

ELEVEN

Racial Sexual Desires

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Raja Halwani addresses the issue of whether there is something morally defective with someone who sexually prefers or desires only members of a particular race or ethnic group (or someone who does not sexually desire or prefer members of a particular race or ethnic group). People with such “racial desires” are often viewed as racists, but virtually no sustained arguments have been given in support of this view. In this essay, Halwani constructs three possible arguments—those based in discrimination, exclusion, and stereotypes—that might support the charge of racism. He argues that none is convincing. He further argues that only in some cases are people with racial desires racist, but that in those cases their racism is not because of their sexual desires.

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People who sexually desire or do not sexually desire members of a racial or ethnic group have, let’s call them, “racial sexual desires” or “preferences”—for example, men who are into Asian women or women who are into Latino men. I will call such people PRSDs (“people with racial sexual desires”). I have had many discussions of racial sexual desires with friends, colleagues, students, and others, and in almost all of them, PRSDs come out looking bad; they are always considered, because of their sexual desires, ethically defective people—usually racist.

There is no focused discussion of this issue in the philosophical literature.¹ One finds mention of it here and there in cultural studies, yet they tend to be superficial and lacking in argumentation. Here are two examples.

In her essay, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," bell hooks, speaking of white men who are not racist in the traditional sense, writes,

These young men see themselves as non-racists, who choose to transgress racial boundaries within the sexual realm not to dominate the Other, but rather so that they can be acted upon, so that they can be changed utterly. Not at all attuned to those aspects of their sexual fantasies that irrevocably link them to collective white racist domination, they believe their desire for contact represents a progressive change in white attitudes towards non-whites. They do not see themselves as perpetuating racism.²

There are two sweeping claims in this passage: that white men's fantasies are "irrevocably" linked to "collective white racist domination," and that their actions perpetuate white racism. Even though hooks allows for interracial romantic encounters that are not tainted by racism as long as there is "mutual recognition of racism" (a condition I find neither necessary nor sufficient for non-racism), what is troubling about hooks's claims is their lack of supporting reasons or arguments.

The second example comes from Daniel Tsang, who, commenting on white men who are attracted to Asian men, writes, "He views Asians as a class lumping Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Vietnamese, etc., into one amorphous group. He is attracted to Asians for our youthfulness, our lack of body hair, and our perceived submissiveness, dependence, and dependability."³ Note Tsang's reasons behind white men's attraction to Asian men: the latter's youthfulness, lack of body hair, and perceived submissiveness, dependence, and dependability—"rice queens" are attracted to Asian men because of stereotypes. Yet Tsang gives no argument as to why desiring Asian men for these reasons is a problem.

My direct aim in this essay is to evaluate some possible reasons for why PRSDs might be racists. Because, as I mentioned, there is no sustained discussion of this issue in the literature, I construct what I think are the three strongest arguments in support of the idea that PRSDs are racist. I will argue that none is convincing. I conclude that though some PRSDs might be racists, they are not so *because* of their sexual desires.

My indirect aim is that this essay be a starting point for more sustained discussions of these issues. I hope that the points I raise and address are taken up in future discussions so that the topic of racial sexual desires receives more attention.

PRELIMINARIES

1. PRSDs fall into at least five conceptual categories. If *G* is the racial group whose members are (or are not) the objects of desire, then the categories are: those who *exclusively* sexually desire members of *G*;⁴ those who sexually *prefer* members of *G*; those who have

weak sexual desires for members of *G* (they find them attractive but only infrequently or faintly); those who do not sexually desire members of *G*; and those who feel sexual aversion to members of *G*, perhaps feeling nausea or some similar reaction at the thought of having sex with them.

To keep the discussion manageable, I will discuss PRSDs who have exclusive sexual desires for members of a racial or ethnic group, and those who feel revulsion at the thought of having sex with these members (the PRSDs I discuss are also not members of these groups). These two types seem to adequately represent what people have in mind when they think of PRSDs as racist.⁵

2. Preferences admit of degrees, so those with non-exclusive preferences admit of variations depending on the strength or weakness of the preference.⁶
3. PRSDs fall into four types as far as their attitudes toward their sexual desires are concerned: rejection or unhappiness, indifference, acceptance or happiness, or no attitude. For example, the person who has weak desires for members of a particular group might have no thoughts or attitudes about his state of sexual desires, might be unhappy about it, might be happy, or might be indifferent.
4. To claim that *X* prefers Latinos does not mean that *X* finds every Latino sexually attractive. *X* might not find particular Latinos attractive simply because they happen to be not to *X*'s taste (e.g., too skinny, too short). Thus, to claim that *X* sexually prefers *G*s, where "*G*" refers to a racial or ethnic group, is to claim that *X* prefers (or does not prefer) *G*s only in regards to *X*'s racial preferences.⁷
5. Finally, it is important to bear in mind that my discussion is solely about sexual desire, not about love, relationships, marriage, or even sexual acts. It is about what people *sexually desire* as far as race and ethnicity are concerned. Though sexual desire is often connected to these other phenomena, it need not be, and my discussion is only about it.

THE FIRST ARGUMENT FOR WHY PRSDs ARE RACIST

The first argument revolves around the idea of unfair discrimination. It goes as follows. Suppose that *X* sexually desires only members of group *G*, which is other than *X*'s own. Given *X*'s sexual desires, *X* sexually discriminates against members of some groups and in favor of others. When *X* desires only members of *G*, *X* discriminates against members of other groups. Because such discrimination is pernicious, *X* is racist. Thus, PRSDs are racist because of pernicious discrimination.⁸

For example, if John is white and sexually desires only Asians, then John discriminates against, say, blacks in not sexually desiring them. This type of reasoning is easiest seen in employment: Suppose that Mark hires only Asians to work in his company, even though an employee's race or ethnic group is irrelevant to the job performance. In this type of case, Mark unfairly discriminates against non-Asians.

There is no doubt that John, in sexually preferring Asians, engages in some sort of discrimination: his sexual taste is discriminatory in targeting Asians. The question is whether this discrimination is bad (pernicious, unfair, or unjust). The argument under discussion does assume that the discrimination is bad. But is it?

In most cases, one's racial and ethnic background is irrelevant to one's proper performance of a job or task.⁹ For example, hiring a good accountant should not depend on the candidate's racial or ethnic background. His or her accounting qualifications should suffice. But this is different when it comes to sexual desire. How someone looks can, and usually is, relevant to sexual desire. This is because one crucial goal of sexual desire is sexual satisfaction or pleasure.¹⁰ And for X to attain sexual pleasure or sexual satisfaction it is usually necessary that X be sexually attracted to X's object of sexual desire.¹¹ If Juan is not attracted to skinny people, for example, it is hard for him to attain sexual pleasure by having sex with them. Being non-skinny is a property that Juan's sexual partners need to usually have if Juan is to enjoy his sexual acts with them.

PRSDs are similar in this respect. Their sexual partners must usually have (or lack) a property related to their race or ethnicity for PRSDs to find them attractive. Because racial or ethnic looks are normally part of physical looks, and because physical looks are normally necessary for satisfying the goal of sexual pleasure or satisfaction, PRSDs choose their sexual partners (partly) on the basis of racial or ethnic looks. Such looks determine whether the PRSD finds his or her sexual partner attractive. This means that, just as in the case of Juan we have no good reason to claim that he unfairly discriminates against skinny people, we also have no good reason to claim in the case of John that he unfairly discriminates against non-Asians.

To see this argument better, compare it to the following argument about employment: If P is necessary for the proper performance of a task, then in hiring Y's who are P, X is not unfairly discriminating against people who are not P. Similarly, if P is necessary for the proper satisfaction of sexual desire, then in choosing Y's who are P, X is not unfairly discriminating against people who are not P. It just so happens that in this case P is a racial or ethnic property.

One might object that although in employment some properties (e.g., accounting skills) are necessary for the proper performance of a task, racial and ethnic properties are not necessary for attaining sexual pleasure. After all, John might sexually enjoy having sex with a non-Asian if

he were to give it a try (provided that the non-Asian meets John's other sexual preferences—for example, he or she is not too skinny). So in not having sex with non-Asians, John does discriminate; he could, after all, try having sex with non-Asians and see what happens.

It is true that John might enjoy sex with a non-Asian, but unless he, for some reason, insists on not having sex with non-Asians, this would not show that he is discriminating. All it would show is that he prefers to act on his sexual desires because acting on them has the best chance of yielding sexual pleasure. Moreover, sexual pleasure is somewhat peculiar in that attaining it is usually desired through the satisfaction of sexual desire, not through some substitute that can yield the same or similar pleasures. That is, sexual pleasure partly consists in acting on one's desires. Consider a machine that would simulate the sexual pleasures one would feel if one were to have sex with Mario Lopez.¹² One would not normally consider the option of hooking up into the machine to be equal to having sex with Lopez. Far from it.¹³

This means that in wanting to act on his sexual desires John is not wrongfully discriminating against anyone, much like in wanting to act on her preference for hairy men Anna is not wrongly discriminating against non-hairy ones. It is only if John insists on not having sex with non-Asians that problems might arise ("might" because a lot depends on why John refuses to have sex with non-Asians; see below for more discussion).

What if unfair discrimination is not tied to tasks and performance? What if it is tied, simply, to exclusionary practices? That is, what if PRSDs engage in unfair discrimination because they arbitrarily exclude entire groups from their sexual practices? John, in desiring only Asians, arbitrarily excludes blacks, Latinos, and other groups as potential sexual partners. In doing so, he unfairly discriminates against them.

To see this, suppose that the government of country C, which has two ethnic groups, decides, for no reason whatsoever, that only members of C1 can use the country's highways, whereas members of C2 can use only the back roads. This decision is arbitrary and thus unfairly excludes members of C2 from the use of the C's highway system.

The issue now is whether John's exclusion of non-Asians is arbitrary. To see whether it is, consider Rafael, who is gay. He excludes women as sexual partners. Is he unfair to them because he arbitrarily excludes them? Rafael can (plausibly) argue, "I don't know why I am attracted only to men, but I am. And being gay means that I am not sexually attracted to women. It is not as if I am sexually attracted to them, but I decide, somehow, that I want to have nothing sexually to do with them. This is just the way that I am."

And John can say the same when it comes to race: "I don't know why I am attracted only to Asians, but I am. And being attracted only to Asians means that I am not sexually attracted to non-Asians. It is not as if I am sexually attracted to non-Asians, but I decide, somehow, that I want to

have nothing sexually to do with them. This is just the way that I am." If Rafael does not sexually arbitrarily exclude women, then neither does John arbitrarily exclude non-Asians. So PRSDs are not engaged in arbitrary and thus unfair discrimination.

It might be that John can try to change. He might try to find ways to get himself to feel attraction to non-Asians (and here the parallel with sexual orientation might break down), but until that happens, John is right that his exclusion is not arbitrary. Because, again, if one crucial goal of sexual desire is pleasure and satisfaction, excluding non-Asians is not arbitrary given that having sex with them will not normally yield for John sexual pleasure or satisfaction. Hence, we cannot sustain the claim that PRSDs are racist on the grounds that they engage in arbitrary exclusionary practices.

We can conclude that PRSDs are not racists *if* the accusation of racism is based on wrongful discrimination against others. If they are racist, it has to be because of some other consideration, to which I now turn.

THE SECOND ARGUMENT FOR WHY PRSDs ARE RACIST

According to the second argument, PRSDs are racist because they are defective individuals. And they are defective individuals because their desires are narrow and are not as encompassing as they can be. A morally healthy individual, on this argument, is someone who sexually desires other people regardless of their racial or ethnic membership. He finds people sexually desirable not because of their race or ethnicity, but because of their own individual (albeit often physical) attractive properties, according to how these properties match his own tastes. Thus, an ethically non-defective person, as far as sexual desire is concerned, is someone who finds others attractive by virtue of their individual looks, as these looks cut across ethnic or racial lines. Someone who does not is defective. Since in this type of case we are discussing racial preferences, the defect is that of racism.¹⁴

But this argument faces a dilemma. Either it is an exercise in overkill or it arbitrarily targets racial and ethnic preferences for moral condemnation. To see this, consider that if this argument is sound, then we are *all* morally defective individuals, because we all have sexual preferences of some sort or other. By this argument, a gay man is sexist for not preferring women, a straight woman is (also?) sexist for not preferring women, and, to add a third example, a straight man would be anti-average and anti-shortist for preferring tall women. We can agree that the individuals in question have sexual preferences, but these preferences seem to be morally neutral. Thus, if the argument under consideration insists that we must have democratic desires across the board, we would all be morally defective given that our sexual preferences are bound to exclude

some groups of people. This is an absurd conclusion, and it constitutes the first horn of the dilemma.

Thus the argument must select some sexual preferences and not others as morally objectionable—in this case, racial or ethnic ones. But why select race and ethnicity? What is it about them that make PRSDs racists? The argument needs to address this point, for otherwise it would be arbitrary in its insistence on race, thus facing the second horn of the dilemma.

An advocate of the argument might claim that in a purely natural state people would have no racial preferences whatsoever, though they would still have sex or gender-based preferences. So in a “state of nature” type of existence, we would expect men to desire women and women to desire men. But because all human beings, regardless of their race, belong to the same species, we should expect them to sexually desire each other on the basis of individual looks, not on the basis of race. So when racial preferences exist, this is not an expected thing and is an aberration of sorts.

The problem with the above reasoning is that even if in a state of nature people do not have racial preferences (actually, there is no reason to believe that they would not), it is not clear why this would be a morally good thing as opposed to simply being a biological or natural norm. That is, the above argument derives a moral judgment from a biological or social claim (depending on how we describe the state of nature). Even if things should naturally be a certain way, this does not entail anything moral. For example, we are biologically set up to eat the flesh of other animals. But it does not follow that being a vegetarian makes one morally defective. Indeed, one might argue that eating meat, despite its “naturalness,” is the morally wrong thing to do. Not conforming to nature *might* be a defect,¹⁵ maybe even a moral defect, but not simply because of non-conformance to nature. If it is a moral defect, which is what an accusation of racism is, it would have to be for other reasons. Thus, for this reasoning to succeed, it needs to show why not conforming to our sexual nature means that we are racist. I suspect that this is a difficult task.

The advocate of the argument can change the strategy and argue that we do not need to discuss nature in order to see that PRSDs are morally defective. She can argue that it is precisely because we do *not* live in a state of nature—it is precisely because we live in a world where races and ethnic groups have access to each other—we should expect people to sexually desire each other on the basis of individual looks rather than racial types. When someone is a PRSD, this indicates that something has gone wrong with his process of growing up. Instead of growing up with sexual desires for people based on their individual looks, something has interfered with this process to skew his sexual desires. Perhaps he grew up in a racist society that made him not sexually desire members of the

race considered inferior. Thus, owing to a skewed causal process, he ends up with racial desires. He thus has a defective character.

However, this reasoning confuses the causal history of a person's sexual desires with what his sexual desires ethically tell us about him. It might be that X's sexual desires were caused by a pernicious causal history, but it is not clear why X is racist because of that. After all, X might have no bad beliefs, feelings, or values toward members of G, as he finds himself sexually (or not sexually) preferring them (see below for more discussion on how intricate judgments of racism are). At best, what this reasoning shows is that it is the society and the way individuals are formed that are morally defective, not the individuals themselves.

Moreover, we must avoid a simplistic picture of how sexual preferences are caused. Consider for example homosexuality (and heterosexuality). We still have no idea of how homosexuals come to be. There are even cases of identical twins growing up in the same family but such that one is gay and the other straight.¹⁶ The formation of racial preferences is more complex than twins raised in the same family—it is about different individuals raised in different contexts (even if they are raised in the same society during the same time period). The formation of sexual preferences can go in all directions, such that X might find X's-self attracted to members of G, while Y, growing up in the same society as X and belonging to the same race as X, might not. So even if we ignore the first mistake in this argument and claim that someone is morally defective because of the way he or she were "made," it is not obvious that the processes that result in PRSDs are really pernicious.

Thus, the second argument does not provide a good reason why racial preferences are pernicious. It then faces the second horn of the dilemma, which is that it arbitrarily targets racial preferences for moral condemnation. The argument then fails.

THE THIRD ARGUMENT FOR WHY PRSDs ARE RACIST

The third argument is probably the most popular among people who think that PRSDs are racist. On this argument, X is racist because X's desires for members of G are, per the Tsang quotation above, based on or because of stereotypes about them. Such stereotypes either are sexualized to begin with or become sexualized.¹⁷ The argument goes as follows: If X sexually prefers members of G because of sexual stereotypes, X is racist, since one understanding of a racist person is someone who has stereotypes about members of the group against which he is a racist. If, however, X is sexually averse to having sex with members of G, then X is racist for the same reasons, except that the stereotypes operate more blatantly. For example, in a 2010 *Playboy* interview, the (white) pop star John Mayer replied to the question, "Do black women throw themselves at you?" by

saying, "I don't think I open myself to it. My dick is sort of like a white supremacist. I've got a Benetton heart and a fuckin' David Duke cock."¹⁸ Discussing this quotation, Nathaniel Adam Tobias Coleman takes Mayer to have evinced sexual aversion to black women (to be sexually averse to a property, according to Coleman, is to be frightened or repulsed by it). Coleman claims that this is due to Mayer's belief in stigmatizing narratives about black women that see them fit for work, not sex or marriage.¹⁹

Before we evaluate this argument, it is good to say something about stereotypes. There is no generally accepted definition of "stereotype." Beyond the common claim that stereotypes are beliefs containing generalizations, there is no agreement that stereotypes are necessarily bad, though the word "stereotype" has come to have a negative connotation.²⁰ The popular understanding of a stereotype is that it is a belief containing generalizations that are *false*.²¹ Thus, the belief that "Russians drink vodka" is not a false generalization because it is, well, true, while the belief that "Latinos eat beans" is false.

However, just because a generalization is false need not mean that believing it is morally objectionable. For example, "Arabs wear turbans" is a false generalization, but believing it is not necessarily morally objectionable, and for two reasons. First, its content is non-moral: the property being attributed to Arabs is not a moral one (cf. "Arabs are terrorists"). Second, one need not believe it on morally objectionable grounds. For example, if a young adult believes it because her teacher said it in class, the young adult need not be culpable (unless we are to hold her culpable for looking up every claim her teachers make in class). But if an adult believes it on the grounds that Arabs are backward people (or so he thinks) and backward people wear turbans, then he is morally culpable for adopting a claim that he should have known better than to adopt.²²

Note then that stereotypes can be morally objectionable in at least two ways. The first has to do with their content: "Arabs want to kill Jews," "Mexicans are lazy," "Jews are treacherous people," and "Black men are dangerous" are all examples of beliefs that falsely attribute immoral properties to their subjects. Second, stereotypes can be morally objectionable in the way they come to be accepted. Consider: "Asians are excellent at math" is a false generalization, though the property it attributes to its subjects is not morally problematic. However, accepting this claim is objectionable because one ought to know better.

I will assume, to strengthen the argument that PRSDs are racist, that *accepting* these stereotypes is sufficient for being a racist: even if the stereotypes attribute non-moral properties to the people, and even if nothing else is going on in the PRSD's psychology other than accepting the stereotypes, the PRSD is racist. So someone who accepts the belief that Asian men have hairless bodies is racist, even if the property being attributed to Asians is non-moral and even if the person in question does not, say, *feel* anything toward Asians because of this belief.²³ Note here

that *believing* a stereotype might not be enough to make one racist because one might struggle against one's beliefs, believing them despite one's better judgment. It is agreeing with them, accepting them, endorsing them, or having a pro-attitude toward them, that makes one racist.²⁴

A second assumption I will make to further strengthen the arguments that PRSDs are racist is that all stereotypes about races and ethnic groups have morally objectionable content. This way we do not get sidetracked by whether someone is racist for accepting a stereotype that attributes a non-moral property to the group in question.

In sum then, I assume that (1) all stereotypes about races and ethnic groups are morally objectionable, and that (2) accepting them is enough to make someone racist. Thus, to be racist because of stereotypes means that one is racist because one accepts these stereotypes.

Let us now evaluate the argument. Suppose that all we know about someone is that he is sexually attracted to members of G. On its own this does not tell us anything morally substantive about him, because, with the possible exception of sexual aversion, sexual preferences on their own still tell us little about their possessor's overall moral character. To know whether he is racist, we need to know what he believes about members of G, because, according to the view of racism we are adopting, he would be racist if he were to accept stereotypes about G. (Or if he is repulsed by members of G—if he negatively viscerally reacts to them; this is the possible exception, which I discuss below.)

Let's flesh out this thought. Suppose that John is a white straight male who desires Asian women. Obviously, it is possible that he sexually desires them based simply on their looks, *because* they are Asian-looking. But is this possible with no stereotypes about them? It *seems* to be. It is not necessary that John *must*, somehow, have stereotypes about Asian women. It is this claim that constitutes the reply to the third argument that PRSDs are racist—namely, that it is *possible* that people have racial sexual desires in morally non-defective ways. And we know this claim is true because it is easy to imagine such cases. In such cases, what causes or constitutes someone's attraction to the group in question are not stereotypes, but features, mostly physical but perhaps also non-physical, that members of the group tend to have. To see this better, imagine a case in which John is sexually attracted to a woman who has Asian physical features but who is actually not Asian. Upon finding this out, he continues to sexually desire her, precisely because of her physical features.

Because such cases are obviously possible, someone who wishes to defend the third argument must deny their possibility—a difficult, if not impossible, task. Of course, it is possible that someone likes Asian women because of stereotypes. But it is also possible that he likes Asian-looking women simply based on their looks, not on anything else, and this is the point.

However, even in cases of PRSDs with stereotypes, we cannot simply infer, without further information, that X is racist. Such cases come in at least three types: (i) the stereotypes are part of the sexual desires; (ii) they cause the desires; and (iii) they are the agent's reasons for the desires.

(i) Abstractly, it is easy to see how stereotypes are part of sexual desires. Sexual desires usually have content; they have intentionality, focusing on specific individuals (or acts) and accompanied by particular beliefs: X sexually desires Y because X finds Y good-looking or believes that Y is good in bed, and so forth.²⁵ Because stereotypes can be beliefs, we can see how they can be part of sexual desires. Consider Seiriol Morgan's example of a man whose sexual arousal is enhanced by the thought that the woman with whom he has sex is a police officer, "to the extent that he found himself repeating the inner mantra 'I'm fucking the Police! I'm fucking the Police!,' as he was penetrating her."²⁶

Something similar can happen in the case of stereotypes. As X has sex with an Asian man, X repeats a stereotypic mantra, such as, to use the Tsang quotation, "His body is so smooth and hairless!" or "I'm fucking such a smooth and hairless man." In such ways, stereotypes can be part of an agent's sexual desires. So wouldn't having these stereotypes make X racist?

Not necessarily. This is because the stereotypes need not operate outside the sexual context. When it comes to sexual desire, which is often intimately connected with fantasy, people are able to compartmentalize: they can have sexual desires containing weird or immoral beliefs, yet not have these beliefs across the board. A man might find it sexually exciting to masturbate while watching (e.g., in a pornographic film) a woman having sex with three or four men, and might entertain the thought that women "just love to have this kind of sex" as he masturbates, but not actually accept it outside a sexual context (even outside the particular sexual context of masturbation). Because of the way sexual desire operates, it is not necessary for someone with immoral desires to maintain the immoral thoughts (that belong to the desires) outside the desires.

Similarly, someone's (call him "Paul") sexual desires might contain the belief that Asian men are smooth and hairless; yet Paul might not have this belief in general, let alone accept it. Thus, we cannot simply infer from the fact that people with racial stereotypes as part of their sexual desires have these stereotypes across the board, let alone accept them. It is not obvious, then, that someone like Paul is racist.

How do we decide whether people like Paul are racist? Are they racist because the content of their sexual desires is enough to make them racists? Or are they not racist because this content does not extend beyond their sexual desires? One answer is that it partly depends on which beliefs are "deeper" in the person's psyche. But it is not obvious that not-so-deep beliefs take a back seat to sub- or unconscious ("deeper") ones as far as the "real truth" about someone is concerned. Another answer is that

since X's sexual desires, on the one hand, and beliefs and attitudes, on the other, reflect his values, perhaps we ought to check and see which reflect his true values. Here, much depends on the person's higher-level attitudes toward his sexual desires. So a third answer is that if he ensures that they do not pervade his belief system, he seems to be morally in the clear. But if he, somehow, bemoans the fact that they are confined to his sexual desires, he certainly smacks of racism.²⁷

Even if the stereotypes are not confined to the agent's sexual desires, we still cannot simply infer that the agent is racist, because the agent might not accept them and might even struggle against them. If he does not accept them, judging him racist becomes tricky at best.

Obviously, the issues here are complex. But the complexity is instructive. It shows, first, that the inference that someone is racist from the fact that his sexual desires contain stereotypes is not (obviously) valid, given that the stereotypes need not be part of the agent's general belief system. It shows, second, that even the inference that someone is racist from the fact that stereotypes are part of his general belief system is not (obviously) valid, given that he might not accept these beliefs.

Now consider someone, Peter, who does accept the stereotypes: not only are they part of his sexual desires and general belief system, but he also endorses them. On my assumption, Peter is racist because accepting stereotypes is enough to make someone racist. But then note something important: the indictment of racism is based not on the content of Peter's sexual desires but on his attitude and his value system in general; it comes from his *acceptance* of stereotypes. His sexual desires play no role in the indictment of racism; they might play an epistemological role, alerting us to the possibility that Peter is racist, but they are not necessary (or sufficient) for the moral claim that Peter is racist.²⁸

(ii) The second possibility is that stereotypes *cause* the agent to have racial sexual desires, which need not contain these stereotypes (for simplicity's sake, let's assume that they don't). For example, the belief that broccoli is good for me causes me to desire to eat it. Similarly, the belief that Latinos are passionate lovers might get Belinda to form a sexual preference for Latinos, even if this belief is not part of her sexual desires for them. The belief causes the desire to exist, but it need not be part of the desire.

Still, Belinda is not necessarily racist. First, the stereotypes need not exist anymore; they might have caused the desires to exist but then they ceased to exist. If so, she *has no* stereotypes on which to indict her of racism. Second, we need to check her attitude toward these stereotypes. If she rejects them or is indifferent to them, it is not clear that she is racist. If she accepts them, she is racist, but then, again, her sexual desires play no role in forming this judgment. Thus, again, there is no direct inference from having racial sexual desires to a judgment of racism.

(iii) The third possibility is that the stereotypes are the agent's *reasons* for having racial sexual desires. The best sense to make of this idea is that the agent *accepts* his sexual desires. It is as if Belinda says, "Yes. I do like Latino men, and I like them *because* they are passionate lovers." Whether in such a case the stereotypes have to continue to *cause* Belinda to have the sexual desires she has is unclear. But they are certainly her *reasons* for having these sexual desires. It is, I think, such cases that animate the defenders of the third argument for the racism of PRSDs: it is because the PRSDs endorse the stereotypes.

Still, it is crucial again to note that the agents' sexual desires play no role in supporting the judgment of racism. That is, for us to claim that Belinda is racist, we do not need her sexual desires. All we need is the fact that she accepts the belief that Latinos are passionate lovers.

To conclude the discussion so far: the inference that X is racist is very far from the fact that X has racial sexual desires. First, we must check whether the sexual desires contain stereotypes. If they don't, X is not racist. If they do, then, second, we must check whether the stereotypes are confined to X's sexual desires. If they are, then our confidence in X's non-racism remains intact, especially if X does not believe the stereotypes in general, let alone accept them. If the stereotypes are not confined to X's sexual desires, then, third, we must check X's higher-level attitudes. If X does not accept these beliefs, our judgment that X is not racist, though shaken, is not undermined. So we cannot infer, simply on the basis of having racial sexual desires, that their possessor is overall racist.

Only in the case in which X somehow accepts these stereotypes, whether they are confined to his sexual desires or not, is the judgment that X is racist true. But, again, in such a case it is not X's racial desires that imply the racism but X's acceptance of them.

Consider now PRSDs with sexual aversion, and let's use the above three possibilities. Suppose that Mabel believes that Arabs are, literally, dirty people, and it is because of this belief that Mabel has a sexual aversion to Arabs. Now, because Mabel lacks sexual desires for Arabs, stereotypes won't be part of her desires, so possibility (i) is not relevant. Getting (iii) out of the way next, if Mabel accepts her belief about Arabs, she is racist, though, again, her sexual desires play no role in this judgment.

This leaves us with (ii). If Mabel's stereotypes not only causally blocked her sexual desires but also instilled nausea in her at the thought of having sex with Arabs, we still need to check whether the stereotypes exist. If they don't, then whether Mabel is racist would depend on how much weight we want to give her aversion (see the next paragraph). If the stereotypes do still exist, we need to check her attitude toward them; Mabel might not be racist if she does not accept them. Similarly, John Mayer might fit this type of PRSD but still not be racist because his "Benetton heart" rejects whatever beliefs cause his aversion, which might

force us to issue a mixed judgment about his racism or to withhold such judgment.²⁹

Still, what complicates things with such PRSDs is their gut reaction of aversion, because this might reveal much about the person. Indeed, perhaps such PRSDs are racist because their visceral reaction reveals quite a bit about their value system, indicating that the agent, at some level, harbors negative values about members of the group in question.

But we need to be careful. Consider a straight man who sincerely says, "I find the idea of having sex with men disgusting. If I have to go down on a guy I will throw up." (Consider a gay man who says similar things about having sex with women.) Is the straight man homophobic? A "yes" is hasty. After all, the man need not have any negative values, beliefs, thoughts, emotions, and so on about gay men (or women). He might be honestly reporting his physical reactions. Why not say the same about racial sexual desires?

Perhaps sexual orientations are more natural or basic to us than racial sexual desires, so that such reactions do not indicate anything bad. But this is not always true. The straight man's reaction might exist because of his homophobia; two straight men might say the exact same thing about fellating another man yet one of them is merely reporting his physical reaction while another is doing more; he is expressing his disgust at gay men. This point is the same as the one about what warrants accusations of racism: they are not warranted simply because of the content of the sexual desires but because of the agent's attitude toward that content, whether there is endorsement of them or not.

A WRONG VIEW OF RACISM?

Perhaps one potential problem with the discussion so far is the view of racism that I have adopted. Maybe stereotypes or beliefs are not the crucial factor when characterizing racism, but something else, such that were we to adopt this something-else view of racism, we would have a convincing picture of how PRSDs are racist.

J. L. A. Garcia's famous view of racism denies the necessity or sufficiency of beliefs (including stereotypes) for someone being a racist. According to Garcia, racism is a "vicious kind of racially based disregard for the welfare of certain people. In its central and most vicious form, it is hatred, ill-will, directed against a person or persons on account of their assigned race."³⁰ Racism on this view is essentially not about beliefs but about wants, intentions, and vices; its core is constituted by vicious attitudes toward members of the hated race.

It is hard to think of wants, desires, or vices as devoid of beliefs. Indeed, we need beliefs to be able to distinguish between different cases or types of, say, hatred or contempt.³¹ For example, suppose that Mabel

hates Ziad, who is Arab. To find out whether her hatred is racist, we need to know what she believes about Arabs and about Ziad; after all, she could hate Ziad for all sorts of reasons. And it is not just hate: Mabel could have contempt for Ziad, she could dislike him, she could scorn him, and she could be repulsed by him. But none of these on its own shows that Mabel is racist. To know whether she is, we need to know what beliefs animate or constitute her emotions.

So beliefs are unavoidable in a characterization of racism (certainly in individuals, as opposed to institutions). But let us assume that an account such as Garcia's is basically correct. Would that help the case that PRSDs are racist?

No. If all we know about Belinda is that she is sexually attracted to Latinos, or if all we know about Mabel is that she is sexually repulsed by Arabs, this tells us nothing about their other emotional or desirous states: we know nothing about whether they hate Latinos and Arabs, feel contempt for them, or, generally, have vicious attitudes toward them. Belinda's sexual attraction for Latinos is compatible with three states of her character: vicious emotions toward Latinos, virtuous ones, or neither.³² Thus, a vice-based or an emotion-based account of racism is neutral as far the issue of PRSDs is concerned. The only way it could entail that PRSDs are racist is if it were to assume, from the start, that racial sexual preferences are forms of hatred or viciousness. But this assumption would beg the very issue under discussion.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that we cannot justify accusations of racism against PRSDs because none of the arguments I have reconstructed on behalf of such a view succeeds. Thus, either better arguments need to be offered or we have to agree that some PRSDs are racist (in which case their racism stems from their overall beliefs, not their sexual desires) while others are like people with other sexual preferences—warranting at most a "Who cares?" attitude.³³

NOTES

1. Some philosophical essays discuss related issues—for example, Charles W. Mills, "Do Black Men Have a Moral Duty to Marry Black Women?" *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 25th Anniversary Special Issue (1994), 131–53; Lewis R. Gordon, *Bad Faith and Antiracism* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Books, 1995), chapter 16; Laurence M. Thomas, "Split-Level Equality: Mixing Love and Equality," in *Racism and Philosophy*, edited by Susan E. Babbitt and Sue Campbell (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), 189–201; Robert Gooding-Williams, "Black Cupids, White Desires," in *Look, A Negro! Philosophical Essays on Race, Culture, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006); and Ronald R. Sundstrom, *The Browning of America and the Evasion of Social Justice* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2008), chapter 4. Recently Robin Zheng has

addressed this issue head-on in her essay "Why Yellow Fever Isn't Flattering: A Case Against Racial Fetishes" (*Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 2:3 [2016], 400–419). The focus of her paper is different from mine: hers is about the effects of racial desires, not the character of the person who has them. She argues that such desires subject Asian/American women to disproportionate harms. However, I think that her essay is deeply marred because of three mistakes. First, Zheng does not take seriously the distinction among love, relationships, and sex; she collapses the three together for the purposes of her essay. Given that many of the data on which she relies are about relationships and love, as opposed to mere sexual desire, and given that racial sexual desires are, basically, *sexual* desires, this leaves her with the unanswered question of what effects racial sexual desires have on their own, outside the context of love and relationships (e.g., many of the doubts that the women express in the studies have to do with the status of their relationships). Second, Zheng does not take seriously the distinction between the *reasons* (or bases) for sexually desiring someone (or loving someone, if love is the issue) and the *object* of someone's sexual desire (or love). Not accounting for this distinction undermines Zheng's claim that racial desires "depersonalize" and "otherize" people.

Third, and most crucially, Zheng distinguishes neither between hurts and harms nor between subjective harms and objective harms. She relies (almost) unquestioningly on what Asian/American women have to say about this issue. Assuming (heftily) that there are no problems with the studies on which Zheng relies, not making these distinctions is problematic because it assumes that the doubts and anxieties that the sampled women go through constitute morally objectionable harm, whereas *this is precisely* the issue, especially given that not all psychological pain is a form of morally objectionable harm, given that Zheng does not hold the men with racial desires culpable for their desires (at least not directly), and given that she does not assume that all racial desires are permeated by stereotypes. That is, *if* racial desires are morally problematic because they lead to harm, Zheng needs to make the case that the harm in question is morally objectionable in order to show that the racial desires are morally problematic. Consider: suppose that I am very sensitive to noise, and that when I'm home any noise made by my neighbors causes me severe anxiety. We cannot infer from the fact that the noise makes me anxious that when my neighbors move around they are doing something wrong, because my anxieties, as miserable as they make me, are my own issue to cope with, and so are not a form of morally objectionable harm. I am not arguing that all mental anguish is like this, only that by itself mental anguish does not constitute objectionable harm. (It is interesting, in this connection, to compare the doubts that some minority members entertain on being hired to, say, an academic position ["Was I hired because of my ethnicity?"] to the doubts that some Asian/American women feel when they are pursued by a white man ["Does he want me because I am Asian?"].)

There's more written on this issue in cultural studies; in addition to the citations below, see, for example, Laurel C. Schneider, "What Race Is Your Sex?" in *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within: White People on What We Need to Do*, ed. Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), 142–62; and Abdul R. JanMohamed, "Sexuality on/of the Racial Border: Foucault, Wright, and the Articulation of 'Racialized Sexuality,'" in *Discourses of Sexuality: From Aristotle to AIDS*, edited by Domna C. Stanton (Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), 94–116.

2. bell hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," in *Feminist Approaches to Theory and Methodology: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, edited by Sharlene Hesse-Biber, Christina Gilmartin, and Robyn Lyndenberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 179–94, at 182.

3. Quoted in Laurie Shrage, *Moral Dilemmas of Feminism: Prostitution, Adultery, and Abortion* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 151.

4. I speak here of members of racial or ethnic groups as being the *objects* of sexual desires or attraction, not as the reasons why they are desired or as the causes of the desire—I discuss the reasons and causes below.

5. Future discussions of this issue might have to amend what we have to say about them to apply to other types of PRSDs.

6. Moreover, a person's sexual preferences usually change over time. Thus, in referring to PRSDs, we are actually referring to time-slices of such people. Even if someone's preferences never change, we are still referring to a time-slice, in this case the person's whole life (or the years of his life that mark the beginning and the end of his non-changing sexual preferences). I use "PRSD" to refer to whatever time-slice is necessary.

7. This is no different than saying that someone prefers blondes; it does not mean that he prefers *every* blonde.

8. Strictly, discrimination occurs through actions, not desires, but I gloss over this point and assume, for the sake of the argument, that one can discriminate through one's desires.

9. This is, however, a complicated discussion, and a lot depends on, for example, how we describe the task in question. See Alan Soble, "Physical Attractiveness and Unfair Discrimination," *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 1:1 (1982), 37–64, and *Sexual Investigations* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), chapter 5.

10. Alan Goldman defines "sexual desire" as "desire for contact with another person's body and for the pleasure which such conduct produces" ("Plain Sex," in this volume, 54), and Igor Primoratz defines it as "the desire for certain bodily pleasures, period" (*Ethics and Sex* [London and New York: Routledge, 1999], 46).

11. I say "usually" because many prostitutes can perform the sexual act even if they are not sexually attracted to a client, though here things can get complicated depending on what sexual act they perform, since some acts, such as oral sex, are easier to perform without sexual attraction. And I say "necessary" because despite the sexual attraction, the sexual act might not end up being satisfactory for many types of reasons.

12. You can substitute your favorite example of an object of sexual desire.

13. Goldman (see note 10 above) goes on to say about the desire for bodily contact, "It is not a desire for a particular sensation detachable from its causal context, a sensation which can be derived in other ways" ("Plain Sex," in this volume, 54).

14. Note that this argument is not about what members of other groups are sexually entitled to, but about what the defect in a PRSD is. That is, even if a PRSD is entitled to his sexual preferences and has no obligations to have sex with members of groups he does not desire, the argument insists that he is defective because of the narrowness of his desires.

15. The defect might be biological, related to health, or to proper functioning (as opposed to moral). But since PRSDs seem to evince no such defects, it will be hard to argue for one or more of them. The case would be easier if we knew that racial preferences are defects, but, of course, this is the point under debate.

16. A famous study in 2000 seemed to show that under 50 percent of male and female identical twins with the same sets of genes are both gay. This indicates how crucial the environment is in forming sexual orientation. We would expect things to be even more complicated with the formation of racial desires. See J. M. Bailey, M. P. Dunn, and N. G. Martin, "Genetic and Environmental Influences on Sexual Orientation and Its Correlates in an Australian Twin Sample," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78:3 (2000), 524–36.

17. For example, the stereotype that Asian women are demure is not as such a sexual one. But it might become sexualized by playing a causal role in how some men sexually desire Asian women or by becoming part of the very sexual desire itself.

18. Quoted in Nathaniel Adam Tobias Coleman, "The John Mayer Interview, or How to Start Dating Separately from Your Dick" (unpublished paper; I thank Cole-

man for sharing it with me). Benetton is a clothes retailer known for its racially and ethnically inclusive advertisements. David Duke is a notorious white supremacist.

19. Coleman, "The John Mayer Interview." There are a number of problems, however, with Coleman's claim, some of which emerge below.

20. For some discussion of stereotypes and racism, see Lawrence Blum, *"I'm Not a Racist, But . . .": The Moral Quandary of Race* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002); Sally Haslanger, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Erin Beeghly, "What Is a Stereotype? What Is Stereotyping?" *Hypatia* 30:4 (2015), 675–91.

21. And these are *generalizations*. No one ever says, "Every A is P"; instead, it is more like "As tend to be Ps."

22. See Blum, *"I'm Not a Racist, But . . ."*, chapter 1, for a discussion of believing non-racist beliefs on racist grounds.

23. This goes against some major definitions of "racist," such as Blum's (*"I'm Not a Racist But . . ."*, chapter 1), according to which a racist is someone whose motives and attitudes are deeply embedded in his or her psyche.

24. These have different strengths: agreeing with a belief might not be as strong as endorsing it. Still, I will treat them interchangeably.

25. See Seiriol Morgan, "Sex in the Head," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 20:1 (2003), 1–16, reprinted in *The Philosophy of Sex*, 6th ed., edited by Nicholas Power, Raja Halwani, and Alan Soble (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 99–121.

26. "Sex in the Head," 7. The man, "Johnny Drugs," is a drug dealer or user, thus making "fucking the police" even more sexually exciting for him.

27. A fourth answer is that our judgment of people like X is mixed: X is racist in certain aspects but not in others.

28. Even if we assume that merely believing the stereotypes is enough to make someone racist—that is, the person does not have to accept them to be racist—the indictment of racism still comes from outside the person's sexual desires.

29. It is actually not clear that Mayer is averse to black women—that he is frightened and repulsed by them, to use Coleman's understanding of "averse"—as opposed to not sexually desiring them (his use of racist imagery might have been an attempt, albeit a stupid, thoughtless one, at humor).

30. J. L. A. Garcia, "The Heart of Racism," in *Race and Racism*, edited by Bernard Boxill (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 257–96, at 259.

31. Thus, I think that even a view such as Garcia's cannot escape the essentiality of beliefs; see Tommie Shelby's criticism to this effect in "Is Racism in the 'Heart'?" *Journal of Social Philosophy* 33:2 (2002), 411–20.

32. A nice example is the novel *Season of Migration to the North* by the Sudanese writer Tayyeb Saleh. Its protagonist was sexually attracted to white women, but what motivated him was his hatred of white people because of their colonization of Arab lands.

33. I thank Linda Martín Alcoff, Elliot Layda, Patricia Marino, and Kunitoshi Sakai for extremely helpful comments and discussion on earlier drafts of this paper. Special thanks go to Sarah Hoffman, David Haekwon Kim, and Alan Soble for extensive and insightful comments.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Can you think of examples of (sexually relevant) properties or traits that are found among members of only one race or ethnic group, and not others? Suppose that such traits do not exist. Would then PRSDs exist? How?