

# Realizing Race

## Abstract

A prominent way of explaining how race is socially constructed appeals to social positions and social structures. On this view, the construction of a person's race is understood in terms of the person occupying a certain social position in a social structure. The aim of this paper is to give a metaphysically perspicuous account of this form of race construction. Working on an analogy with functionalism about mental states, I develop an account of a 'race structure' in which various races (Black, White, Asian, etc.) are functionally defined social positions. Individual persons occupy these social positions by 'playing the role' characteristic of those positions. The properties by which a person plays a race role, are the realizers for one's race. I characterize the social construction of a person's race in terms of a realization relation that satisfies a 'subset' condition on the social powers of raced persons. Races, on this view, are functionally defined, multiply realizable social kinds. The final section of the paper outlines some explanatory benefits of the account.

## 1. Introduction

According to social constructionism about race, race is real but has a social rather than biological reality.<sup>1</sup> Race is real for the constructionist because it is causally efficacious, it figures in social scientific inductions, inferences, predictions, and explanations, and because it normatively structures our lived experience. Race is social, on the other hand, because it is a product of human social interaction. For the social constructionist, race is something like the social significance of morphology (skin color, hair type, eye shape, etc.) associated with ancestry from certain geographical locations (cf. Haslanger 2012b: 236). One way that constructionists have fleshed out this thought is with the notion of a 'social position.' To think of races as social positions is to think of them as locations or roles that individuals occupy in a society, similar to roles such as being a CEO, being a mother, or being a US Senator.<sup>2</sup> These positions are defined by the various norms, powers, meanings, and expectations associated with—deemed appropriate for—different morphologies and ancestries. Races qua social positions stand in various relations to each other, forming a system or structure. To the extent these relations privilege some and subordinate others, the structure is hierarchical. The social construction of race, then, amounts to the production of a social structure involving groups of persons that are socially positioned in virtue of their morphology and ancestry.

The aim of this paper is to elucidate the relations and mechanisms by which persons come to occupy positions in this sort of structure. Working on an analogy with functionalism about mental states, I argue that we think of a 'race structure' as a structure involving races—Asian, Black, White, Latinx, etc.—that are positions defined in terms of their function in the structure (section 2). Then in section 3, I offer an analysis of the social construction of a person's racial identity in terms of the realization of their race by certain

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Alcoff (1995, 2006), Ásta (2018), Boxill (2001), Diaz-Leon (2015), Gooding-Williams (1998), Haslanger (2012b, d, e), Mallon (2003, 2016), Mills (1998a), Omi and Winant (2015), Outlaw (1996), Root (2000), Shelby (2005), Sundstrom (2002), and Taylor (2000, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Some choose not to use the term 'race' to describe such social groups/positions. Hardimon's (2014) preferred term is 'socialrace'; Blum's (2010) and Hochman (2017) is 'racialized group'; Glasgow's (2009) is 'race\*'.

properties, viz. morphology and ancestry. It is by having these features that a person ‘plays the role’ characteristic of their race. This realization relation, moreover, satisfies a ‘subset’ condition on social powers (3.1). Race, on this account, is a functionally defined multiply realizable social kind (3.2).<sup>3</sup> In section 4, I show how the account can explain the reality and causal efficacy of races (4.1), offer a response to what I’ll call the ‘exclusion problem’ (4.2), and explain the phenomenon of racial passing (4.3).

One motivation for giving such an account is that social constructionists about race have not often been explicit about the metaphysical nature of the relation of social construction or about the mechanisms by which race is produced.<sup>4</sup> That leads Blum, for example, to say, “in general the language of ‘social construction’ seems to me too fraught with confusion to recommend” (2010: 304). But perhaps that confusion should push us to clarify and make precise the notion of social construction, rather than abandon it. Sally Haslanger (2003, 2012a, 2012b, 2012e) has likely done the most to develop a metaphysics of the social construction of race and gender. On her view, race, like other social categories, is constitutively constructed in the sense that in defining what race is we must make reference to certain social factors. I have argued elsewhere (Griffith 2018a) that her account of constitutive construction does not specify the relation that holds between a person’s being of a certain social category and the social factors in virtue of which she belongs to that category. In other words, Haslanger’s account does not tell us what it is for a person to be *made* a member of a social category by social reality. The present account seeks to remedy this by giving a precise account of the means by which people are made to belong to races.

The utility of the account given here is not afforded to constructionists about race alone. Some who deny that races exist nevertheless believe that there are ‘racialized groups,’ i.e., populations that are wrongly believed to be biological races (Hochman 2017: 75).<sup>5</sup> The account given below could be utilized by those committed to racialized groups but not races insofar as their view requires an account of the processes by which individuals and groups are ‘racialized.’ The present account offers an explanation of the non-causal mechanisms by which one belongs to a race qua position in a social structure. Those who believe that individuals are racialized can appeal to these mechanisms in their account of racialization, despite the fact that they deny that these mechanisms produce races.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. The Race Structure

A race structure is a species of the more general category of ‘social structure.’ While there are competing conceptions of social structure on offer, I adopt the conception found in Ritchie (2013; 2015; forthcoming).<sup>7</sup> On this view, a social structure is an abstract form of a system of relations among social positions. Generally, a system is a collection of objects

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<sup>3</sup> The connection between functionalism in the philosophy of mind and social reality has not gone unnoticed. Kincaid (1990), Ruben (1985: chapter 3), Sawyer (2002, 2003), Wilson (2004), and Witt (2011) all recognize the applications of notions like ‘function,’ ‘multiple realizability,’ and ‘emergence’ to social properties. However, my application of these notions to the construction of race is, I believe, novel.

<sup>4</sup> There are notable exceptions, e.g., Ásta (2018).

<sup>5</sup> See Blum (2010) and Hochman (2017). See Glasgow (2009) and Hardimon (2014) for related concepts.

<sup>6</sup> Hochman (2017) offers an account of racialization in terms of developmental systems theory. But the account focuses on the various factors that produce racialized groups rather than the nature of the production itself.

<sup>7</sup> See Haslanger (2012f, 2016) and Porpora (1989: 198ff) for similar views of social structure. Also see Burman (2007: chapter 5) and Barnes (2017).

standing in certain relations and a structure is the abstract form instantiated by the system.<sup>8</sup> According to Ritchie, structures are networks of relations between positions that are occupied by objects of a system. These networks can be represented as graphs of edges and nodes. The positions are defined in terms of their relations to each other; their identities are derived from their relations to other positions in the structure. These positions, moreover, set certain constraints on their occupants, including what types of objects can occupy the position and what features its occupants must have.<sup>9</sup> A structure is social, for Ritchie, to the extent that it is constitutively dependent upon social factors, i.e., social factors figure in the definition of the structure, are metaphysically necessary for the structure to exist, or ground the structure.

Ritchie's main application for these kinds of social structures in her (2013, 2015) is organized social groups such as the Supreme Court, baseball teams, and university committees (what she calls 'type-1' groups). However, not all instantiations of these structures are organized social groups. According to Ritchie (forthcoming) (and Haslanger 2016 and my 2018b), social kinds or categories like gender, race, and class can be thought of as positions in social structures whose instantiations are not themselves groups. On this view, races are positions in a 'race structure,' which is organized in the way that social groups like the Supreme Court and baseball teams are.

The way I propose to develop this idea is to treat races as functional roles in a social structure, whose positions are the various races (Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, Indigenous American, Latinx, White, etc.).<sup>10</sup> Treating races as functional roles in structures suggests an analogy with functionalist views about the mind. According to classical functionalism, psychological kinds are higher-order properties that are defined in terms of the functional role that they play in the causal network of psychological states, sensory stimuli, and behavioral inputs and outputs.<sup>11</sup> Pain, for example, is a state defined in terms of its causes (bodily damage) and its effects (other mental states and behavioral outputs). The mind is constituted by a structure involving different (types of) psychological states that are functionally defined in terms of their unique causal profiles in a structure. Teleological functionalist accounts of the mind want to allow for the possibility of malfunction (Sober 1985 and Neander 1991). They, therefore, define the causal role of mental states in terms of characteristic or normal, rather than actual, causal roles. Construed in this way, the causal profile of a mental state tells us what it is for, i.e., what its job is in the system. It allows us to specify the proper function of the kind and thereby allow for the possibility of malfunction (Neander 2018).

Races, by analogy, are higher-order properties defined in terms of their functional role in the race structure. A race structure is constituted by different races that are functionally defined in terms of their unique profiles in the structure. But instead of being defined in terms of causal inputs and outputs (as mental states are), races are defined by *normative* inputs and outputs. The inputs are various norms and expectations applied to occupants of the race, along with their attendant incentives for punishment or reward.<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>8</sup> Haslanger (2016: 118). Both Giddens (1981: 26) and Shapiro (1997: 73) draw a distinction between systems and structures.

<sup>9</sup> See Ritchie (forthcoming) and Koslicki (2008: 235-6).

<sup>10</sup> Witt (2011) treats social positions, e.g., genders, functionally but does not understand functions vis-à-vis functionalism about the mind as I do.

<sup>11</sup> See Block (1980), Fodor (1968), Lewis (1980), and Putnam (1975).

<sup>12</sup> Constructionists have explored role norms in depth. See Ásta (2013, 2018), Hardimon (1994), Haslanger (2012d: 279, 2016), Ritchie (forthcoming), Thomasson (forthcoming), and Witt (2011).

outputs are the specific forms of compliance expected of its occupants. These include the behaviors, treatment, speech, appearance, etc. that the input norms demand. Races are defined not only by a particular normative profile,<sup>13</sup> but also by how they constrain occupancy, viz. by applying that profile to persons with certain morphology and ancestry. This profile specifies the normal or proper function of its occupants in the structure and allows for the possibility that individuals may ‘malfunction’ by failing to ‘play their race role’ (more on this in the next section).<sup>14</sup>

This analogy with functionalism not only fits nicely with Ritchie’s characterization of social structure, but it will also be useful for understanding how persons occupy the positions in a race structure. We can now define a race structure more formally as follows:

*S* is a *race structure* iff<sub>df.</sub> *S* is a social structure (i.e., an abstract form of a system whose instantiation is a product of social factors) such that (i) *S*’s positions are races  $R_1, \dots, R_n$ ; (ii)  $R_1, \dots, R_n$  are defined in terms of their unique functional roles in *S*; (iii) the functional role of race  $R_i$  is individuated by the norms and expectations applied to  $R_i$ ’s occupants and the forms of compliance expected of  $R_i$ ’s occupants; (iv)  $R_i$  restricts its occupants to individuals with certain morphologies and ancestries.

Charles Mills (1997; 1998b: 71) provides a clear example of this kind of structure in his discussion of the historically dominant race structure in the West: the white/non-white structure. For Mills, to be white is to be positioned in a privileged or advantaged social position in which one’s personhood, i.e., one’s autonomy, moral agency, and dignity, is fully affirmed. In our terms, a white person is one who *functions* as a person in that context.<sup>15</sup> It is a position defined by a set of norms and forms of compliance by virtue of which its occupants are afforded their full personhood. To be non-white, on the other hand, is to be positioned subordinately in such a way that one is treated as a ‘subperson’, i.e., one whose personhood is not fully (or at all) affirmed. A non-white person, in other words, *functions* as a subperson in that context. It is a position defined by a set of norms and forms of compliance by virtue of which its occupants are denied their full personhood. In this race structure, white and non-white are positions in a hierarchical structure that persons occupy.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> I take it that the *specific* norms applied to members of races change with relative frequency. It does not follow, however, that when the specific norms change, so do races. The norms that help individuate a race may be defined in a general way to allow for specifications.

<sup>14</sup> One possible way of extending this view is to let the normative profile of a race determine its function in the operation and maintenance of the structure. This provides a link between our account and functionalism in sociology. According to Kincaid (1990: 343), “Functional explanations [in sociology] involve two broad claims: (1) that some social practice or institution has some characteristic effect and (2) that the practice or institution exists in order to promote that effect.” Insofar as a race makes a characteristic contribute to a race structure, it exists in order to make that contribution. In Mills’ (1998b) structure, discussed below, the explanation for the existence of various racial categories is their function to promote White supremacy.

<sup>15</sup> Jenkins (diss) also uses the language of functioning as a (sub) person. Jenkins’ notion of the function of persons is an extension of Searle’s (1995, 2010) idea of a ‘status function’ that is applied to persons who are regarded as having a certain status. These status functions create and modify a person’s deontic powers.

<sup>16</sup> It is controversial whether race is inherently hierarchical. While this model of the race structure individuates races according to their functions in a social structure, that alone does not entail that race is inherently hierarchical. It is logically possible to have a race structure with functionally distinct positions that are non-hierarchically related. But logical possibility aside, historical and current race structures are hierarchical and the purpose of thinking about race in terms of social structure is to draw attention to this fact with the goal of

### 3. Realizing Race

Now that we have an account of the race structure, we can turn to the question of how a person's race is constructed in that structure. To further develop the analogy with functionalism about the mind, we can understand the construction of a person's race in terms of *realization*.

Pain is realized by the underlying physical state that plays the functional role characteristic of pain. By analogy, a race *R* is realized by persons who play the functional role characteristic of *R* in a race structure. To be precise, *R* is realized by persons who have certain properties by which they occupy the position characteristic of *R*. That is, it is *through or by way of* instantiating these properties that a person plays the *R*-role. Let's call these properties the realizers for a person's race, though we should note that, technically, it is a person's having these properties (a state) that realizes the person's race.<sup>17</sup>

The central realizers for a person's race are their morphology and ancestry. Morphological features, especially skin color, hair-type, eye, nose, and lip shape, are inherited and indicative of ancestry from certain geographical regions (cf. Haslanger 2012d: 277). When these features are absent or ambiguous, being a descendant of people from the geographical locations associated with a race, who are widely taken to have had these physical features, may be a realizer for the race (cf. Shelby 2005: 208).<sup>18</sup> (Being merely perceived to have the realizer properties for a race is discussed below in section 4.3 on racial passing.) The race structure restricts which persons with which features can occupy which positions in the structure. Morphology and ancestry are 'markers' in a race structure for the appropriate application of the input norms of a race (Haslanger 2012d: 277). These features of a person are what make them "responsive to and evaluable under" (Witt 2011: 32) these norms in the structure. Morphology and ancestry are realizers for race because it is through or by way of having these features that a person plays the role of their race in a race structure.

Although 'playing a race role' might appear to be something done consciously and willingly, this is not necessarily so. The functional profile that defines a race is normative rather than simply causal. It encodes an evaluative standard for occupants that have the function.<sup>19</sup> It prescribes an ideal; it says what members of a race are for, what their role in a society is, or what their proper function is. Nevertheless, having a function in a race structure is not causally determinative of a person's behavior. (Though, to be sure, it often prescribes through coercive or even violent force.) Something can have a function even if it chronically and systematically fails to perform the function (Neander 1999). Hence, one can 'play a race role' while at the same time consciously and deliberately resisting or subverting the norms and expectations that come along with being a member of a race. Therefore, any talk of 'playing a race role' should not be understood as something one necessarily does

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dismantling them. See Alcoff (1995) and Outlaw (1996) who argue that there can be race without hierarchy. See Hardimon (2014), Haslanger (2012c), and Jeffers (2013) for further discussion.

<sup>17</sup> Note that this approach is neutral about whether there is a set of properties that are necessary and sufficient for racial membership or whether there are merely clusters of properties, each of which are sufficient for racial membership (see Outlaw 1996: 84, Mallon 2016). Either stance will specify a range of properties that may realize one's race.

<sup>18</sup> Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for discussion on this point.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Witt (2011) on gender and Neander (1999) on biological functions. Appiah (1994) and Root (2000: S636) discuss the 'rules' for being white or black, Alcoff (2006: 184) 'racial etiquette.'

consciously or willingly. The race structure itself is a social product and is, to a significant extent, imposed upon individuals. That is, we find ourselves positioned in this structure, subject to the norms, privileges, disadvantages, stereotypes, and expectations encoded in the structure. Playing a race role involves a constant negotiation with complex social dynamics in which we find ourselves enmeshed. Moreover, a full account of the race structure will also incorporate the ways in which members of a race might shape their race (viz. by shaping its norms and expectations) and therefore the race structure itself over time.<sup>20</sup>

What is it exactly for a person's race to be realized? I turn now to outlining some important features of this realization relation.

### 3.1. The Subset Condition on Social Powers

Roughly, for a kind  $K$  to be realized by a property  $F$  is for the instantiation of  $F$  to 'bring about' the instantiation of  $K$  by  $F$ 's being a *way* of being a  $K$ . If suitably different properties can bring about the instantiation of a token of  $K$  (i.e., by being different ways of being a  $K$ ), then  $K$  is multiply realizable. Realization is a synchronic, asymmetrical, and non-causal determination relation.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, realization will be understood to be a many-one relation that holds between properties.

In my (2018b) I introduced what I called 'the subset condition on social powers.' Here I expand on that condition and its significance. Some non-reductive physicalists adopt a 'subset' condition on realization.<sup>22</sup> According to this condition,  $F$  realizes  $G$  only if the powers bestowed by having  $G$  are a proper subset of the powers bestowed by having  $F$ . A power is a manifested or unmanifested capacity to bring about a certain effect. The purpose of the subset condition is to keep mental properties distinct from and irreducible to the physical properties that realize them. Moreover, the condition helps the non-reductive physicalist avoid problematic causal overdetermination of realized properties, since realized properties have their own unique profile of powers.

The powers at issue in the case of mental-physical realization are the *causal* powers of the realized and their realizers. To apply the subset strategy to the realization of race, we can appeal to what Åsa Burman (2007) calls "social powers." A social power, according to Burman, is a capacity, which depends for its existence upon social phenomena, to bring about a certain outcome. For her, social power divides into normative and causal powers. Normative powers operate by giving others (at least the perception of) normative reasons to act, while causal powers do not (2007: 150). Among the normative powers, she includes 'deontic' powers and 'telic' powers. Deontic powers are collectively endowed and recognized. They include rights, obligations, and permissions, e.g., one's power to vote or the US President's power to issue executive orders. Telic powers, on the other hand, are defined in terms of purposes or goals and entail ideals or standards by which one can be judged, e.g., being a 'good wife.' Causal social powers, by contrast, are powers (visible or invisible) to bring about certain effects as byproducts of one's social position. Burman uses the example of the head of the central bank mentioning her friend's start-up company (2007: 152). This action may cause people to buy stocks in the new start-up, but this power is not

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<sup>20</sup> See Alcoff (2006: 185). See Hacking (1995) on the 'looping' effect in human kinds.

<sup>21</sup> See Funkhouser (2007: 311), Haug (2010: 325), Shoemaker (2007: 3).

<sup>22</sup> See Clapp (2001: 130), Pereboom and Kornblith (1991), Pereboom (2011), Shoemaker (2001, 2007, 2011), and Wilson (1999, 2011).

endowed by her social position as head of the bank, nor does it give reasons for buying stock in the start-up. Rather it is a byproduct or ‘spill-over’ effect of her position.

When applied to the realization of race, the subset condition on social powers (**SUBSET**) is:

(**SUBSET**) Properties  $F_1, \dots, F_n$  realize race  $R$  only if the social powers bestowed by  $R$  are a (non-empty) proper subset of the powers (social or otherwise) bestowed by  $F_1, \dots, F_n$ .<sup>23</sup>

**SUBSET** helps explain the origin of the social powers associated with a race. Races ‘inherit’ their social powers from their realizers in the sense that they are taken from the powers of their realizers by set construction. The properties that realize one’s race involve properties, e.g., morphology and ancestry, that are deemed to be socially significant in the race structure. These properties are what people are “tracking” (Ásta 2013: 719) when they racially classify others. While they are mistakenly taken to be necessary and sufficient for racial membership, these properties come with a profile of powers within the race structure. The social powers associated with a race are then drawn from the stock of powers generated by the social significance of morphology and ancestry.<sup>24</sup>

For example, the power to make use of certain affirmative action programs in America is a deontic social power of *being Black* (I discuss this example in my 2018b). According to **SUBSET**, this power is a member of the set of powers bestowed by the realizers for *being Black*. Among these realizers is, suppose, *having skin color c associated with sub-Saharan African ancestry*. Having this and other properties in certain contexts bestows upon a person the power to make use of the program.<sup>25</sup> Given that these properties help realize *being Black*, they contribute this power to the social power profile of *being Black*. But because the powers bestowed by *being Black* are a *proper* subset of its realizers’ powers, there are other powers bestowed by the realizer properties that are not members of the set of powers bestowed by the realized kind *being Black*. Consider having skin with substantial levels of melanin (see Griffith 2018b: 247). This bestows on its bearer a certain power to protect the skin from the sun’s damaging UV rays. Despite being a power bestowed by a realizer of *being Black*, e.g., *having skin color c*, it is not among the powers bestowed by *being Black* itself. After all, a lighter-skinned person who lacks this power may still be Black. (They may have a different shade of skin that helps realize *being Black*, have enough other morphological features that realize *being Black*, or have ancestors from sub-Saharan Africa who are presumed to have had dark skin.)

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<sup>23</sup> A similar but more general principle for social kinds was formulated in my (2018b: 247). In **SUBSET**, ‘ $F_1, \dots, F_n$ ’ and ‘ $K$ ’ refer to property types. However, when  $F_1, \dots, F_n$  realize  $K$ , there are tokens of  $F_1, \dots, F_n$  and  $K$  such that the token social powers of a  $K$ -token are a non-empty proper subset of the token powers of  $F_1, \dots, F_n$ -tokens. There will be other constraints on which properties can help realize  $R$ , viz. morphology and ancestry.

<sup>24</sup> Jenkins (diss.) holds that social powers come with the imposition of status functions to persons. Our views agree to the extent that there is an intimate connection between social positions, morphology/ancestry, and social power. We differ in the mechanism that produce race and its social powers.

<sup>25</sup> Obviously, the existence of this power also depends upon the functioning of certain institutions and laws. To make sense of this we can avail ourselves of Shoemaker’s (1981) and Wilson’s (2001, 2004) distinction between ‘core’ and ‘total’ realizers. Core realizers—morphology and ancestry for race—are the most significant in bringing about the realized property but may only do so in the appropriate context. The total realizer includes the core realizers as well as the relevant contextual factors.

### 3.2. Multiple Realizability

For the functionalist about the mind, mental states are multiply realizable in the sense that importantly different physiologies can realize the same mental state. With respect to race, we can say that a race *R* is multiply realizable insofar as *R* can be realized by different persons in virtue of different properties of those persons. In terms of **SUBSET**, race *R* is multiply realizable just in case there is (or could be) more than one property (or properties) whose associated powers are (or could be) the superset of which the social powers associated with *R* are (or could be) a non-empty proper subset (cf. Griffith 2018b: 250).

While pain is multiply realized because it can be realized by different physiological states, race is multiply realizable because it can be realized by differences in morphology and ancestry. The function of a race in the race structure constrains the kinds of differences there can be among the realizers for the race. That is, only properties by which persons perform the function characteristic of the race qualify as realizers for the race. Different instances of race *R* are realized by properties that constitute different ways of occupying the social position characteristic of *R*.

One way in which the race structure sets constraints on position occupancy is by selecting a range of morphological features and ancestries that make their bearers the ‘appropriate’ subjects of the norms associated with a race. The selection of this range of features, which varies from culture to culture, is what allows for a race to multiply realizable. Differences in skin tone, hair texture, and nose or lip shape, for instance, can help constitute different ways of realizing a race. Differences in ancestry can also help realize a race in different ways. For instance, ancestry in northern Europe and southern Europe may be different ways of realizing *being White*; ancestry in Vietnam and Japan may be different ways of realizing *being Asian*. Different realizers for a race interact with the norms of the race in unique ways. For instance, having darker rather than lighter skin may make a difference in how the norms of *being Black* are applied to a person and enforced. This goes some way towards explaining how different members of the same race can have importantly different experiences.

But a full explanation of such differences cannot ignore how race is enmeshed with gender, class, and other social positions.<sup>26</sup> White women and white men, for instance, may both realize their Whiteness through their skin color and ancestry. But white women are socially positioned and privileged differently than white men because of how their gender is realized (cf. Haslanger 2014: 116). Many of the morphological features, e.g., skin color or hair type, that realize a person’s race are at the same time gendered; the anatomical features that realize a person’s gender are at the same time raced. That is, the features that serve to socially position someone in the race structure may also play a role in socially positioning them in the gender structure (and vice versa). It is the complex interactions between the realizers for one’s race and the realizers for one’s other social identities that produces differences in privilege and subordination among members of the same race. The way in which a person realizes their race can reinforce, neutralize, or undercut the privilege/subordination they are afforded by the way in which their other social identities are realized (and vice versa) (cf. Haslanger 2014: 116). For instance, the realizers for one’s *being White* might bolster the privileges one has in virtue of realizing *being a Man* in certain

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<sup>26</sup> These brief remarks point toward a metaphysics of intersectionality, development of which is work for another time. See Ritchie (forthcoming) and Bernstein (ms.) for recent metaphysical accounts of intersectionality.



contexts. Similarly, the realizers for one's *being Black* might function to swamp or undercut the privileges one has in virtue of realizing *being a Man* in certain contexts. The explanation is that race realizers can promote or prevent the manifestation of the social powers of gender realizers (and vice versa) in a given context.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4. Explanatory Benefits of the Account

##### 4.1. Race is Real and Causally Efficacious<sup>28</sup>

Our account helps explain why race is real, though socially constructed. First, **SUBSET** prevents the ontological reduction of race to its realizers. The set of powers of a race do not include any powers not bestowed by its realizers. Yet, the set of powers of a race are not identical to the set of powers of its realizers; races have their own 'distinctive power profiles' (cf. Wilson 2011: 129). Insofar as kinds are individuated by their powers, realized kinds like race are not identical to their realizers and hence do not ontologically reduce to them. The unique set of powers of a realized property is drawn from the powers of its realizers. The social powers one has because of their race are unique, though derivative from, shaped by, and limited to the nature and organization of the race structure one inhabits.

Second, **SUBSET** also helps explain the causal autonomy of races. The distinctive power profile for a race contains powers that are uniquely relevant to the production of certain effects (cf. Wilson 2011: 129 and my 2018b: 248). Suppose a Black person in America makes use of their government's African American Employment Program. It is in virtue of *being Black* that the person is eligible to make use of the program. That is, it is the power profile of *being Black* that is relevant to producing the effect, i.e., of making use of the Employment program. Wilson (2011: 129) argues that to establish the causal autonomy of realized properties it is sufficient to show that the realized property makes a *distinctive* causal contribution, not necessarily the only causal contribution.<sup>29</sup> If that is correct, then the causal autonomy of race is secured by its unique contribution to bringing about various social effects. If the causal autonomy of something is sufficient for its reality, then realized kinds like race are real, though socially constructed.

##### 4.2. The Exclusion Problem

Some constructionist accounts of race make privilege and disadvantage essential to racial membership, e.g., Mills (1998a) and Haslanger (2012b). The exclusion problem is the worry that not every member of a race seems to enjoy the privilege or face the disadvantage said to be essential for membership in the race. Hence, the account would wrongly exclude certain people from membership in their race.<sup>30</sup> Michael Jordan, it might be thought, would

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<sup>27</sup> This could help explain Haslanger's (2012b; 2014) view that, for example, Black men in America or Indigenous men in Australia might fail to function as men (though they would still be males) in certain contexts due to racist oppression.

<sup>28</sup> This section is heavily indebted to my (2018b: 248ff.) where I provide the same argument for social kinds in general.

<sup>29</sup> As I noted in (2018b: 248), other subset theorists go further and argue that this feature shows that the realized property is the only cause for the relevant effect. See Shoemaker (2001: 31) and Yablo (1992: 274).

<sup>30</sup> Haslanger (2012b: 239-40) addresses a similar worry, which she calls the 'normativity' concern. I take up a general version of this objection in my (2018b: 248-9). Thanks to Bradley Rettler for originally putting the objection to me.

be wrongly excluded from *being Black* on constructionist views that make subordination on the basis of African ancestry criterial for *being Black* insofar as he avoids such subordination because of his celebrity status.

**SUBSET** helps the constructionist avoid this problem. According to **SUBSET**, the properties that realize a person's race are individuated in terms of the powers they bestow on their bearers. Powers are dispositional and therefore need not be manifested to be had. Hence, a person can have their race realized without the social powers, e.g., privileges or disadvantages, bestowed by having that race being manifested. As long as one has the power—the disposition—to play the functional role characteristic of their race, she may be a member of that race. If *being Black* is defined in terms of being subject to certain norms that lead to subordination, Jordan need not actually and presently experience that subordination to be Black. He is Black in virtue of having properties—morphology and ancestry—that bestow upon him certain social powers in the American race structure. As long as he *would* manifest those powers in the appropriate circumstances (to be determined on a full account of *being Black*), he satisfies the conditions for *being Black*. For instance, he will be subject to the norms and expectations associated with *being Black* in circumstances in which he is not recognized as Michael Jordan. For his skin color will still 'mark' him as the appropriate target for those norms and expectations. These are circumstances in which his celebrity does not shield him from the norms and expectations that he would otherwise be "responsive to and evaluable under" (Witt 2011). So, **SUBSET** allows us to explain the specific connection between race properties and their realizers in a way that avoids requiring all members of a race to experience their race in the same way.

### 4.3. Passing

Racial passing occurs when a person who is a member of race  $R_1$  is regarded as a member of a different, mutually exclusive race  $R_2$ . Passing is a difficult phenomenon for constructionist accounts of race to explain (see Michaels 1994; Gooding-Williams 1998; Mallon 2004). The reason is that if being of race  $R_2$  is simply a matter of occupying some social position, then no one can occupy such a position while *really* belonging to another race  $R_1$ . On my account, one has membership in a race  $R$  if one has properties by which she plays the  $R$ -role. It seems, though, that one could play the  $R$ -role without having the morphology or ancestry associated with  $R$ . One could play the  $R$ -role, e.g., by being *perceived* to have ancestry associated with  $R$  while actually having ancestry associated with another race. Does this mean that the account cannot explain racial passing? It does not.

The account can still distinguish, among those who play the  $R$ -role, between those who are described as 'passing' as  $R$ s and those who are described as 'really'  $R$ s. That is, the account has the resources to acknowledge and explain the distinction non-constructionists are making. (Intuitions about passing often presuppose folk biological conceptions of race, i.e., what race a person 'really' biologically is, that the constructionist rejects.) My account explains racial passing in terms of the functions that individuate races and the public awareness of the properties that realize one's race.<sup>31</sup> The person who passes as a member of race  $R$  plays the role characteristic of  $R$ . That is, she is publicly recognized to be a member of  $R$  and is subject to the norms and expectations that constitute  $R$ 's function in the structure. However, she actually has or lacks certain properties such that her having or

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<sup>31</sup> My approach is similar to those found in Ásta (2018: 123-4), Jenkins (diss. Chpt 1), and Mallon (2004). It is most similar to Ásta's since she also builds a counterfactual component into her account.

lacking these properties is (a) not widely known and (b) if it were widely known, she would no longer play the *R*-role and so no longer be a member of *R*. That is, a person is merely passing as an *R* when there are facts about the person, e.g., facts about their ancestry, such that if they were widely known, the person would no longer realize *R*. The revelation that the person has or lacks these properties would have the effect that they would no longer be seen as subject to the norms relevant to *R* (cf. Ásta 2018 and Haslanger 2012b). The person who passes plays the *R*-role, but has properties, again not publicly recognized, that by the constraints of the race structure should disqualify them from being a member of *R*.

Rachel Dolezal passed as Black for years during her employment with the NAACP; she was perceived to be Black by those around her. Later it was revealed that she had White parents and was in fact of Czech, German, and Swedish, but not African, ancestry. Dolezal ‘played the Black role’ for a time, but she was passing as Black. For she had properties (having White parents, having only European ancestry) that satisfied (a) and (b) above. Once those properties were publically known, she no longer played that role.

Contrast this with someone who is a non-passing member of *R*. Such a person plays the *R*-role and there are no relevant facts about them such that if they were widely known, the person would no longer realize *R*. For instance, there are no facts about their actual morphology or ancestry that if publicly recognized would mean the person no longer plays the *R*-role. The non-passing member of *R*, in other words, actually has the properties that, by lights of the race structure, mark them as appropriate subjects of the norms associated with *R*. It is important to note, that on my account it is not having these realizers—morphology and ancestry—that make a non-passing person a member of a race. One’s race is a matter of playing a certain functional role by way of having these realizers.

## 5. Conclusion

‘Social structure’ is an important notion in social ontology and the social sciences. Understanding social structures help us to explain the meaning of our social interactions, to organize our lives with others, to facilitate predications and inferences about people’s behaviors, and to highlight unjust social arrangements. The account developed here offers a metaphysically perspicuous characterization of one kind of social structure—a race structure—and the construction of our racial identities. Races are positions in a race structure that persons occupy. Like a network of functionally defined mental states, the race structure is a network of functionally defined races. Analogous to the way mental states are realized by physical features that play the roles characteristic of those states, race is realized in persons that have features by which they play the role characteristic of their race. The account is intended to help explain how an individual’s race can be real, while being contingently socially produced. Moreover, it explains how an individual’s racial identity is connected to the broader race structure in which she is positioned. Several aspects of the model remain to be developed, e.g., the grounds for the race structure itself, the persistence conditions of racial groups, the variation of racial categories and identities across contexts, and how racial identities are experienced. Nevertheless, the present effort provides a framework in which these issues can be profitably addressed.<sup>32</sup>

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