting DEI programs at educational institutions; 14 of these bills have become law, while 54 have been tabled, failed to pass, or were vetoed (Chronicle of Higher Education 2024). Although two-thirds of American universities require students to take DEI courses as a graduation requirement (Christenson 2024), 215 campuses in 32 states have either dropped or made changes to their DEI programs (Gretzinger et al. 2024). While there is majority support among American college students for voluntary DEI courses, nearly half (45%) oppose making them required (Hays 2025). Critics frequently see DEI initiatives as attempts to indoctrinate students into particular political ideologies and rally support for their agendas (Johnson and Heckenlively 2023). While some aspects of DEI training may be perceived as positive, there is significant opposition to the establishment of DEI offices, mandatory DEI courses, requiring professors to show their support by signing diversity statements, and using identity based preferences for hiring and admissions.

Academic reviews and appraisals of DEI (from scholars of all races and genders, including non-whites and females) range from the generally sympathetic (Blum 2008; Goodwin and McKendree 2024; Wang et al. 2023) to the highly critical (Mac Donald 2018; Pluckrose and Lindsay 2020; Rodriguez 2023; additional articles are listed at National Association of Scholars 2024). An increasing number of academics have begun to question the empirical, theoretical, and normative foundations on which WMP, CRT, and DEI are based, suggesting that they do not live up to their stated goals and, in fact, often undermine them. In a comprehensive survey entitled “What DEI Research

Concludes About Diversity Training: It Is Divisive, Counter-productive, and Unnecessary,” David Millard Haskell, Associate Professor at Waterloo University in Canada, documents the gap between DEI claims and outcomes, its inequitable treatment of minority and majority groups, and evidence showing that, far from decreasing prejudice and bigotry among participants DEI actually increases it (Haskell 2024; see also Cooley et al. 2019; Badenoch 2021; Ramsey 2024; Rufo 2024). Even a significant number of researchers who are sympathetic to the goals of DEI are suggesting, along with corporate critics, that it needs to be significantly revised, rebranded, or perhaps even abandoned altogether (Swain and Towle 2023; Brest and Levine 2024; Najarro and Peetz; Srivastava 2024; Telford and Mark 2024; Witherspoon 2024; Zack 2024). The University of Alberta in Canada, for example, is dropping the DEI label (and ideological positions) in favor of “Access, Community, and Belonging,” acknowledging, in the words of university president, Bill Flanagan, that “the language of DEI has become polarizing, focusing more on what divides us rather than our shared humanity” (Wakefield 2025).

Paul Brest, professor emeritus at the Stanford Law School and former president of the Hewlett Foundation, which supports liberal and progressive causes, and Emily Levine, an associate professor at Stanford, have criticized DEI programs for being overly ideological, overemphasizing identity and separating participants into rigid racial categories, being incompatible with cultivating critical thinking skills, seeing the world as being divided into two distinct groups, “the oppressors and the oppressed,” reinforcing rather than correcting stereotypes, increasing resentment and a sense of victimization, “pitting students against one another,” falling short of their goals, and exacerbating “the very problems they intend to solve” (Brest and Levine 2024). The authors advocate a pluralistic alternative to DEI based on critical inquiry and open dialogue, writing, “At the core of pluralistic approaches are facilitated conversations among participants with diverse identities, religious beliefs, and political ideologies, but without a predetermined list of favored identities or a preconceived framework of power, privilege, and oppression” (ibid.).

The political debate between WMP, CRT, and DEI supporters and critics is often cast as a culture war between “woke” liberals on the one side who

are making grand efforts to overcome historic forms of discrimination against minorities, and “anti-woke” conservatives on the other who fault DEI programs for failing to live up to their stated aims of being all-inclusive regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, and all the rest. According to a recent CNN article aiming to show both sides of the debate, supporters tend to define DEI in glowing and exclusively positive terms:

Diversity is embracing the differences everyone brings to the table whether it’s someone’s race, age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, or other aspects of social identity. Equity is treating everyone fairly and providing equal opportunities. And inclusion is respecting everyone’s voice and creating a culture where people from all backgrounds feel encouraged to express their ideas and perspectives. (Ellis 2024)

The same article notes that detractors regard DEI as “unfair,” “racist,” and “fundamentally un-American,” and includes the following quotes, all from prominent conservatives, which should nonetheless be judged on their merits rather than dismissed on the basis of ad hominem arguments against the persons making them. While there may be other points of disagreement, it turns out that conservative white males make some of the most cogent arguments against DEI for those who are willing to listen. Those who find them unconvincing are, of course, free to make their own counterarguments (all quoted in Ellis 2024):

The words that the acronym “DEI” represent sound nice, but it is nothing more than affirmative action and racial preferences by a different name, a system that features racial headcounts and arbitrarily assigned roles of “oppressor” and “oppressed” groups in America....If we continue to do democracy this way, it will only end in acrimony, strife, resentment, and American collapse. (Ryan P. Williams, president of the Claremont Institute)

[DEI is] inherently a racist and illegal movement in its implementation

even if it purports to work on behalf of the so-called oppressed. (Bill Ackman, investor and philanthropist)

DEI is just another word for racism. Shame on anyone who uses it.....DEI, because it discriminates on the basis of race, gender, and many other factors, is not merely immoral, it is also illegal. (Elon Musk, entrepreneur and business leader)

In short, DEI is a contested concept. While programs vary and there is undoubtedly a range of political orientations among practitioners, DEI has become a default position among its supporters, who often fail to realize how controversial it has become, not just politically but also from a critical scholarly perspective. Little to no effort is made among DEI scholars to either escape their intellectual bubble or maintain political neutrality. It would be wrong, however, to think that anyone who criticizes DEI automatically is part of a white/male/conservative “backlash.” Indeed, while much of the political opposition to WMP, CRT, and DEI initially came from conservative figures (see, for example, Steele 2006; Murray 2019), an increasing number of people of all races and genders from across the political spectrum, including centrists, liberals, progressives, and radicals, have noted that while WMP, CRT, and DEI have the laudable aim of attempting to overcome racism and sexism, they often end up promoting racist and sexist biases of their own, often by purposefully disparaging whites and males and disrespecting their opinions (Campbell and Manning 2018; Lukianoff and Haidt 2018; Williams 2020; McWhorter 2021; Galloway 2024).

What these realignments suggest is that a paradigm shift is occurring in which the old “us-vs.-them” paradigm which informs WMP, CRT, and DEI and divides people into racial and gender groups on the basis of their “identities,” is giving way to a new Color/Gender-Blind paradigm (or, rather, a resurrection of the “old” paradigm of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X) based on a genuinely diverse and all-inclusive antiracism and antisexism, comprised by and working on behalf of people of all races and genders. While there are any number of other issues which continue to divide conservatives, liberals, and people of other political persuasions, something

of a rapprochement is occurring with respect to diversity issues. There is an emerging consensus that WMP, CRT, and DEI are simply not up to the task of diminishing racial and gender tensions and that they in fact aggravate them. One manifestation of this realignment is a loose affiliation of conservatives and progressives known as the *Intellectual Dark Web*, which is by no means a formal movement but simply a group of highly free-spirited academics and social commentators from both the right and left, including Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Sam Harris, Heather Heying, Maajid Nawaz, Jordan Peterson, Steven Pinker, Joe Rogan, Dave Rubin, Ben Shapiro, Deborah Soh, Christina Hoff Sommers, and Bret Weinstein (Weiss 2018), who share an antipathy to identity politics, political correctness, authoritarianism, and the suppression of free speech.

More heat than light is generated when DEI supporters accuse opponents of being far-right neo-Nazis and White Nationalists and opponents cast DEI supporters as far-left neo-Marxists and commies. No doubt there are extremists among conservatives who hold prejudicial views against non-whites and women, just as there are liberal WMP, CRT, and DEI supporters who hold prejudicial views against whites and men. Some figures in the latter group espouse views which differ little from those of the most rabid White Supremacists. Consider, for example, the following genocidal statement of Brittney Cooper, Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Africana Studies at Rutgers University:

White people are committed to being villains in the aggregate....Their thinking is so morally and spiritually bankrupt about power that...they fear viscerally, existentially letting go of power because they cannot imagine that there is another way to be. It is either that you dominate or you're dominated....The thing I want to say to you is we gotta take these motherfuckers out. (Cooper 2021; for critiques see Brad & Lex Couchcast 2021a; Rufo 2022)

White scholars would no doubt be immediately condemned for making eliminationist remarks such as these about non-whites, yet Cooper was never censured by her university nor repudiated by other CRT scholars for her views. She is and remains an applauded scholar.

Ibram X. Kendi (2022), a key figure in CRT, claims that the theory does not teach that “white people are inherently evil.” In response to tenets prohibited by state laws in Oklahoma and Tennessee, David Miguel Gray (2021), a philosopher of race and racism at the University of Memphis, writes that he “can safely say that critical race theory does not assert the following”:

- (1) One race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex;
- (2) An individual, by virtue of the individual’s race or sex, is inherently privileged, racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or subconsciously;
- (3) An individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment because of the individual’s race or sex;
- (4) An individual’s moral character is determined by the individual’s race or sex;
- (5) An individual, by virtue of the individual’s race or sex, bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex;
- (6) An individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or another form of psychological distress solely because of the individual’s race or sex.

As will be further documented, however, there is sufficient evidence which shows that these statements by CRT apologists are little more than ideals that are often violated in practice by some if not all CRT practitioners and supporters. CRT’s critics brand it as “a dangerous and damaging philosophy, one that undermines individuality, fosters a victimhood mindset, and divides along racial lines instead of uniting us in our common humanity” (Miltimore 2024).

It may be hoped that Brittney Cooper’s views are held by only a small minority of CRT supporters. From the other side, while there were 165 active White Nationalist groups in the United States in 2023 (Southern Poverty Law Center 2023), they can hardly be taken as representing the views of white Americans as a whole. Although opinion polls are lacking, it can be hypothesized that the vast majority of Americans of all races are opposed to

both the tenets of White Supremacy *and* the extremist positions of some WMP, CRT, and DEI supporters, suggesting the possibility of a “third way” based on a color-blind antiracism and antisexism, which is opposed to racism and sexism against all groups, regardless of race and gender (including white males). It is not necessary, therefore, for the vast majority of Americans who are neither racist or sexist to take sides in the acrimonious debate between racists and sexists on either the extreme right or the extreme left, let alone become “allies” with one group or the other. Rather, the majority, composed of people of all races and genders who are genuinely antiracist and antisexist, can and should form an alliance with each other in opposition to all forms of racism and sexism as expounded by both rightwing and leftwing extremists.

While public opinion is also divided, an increasing number of social media and other commentators are also alleging that WMP, CRT, and DEI fan the flames of prejudice and discrimination rather than throwing water on them and putting them out, including not only whites males but also non-whites and females. A sampling of testimonials:

WHITE MALES

American radio talk show host, Charlie Kirk: “White Privilege is a racist myth rooted in bigotry, trying to classify people based on their skin color.” (Turning Point USA 2024)

Canadian psychologist and author, Jordan Peterson: “The idea that you can target an ethnic group [whites] with a collective crime regardless of the specific innocence or guilt of the constituent elements of that group, there is absolutely nothing that’s more racist than that.” (PragerU 2020)

Political commentator and media host, Ben Shapiro: “If you want to point out to me a case where somebody is being a racist so that I can get on the same side as you and then fight alongside you against that racism, that’s fine. But if you want to go ghost hunting against things like white privilege, it doesn’t have a specific enough definition or an action plan for me to do anything about it.” (Shapiro 2019)

NON-WHITE MALES AND FEMALES

British television presenter and journalist, Nana Akua (Amoatema-Appiah): “If you are educated with the concept of white privilege—which I absolutely never was—then you start to believe that white people do have an advantage, and that is ridiculous because it’s not true.” (GB News (2021)

Immigrant female journalist, Saritha Prabhu: “As you’ve probably noticed, bashing straight white men, especially of the conservative kind, is very fashionable these days....It’s become often enough that it is seemingly now normal to just casually attack a broad group of the country’s citizens....Whenever I hear someone on TV bash white men, my overriding feeling is ‘Excuse me, but I really don’t want to be a party to this.’” (Prabhu 2018)

Brandon Tatum, American former police officer: “Woke white people: I’d like to ask you a favor. Please stop asking for forgiveness for your white privilege. You’re not fooling anybody. You’re not helping black people or any other minority. And your public confessions don’t make you look virtuous. They make you look disingenuous, which is a really nice way of saying fake, phony, and fraudulent.” (PragerU 2020)

Ugandan-American artist, musician, and skateboarder, Kimi Katiti: “I hate Critical Race Theory because I hate racism. I’m not shunning Critical Race Theory because I’m, like, skeptical of the existence of racism or that I do want to support the KKK. Absolutely not. One thing Critical Race Theory for sure does is that it brings back racism like a little cycle. It says that in order to remove race we must elevate and emphasize race even more....We’re ridiculing color-blindness.” (Katiti 2021)

British rapper and podcaster, Zuby (Nzube Olisaebuka Udezue): “[White Privilege] is not a useful concept.... I don’t think that it’s accurate and I don’t think that it’s helpful. It’s extraordinarily divisive. I would argue

that the concept in itself is racist.” (Zuby 2023)

Perhaps the most endearing criticism has come from Kory Yeshua and his six-year-old daughter, Royalty, who put it much better than the experts:

KORY: Daddy teaches you can be anything in this world that you wanna be. Right, don’t daddy teach you that?

ROYALTY: Yeah, and it doesn’t matter if you’re black or white or any color....

KORY: How we treat people is based on who they are and not what color they are.

ROYALTY: And if they’re nice. And smart.

KORY: See? This is how children think right here. Critical Race Theory wants to end that. Not with my children. It’s not gonna happen. My baby’s gonna know that no matter what she wants to be in life all she has to do is work hard and she can become that.

ROYALTY: Work hard. Even though you don’t know anyone, you can make friends.

KORY: Yeah, you can make friends no matter what color they are. So we need to stop CRT. Period. Point blank. Children do not see skin color, man. They love everybody. If they’re good people, they love ‘em.

ROYALTY: We pray for people that are hurt. (KUSI News 2021)

My guess is that a vast majority of people would be more comfortable forming alliances with ordinary citizens such as Kory and Royalty than with inflammatory CRT scholars such as Brittney Cooper. Personally I am hoping that Royalty will be invited to give a keynote speech at a future academic conference on Intercultural Communication.

Coming to terms with WMP, CRT, and DEI

Current controversies about WMP, CRT, and DEI mainly revolve around whether people should be treated as individuals regardless of their race,

gender, or other characteristics (the Color/Gender-Blind perspective) or be stripped of their individual identities and lumped together into categories on the basis of their skin color, sex, and other characteristics (the WMP, CRT, and DEI perspective). Since how problems might be solved depends in part on how they are conceptualized (a point also made by Kendi 2019), this section will look at how key terms are differently defined by some supporters of WMP, CRT, and DEI and their Color/Gender-Blind critics, with a view towards showing that the former typically twist definitions to make them more narrowly focused and exclusive, while the latter employ generally accepted definitions that are wider and more inclusive. The conclusion is, quite simply, that the one-sided definitions of WMP, CRT, and DEI supporters don't cut it.

Prejudice: Supporters believe it is possible to prejudice whether or not a person is “racist,” “sexist,” “oppressive,” etc. solely on the basis of their sex and gender (Deguchi 2021, cited below). Critics think that prejudging people on the basis of physical characteristics, including race and gender, rather than their actual attitudes and character should always be avoided (*cf.* Gould 2024).

Stereotypes: Supporters assume that all members of a given group, including racial and gender groups, share the same characteristics, for example, all whites and males have “privilege,” while non-whites and females do not (McIntosh 1989). Critics do not assume that all members of a given group, including racial and gender groups, share the same characteristics (*cf.* Drew 2023).

Discrimination: Supporters agree with Ibram Kendi that “The only remedy to racist discrimination is antiracist discrimination. The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination. The only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination” and with U.S. Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun that “in order to treat some persons equally we must treat them differently” (Kendi 2019, p. 19). Critics contend that rather than perpetuate discrimination into a never-ending future, the only remedy is to end racial discrimination now and forever by treating

all persons equally and the same (the “fierce urgency of now” in Martin Luther King, Jr. 1963).

Racism: Supporters agree with the following definition used in Critical Race Theory curriculum: “What is racism? The marginalization and/or oppression of people of color based on a socially constructed racial hierarchy that privileges white people” (quoted from Glen E. Singleton’s *Courageous Conversations About Race* in Martin 2021). Critics contend that racism is prejudice or discrimination against any person of any race by any other person of any race.

Sexism: Supporters agree with the following definition from the *Diversity Dictionary*: “Sexism: An ideology that assumes that the dominance and privilege of men over women and gender-diverse people are the natural order of things (they are not)” (quoted in TheOtherBox 2022). Critics contend that sexism is prejudice or discrimination against any person of any gender by any other person of any gender.

Diversity: Supporters define diversity primarily in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, and other biological factors, while giving short shrift to other types of diversity, even when they are acknowledged. Critics see diversity as also applying to individual traits such as aptitude, ability, motivation, interests, and personal values, and social factors such as family backgrounds, upbringing, socialization, socioeconomic status, and indeed political opinions, which cut across race, gender, and sexuality; if we stop dividing people by race, gender, sexuality, etc. and treat every person as unique, diversity automatically follows.

Equity: Supporters see equity in terms of advancing the social, economic, and political agendas of some racial, gender, and other minority groups, stereotypically perceived as being “underprivileged” even though many individuals in these groups have attained relatively high positions in society at the expense of majority groups, stereotypically perceived as being “overprivileged” on the basis of their race, gender, sexuality,

etc., despite the fact that many in these latter groups occupy relatively low positions in society. Critics see equity as lending a helping hand to people who need it regardless of their external physical features or internal psychological identities.

Inclusion: Supporters perceive inclusion primarily in terms of helping members of minority groups while excluding members of majority groups, such as helping minorities attain elite positions in the current social hierarchy, e.g., at top-name universities and corporations and in prestigious professions, while giving comparatively little attention to the needs and concerns of non-elites of all races and genders. Critics seek to be all-inclusive: skin color, sex, and other biological factors simply do not matter. In the words of Royalty, cited above, “It doesn’t matter if you’re black or white or any color...you can make friends.”

Color- and gender-blindness: Supporters reject color- and gender-blindness on the ground that since racism and sexism continue to exist in society, we should adopt the norm of treating people differently on the basis of race and sex; to think otherwise is racist (*cf.* Kendi, 2019, cited above). Critics accept color- and gender-blindness on the ground that since racism and sexism continue to exist in society, we should adopt the norm of treating people the same regardless of race and sex; to think otherwise is racist (*cf.* Hughes 2024).

THE FAILURE OF WHITE MALE PRIVILEGE THEORY (WMP)

1. WMP frames privilege in sexist and racist terms.

Contemporary theories of “White Privilege,” “Male Privilege,” or, jointly, “White Male Privilege” contend that certain racial and gender groups in society, specifically whites and males, enjoy privileges which are denied to other racial and gender groups, specifically non-whites and females (this article uses the acronym *WMP* to refer to the theory and words such as *white male privilege* to refer to the phenomenon). A founding document is Peggy

McIntosh's essay, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondence Through Work in Women's Studies" (1988), subsequently revised in the more frequently cited "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" (1989). In these foundational texts McIntosh constructs binary divisions between two different groups on the basis of sex and race: (1) a dominant "majority" group consisting males and whites, whom she categorizes as overprivileged, advantaged, and oppressive, and (2) a subordinate "minority" group consisting of females and non-whites, whom she correspondingly typecasts as underprivileged, disadvantaged, and oppressed. In her summary of McIntosh's work, Makiko Deguchi (2021, 20:15) introduces the following categories: "Sexism: Men are oppressive" and "Racism: Whites are oppressive." The absence of any qualifications to these categorizations easily leads to an "us vs. them" mentality based on the stereotypes that all men and whites are "oppressors" (or all sexists and racists are oppressive males and whites) and that all women and non-whites are "oppressed" (or the only victims of sexism and racism are oppressed females and non-whites).

The same basic idea has been applied to DEI initiatives, as the following summary indicates:

The ideology behind DEI teaches that American society is a rigged system in which the "oppressors"—white people and/or men—use law, culture, and institutions to subjugate the "oppressed"—"minoritized" persons and/or women. The only way to fix this fundamentally unjust system, according to DEI advocates, is to discriminate against the "oppressors" to topple them from the summit of the social hierarchy. DEI thus rejects the deeply American principle that people should be judged on their character and merit, not on their race or sex. (Minella 2025)

With respect to male privilege, McIntosh (1989) contends that while men may be willing to admit that women are disadvantaged and commit themselves to improving the status of women in society, they are nevertheless unwilling to acknowledge that they are "overprivileged" as a consequence of the "advantages which men gain from women's disadvantages" (p. 10). Privilege is seen as a zero-sum game in which any advantages obtained by men come at the expense

of women. The solution, then, is not to end discrimination and insure that men and women are equally advantaged or have equal access to advantages, but rather for white male privilege to be “fully acknowledged, lessened, or ended” (ibid.). The goal is not simply to raise the status of women but also to strip men of their privileges, whether legitimately earned or not. The problem is framed as a power struggle in which female privileges can be increased only by decreasing male privileges. Since they believe that men have obtained advantages by denying advantages to women, the remedy is to reverse the situation by allowing women to gain advantages at the expense of men (which is basically how *equity* in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is interpreted).

In the same article McIntosh (1989, p. 10) suggests that “since hierarchies in our society are interlocking,” or *intersectional*, to use the term coined by Crenshaw (1989; see also Crenshaw 1991; Crenshaw et al. 1996; Morgan 1996), white privilege can be analyzed in much the same way as male privilege. McIntosh defines *white privilege* as “an invisible package of unearned assets that [whites] can count on cashing in each day” and compares it to “an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks” (ibid.), which whites, but not non-whites, have access too. In McIntosh’s view while racism is “something that puts others at a disadvantage,” its corollary, “white privilege,” is something that puts whites at an advantage (ibid.). Instead of focusing on how non-whites are disadvantaged as a result of racism, McIntosh proposes (as with her treatment of male privilege) to reverse the analysis by considering how whites are advantaged as a result of the privileges they enjoy. In other words, the problem is framed not in terms of racism or discrimination, but as privileges supposedly enjoyed by white people at the expense of non-whites. In an addendum to her 1989 paper, McIntosh (2010, p. 5) writes that her work “is about seeing privilege, the ‘up-side’ of oppression and discrimination,” defined as “unearned advantage, which can also be described as exemption from discrimination.” In Deguchi’s words, “privilege and oppression are opposite sides of the same coin” (2021, 16:05, capitalization omitted).

The chief problem with these views is that privilege and discrimination do not always or necessarily correlate with each other. The opposite of privilege is not oppression and discrimination but non-privilege. Some people may be

more privileged than others without oppressing and discriminating against them; some people may be less privileged than others without being oppressed and discriminated against. A lower-class person of any race or gender with a low-paying job and one-room apartment is unquestionably more privileged than an unemployed homeless person of any race or gender but this in no way entails that the more privileged person is oppressing or discriminating against the less privileged person. Conversely the fact that someone is not discriminated against does not entail that the person is privileged. Michael Dahlen (2022) suggests that WMP performs “a rhetorical sleight of hand” in which they “deceptively conflate advantages with a lack of disadvantages”:

A privilege...is a favor or entitlement; it's not the absence of a penalty. If someone gives me \$1,000, that's a favor or privilege; if someone refrains from stealing \$1,000 from me, that's not. It makes as much sense to conclude that white people are privileged because they're not victims of racism as it does to hold that a bystander at a robbery is privileged because the thief did not demand his wallet. Equating privilege with the absence of disadvantage leads to absurdity, for it means that everyone is privileged in countless ways. On this perverse conception, I'm “privileged” because I haven't been assaulted, poisoned, or murdered. (ibid.)

It is simply bad sociology to think that social groups defined on the basis of race and gender (and other identities) perfectly coincide with groups defined on the basis of the privileges they do or do not enjoy. A more nuanced and differentiated analysis with more empirical support shows that some whites and males may be privileged in ways that other whites and males are not; similarly some non-whites and females may be privileged in ways that other non-whites and females are not. Moreover, some non-whites and females may be more privileged than some whites and males, while some whites and males may be less privileged than some non-white females. Although there may be varying degrees of overlap, the set of people who are privileged never coincides completely with any set based on a particular identity. The same applies to discrimination. While some non-whites and females may indeed face forms of discrimination not faced by whites and males or even by other non-whites and

females, some whites and males may face forms of discrimination not faced by non-whites and females or even by other whites and males, particularly with the rise of equity and affirmative action programs that openly discriminate against whites and males while conferring numerous unearned advantages on non-whites and females (as the examples provided below will demonstrate).

In short, framing the problem of privilege by indiscriminately lumping all whites and males together into an “overprivileged, advantaged, and oppressive” category and all non-whites and females into an “underprivileged, disadvantaged, and oppressed” category solely on the basis of skin color and sex is itself racist and sexist. In a direct response to McIntosh’s 1988 article on white and male privilege, Kurt Miller writes,

...[W]hite privilege is a racist term. We know it is racist because in her essay in support of her white privilege conclusion, McIntosh writes, “we (whites) are justly seen as oppressive, even when we don’t see ourselves that way.” If one is going to describe an entire race of people (i.e., whites) with a derogatory term (i.e., “oppressive”), by definition one has made a racist statement—a race-based negative generalization. White privilege further fits the definition of a racist term because it neglects all of the experiences that are part of who I am. It doesn’t look at the individual but instead paints me with a broad racial brush and stereotypes my experience according to the color of my skin. (Miller 2014)

Making prejudgments about people on the basis of physical characteristics such as race and gender without examining the actual privileges and advantages they do or do not enjoy or the specific instances of discrimination they do or do not face is a textbook case of prejudice (by definition *prejudice* is making such prejudgments about people on the basis of their group identities rather than on the basis of individual traits). Rather than frame the issue of privilege in racist and sexist terms, as WMP does, the problem can and should be reframed in terms of the specific privileges actually enjoyed by specific individuals regardless of race and gender, e.g., not as “overprivileged, advantaged, and oppressive whites and males” vs. “underprivileged, disadvantaged, and

oppressed non-whites and females,” but, as the case may be, “overprivileged, advantaged, and oppressive whites, males, non-whites, and females” vs. “underprivileged, disadvantaged, and oppressed whites, males, non-whites, and females.” The issue is not about race and gender but privileges. Focus first on which specific privileges are being referred to, then to who has them and who doesn’t, then to the factors that may cause disparities in a given privilege, and finally to what, if anything, should be done to remove those disparities. A further analysis would no doubt show that many of these privileges and advantages do not adhere to people as such but rather to the social positions they occupy, as will be further examined.

2. WMP defines *privilege* in an amorphous, undifferentiated way.

Clearly we need a more highly differentiated concept of *privilege*, as well as a more highly differentiated understanding of which specific individuals and social groups the term can be applied to. An easy way to support stereotypes about privilege is to use the word as an uncountable noun to cover all possible types of privilege and then to say that all the members of a given social group are “privileged” while people who do not belong to that group are “not-privileged”—in other words, to categorize *people* as “privileged” and “not-privileged” rather than to differentiate between different kinds of *privilege* enjoyed by different individuals. (For a critical philosophical treatment of how the rhetoric of white privilege “obscures as much as it illuminates,” see Monahan 2014).

Privilege is generally defined as advantages or benefits given to some people but not others. The word may nonetheless be used in different ways and different contexts to refer to different *types* of privilege, some of which are more justifiable than others. An analysis of privilege is weakened when these different types are conflated into a single amorphous concept. In her 1989 essay McIntosh initially defines *privilege* as “an invisible package of unearned assets” (p. 10, also cited above), but soon acknowledges that the term may be “misleading” since it is usually thought of as a “favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck.” She then attempts “to distinguish between earned strength and unearned power conferred systemically” (p. 11), the former presumably (she is not clear about this and does not develop the

point) referring to advantages which a person has legitimately worked for and achieved and the latter to “unearned advantage and conferred dominance” (p. 12), which applies to males and whites, and others on the basis of age, ethnicity, physical ability, nationality, religion, and sexual orientation. Deguchi offers a more one-sided definition of *privilege* as “unearned access to social power based on membership in a dominant group,” adding that it is “not an advantage gained through one’s effort but afforded automatically by being a member of the dominant group” (2021, 5:20).

McIntosh also suggests that not all of the privileges she considers are “inevitably damaging,” writing that “the expectation that neighbors will be decent to you, or that your race will not count against you in court, should be the norm in a just society” (ibid.). The latter sort of privileges (i.e., those that “should be the norm in a just society”) are privileges which, in principle (as norms) should be extended to all people universally, regardless of race, gender, or any other attributes which a person has no control over. Some of these norms may be *ethical* even if they are not enforced by law (e.g., “the expectation that neighbors will be decent to you”), while others may be regarded as *rights* and given legal sanction (e.g., “the expectation that your race will not count against you in court”). As such, they are “unearned.” These expectations cannot be regarded as unearned *privileges*, however, but are instead unearned *rights* which everyone is entitled to, regardless of effort.

While various theories of *justice* have been developed from ancient times to the present (for an overview see Sandel 2010), it is generally held in most modern societies that political rights cannot be applied to specific groups on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, class, religion, ethnicity, or other factors, including wealth, power, and social status (i.e., whether one is “privileged” or not), but must be applied *equally* and *universally* to all law-abiding citizens in a given society. The principle of equality before the law for all citizens is enshrined in the Fourteenth Amendment of United States Constitution and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (Article 7), which further holds that everyone is entitled is to all such rights and freedoms “without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property birth or other status” (Article 2). These rights are guaranteed, of course, to white males as

much as they are to other groups.

As *norms*, all such principles are *ideals* which societies should strive for and by which progress can be measured. In reality, of course, these ideals may not always be achieved in practice. Both historically and at present some specific groups have been and are the victims of prejudice and systematically discriminated against on the basis of gender, race, and other factors. Whenever particular individuals or groups are denied equal rights by prevailing social norms or by law, it is entirely legitimate for them to agitate for equal treatment, which is precisely what the labor rights, civil rights, women's rights, gay rights, and other movements for social justice have attempted to do, with considerable though still imperfect success. The struggle for universal human rights is, moreover, one which can be embraced by persons of varying political perspectives, from conservatives to liberals to progressives and radicals, and applied to all social groups, however defined, including members of "majority" identity groups if and when they are legally discriminated against by policies intended to confer advantages to members of "minority" identity groups.

Equal rights knows no distinction between "majority" and "minority" groups. "Justice is blind" and, indeed, *must be blind* with respect to skin color and sex. Simultaneously it *must not be blind* with respect to racism and sexism or other attempts to deprive individuals of their basic human rights. Impartiality and equality before the law are not privileges, but ethical and legal rights, which should be granted to and enjoyed by all. A distinction can be made between *rights*, which are unearned but should be conferred equally to all people in society, and *privileges*, defined as unearned or earned advantages enjoyed by some people and not others. *Advantage* is a comparative term, which cannot be applied to rights (a right granted equally to everyone does not result in one person having an advantage over someone else) but only to privileges (a person holding a privilege by definition has an advantage over someone else).

Privileges can be further categorized as *fair* or *unfair*. Some privileges are natural in the sense that some people have proclivities which others lack. Other privileges may be the result of effort and social achievement. Sometimes they are both. Consider a person with an aptitude for mathematics and the appropriate education and a person who has an aptitude for music and has put

in the effort to become a good pianist. The former will have an advantage over the latter getting a job as an engineer, while the latter will have an advantage over the former getting a job as a professional musician. Most people would regard such outcomes as “fair.” The gender or race of the persons involved may have little or nothing to do with it. A concrete example: CareerExplorer (2024) reports that 88% of welders in the United States are male while only 12% are female, even though 84% of the people who express a career interest in becoming a welder are male and 16% are women. While some of the discrepancy may be due to gender bias, the main reason why there are more men than women in the welding profession is not because of overprivilege, discrimination, sexism, oppression, or domination on the part of men, but for the simple reason that women are far less interested than men in becoming welders.

Another example: The Institute for Diversity and Ethics (TIDE) reports that 82.5% of players in the National Basketball Association (NBA) are non-white while only 17.5% are white (Lapchick 2023, p. 5), facts which in themselves hardly establish that the NBA discriminates against whites, since teams are presumably more interested in hiring more qualified over less qualified players regardless of race. TIDE fails to note its hypocrisy, however, in awarding a grade of A+ to the NBA for its hiring practices while claiming that such grades are determined on the basis of federal affirmative action policies which state that “the workplace should reflect the percentage of the people in the racial group in the population” (p. 31). Given that racial minorities comprise 40.8% of the U.S. population (ibid.) while non-Hispanic whites comprise 59.2% (United States Census Bureau 2023), the fact is that the NBA employs nearly twice as many players of color than the percentage in the general population and less than one-third as many whites. What such skewered results indicate is that TIDE’s standard for “diversity and inclusion” is not racial balance but rather increasing the number of non-white players even if it results in a decrease in the proportion of white players. Such double standards undermine TIDE’s unqualified praise for the NBA’s “progressive commitment to diversity and inclusion and social justice advocacy” (p. 2). Nor should the fact that the NBA hires a disproportionate number of non-white players be taken as proof of “non-white privilege,” as a consistent application of the logic of WMP

would be obliged to admit. Rather, it should be taken as evidence of the NBA's laudable commitment to anti-discrimination on the basis of race. Most people who enjoy watching basketball really do not care about the race of the players, which is as it should be.

In an ideal society everyone would be able to find work that aligns perfectly with both their qualifications and interests but in reality there may be discrepancies between the number of people who would like to pursue careers in a particular field and the number who are actually able to obtain employment in those fields, which could be due to any number of factors, including a limited number of jobs being available in a particular field, a larger number of people who would like those jobs, and, indeed in some cases, discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, and other irrelevant factors. Nonetheless, the fact that people of some races and genders tend to "dominate" certain professions cannot in all, and perhaps the vast majority of cases, be blamed solely on systemic discrimination or oppression, as implied by WMP. Not everyone is able to gain positions in society they are both qualified for and want. Diversity is undoubtedly a good thing in society. If everyone is a doctor, there is no one to do the plumbing. If everyone is a plumber, there no one to do open heart surgery. And we still need people to do many useful but less prestigious jobs in society, even if the persons doing them are qualified for more prestigious jobs. It should be further noted as a simple matter of fact that there are both "majority" and "minority" persons who have the privilege of working in prestigious positions and in jobs they like, as well as "majority" and "minority" persons who are obliged to fill less prestigious positions and take jobs they do not particularly like, a situation which may not be completely "fair" but it is hardly "unfair" either. What is definitely "unfair" are situations in which unqualified people are hired for jobs they are not qualified for. (There are, no doubt, quite a few incompetent people in positions of privilege and prestige in society.)

Filling positions in society on the basis of the advantages some people have over others in terms of skills and capabilities rather than on the basis of race and gender undoubtedly results in greater benefits to society for the simple reason that we want the most competent people to be given the jobs we need them to do. We don't call a doctor when a water pipe breaks and we

don't call a plumber when we need open heart surgery. In the same way that it is inexcusable to discriminate against competent people on the basis of race or gender, it is inexcusable to ask incompetent people to do a job they are unqualified to do simply because of their race or gender. Employing a person for a particular job who has earned the necessary qualifications may be appropriately regarded as "fair." Employing a person for a particular job who lacks the necessary qualifications may be appropriately regarded as "unfair." Accepting or rejecting candidates on the basis of irrelevant characteristics (race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) may also be appropriately regarded as "unfair." There is no justification for hiring an unqualified person or discriminating against a qualified person simply on the basis of race, gender, or other factors.

These principles cut both ways by prohibiting *negative* forms of discrimination against people of any race or gender, as has been the case with historical manifestations of racism and sexism, as well as *positive* forms of discrimination that give preferential treatment to some people on the basis of race and gender at the expense of others, as with some contemporary forms of affirmative action. In a genuinely meritocratic society social positions are filled on the basis of merit, not on the basis of other factors, such as race or gender, which have no bearing on a person's merit. Obviously it is unjust when an unqualified white or male is hired for a position simply because the person is white or male, but equally unjust if an unqualified non-white or female is hired for a position simply because the person is non-white or female. Conversely it also unjust for a qualified non-white or female or a qualified white or male not to be hired for a position solely on the basis of their race or gender. It is, of course, just as unjust when students are admitted to a university on the basis of their ability to pay or legacy ties rather than on the basis of academic merit.

McIntosh condemns what she refers to as the "myth of meritocracy," arguing to the contrary that "one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own" (1989, p. 11). The problem, however, is not meritocracy as such, but rather whether a meritocracy is operating fairly or unfairly. If the meritocracy is being operated fairly, then there is no reason why everyone cannot be treated with full equality. If

the meritocracy is being operated unfairly, however, the way to remedy the situation is not to give preferential treatment to some people purely on the basis of their race or gender but rather to reform the meritocracy and insure that it is indeed being operated fairly. In either case, the end goal is full equality regardless of race or gender. Meritocracy should not be conflated with hierarchy. Hierarchy simply means that a society is stratified into “higher” and “lower” positions, with people in “higher” positions generally given more responsibility for performing certain functions, which may in some cases also involve having legitimate authority over others. Meritocracy simply means that social positions are filled on the basis of merit, not on the basis of other factors, such as race or gender, which have no bearing on a person’s merit. Even in a perfectly meritocratic society with a perfect statistical balance of races and genders, there will still be some people (of all races and genders) occupying positions of privilege and others (of all races and genders) occupying less privileged positions. It should be further noted that simply because a person occupies a higher position in a social hierarchy does not necessarily entail that that person should also be accorded disproportionate or unfair political power, economic advantages, or other unearned privileges, a topic which requires separate deliberation.

McIntosh’s account fails to note such distinctions and as a result glosses over what may be legitimate forms of privilege. In her notes for facilitators who present her WMP papers to others, she recommends that they “not get trapped in definitions of privilege and power” since such definitions “lack nuances and flexibility” (2010, p. 6). Well, there is no doubt that McIntosh’s treatment of privilege also lacks both nuance and flexibility. A charitable reading of her work would suggest that while she conflates various forms of privilege into a single amorphous concept, she nonetheless manages to present the beginnings of a plausible account of illegitimate forms of privilege, defined as privileges that are both unearned and undeserved. She then botches the account, however, by insinuating that only males and whites are the recipients of these privileges.

Although it is not the case that *all* forms of privilege are gained through oppression and discrimination, *some* of them undoubtedly are. Active forms of racism and sexism may manifest themselves, as McIntosh writes, in “individual

acts of meanness” (1989, p. 12) by members of one group against another. There may also be cases in which one group consciously attempts to gain or maintain dominance in order to successfully oppress and discriminate against other groups. Such tendencies can be found not only in whites and men seeking power over non-whites and women but also in non-whites and women seeking power over whites and men. Any attempt to maintain unfair customs, implement prejudicial social norms, institute laws, or “write the rules” in ways that advantage one group over other groups, however categorized, is incontestably discriminatory and can be justly opposed. Embedded forms of discrimination such as these are examples of what is generally referred to as *structural* or *systemic discrimination*. When found in particular organizations it is referred to as *institutional discrimination*; when found in society as a whole it is referred to as *societal discrimination* (cf. Banaji, Fiske, and Massey 2021). While some forms of structural discrimination may be easily observed, others, as McIntosh notes, are “invisible systems” which extend “unearned advantage and conferred dominance” (1989, p. 12) to some groups rather than others. *Conferred* is the appropriate word here because it suggests that the source of privilege is not *people* but rather *social structures* and how these structures enable some people (of all racial, gender, and other groups) to enjoy more privileges than others (of all racial, gender, and other groups).

Despite claiming to offer a “systemic,” “structural” account of “social change,” White Male Privilege theorists are mainly psychologists whose micro-level methodical individualism focuses more on the subjective personal motivations of individual actors than on macro-level social structures, which leads them to see “social change” almost entirely in terms of internal personal and collective transformation while they rarely get around to examining and trying to change actual social structures. While McIntosh insists that her work “is not about blame, shame, guilt, or whether one is a ‘nice person’ [but] about observing, realizing, thinking systematically and personally” (2010, p. 5), she in fact diverts attention away from genuine structural problems in hierarchical, meritocratic societies by personalizing the issue and focusing instead on the people who occupy privileged positions in society. For McIntosh and other WMP theorists, such as Deguchi (2021, previously cited), the problem is not oppressive social *structures* but oppressive *people*, with whites and males

being especially singled out for opprobrium, as if they are in some way morally defective simply due to their race and gender. Despite any objections McIntosh or Deguchi may make to the contrary, this is exactly how their theories of WMP are often interpreted. In his article, “The Problem with White Men,” David Todd McCarty states unequivocally, “More than any other single demographic, it is infinitely arguable that white men are responsible for the vast majority of America’s social ills” (2020). Despite the fact that such views are blatantly racist and sexist, they are frequently presented as incontrovertible truths that can only be challenged at one’s peril. Witness the case of Daniel Schmidt who was almost expelled from the University of Chicago for complaining about hatred and racism against whites in a class entitled “The Problem of Whiteness” (Sky News Australia 2023).

Equating privilege with certain racial, gender, or other identity groups ignores the empirical fact that privileged and not-privileged social positions may be occupied by anyone, regardless race, gender, or any other identity. No identity group is completely homogenous. Some members of majority groups are “privileged” while others are not; some members of minority groups are “not privileged” while others in fact are. As will be further demonstrated below, although it may be statistically true that a high percentage of privileged positions in any society are occupied by people of numerically dominant identity groups, it is just as true that a significant percentage of people in these same groups do not occupy privileged positions. Although it may be statistically true that a high percentage of underprivileged positions in any given society are occupied by people of numerically non-dominant identity groups, it is just as true that a significant percentage of people in these same groups may occupy privileged positions. It is simply not the case that all white men are oppressive or that all non-white females are oppressed. Females and non-whites may also enjoy unearned and undeserved privileges.

3. WMP lacks academic rigor and is methodologically flawed.

McIntosh supports her flawed theoretical treatment of privilege with a flawed methodological approach to gathering evidence in its support. Her seminal papers on privilege focus mainly on providing concrete examples of white privilege, while offering virtually none of male privilege. Eschewing empirical

research and statistical data, she employs a purely anecdotal methodology in which she attempts to identify “some of the daily effects of white privilege” in her life, choosing conditions which she thinks “*attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege* than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location” while admitting that “all these other factors are intricately intertwined” (1989, p. 10, italics in the original). She arrives at this list by comparing her own life experiences with those of her “African American co-workers, friends, and acquaintances with whom [she] comes into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place and line work” who “cannot count on most of these conditions” (ibid.). Interested readers are, of course, invited to look at the full list, consisting of 46 items in her original 1988 article (from which the examples below are taken), pared down to 26 items in her 1989 paper.

Some of the items on McIntosh’s list are no doubt more significant than others. Non-white motorists being pulled over by the police when no apparent traffic violations have been committed (#25) is obviously an objectionable case of racial profiling, while going to a grocery store and not being able to find staple foods that fit one’s cultural traditions (#12) may simply be due to market forces which oblige supermarkets in some locations to not stock items there are few customers for. (As a white male American living in Tokyo I can testify that it is very difficult to find hamburger buns in most Japanese supermarkets). Some of the privileges listed are not unique to whites but may be enjoyed by non-whites as well, depending on the particular circumstances, e.g., “I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time” (#1) (begging the question of why someone committed to diversity would wish to do this in the first place). Other items are (thankfully) outdated and less relevant, given the social changes that have occurred since McIntosh compiled her list, e.g., “I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely and positively represented”(#6). Even taken in their contemporaneous context, however, nearly all of the items on the list exemplify freedom from prejudice rather than the conferral of privilege, e.g., “I can be pretty sure that my children’s teachers and employers will tolerate them if they fit school and workplace norms; my chief worries about them do not concern others’ attitudes toward their race” (#16). Prejudice, to be sure, is something experienced far more often by non-whites than whites, but as

argued previously, freedom from prejudice is more appropriately regarded as a right rather than a privilege. Otherwise, very few of the items mentioned by McIntosh constitute examples of institutional discrimination, i.e., cases in which discrimination is actually part of the institutional structure rather than simply prejudicial stances taken by individuals and groups within those structures. The two instances of structural discrimination she gives both concern choices made by educational institutions about curricula: “I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race” (#8) and “I can easily find academic courses and institutions that give attention only to people of my race” (#44) (again begging the question of why someone would want to take courses which give attention only to people of one’s own race).

McIntosh’s 2010 essay, “Some Notes for Facilitators on Presenting My White Privilege Papers,” provides guidelines for conducting group discussions in which participants are invited to share their own personal experiences of privilege. McIntosh cautions facilitators not to generalize from her papers, since they are about her own experiences, not “the experiences of all white people in all times and places and circumstances” (2010, p. 5). She further admonishes facilitators to “keep the lists in their autobiographical contexts” (ibid.) and to “draw attention to the specificity of ‘my sample,’” which “is very specific with regard to race, sex, region, location, workplace, vocation and nation” (p. 6), adding (admirably), “It is a matter of scholarly integrity and accuracy not to claim more than I did” (p. 5). Having introduced McIntosh’s account, facilitators then encourage participants to make their own autobiographical lists of privilege based not only on race, but on a variety of other factors, specifically: Class, Region, Religion, Gender, Gender identity, Employment, Physical ability, Handedness, Language, Nation of origin, Ethnicity, Families’ relation to education, money, housing, and neighborhoods, Families’ languages of origin” (p. 6). It should be recognized, McIntosh writes, that “all people in a workshop or class will have a lifetime of experiences of both advantage and disadvantage, empowerment and disempowerment, overwhelming or subtle, within many different systems of power” and that “all people are both located in systems and also uniquely individual” (p. 5). Ultimately what all these caveats amount to is an admission that people

must be treated as individuals and cannot be simply pigeon-holed on the basis of gender and race into her initial categories of males and whites as “overprivileged, advantaged, and oppressive” and females and non-whites as “underprivileged, disadvantaged, and oppressed.”

McIntosh’s concession to pluralism is commendable, but it is also clear that once we start to look at the privileges individuals actually have with respect to the various social groups they belong to, any stereotypes we may make on the basis of binary group identities begin to explode. Indeed, we can find examples to support the claim that “whites and males are privileged,” but we can also find counterexamples to support the claim that “non-whites and females are privileged.” A person’s identity cannot be reduced to a single group, given that individuals never belong to a single group but to many different groups. Everyone has multi-layered, multiple identities (Singer 1998), a fact which suggests that the term *intersectionality* can and should be applied to everyone, i.e., to “white males” as much as to “non-white females.” Most theorists of intersectionality, however, construct further binaries by placing members of some identity groups in a “privileged and oppressive” category and others in a “discriminated against and oppressed” category.

Deguchi (2021), for example, constructs a list of identity categories similar to McIntosh’s:

Identity categories: Race/ethnicity, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Education, Social class, Ability

Dominant (privileged and oppressor) groups: White (US), Japanese (in Japan), Male, Heterosexual, Cisgender, College or more, Upper/Middle class, Able-bodied

Subordinated (underprivileged and oppressed) groups: Non-white, Foreigners/Zainichi/Koreans/Ainu (in Japan), Female, Homosexual, Transgender, High School or less, Lower class, Disabled (8:35)

Dominant group members: Do not experience discrimination. Do not experience a sense of alienation. Not seen through stereotypes. Do not

experience institutional and structural discrimination. Do not experience cultural discrimination. Not seen with prejudice. Believed when speaking up against injustice.

Subordinated group members: Experience discrimination. Experience sense of alienation. Seen through stereotypes. Experience institutional and structural discrimination. Cultural discrimination. Seen with prejudice. Blamed as complaining when they speak up against injustice. (16:00)

DiAngelo (2019, p. 64) comes up with a similar list and adds a few more categories, such as Christians oppressing Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, etc., ignoring cases in which these latter groups discriminate among themselves, as well as against Christians in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas. World Watch (United Kingdom Parliament 2024) reports that approximately 340,000,000 Christians (one in seven) are subject to “high levels of persecution and discrimination” worldwide.

Ironically, the main problem with these overly complicated systems of categorizing people on the basis their identities and then dividing them into “dominant, privileged, oppressive” and “subordinated, non-privileged, oppressed” groups is that they use overly simplistic thinking to deal with what is in fact a genuinely complex issue. Rather than conduct an empirical study of people’s actual experiences, these theorists simply assume that individuals classified according to particular identities will have the experiences of privilege/non-privilege, etc. which the categories they have been placed into predict they will have. Evidence is then sought which confirms that people with those identities in fact have those experiences and taken as “proof” of the initial claim that some groups are privileged and oppressive, while others are non-privileged and oppressed. Utilizing a methodological approach which looks for evidence that supports a particular claim while ignoring evidence that contradicts it is the very definition of *confirmation bias* (and the associated *fallacy of excluded exceptions*), which involves cherry picking the data to include evidence which confirms one’s favored stereotypes while ignoring evidence that does not.

Thus, while the examples of “white privilege” McIntosh provides on her list may be true, they in no way establish the truth of her central claim that whites are “privileged and oppressive,” while non-whites are “non-privileged and oppressed.” She admits as much with her caution not to generalize from her papers. In responsible research, evidence based on personal narratives is regarded as *anecdotal* and, as such, may be true but lacks intellectual rigor and is insufficient to establish any valid overarching claims or theories. Anecdotal evidence can be downright misleading when it is misused to simply “prove” a predetermined conclusion and reach a desired outcome, as is clearly the case when McIntosh starts with the conclusion that whites and males are privileged and then attempts to selectively marshal evidence in its support rather than starting with a comprehensive pool of evidence and then attempting to draw conclusions from it. Part of the problem, no doubt, is the tendency of social scientists in general to “narrow down” their topics, which may be entirely appropriate in some cases but not others. While purely empirical research must often concentrate on minutiae, if one’s aim is to build a theory, all the data (or as much as possible) needs to be accounted for. To focus, as McIntosh does, on “white privilege” or “male privilege” and then look for evidence which confirms her initial hypotheses rather than for evidence that might disconfirm them results in a narrow-minded and myopic rather than a wider and more adequate understanding of the problem.

Having individuals reflect on their own experiences may be useful in encounter groups and sensitivity sessions where individuals attempt to come to terms with their personal experiences of racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice and discrimination and to become more aware of their own privileges or lack thereof. As such, the exercise may have therapeutic value and can serve as a motivation for social action. Yet, while personal narratives are not necessarily invalid and may even qualify as a legitimate type of qualitative research in sociological studies, no general conclusions can be drawn from them; counternarratives may also be produced which “dispute misleading generalizations or refute universal claims” (Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett 2012, p. 1). While all of the items on McIntosh’s own “white privilege” list may accurately reflect her personal experience, she acknowledges that they are “autobiographical” (2010, p. 5, previously cited), which means that the exercise

is essentially an example not of research but of “me-search” (Nash and Bradley 2011), a self-narrative which confirms her own experience of privilege. Attempting to pile up more “evidence” of white privilege by inviting other whites to reflect on their “privilege” is an example of “we-search” (Winberry and Gray 2022). Once this group-think effort is finished, the participants will no doubt reach the conclusion that whites and males are “dominant, privileged, oppressive,” while non-whites and females are “subordinated, non-privileged, oppressed,” just as WMP predicts. The problem with using personal narratives to support general statements is, as Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett (2012, p. 1) point out, that counterexamples can typically be found which refute the statements. Moreover, other evidence can be produced which confirms general statements that stand in direct opposition to the claims made by WMP theorists. Can evidence be found in support of the statement “Whites and males are privileged”? Of course, it can. Can evidence be found in support of the statement “Whites and males are not privileged”? Of course, it can. Can evidence be found in support of the statement “non-whites and females” are privileged? Of course it can. Evidence can even be found which shows that blacks have white privilege (Brad & Lex Couchcast 2021b)!

Cherry picking the evidence is exactly how confirmation bias works and precisely why the flawed methodological approach taken by WMP theorists cannot withstand rigorous scholarly scrutiny. The catch is that the exact same methodology can be used to “prove” that any social group enjoys privileges which are denied to other social groups. Simply change the social group under consideration, start looking for evidence of specific privileges which that group has and others do not, and—*voilà!*—we can confirm that any identity group is “privileged,” including non-whites, females, or any other group.

4. WMP rigs examples of privilege to support conclusions it favors.

In this section examples will be provided which support conclusions that refute the basic statements of WMP and similar premises. The basic contention, as we have indicated, is that who has “privilege” does not always correlate with race or gender, which undermines the central claims of McIntosh and WMP theorists that “whites and males are overprivileged, advantaged, and oppressive” while “females and non-whites are underprivileged,

disadvantaged, and oppressed.” The examples given here are drawn from current social practices; historical examples of privilege and discrimination are further discussed in a subsequent section. The examples show that while people may hold certain privileges as members of any given identity group, they may also be denied privileges as a result of their membership in that group. The purpose in providing these counterexamples is simply to point out inherent biases in how the problem of privilege is framed and how it is possible to adduce evidence which confirms any predetermined conclusion about the privileges enjoyed by any given identity group. It should be noted that while some of this evidence is also anecdotal and subject to confirmation bias, other examples relate to privileges that are legitimately earned or accorded to certain groups on the basis of structural factors, such as prejudicial social norms or laws, which are in some cases openly discriminatory. It should be further noted that while this evidence may show that some groups are indeed “privileged” and others “non-privileged,” the conclusion cannot necessarily be drawn that members of any of the privileged groups are “oppressors” while members of the non-privileged groups are “oppressed.” How we divide people into boxes ultimately depends on who we ask and which questions we ask them.

GENDER: *Examples of privileges enjoyed by women but not men (of all races):*

1. Child support expenses and parenting rights are not always equitably shared between spouses after a divorce.
2. Women are sometimes given preferential treatment over men in education, employment, health care, and government programs.
3. Women are less likely than men to be falsely accused of rape, while cases of domestic violence committed by women against men are not given equal legal treatment.
4. Women suffer lower rates of homelessness and suicide than men.
5. Women are less likely than men to be incarcerated and given the death penalty.
6. Women are free to assume both masculine and feminine roles in society while men are largely restricted to assuming masculine roles (e.g., as “success objects”).

MINORITIES: *Examples of privileges enjoyed by minorities but not majorities (in general):*

1. Embracing a minority identity in terms of race, gender, or sexual orientation is regarded as a source of “pride,” while openly embracing a majority identity (e.g., as a white male cisgender) identity is shamed as “racist,” “sexist,” or “homophobic,” even when it is not.
2. Prejudice against minorities is considered socially unacceptable while prejudice against majorities is rarely called out (e.g., racist slurs).
3. Affirmative action with respect to college admissions (declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2023), scholarships, hiring, promotions, government programs, etc. favor minorities over majorities.
4. Police brutality against minorities is highly profiled by the media, academia, and social justice groups, while police brutality against majorities is largely ignored.
5. Members of minority but not majority groups are able to tout their race and/or gender as “qualifications” for public office.
6. It is easier for minorities to openly express outrage over discriminatory practices than members of majority groups, who risk being censured.

CLASS: *Examples of privileges enjoyed by higher vs. lower class people (of all races):*

1. The ability to find employment in a career of their choosing with decent pay.
2. The ability to live in decent housing in a safe neighborhood.
3. The ability to enjoy an affluent lifestyle in terms of consumer goods, travel, etc.
4. The ability to send their children to decent schools and acquire a good education.
5. The ability to afford adequate medical insurance and have access to

- good health care.
6. Not having to worry about falling into poverty if they lose their job or become ill.
 7. The ability to retire in comfort at a reasonable age.
 8. The ability to have power and influence in corporations, organizations, politics, and society as a whole.

While McIntosh cautions against facilitators of privilege awareness workshops conducting “gym-exercises which position people in only one aspect of their identities, asking them to step forward or back from a baseline at a given prompt” (2020, p. 6), this exercise—called a *privilege walk*—is frequently adopted, particularly by educators eager to demonstrate privilege to students (a video of an actual privilege walk can be found at Tomas 2017; sample questions can be found at Eastern Illinois University 2024; Williams 2024). The main problem with privilege walks is that they divide people into “winners” and “losers,” inducing a false sense entitlement or feelings of guilt among the winners while reinforcing a sense of failure and feelings of resentment among the losers. Rather than helping to overcome oppression, people are simply separated into fixed categories on the basis of factors they have no control over, which is one reason why they encounter so much opposition from the public and those trainers who refuse to conduct them, as well as from scholars (Tomas 2017; Mascolo 2019; Goel 2021; Morton 2022).

It is fairly easy to rig the questions used in privilege walks to insure that members of predetermined social groups move towards the front while others move towards the back. To understand how privilege walks obtain their results, take a group of rich American whites, blacks, males, and females and an equal number of homeless whites, blacks, males, and females, then redivide them on the basis of the following questions:

To end up with all the women in front and all the men in back, ask questions about gender such as “If you are not required to register for the military draft, take one step forward” and “If you were circumcised as a baby without your consent, take one step back.”

To end up with all the whites in front and all the non-whites in back, ask questions about race such as “If your race is widely represented in the U.S. Congress, take one step forward” and “If your ancestors were forced to come to the U.S. not by choice, take one step back.”

To end up so that the number of whites and non-whites in front equals the number of whites and non-whites in back, ask questions about social class such as “If you slept in a bed last night, take one step forward” and “If you do not eat on a regular basis, take one step back.”

To end up with people who support WMP in front and people who oppose it in the back simply ask “If you think that assistance should be given only to people who are non-white and female, regardless of whether or not they are homeless, take one step forward” and “If you are think that assistance should be given only to people who are homeless, regardless of race and gender, take five to ten steps back.”

If you want everyone to be in the front and no one to be in the back, ask “Do you feel we are stronger united than divided?” (Penn State Student Affairs 2018).

5. WMP ignores empirical data which refutes its basic premises.

WMP theorists are not particularly well-known for supporting their claims with empirical evidence. McIntosh’s account of white and male privilege is entirely subjective and impressionistic. Apart from anecdotal examples, she offers no statistical data in support of her more general claims. Deguchi as well provides little to no actual statistical evidence for her conclusions, openly stating in one of her presentations that “the numbers don’t matter” (2023). Both scholars simply ignore empirical evidence which refutes the basic premises of WMP. Their attempt to place whites and males by default into a “dominant, privileged, oppressive” category and non-whites and females into a “subordinated, non-privileged, oppressed” category ultimately fails because it is simply not confirmed by the empirical evidence and ignores the extent to which privilege does not always correlate with specific racial and

identity groups (see Young 2019). The best conclusion that the evidence is actually capable of supporting is that *some* whites and *some* males will in *some* cases experience *some* types of privileges more than *some* non-whites and *some* females. By changing the target identity group and preselecting different examples of privileges it can also be shown, as above, that *some* non-whites and *some* females will in *some* cases experience *some* types of privileges more than *some* whites and *some* males. Let us look then at some of the empirical evidence corresponding to counterexamples provided in the preceding section.

GENDER

Note that some of the items on the gender privilege lists in Section 4 above are clear-cut examples of structural discrimination in which the same laws and rules are not applied equally to both males and females, e.g., men but not women are required to register for the military draft. Other examples of structural discrimination against men include specific privileges currently granted to women with respect to alimony payments and child custody (further documentation of discrimination against men is provided by Nathanson and Young 2006a; 2006b; 2010; 2015; Benatar 2012; and Sommers 2015—the titles alone speak volumes). The struggle for male gender equality has been taken up by what has come to be known as the Men’s Rights Movement in the same way that the struggle for female gender equality has been taken up by the Women’s Rights Movement. Critics of the Men’s Rights Movement have attempted to malign its supporters by claiming that they are part of a male supremacist, anti-feminist “manosphere” (see, for example, Anti-Defamation League, 2024), which may be true of some of the movement’s sympathizers, who are just as misogynist as some supporters of WMP are misandrist. Most, and perhaps the majority, of the Men’s Rights Movement’s members (which includes *both* men *and* women incidentally) are simply opposed to any and all forms of discrimination, whether it be against men *or* women. The struggle to secure equal rights for men is not and should not be regarded as “anti-female” any more than the struggle to secure equal rights for women should be characterized as “anti-male.”

Branding women who fight for their rights as “feminists” and men who fight for their rights as “sexists” is a prime example of the kind of double

standards found so frequently in the discourse surrounding WMP. Emily K. Carian, author of *Good Guys, Bad Guys: The Perils of Men's Gender Activism* (2024a), states in an interview that the foundational belief of the Men's Rights Movement "is that men are disadvantaged or discriminated against because of their gender, while women are privileged, and that feminism is to blame" (2024b). How is this so different from the foundational belief of WMP that women are disadvantaged or discriminated against because of their gender, while men are privileged, and that men advocating for equal rights for males are to blame? If WMP theorists become uncomfortable when such double standards are pointed out, consider this further claim by Carian and simply change the word *men* to *women*: "The idea that men [→ women] are privileged evokes discomfort and negative emotions, like guilt and anger, and threatens their moral sense of self" (ibid.). *Gynocentrism*, which prioritizes women's concerns and a feminist viewpoint while disparaging men, is as much (and perhaps more) of a problem in contemporary society and scholarly research, as *androcentrism*, which prioritizes male concerns and a masculinist viewpoint while disparaging women. Most supporters of WMP are, in any case, *radical feminists*, who advocate the overthrow of male supremacy and the elimination of patriarchy, rather than *liberal feminists* who advocate ending discrimination and achieving full equality within existing political and economic structures.

MINORITIES

While it is absolutely true that *some* members of *some* minority groups are in *some* cases discriminated against and do not enjoy *some* privileges enjoyed by *some* members of *some* majority groups, it is also true that *some* members of *some* majority groups are in *some* cases discriminated against and do not enjoy *some* privileges enjoyed by *some* members of *some* minority groups. Although experimental studies show that discrimination against minority groups in the United States is in fact more prominent than discrimination against majority groups (Payne 2019), discrimination against members of majority groups, specifically whites, inarguably exists (Carl 2024; the provocative cover of his book includes a photo of graffiti reading "Kill All Whits [Whites]"), as evidenced by recent court cases against discriminatory government programs and an increase in the number of lawsuits challenging DEI programs and

corporate discrimination against whites, males, and cisgender people (Guynn 2023). American Airlines, for example, has been obliged to discontinue discriminatory employment practices, acknowledging that its “recruiting and hiring based on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) violated federal laws and equal employment opportunities” (America First Legal 2024). U.S. District Court Judge Mark T. Pittman ruled that the Minority Business Development Agency violates the Constitution’s guarantee of equal protection by serving only Blacks, Latinos, and other minorities on the presumption that they are inherently disadvantaged while excluding whites, who may also be disadvantaged (Jones 2024). The Small Business Administration’s policy of prioritizing minorities and women when distributing Restaurant Revitalization Fund grants during COVID (as if restaurants owned by whites and men were not under comparable stress) was declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court (Fantozzi 2021).

According to a 2017 poll conducted by Harvard University, even though 84% of whites “believe that there is discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities in America,” 55% also “believe that there is discrimination against whites” (Harvard University 2017, p. 2). Nonetheless, discrimination against whites is often denied, explained away, or simply ignored by minority rights advocates, including supporters of WMP. Historically, of course, there have been any number of government policies and programs that have openly discriminated against racial and ethnic minorities, such as the Federal Housing Administration’s practice of insuring mortgages for whites but not blacks from the 1930s to the 1960s and of “[subsidizing] builders on the condition that they sell new homes only to white people” (Dahlen 2022). Given active efforts to dismantle discriminatory practices in government, the workplace, and public facilities, however, one would be hard pressed to point to any clear-cut examples of policies or laws that specifically favor whites or males at present, while cases do exist which favor non-whites and females over whites and males—facts that are simply ignored by WMP.

The aim of WMP is in any case not to assure equal rights for all but rather to extend privileges to minority groups while denying them to members of majority groups, a project which, as the above examples show, has achieved a fair amount of success. To even raise questions about “black privilege”

(Horowitz and Perazzo 2013; Blake 2016; Dow 2020) or “reverse racism” (discrimination by minority group members against majority group members) provokes outrage among WMP supporters. Those who do not get onboard with their agenda are chastised for being unaware of or refusing to acknowledge their “privilege.” Whites advocating equal rights for all regardless of race and gender are smeared as “racist” and “sexist” (*cf.* Deguchi 2021, 20:15, previously cited) or accused of being part of a “white backlash” which purportedly fears the loss of white dominance in society. The contention is that even whites who think of themselves as “good persons” may be unable to admit their own explicit or implicit racial biases and to acknowledge the role of whites in systemic racism. White feminist scholar, Robin DiAngelo, writes, “White identity is inherently racist; white people do not exist outside the system of white supremacy” (2019, p. 149). DiAngelo, who coined the term *white fragility* (2019), defines it as “the defensive reactions so many white people have when [their] racial worldview, positions, or advantages are questioned or challenged” (quoted in Doyle 2018), while failing note that persons in minority racial, gender, and sexual orientation groups may also exhibit “defensive reactions” when their “worldview, positions, or advantages are questioned or challenged” (another double standard). The concept of *white fragility* has been criticized by black linguist, John McWhorter, as “racist” and “condescending to Black people” (quoted in Doubek 2020).

The spurious claim is sometimes advanced that minorities cannot possibly be prejudiced, racist, or discriminatory against majorities because they lack the power to do so. DiAngelo again: “When I say that only whites can be racist, I mean that in the United States, only whites have the collective social and institutional power and privilege over people of color. People of color do not have this power and privilege over white people” (2019, p. 22). Ironically, it is a black legal scholar, Randall Kennedy, who calls out the white feminist scholar DiAngelo for her racist stereotyping of blacks by pointing out that minorities also occupy positions of power and privilege in American society:

The idea that Black people cannot be racist because they lack power to effectuate their prejudice is misguided for a number of reasons including the obvious empirical point that there are Black people who, as police

chiefs, mayors, Cabinet officials, members of Congress, professors, directors of human resources offices, chief executive officers, prison wardens, and president and vice president of the United States, do exercise decisive, often unreviewable, power over whites and others. (Kennedy 2021; see also Wood 2015, “Where Did We Get the Idea that Only White People Can Be Racist?”)

Claims which tar all whites and males as “racist” simply because they advocate people being treated equally irrespective of race and gender miss the mark. In fact, a higher percentage of whites (92%) than blacks (86%) support the proposition that “all people deserve an equal opportunity to succeed, no matter their race or ethnicity” in the United States (Public Agenda 2023), as is in fact guaranteed by the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which specifically bans discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin with respect to voting, public accommodations, federally assisted programs, and employment. DEI’s tendency to advocate favorable treatment to some groups over others is not only unconstitutional but also illegal (Eden and Hammer 2024). Yet a quick Google search of “special programs for minorities and women” reveals 24 pages of government, private, financial, and educational institutions offering support programs specifically for minorities and women to the exclusion of whites and males, including programs offered by the Department of State, Department of Defense, Department of Justice, Department of Agriculture, Department of the Treasury, Department of Commerce, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, National Archives, National Science Foundation, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes of Health (all from the first two Google pages). Correspondingly a Google search of “special programs for whites and men” turns up exactly zero contemporary support programs for people in this racial and gender group, a figure which would be totally acceptable, of course, if only it were consistent with figures for other racial and gender groups. These results are indicative of overt structural discrimination not against non-whites and females but against whites and males and—dare we say it—of the

tendency of current social structures to *privilege* non-whites and women over white men in spades.

There are high levels of support (70% of all Americans, 67% of whites, 81% of blacks, 76% of Latinos) for the U.S. Equality Act, which, if passed, would prohibit discrimination against people on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Hart Research Associates 2021). Most Americans, including most whites, are completely comfortable with and open to including and welcoming members of minority groups in all areas of society and do not harbor any racist or sexist attitudes towards them. By casting all whites and males as “racist,” “sexist,” and “oppressive,” WMP presents a highly misleading (and ethnocentric in the case of Deguchi) view of race relations in the United States. A more accurate characterization of the “majority-minority” divide in the United States would distinguish between: (1) the vast majority of Americans of all races and genders, including most white males, who are neither racist or sexist and are opposed to *all* forms of discrimination, and (2) a growing racist and sexist minority comprised of both (a) extremists on the right, such as White Nationalists and alt-right neo-fascists, and male and female incels, and (b) extremists on the left who promulgate an anti-white, anti-male perspective, sometimes in the guise of DEI, CRT, and WMP.

CLASS

Class is acknowledged by WMP (McIntosh 1989; Deguchi 2020) and intersectionality theorists (Collins and Bilge 2020) as a factor which confers privilege, but is seldom given more than a superficial analysis, particularly of the lower classes, except as it intersects with people of color, women, and other minority groups (while excluding whites and males), undoubtedly because it is the one category which most clearly disrupts their attempt to see males and whites as constituting an “oppressor class” and females and non-whites as constituting an “oppressed class.” The simple fact is that there are males and females, whites and non-whites in all socioeconomic classes. A 2023 report on wealth across racial groups (Pew Research Center 2023b) found that 36% of Asian-Americans are upper class, 39% middle class, and 26% lower class; the respective figures are while 28%, 47%, 25% for whites, 10%, 42%, 48% for Hispanics, and 7%, 38%, 55% for blacks. (The report divides households

into classes on the basis of wealth: upper class more than \$667,500, middle class \$41,700-\$667,500, lower class less than \$41,700.) When looked at as percentages the figures indeed show discrepancies between racial groups in terms of wealth, with Asian-Americans, not whites, having the highest percentage of people in the upper class.

The figures also clearly disrupt the notion that whites are the only (or even the major) group occupying “privileged” upper class positions in society or that non-whites are the only group occupying “underprivileged” lower class positions. In other words, whites and non-whites in the upper classes share similar class privileges and advantages, while whites and non-whites in the lower classes share a similar lack of class privileges and advantages. Moreover, middle-class blacks share much the same range of privileges and advantages as middle-class whites (Claytor 2020). Note that the figures do not justify the notion that upper-class whites “oppress” lower-class non-whites any more than they justify the notion that upper-class non-whites “oppress” lower-class whites. A similar analysis can be conducted on statistics which show that men constitute 18% of upper income earners, 53% of middle income earners, and 28% of lower income earners, while women constitute 16%, 51%, 32% respectively (Pew Research Center 2023a). Indeed, there are still some discrepancies in education and pay gaps between men and women nationwide. Nonetheless 60% of college graduates are currently women and only 40% are men and in some (not all) areas of the country women earn as much as 120% the income of men (NewsNation 2022).

Figures from the U.S. Census Bureau (2023) similarly indicate that Asian-Americans are the ethnic group with the highest level of median annual income (\$108,700), followed by non-Hispanic whites (\$81,060), Hispanics (\$62,800), and blacks (\$52,860). A higher percentage of Asian-Americans have also earned a bachelor’s degree (33.7%) than non-Hispanic whites (26.0%), blacks (17.2%), and Hispanics (14.5%). Asian-Americans and non-Hispanic whites have the lowest percentage of people living below the poverty line at 8.6% each; the percentage of Hispanics living below the poverty line is 16.9%, while the percentage of blacks is 17.1%. The figures also show, however, that non-Hispanic whites constitute 16,690,000 (44%) of the total number of people living below the poverty line, more than the number of Hispanics

at 10,780,000 (28%), blacks at 7,626,000 (20%), and Asian-Americans at 1,866,000 (5%). The reason, of course, is mostly (but not entirely) due to the fact that non-Hispanic whites constitute a higher percentage of the total population of the United States (59.2%) than Hispanics (19.0%), blacks (13.4%), and Asian-American (6.3%).

Nonetheless, the 16,690,000 whites who live in poverty are real people and as such can be classified as “underprivileged” in exactly the same way that blacks, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans living in poverty are. Black pastor and author, William J. Barber, Jr. (2024), who gives the somewhat higher estimate of 40,000,000 more whites than blacks living in poverty, suggests that it is time to stop thinking about poverty, unemployment, and welfare in the U.S. as a stereotypic “black problem” and acknowledge that it is also a “white problem.” In 2009 (the latest year for which statistics could be found), 6.5% of all Americans received some form of public assistance. The percentage of American Indians and Alaskan Natives receiving assistance was 16.1%, blacks 13.5%, Hispanics 8.7%, Asians and Pacific Islanders 5.9%, and whites 4.4% (National Center for Education Statistics 2011). While these percentages are higher for non-whites than whites, in 2019 whites nonetheless received 43% of all public assistance, while Hispanics received 26%, blacks 23%, and Asians, Pacific Islanders, Alaskan Natives, and American Indians 8% (separate figures for each group are not available) (Semmi 2024). Given the ten-year gap in when these statistics were collected, they are not directly comparable, but they do lend support to the claim that even though the *percentage* of whites receiving public assistance is lower, there are a higher *number* of whites than other groups receiving assistance due to their numerical majority in the population as a whole and the fact that a greater number of whites actually live in poverty.

A careful analysis shows that same data can be interpreted in different ways to confirm seemingly opposite conclusions depending on whether we consider (a) the percentage of the total number of people in a given identity group who are “privileged” or “underprivileged” or (b) the percentage of the total number of “privileged” or “underprivileged” people who are members of a given identity group, e.g., 8.6% of whites live in poverty vs. 44% of Americans living in poverty are whites. Whether figures are reported in raw numbers

or percentages is also often significant in terms of how discrepancies are perceived (Watson and English 2013; any number of books have been written about how statistics can be manipulated to support desired outcomes; see, for example, Best 2012.)

All of the above figures become more highly differentiated, of course, when other ethnic groups and mixed-race people are included. From a purely structural standpoint, the most significant figures from the same census report are that the lowest quintile of the U.S. population receives only 3.0% of the nation's annual income, while the highest quintile receives 52.1% (more than half the total income of the entire country), a figure which much better demonstrates the distribution of privilege in the U.S. when compared with the anecdotal evidence given by McIntosh (1988) about non-whites not being able to find blemish cover and bandages that match their skin color (#46). Even more troubling from a political perspective is the fact that the share of Americans of all races and genders in the middle income group has plummeted from 1971 to 2023 from 61% to 51%, while the percentage of people in lower income groups has risen from 27% to 30% and the percentage of people in upper income groups of all races and genders has risen from 11% to 19% (Pew Research Center 2023a). It is pretty clear which income group has the most amount of power to advance its privileged position in society and which are being left behind. It's all about class, not race or gender.

It is also significant that 92% of Americans agree that everyone “should have a right to the basic necessities of life”; 89% agree that “people in the United States should have a right to quality education”; 84% agree that “before America can be truly united, we need to give equal opportunity to the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’”; and 80% agree that “it is the responsibility of the federal government to implement these rights, for example by ‘guaranteeing equal access for all Americans to decent housing’” (Carr Center for Human Rights Policy 2023). Overwhelming majorities of Americans also support “improvements in the electoral process” and “strengthening civil rights protections against discrimination on the basis of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity” (ibid.). In contrast, 68% of U.S. adults, including 72% of whites, 68% of Hispanics, and 63% of Asians, and 52% of blacks (majorities in all cases) supported the Supreme Court's decision in

Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard to end race-based admissions at U.S. colleges and universities (McCarthy 2024). As for affirmative action in the workplace, while there is significant support for promoting racial and ethnic diversity in companies and organizations (75% to 24%), Americans are almost equally opposed to race and ethnicity being taken into consideration in hiring and promotions (74% to 24%; the latter figure includes 21% of whites, 27% of Hispanics, and 37% of blacks, with no data given for Asians). Currently affirmative action in employment practices is legally banned in nine U.S. states, including the liberal states of California and Washington. Clearly most Americans are more supportive of helping everyone achieve a decent standard of living in terms of basic necessities, education, and housing (as well as health care and other essentials) than of affirmative action programs which give special treatment to some groups solely on the basis of race, gender, or other factors, as WMP theorists advocate.

Class is by all accounts a better indicator of privilege than factors such as race or gender. A more judicious class-based division which considers the actual privileges enjoyed by specific individuals would show that there is a spectrum, running from privileges enjoyed by the “overprivileged” elite and upper classes to the “moderately privileged” middle classes to the “underprivileged” lower and working classes. Such an analysis cuts across racial and gender divisions, since each of these classes is occupied to varying degrees by people of all races and genders. The specific privileges enjoyed or not enjoyed by people in the upper, middle, and lower classes may in many cases be similar, even if there are variations and they are not completely identical. Moreover, many of the problems faced by people in racial and gender majority groups (i.e., whites and males) are exactly the same as those faced by some people in racial and gender minority groups (i.e., non-whites and females): unemployment and underemployment, low wages and poverty, homelessness and a lack of affordable housing, poor schools and inadequate healthcare, crime and drug abuse, and so on. The only difference is that whites are thrown the bone of “privilege” while blacks are not, at least in the eyes of WMP theorists.

A class-based, rather than a race- or gender-based approach reconstructs the issue of privilege in ways that are non-discriminatory and inclusive of all groups rather than being discriminatory and exclusive towards some groups

and favorable to others. Since the underprivileged class includes members of both “majority” and “minority” groups, members of both groups benefit when class-based inequalities are rectified. The aim should be to help people who are underprivileged or oppressed regardless of race or gender, not to help people of certain races or genders regardless of whether or not they are underprivileged or oppressed.

6. WMP promotes racist and sexist stereotypes.

By dividing people into two categories—“oppressive white males” vs. “oppressed non-white, females”—WMP perpetuates racist and sexist stereotypes and, despite its best intentions, ultimately exacerbates rather than helps to overcome racial and gender divisions. Such overgeneralizations portray all and only white males as “privileged” and “advantaged,” stereotypes that, quite simply, fail to accurately describe the situation of many white males, while simultaneously stigmatizing all and only women and minorities as “underprivileged” and “disadvantaged,” an equally specious stereotype that many women and members of minority groups might wish to resist. The result is that white males are demonized as victimizers and non-white females cast as victims solely on the basis of their sex and skin color. Although practitioners in the field of Intercultural Communication are trained to regard all such overgeneralizations as stereotypes, they are in fact becoming more prevalent, as exemplified in the work of scholars such as Makiko Deguchi (2023c).

What gives WMP its initial plausibility is that it is based on overgeneralizations which have, as with all stereotypes, some basis in fact. Stereotypes can *always* be supported with empirical data. Ample evidence can be found in support of the statement “Roses are red” since there are, in fact, a lot of red roses out there. But does this mean that the statement “Roses are red” is true? Well, indeed, it is true in some ways, but false in others, since there are, as a matter of fact, a number of pink, yellow, and white roses out there, too. In the same way, the generalization “White males are privileged” may be true in some ways and false in others. As a generic concept *white male privilege* plays on this ambiguity. It is indeed possible to find incontrovertible evidence which proves that white male privilege exists, in the same way that it is possible to find incontrovertible evidence for the existence of red roses.

It is also possible to find evidence in support of the claim “Non-white females are not privileged” and, moreover, the counterclaims “White men are not privileged” and “Non-white females are privileged.” The question is not about which of these statements are true and which are false, which is how the debate is usually framed. Rather than think of overgeneralizations as being either completely “true” or completely “false,” it is possible to see them as being subject to varying levels of accuracy or inaccuracy (Jussim et al. 2016).

All such statements are still overgeneralizations, however, and based on what is known in informal logic as a *faulty generalization*, an inductive fallacy which involves drawing a conclusion on the basis of a limited number of cases while ignoring or being unaware of cases that contradict it. In the philosophy of science the *problem of induction* is the question of whether or not it is possible to make inferences about what is unknown on the basis of what is known, i.e., of establishing something universal on the basis of particulars. If at any given point in time all of the roses we have observed have been red, we may jump to the conclusion that all roses are red. Presenting more and more empirical evidence in favor of a particular conclusion can never confirm it, however, since it is always possible there will be counterexamples which refute it. Claims are corroborated not on the basis of accumulating further evidence but on the basis of how well they are able to survive stringent attempts to falsify them (Popper 1962). It is clear that no matter how much data WMP accumulates in support of its overgeneralizations, they are ultimately unable to stand up to critical scrutiny and are easily falsified by conflicting evidence.

Moreover, any and all data cannot be simply presented but must also be interpreted. A fact (data) is different from an explanation (theory). Making inferences to the best explanation involves a process of abductive rather than inductive reasoning. We wake up and see that the grass outside is wet. Why? It could be morning dew or because it rained last night or someone watered the lawn or because aliens flying overhead decided this would be a good place to empty their toilet tanks. Similarly if we try to explain why whites, Hispanics, and blacks as a group do not perform as well as Asian-Americans in terms of education and income, it could be because whites, Hispanics, and blacks are lazy and do not try as hard (the traditional favored conservative explanation) or because of racism and structural impediments (the traditional favored

liberal explanation). It could also be due to other factors, which at present are overlooked or not yet fully understood. Kenny Xu, Chinese-American author of *An Inconvenient Minority: The Attack on Asian American Excellence and the Fight for Meritocracy* (2021; see also 2023), a key leader in Students for Fair Admissions, which brought the case against Harvard University over affirmative action to the Supreme Court, contends that the main reason why Asian-Americans outperform other groups in the U.S. is because of the high value many Asian cultures place on education and the amount of time they put into it (often studying twice as long as the average American).

It is possible, of course, that none of these interpretations are completely correct, or that each of them is partially correct, or that there are multiple factors which work in combination with each other to produce certain outcomes. The point is that to arrive at an adequate interpretation of the data, researchers cannot simply start with a predetermined conclusion (e.g., white males are racist, sexist, and oppressive, as McIntosh and Deguchi contend) and then look for evidence which confirms it; rather they should start with an analysis of the actual data that is both comprehensive and highly individuated (i.e., distinguishes between the variety of traits that exist *within* target groups) and then attempt to arrive at a reasonable theory which explains it.

A more differentiated analysis of privilege would acknowledge that privilege does not always correlate with specific social groups. While WMP focuses solely on differences *between* racial and gender groups, it is also necessary to look at differences *within* these groups. The overgeneralization “All white males are overprivileged” is easily refuted, given the significant number of white males who lack a significant number of privileges. Consider the situation of poor white males who are homeless, unemployed, or live in poverty, and who lack adequate housing, education, healthcare, and so on. The overgeneralization “All non-white females are underprivileged” is also easily disproven by the fact that some non-white females with sufficient levels of income and other social resources enjoy a considerable number of privileges, in some cases vastly more privileges than some white males. Nonetheless, denying the claims that *all* white males are overprivileged and *all* non-white females are underprivileged does not entail that “No white males are overprivileged” and “No non-white females are underprivileged,” since empirical evidence can indeed be produced

which shows that “*Some* white males are overprivileged” and “*Some* non-white females are underprivileged.” If supporters of WMP are genuinely concerned about diversity, as they claim to be, they must acknowledge the existence of diversity *within* racial and gender groups, rather than focus exclusive attention on diversity *between* these groups. Not all white males are the “same”; nor are all non-white females.

It is disingenuous, however, to focus exclusive attention on overprivileged white males vs. underprivileged non-white females as WMP does, while ignoring the various ways in which some white males may be less privileged than some non-white females and some non-white females may be more privileged than some white males. The fundamental divide is not between “overprivileged white males” and “underprivileged non-white females” but between “overprivileged whites, non-whites, males, and females” and “underprivileged whites, non-whites, males, and females.” On a purely *empirical* level, it is clear that while some white males are privileged, not all are; some white males are underprivileged. And while some non-white females are underprivileged, not all are; some non-white females are privileged. But focusing exclusive attention on underprivileged non-whites and females while simultaneously ignoring the equally pressing problems faced by underprivileged whites and males fails to address the fundamental problem of “overprivileged vs. underprivileged” among all racial and gender groups. Being born to a wealthy urban minority family confers more socio-economic privileges than being born to a poor rural majority family. It is largely because WMP refuses to acknowledge the existence of a “white underclass,” particularly in rural areas of the United States (Longworth 2013), that it receives so much criticism from underprivileged whites and males—not because underprivileged whites and males are “racist” or “sexist” (although some no doubt are) but because the system is failing them just as much as it is failing underprivileged non-whites and females. From this perspective it may be possible to develop a Color/Gender-Blind approach, which considers a wider range of factors related to privilege.

WMP supporters are likely to become impatient with this kind of interpretive analysis of the empirical data and may even be inclined to dismiss it as “hairsplitting.” What we should be really concerned about,

these advocates may say, are not arcane logical arguments but indisputable specific instances in which non-whites and females are discriminated against and denied privileges which some, even if not all, white males enjoy. It can be readily agreed that such cases exist (in the same way that red roses exist) but it can also be contended that adopting the wider view of a Color/Gender-Blind approach, which does not reduce privilege to simplistic racial and gender categories, may offer much more effective ways of overcoming prejudice and discrimination than WMP is capable of. The reason is that while supporters of WMP concern themselves *exclusively* with specific cases of prejudice and discrimination against non-whites and females on the part of whites and males, the wider Color/Gender-Blind view considers *all* forms of prejudice and discrimination against *any* group of people (whether white or non-white, male or female, or other) by *any* other group regardless of race or gender. Furthermore, unlike WMP, which seeks to extend the privileges of non-whites and females while, as Peggy McIntosh (1989, p. 10) writes, working to “lessen or end” the privileges of whites and males, supporters of a Color/Gender-Blind approach consistently object to any and all policies which confer unearned privileges on some racial and gender groups at the expense of other racial and groups, regardless of the specific races and genders involved. The Color/Gender-Blind view is, thus, far more radical than the relatively blinkered perspective of WMP. More than 16% of American children live in poverty (Benson 2023). Should we only help those who are non-white or female and ignore the white boys simply because they are white and male (and therefore fall into WMP’s “racist, sexist, and oppressor” category)?

Given that some privileges may be granted to both some whites and non-whites and some males and females while some privileges may be denied to others from the same racial and gender groups, the primary dividing line should be not be made on the basis of race or gender but rather on the basis of the privileges actually granted or denied. Put more schematically: not between white vs. non-white or male vs. female, but between privileged vs. not-privileged people of any racial or gender group. The goal, then, should not be to give specific attention to the situations of privileged and non-privileged non-whites and females, which is clearly racist and sexist, but rather to focus attention on the situations of non-privileged persons regardless of race or

gender. Such a focus cannot be dismissed on the ground that it discriminates against underprivileged non-whites and whites since it in fact supports them. It can, moreover, not be dismissed on the ground that it gives underprivileged whites and males an unfair advantage since it supports it them to exactly the same extent and not more than it supports underprivileged non-whites and females. There is no bias whatsoever on the basis of race or gender. While this stance would not enhance the positions of those of all races and genders who are already privileged, it would definitely help those of all races and genders who are underprivileged. Focusing attention on and showing favoritism to some racial and gender groups over others is racism and sexism pure and simple. A Color/Gender-Blind approach takes a much strong stance against racism and sexism than WMP does, especially since the latter is unable to overcome its racism and sexism against whites and males.

7. WMP is based on an essentialist understanding of race and gender.

Essentialism is the view that, first, people can be divided into discrete identity groups on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, or other factors and, second, that all the members of these given groups share certain attributes in common, which are regarded as “essential” to that particular identity. In a U.S. context, assertions that whites and males are “privileged,” “racist,” “sexist,” and “oppressive” simply by virtue of their race and sex are textbook examples of essentialism. Essentialism typically ignores individual differences and diversity *within* groups, leading to gross overgeneralizations about a given group’s members. Individual members may share some features with other group members but not others. And the larger the group the more likely it is that the members will share few if any features completely in common with each other. To borrow a metaphor from Wittgenstein (1958, p. 32, § 67), the strength of a thread “does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.” Social groups are similarly constituted by members have overlapping attributes rather sharing any particular attributes in common. From an essentialist perspective statistics are completely unnecessary when it comes to categorizing people on the basis of race and gender since the prejudgment (prejudice) has already been made that people of

certain groups inherently possess the features attributed to them.

The first difficulty with essentialism with respect to grouping identities on the basis of biological features is that social scientists have for the most part (with the exception of some WMP supporters) abandoned the notion that the terms *gender* and *race* define distinct biological categories in favor of the view that they are *personal constructs* based on the psychological (subjective) adoption of a particular identity or *social constructs* based on identities that are socially (intersubjectively) ascribed to people on the basis of physical characteristics. Sex is biological. From a purely biological standpoint there are two and only two sexes, based on a person's physiological genotype (De Loof 2018). As the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (2024) puts it, "Race is a spectrum. Sex is pretty damn binary." Intersex people do not constitute a "third gender"; they also have either a male or female genotype even though their phenotype—the physical characteristics they possess—may be ambiguous. Individuals who undergo a sex-change operation retain the genotype they were born with even though their phenotype has been altered. From a psycho-sociological standpoint, however, there may be innumerable genders depending on how a person subjectively thinks about his or her identity and the extent to which a society is willing to intersubjectively acknowledge that identity. The numbers vary from scholar to scholar, but Disabled World (2025) lists 105 (and counting!) different gender identities in addition to "male" and "female." The notion that persons born male or female should, for example, be allowed to use restrooms or play sports on teams that do not correspond to their biological sex simply because they subjectively "think" they are the opposite gender is, of course, highly contested, even when their phenotypes have been altered, since there is, as yet, no intersubjective social agreement on the issue.

Even though CTR teaches that it is racist to say "we belong to the human race" (quoted in Martin 2021), there is in fact one and only one race—the human race—with all its glorious biological, psychological, and cultural diversity. There are, of course, obvious differences in skin color, facial features, hair texture, and other biological features, but whether or not such differences are regarded as significant is also a matter of how individuals and groups subjectively and intersubjectively *think* about physiological differences. We could just as easily divide people into "races" on the basis of eye or

hair color as on skin color. Given that humans share a common evolutionary ancestry and are members of the same species, phenotypical differences are for the most part entirely arbitrary. Exceptions may include genetic differences in susceptibility to certain diseases, although socioeconomic, environmental, and other factors also need to be taken into account. Genetic similarities and differences exist both within and between arbitrarily defined “racial” groups. People sharing a particular phenotypical trait, such skin color, for example, may have relatively distinct genetic lineages (e.g., people classified as “dark-skinned” may have African, Indian, or Australian ancestry; people classified as “light-skinned” may have European, Central Asian, or Korean ancestry), while people from the same genetic lineage may show significant phenotypic variation (skin tones vary considerably within each of the preceding geographic regions).

Mixed-race people, of course, defy clear categorization. Biologically Barack Obama could be classified either as a black man with a white mother or a white man with a black father; although Obama self-identifies as “black” or “African-American,” 51% of white Americans and 61% of Hispanics classified Obama as “biracial,” while 66% of blacks classified him as “black” in a poll conducted before he became president (BBC News 2006). Rather than fit himself into a single racial category, Tiger Woods has famously referred to himself as a *Cablinasian* to reflect his Caucasian, black, American Indian, and Asian racial heritage. The number of Americans who self-identify as “mixed race” has increased substantially, with 33.8 million people or 10.2% of people self-identifying as “mixed race” in the 2020 U.S. census (United States Census Bureau 2023). Where exactly would WMP put these biracial individuals in its white vs. non-white binary? As the blurb for David L. Burunsama’s (2006) book, *Mixed Messages: Multiracial Identities in the “Color-Blind” Era* states: “The experiences and voices of multiracial individuals are challenging current categories of race, profoundly altering the meaning of racial identity and in the process changing the cultural fabric of the nation.”

Given that there is no scientific basis for classifying people into discrete racial groups on the basis of biology (see National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2023), it is clear that all such classifications can and should be regarded as personal and social constructs which vary among cultures and are subject to change. While many countries, including Italy

and Japan, do not classify people by race (although some classify people by ethnicity or language), those countries which do classify people by race, do so in highly variable ways. South Africa categorizes its population as Black African, Coloured, Indian or Asian, White, and Other; Brazil as White, Multiracial, Black, Yellow/Asian, and Indigenous; and the United States as White, Black or African American, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, Some Other, and Two or More (i.e., multiracial/mixed). In the U.S., there are also issues regarding how to treat Latinos and Hispanics, who may identify as white, black, or mixed race, and Middle Easterners, who may identify as white or see themselves as constituting a separate group.

Similar controversies surround the categories that activists use to describe racial minorities (Chisholm 2020). Should they use comprehensive acronyms such as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) or should Black be regarded as a separate group, given that blacks may have little in common with other People of Color, particularly “privileged” Asians (as we have seen)? Where do Jewish people fit into this scheme, since some may identify as white while others do not? Moreover, as one Jewish-American student contends, “We don’t fit into ‘oppressor’ or ‘oppressed’ categories. We are both privileged and marginalized, protected by those in power and yet targeted by the same racist lunatics as those who target people of color” (quoted in Berkovitz 2021). Whites in any case are not regarded as having a skin color but remain transparent and unseen, as they typically are by race-conscious DEI people who despite making strong arguments in favor of inclusivity typically exclude marginalized whites from their analysis. The American Anthropological Association has gone so far as to recommend that “race” simply be eliminated from the U.S. Census, given the harm caused by making racial distinctions and the fact that they are not scientifically justified in human biology (see Anderson and Fienberg 2000), although this recommendation has not (yet) been adopted by the United States Census Bureau. A case could be made that racial categories should also be eliminated from social science research and political activism for the same reason.

Sexism and racism only become issues if physical features are regarded as salient and if these features are associated with non-physical attributes

such as intelligence, dispositions, and character. There is, therefore, no biological basis for the claim that males are inherently sexist or racist in the sense that sexism and racism are innate biological traits associated with a person's physiological characteristics. We may be born white or black, male or female, but we are not born racist or sexist. Racist and sexist attitudes are instead personal and social constructs that a person either freely adopts or is socialized into accepting. Here, too, however, there is no basis for shifting from a biological to a cultural essentialist claim that all whites and males embrace sexism and racism simply because of how they are socially identified by race and gender, as WMP scholars (McIntosh 1989; Deguchi 2021) and social justice activists (Cocco 2020) contend. Instead of offering evidence to support these claims, WMP simply supposes from the outset that the stereotype is true. Indeed, some whites and males may be prejudiced and discriminatory but many are not. It is also likely that some non-whites and females are prejudiced and discriminatory while others are not. It is clear that race and sex as biological phenomenon have no intrinsic influence on a person's attitudes toward race and gender as personal and social constructs. Nonetheless, as Smedley and Smedley (2005) suggest, even though race and sex as biological categories are a fiction (i.e., constructs), race and sexism are indeed real social problems. It is, moreover, possible for individuals of all races and genders, including females and non-whites, to have prejudicial attitudes and engage in discriminatory behavior.

From an anti-essentialist constructivist perspective (see Roth, van Stee, and Regla-Vargas 2023), how researchers divide people into "groups" is not given by the groups themselves but is rather a matter of conceptual choice, which is dependent on the interests of the researcher. The attributes (traits, values, beliefs, etc.) to be studied are as well a matter of conceptual choice. The problem then is to see the extent to which a given attribute is shared or not shared by the members of a social group, however defined. Attributes such as "privilege" (especially when amorphously defined), "racism," and "sexism" cannot be mapped directly onto particular social groups, as if these attributes are shared by all whites and males and not shared by all non-whites and females. Essentialism embraces the *realist* view that social groups (including "cultures") can be reified and that members of a given group share

certain essential values which are inherent to the members of that culture. The opposing *nominalist* view suggests that each individual is ultimately unique and that social groups have no existence apart from the extent to which any given value may be intersubjectively shared by some (rarely all) members of a defined group.

A better way of characterizing differences is to dissociate attributes from the groups which hold them. That is, we need to define the attributes first, which is a philosophical question, and then see exactly who possesses these attributes, which is an entirely separate empirical question. First, then, is the need to recognize that any given individual may exhibit any given attribute in varying degrees (e.g., some people may be more racist or sexist than others) and then to measure the extent to which individuals in any given social group exhibit those tendencies. If an empirical study were actually conducted, it may be hypothesized that there will be racists and sexists, as well as antiracists and antisexist, in *all* social groups (i.e., among *both* whites *and* non-whites, and *both* males *and* females. In other words, racism is *not* an essential feature of any racial group and sexism is *not* an essential feature of any gender group. There are intragroup differences within specific racial and gender groups, as well as intergroup commonalities between them. The relevant divide, then, is not between “racist and sexist white males” and “antiracist and antisexist non-white females” but between “racist and sexist white males and non-white females” and “antiracist and antisexist white males and non-white females.” The same applies to privilege. Everyone has some privileges and not others. Members of the *same* social group may not share the *same* privileges while members of *different* social groups may share exactly the *same* privileges; members of different social groups may also *lack* the same privileges. Contrary to the stereotype perpetuated by WMP theorists, some whites, blacks, males, and females may enjoy or lack privileges that are enjoyed by other whites, blacks, males, and females.

The problem, again, is the tendency of WMP to think of privileges as attributes that are inherent to people and define them in an essentialist way. To illustrate the point, consider the subtle but highly significant difference between the labels *disabled people* and *people with disabilities*. The former immediately posits a binary distinction between two groups, *abled people*

vs. *disabled people*, with the implication that the first group is in some way “normal” while the second is in some way “defective.” While most of us would be too polite to actually use the word *defective* and would immediately blanch at its use, the implication is nonetheless still there. The expression *people with disabilities*, however, does not divide people into separate groups; rather everyone is placed into one single group since each individual person possesses not only some abilities but also some disabilities. With this categorization we can now focus not on *people* conceived as belonging to different groups based on the essential feature of being “disabled,” but rather on the disabilities themselves and what we may or may not want to do to remedy them. We may consider, for example, building ramps and adding elevators at train stations for people with wheelchairs but not necessarily building an escalator to the top of Mt. Fuji for the many people (including those otherwise considered “abled” and “normal”) who lack the ability to climb it.

In the same way, rather than make a binary distinction between “overprivileged people” and “underprivileged people,” particularly on the basis of race and sex, it makes more sense to speak of everyone falling into a single category “people who have some privileges but not others,” and then to specify what, if anything, should be done to increase or decrease the privileges any given individual person has. Making everyone a billionaire probably isn’t an option but insuring that everyone has the opportunity to make a living wage may be. Similarly words such as *oppressor* should be used to refer not to the average white dude on the street but to people who actually deserve it, regardless of race and gender. Genuinely oppressive historical figures that come to mind might include the Roman Emperor Nero (white male), Queen Mary I of England, aka “Bloody Mary” (white female), Ugandan President Idi Amin (black male), Ranavalona I, Queen of Madagascar (black female), Mongol Emperor Genghis Khan (Asian male), and Chinese Empress Wu Zetian (Asian female). WMP’s tendency to place all white males in the same category as these illustrious despots bends not only the conventional category of *oppressor* but also the conventional understanding of most human minds.

Such distinctions are for the most part beyond the ken of WMP, which is much better at dealing with simplicities than subtleties. Lacking a sound empirical and theoretical foundation for their views, how, then, do WMP

theorists “confirm” their essentialist view that whites and males are racists and sexists? McIntosh decries what she sees as the unwillingness of men and whites to grant that they are “overprivileged,” that they “work from a base of unacknowledged privilege” in which “much of their oppressiveness [is] unconscious,” and that they are, therefore in a state of “denial” about the advantages which men gain from women’s disadvantages (1989, p. 10). The same tendencies are then applied to whites, who along with males, are simply “oblivious” to their advantages (*ibid.*, p. 12). In Deguchi’s gloss, “men are oppressive even though men may not think they are” and it is possible for both males and whites to “be extremely well-intentioned, a really nice person, and be oppressive if you haven’t acknowledged or if you aren’t aware of the privileges that you have in the dominant group” (2021, 20:25 ff.). Thus, even whites and males who consciously hold no explicit racial prejudices or engage in overt acts of discrimination are accused of holding implicit biases which purportedly make them “racist” and “sexist.” While it is tempting to associate these views with the formal research on “implicit bias” initiated by Greenwald and Banaji (1995) and associated with the Implicit Association Test (described in Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz 1998), which purports to measure subconscious biases with respect to racial, gender, and other stereotypes, there is little evidence that individual scores on the test correlate with actual behavior (Forscher et al., 2019; for comprehensive lay critiques of the research on implicit bias see Goldhill 2017; Mac Donald 2017). Even more troubling is the fact anyone can be charged with implicit bias simply for disagreeing with claims regarded as “true” by the accuser, even unsubstantiated, stereotypical ones. As Pluckrose and Lindsay writes,

It is bad psychology to tell people who do not believe that they are racist—who may even actively despise racism—that there is nothing they can do to stop themselves from being racist—and then ask them to help you. It is even less helpful to tell them that even their own good intentions are proof of their latent racism. Worst of all is to set up double-binds, like telling them that if they notice race it is because they are racist, but if they don’t notice race it’s because their privilege affords them the luxury of not noticing race, which is racist. (2020, p. 134)

What is ironic, of course, about McIntosh's and Deguchi's contention that males and whites are "sexist" and "racist" is that the charge itself is sexist and racist. Rather than see men and whites as individuals who may or may not hold such views, it simply places all males and whites into the social groups of "male" and "white," and then, in typical stereotypical fashion, judges them on the basis of what they take to be essential features of those groups, namely that all members of the "male" group are "sexist" and all members of the "white" group are "racist"—a classic case of the stereotypic and prejudicial tendency to see people not as individuals but only as members of a particular group. Even worse, while McIntosh repeatedly laments the inability of white males to acknowledge their privilege, complaining that she has "met very few men who are truly distressed about systemic, unearned male advantage and conferred dominance" or whites who are "outraged about unearned race advantage and conferred dominance" (1989, p. 12), she and other WMP scholars such as Deguchi remain blissfully "oblivious" of their own racism and sexism. It might be claimed with equal validity that there are very few WMP theorists who truly understand systemic, unearned advantage, and conferred dominance. It is not necessary to attribute these attitudes to "implicit biases" on their part since evidence for their racist and sexist views is openly stated in their work and can be easily found.

Supporters of WMP (as well as of DEI and CRT) often refer to themselves, and are sometimes derisively referred to by others, as "woke." Indeed, when it comes to cases of racism and discrimination against "minority" group members, their eyes are wide open. When it comes to cases of racism and discrimination against "majority" group members, however, they not only close their eyes but cover them with their hands. Yes, they are "woke," just not "woke" enough. By contrast, some—though certainly not all—"anti-woke" activists may be more aware of prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes against "majority" groups than they are about racism and discrimination against "minorities." To cut through the acrimonious and often unproductive debates between these two groups, it would undoubtedly be better to adopt a more all-encompassing "panoramic-wokism," which is able to see, and then avoid, racism and sexism against both "majority" and "minority" groups. A message to both the "woke"

and “anti-woke” crowds: Please wake up.

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