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## **Against Identity: a Positionalist Approach to Resisting Identity-Based Violence**

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AGAINST IDENTITY: A POSITIONALIST APPROACH  
TO RESISTING IDENTITY-BASED VIOLENCE

by

Barbara Walkowiak

A Thesis Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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## ABSTRACT

### AGAINST IDENTITY: A POSITIONALIST APPROACH TO RESISTING IDENTITY-BASED VIOLENCE

by

Barbara Walkowiak

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2022  
Under the Supervision of Professor Joshua Spencer

I develop and defend a positionalist theory of identity as a basis from which to resist identity-based violence. On this account, identities are the social positions that individuals occupy due to belief that operate upon them. This contrasts with and is intended to replace the dominant intrinsicist model, which conceives of identity as something about individuals in and of themselves. Taking gender as a focal point, I develop three overarching positionalist kinds: monogyne, polygyne, and androgyne. I propose that additional sub-kinds (e.g. monogyne woman) be developed in order to more exactly track gender positionalities and the operational beliefs that produce them. I anticipate two objections against my positionalist account: the inclusion problem and the respect problem. I argue that positionalism can be used to reliably track the positionalities of individuals (addressing inclusion) and that including individuals into the intrinsicist kinds they identify with is an undesirable theoretical practice (addressing respect).

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Our beliefs about who we are matter. How we think about identities like gender and race informs how we treat one another and ourselves. This can implicate us in identity-based violence or it can facilitate resistance against that violence. In this paper, my practical goal is to develop and defend a theory of identity that enables resistance against identity-based violence.<sup>1</sup> I refer to my theoretical account as a *positionalist theory of identity*. Positionalism conceives of identity kinds like gender and race as social positions that persons occupy. On such an account, ‘woman’ might refer to someone who is socially subordinated due to everyday beliefs about females.<sup>2</sup> Positionalist theories critically evaluate operative beliefs about identity based upon the effects those beliefs have on social beings. In this way, identity-based beliefs about people become implicated in the identity-based violence that they generate. I oppose my positionalist theory against what I refer to as *intrinsicist theories of identity*. Intrinsicism conceives of identity kinds like gender and race as something about persons unto themselves. On such an account, ‘woman’ might refer to something like an adult human who is biologically female.<sup>3</sup> Intrinsicist theories conditions how we ought to treat beings based upon what they are considered to be. Given a practical interest in resisting identity-based violence, I argue that my positionalist theory of identity is a preferable alternative to intrinsicist theories of identity.

In this paper, I argue that my positionalist theory of identity is a preferable alternative to intrinsicism for the purposes of resisting identity-based violence. I structure my paper as

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, ‘identity’ refers narrowly to that subset of metaphysical identities that would ordinarily be referred to as either ‘personal identities’ or ‘social identities’ (e.g. gender, race, etc.). As these options implicitly prejudice the discussion in favor of intrinsicism and positionalism (respectively), I opt for the more neutral ‘identity’.

<sup>2</sup> This example is roughly borrowed from Sally Haslanger’s positional conception of ‘woman’. See Haslanger (2013).

<sup>3</sup> This example represents the biological essentialist view, which is a dominant intrinsicist theory of gender identity.

follows: *Section II* introduces my positionalist theory of identity. This includes my methodology and metatheoretical commitments, a demonstration of my theoretical approach using positionalist gender kinds, and discussion of the practical implications of my theory. *Section III* addresses two anticipated objections against my positionalist theory. I take K. Jenkins' objections against S. Haslanger's positionalism as potential objections against my own account.<sup>4</sup> The first objection is that positionalism has an inherent inclusion problem because the approach will always wrongfully exclude some persons from kinds that they ought to be included into. I argue that the inclusion problem is not inherent to positionalism and that my positionalist theory overcomes this problem better than intrinsicist theories can. The second objection is that positionalism has an inherent respect problem because the approach will always wrongfully exclude some persons from the kinds that they identify themselves with.<sup>5</sup> I argue that the respect problem can never apply to positionalist theories. Moreover, I claim that this ostensible problem only emerges from a misguided intrinsicist commitment and that positionalism recommends itself over and against intrinsicist theories by rejecting that commitment. *Section IV* offers my concluding thoughts and acknowledges avenues for future development.

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<sup>4</sup> See Jenkins (2016) and Haslanger (2013), respectively. See also M.S. Andler (2017) for adjacent commentary. The positionalist/intrinsicist distinction is original to my analysis. My classification of Haslanger as positionalist and Jenkins as (predominantly) intrinsicist does not represent how either author explicitly characterizes their respective views. However, in superimposing my distinction on their respective views I do not take myself to be substantively altering those views. Haslanger refers to their approach as pragmatically 'analytical' and contrasts this against 'conceptual' inquiries into what our everyday concepts of identity are and 'descriptive inquiries into natural (including social) phenomena are (2013, 223-224). Jenkins develops a distinction between the 'positional aspect' and 'self-conceptual aspect' of gender identity (2016, 406-408).

<sup>5</sup> While the respect problem may seem like an instantiation of the inclusion problem, I argue a distinction later on.



## II. (GENDER) POSITIONALISM

In this section, I develop my positionalist theory of identity. First, I discuss my methodology and metatheoretical commitments. Second, I present my positionalist theory of identity. This includes a demonstrative analysis of positional gender kinds. Third, I discuss the practical implications of my positionalist theory. Altogether, this section develops my positionalist theory of identity as a practical tool for resisting identity-based violence.

### *II.i. Methodology and Metatheoretical Commitments*

My methodological approach in this paper is one of *ameliorative inquiry*. This approach guides theoretical inquiries according to metatheoretical commitments, often referred to as *desiderata*.<sup>6</sup> A theory developed through ameliorative inquiry answers foremost to the stipulated desiderata guiding that inquiry. Although the theoretical account may be sensitive to things such as metaphysical reality (typical of descriptive inquiry) or everyday understandings (typical of conceptual inquiry), this will only be true insofar as accounting for such things is useful in serving the stipulated desiderata. An ameliorative methodology therefore generates practical theories that answer to interests that have their basis in lived reality; this is the attraction of the approach. For example, an economic theory that answers to a desideratum of combating homelessness may describe metaphysically real ‘houses’ or allude to everyday

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<sup>6</sup> Desiderata are typically normative commitments (i.e. they are taken as commitments that we ought to have). Although the desideratum in this paper could function as a normative commitment, my personal preference is to extract normativity from the commitment (i.e. to not take it as a commitment that we ought to have). Implicit throughout this paper is an absence of presumption about whether anyone ought to share my desideratum. Rather, I suppose just that if one does share my desideratum that my project will be of some interest to them. It may be helpful to understand my desideratum as a device that guides theory to be of use to more people rather than guiding more people to be of use to a theory. See Haslanger (2013, p.222-225, 376-379) for discussion of a more conventional ameliorative methodology. See also Jenkins (2016, p.395) for further discussion.

beliefs about 'homes' if doing so is conducive to combating homelessness. But this ameliorative economic theory only takes in an instrumental concern in such things. Although describing the world and understanding everyday beliefs about the world may be useful in ameliorative inquiry, such descriptions and understandings are only instrumentally important to amelioratively generated theories. Theories developed through ameliorative inquiry succeed just if they support their guiding desiderata. Relatedly, the desirability of competing theoretical accounts is to be evaluated based upon which theory better supports any desiderata held in common between the competing accounts.

My stipulated desideratum is *resisting identity-based violence*. This warrants a few points of clarification. First, by 'resisting' I mean to describe a dynamic mode of being between an actual practitioner of a theoretical account and their sociopolitical environment. Resistance emphasizes the practice of opposition rather than the pursuit of an annihilative ideal (e.g., 'ending' identity-based violence); put otherwise, my desideratum is practice oriented rather than ends oriented. Second, by 'identity-based' I mean to describe a phenomenon that has its basis in operative beliefs about identity. For instance, the phenomenon of forced birthing has its basis in operative beliefs about the ostensibly appropriate social role of 'women' as procreators. Importantly, the operative beliefs that come under scrutiny of an ameliorative inquiry are distinct from the conceptions of identity that the ameliorative inquiry generates; ameliorative theories analyze and react to operative beliefs in constructing distinct conceptual kinds of identity.<sup>7</sup> Third, by 'violence' I mean to describe a very general sociopolitical

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<sup>7</sup> This is not to suggest that amelioratively generated beliefs about identity cannot be operationalized and implicated in identity-based violence (they can be). Rather, it is the case that when amelioratively generated

phenomenon. Whereas everyday use might suggest merely physical violence against persons, my meaning is considerably broader and includes not only physical violence but also things like psychological abuse, social death, and intergenerational oppression. I adopt this highly general conception of violence so that the desideratum can accommodate a broader array of interests (and so, too, practitioners). Although the exact forms of violence targeted by practitioners may therefore vary widely, I take any resistance to any sort of violence to be desirable. Altogether, ‘resisting identity-based violence’ is a desideratum that guides my positionalist theory to enable resistance against myriad sorts of violence that result from operational beliefs about identity. The desirability of my positionalist account is to be evaluated based upon how well it answers to this desideratum, especially in comparison with intrinsicism.

### *II.ii. A General Positionalist Theory of Identity*

There are two general approaches to theorizing about identity: intrinsicist and positionalist.<sup>8</sup> *Intrinsicist theories* conceive of identity as something to do with what beings are unto themselves. Intrinsicism encompasses a wide array of otherwise disparate theoretical accounts. For instance, the dominant biological essentialist view that e.g., a ‘woman’ is an adult human female counts as an intrinsicist theory. But Jenkins’ mental maps account and T.M. Bettcher’s first-personal authority account also count as intrinsicist, and both of these accounts are explicitly opposed to biological essentialism.<sup>9</sup> My intention in grouping these sorts of

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beliefs about identity come under scrutiny this is done through independent or meta-level ameliorative analyses of those beliefs and the immediate ameliorative inquiry that directly generated them.

<sup>8</sup> This distinction is intended as a conceptual aid. I do not mean to suggest that the distinction is always a clean one. Although some theoretical accounts may be purely intrinsicist or purely positionalist, other accounts may hybridize intrinsicism and positionalism or adopt a metatheoretical pluralism (see e.g., Jenkins 2016 and P. Ikuenobe (2015).

<sup>9</sup> See Jenkins (2016) and Bettcher (2009).

accounts together is not to overlook their important dissimilarities and substantive disagreements. Rather, my intention is to emphasize a commonality that is significant to my project: intrinsicist theories all conceive of identities as things that beings are unto themselves. Whatever it may be, this thing about the being itself functions to make the treatment of that being conditional on its ostensible ontology. That is, intrinsicism directs us to treat beings in particular ways based upon what (we think) they are.

By contrast, *positionalist theories* conceive of identity as something to do with how and why a being is socio-politically located in relationship with other beings. On such an account someone may be e.g., a ‘woman’ because they occupy a socio-politically subordinate position due to dominant biological essentialist beliefs being applied to them; this is roughly the view that Haslanger takes.<sup>10</sup> As with intrinsicism, positionalist theories can vary considerably; my own positionalist account will differ from Haslanger’s in substantive ways. What Haslanger, myself, and other positionalists will share in common is that we all conceive of identity in terms of the sociopolitical positions that beings occupy due to operational beliefs about identity. Howsoever a positionality might be conceived, the function of that conception is to critically evaluate the effects of operational beliefs about identity in order to inform how we should engage those beliefs.<sup>11</sup>

The defining feature of any positionalist theory is that it conceives of identity kinds as positionalities that people occupy due to operational beliefs about identity. This is broken down

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<sup>10</sup> Haslanger (2013, see esp. p.234).

<sup>11</sup> For instance, Haslanger conceives of ‘woman’ as a negative ideal that challenges patriarchy (2013, 240). observes that ameliorative inquiries attempt to generate practically useful understandings of identity (2013, p.223-224) and demonstrates how their theory of gender and racial kinds can and ought to adjust our attitudes to dominant beliefs about identity (ibid, see especially 239-240). However, as far as I can see, Haslanger does not suggest that their approach is

into three general components: classificatory perceptions, operational beliefs, and positional outcomes. By *classificatory perception* I mean to describe whenever a being perceives itself or another being as having membership in some identity kind; for instance, someone viewing themselves as a ‘woman’. By *operational beliefs* I mean to describe those beliefs that beings use in their private and social lives; for instance, someone believing that ‘women’ should be homemakers. By *positional outcome* I mean to describe how a being is socio-politically positioned in relationship with other beings; for instance, a being who experiences financial dependency. Positionalism relates these three components – classificatory perceptions, operational beliefs, and positional outcomes – in a consistent way. We can model this using three general criteria:

(a) a being is regularly and for the most part perceived to have membership in a particular identity kind; (b) that being is subject to operative beliefs that condition their behavior and treatment as a result of (a); and (c) that being occupies a particular positionality demarcated by violence specific to that positionality and as a result of both (a) and (b).<sup>12</sup>

For a positionality to be demarcated by violence is for its occupants to experience violence, be complicit in others experiencing violence, or both. Altogether, these three criteria describe the process by which operative beliefs about identity act upon persons in ways that condition their treatment and thereby determine their positionality. An everyday example of this process is the way in which a being is made financially dependent (criteria c) because they are viewed as

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<sup>12</sup> Readers familiar with Haslanger (2013) will note the influence of their work upon mine. In developing my account of positionalism as a general theoretical approach, I have abstracted away from and generalized Haslanger’s particular definitions for gender and racial kinds. In doing so I have changed most of the language and made some substantive departures away from Haslanger’s original vision. Nevertheless, I remain indebted to Haslanger for the basic structure and interrelation of the three-criteria model I use here. Additionally, the language “regularly and for the most part” is taken directly from Haslanger.

an intrinsic ‘woman’ (criteria a) who ought to serve as a homemaker rather than having a career (criteria b).

### *II.iii. A Positionalist Theory of Gender Identity*

Although positionalism has broad applications I demonstrate the positionalist approach by focusing now on the family of gender kinds.<sup>13</sup> In developing a positionalist theory of gender identity, I propose three overarching positionalist kinds of gender: monogyne, polygyne, and androgyne. First:

Some being ‘S’ is *monogyne* iff they (a) are regularly and for the most part perceived as being one particular intrinsicist gender kind; (b) are subject to operative beliefs that condition their expected behavior and treatment as a result of (a); and (c) occupy a particular positionality marked by specific forms of violence as a result of both (a) and (b).

Although ‘monogyne’ is both an original term and concept, this overarching gender kind encompasses more familiar subsidiary gender kinds like monogyne ‘woman’ and monogyne ‘man’ (more on this shortly). Within most social contexts, monogyne gender kinds will account for the majority of people since most people are perceived and treated as either intrinsic women or intrinsic men.<sup>14</sup> However, monogyne gender kinds alone cannot account for all people who occupy positionalities marked by violence. Two further overarching gender kinds are necessary:

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<sup>13</sup> This focus on gender kinds is largely motivated by the lineage relationship of my project to Haslanger’s (2013) positionalism– which focusses on gender and race – and Jenkins’ (2016) intrinsicist critique – which focusses on gender. Retaining a consistent focus on one family of kinds will hopefully be useful to those following along.

<sup>14</sup> This is not to suggest that ‘monogyne woman’ and ‘monogyne man’ are the only subsidiary monogyne kinds. Multiple intrinsicist theories of identity construct kinds beyond the dominant intrinsicist ‘woman’ and intrinsicist ‘man’, so a comprehensive positionalist theory will correspondingly have more than two subsidiary monogyne kinds.

'S' is *polygyne* iff they (a) are regularly and for the most perceived as being more than one intrinsicist gender kind in different regular contexts; (b) are subject to operative beliefs that condition their expected behavior and treatment within those respective contexts and as a result of (a); and (c) occupy a particular positionality marked by specific forms of violence as a result of both (a) and (b).

'S' is *androgynous* iff they (a) are regularly and for the most part not perceived as clearly being any intrinsicist gender kind; (b) are subject to operative beliefs that condition their expected behavior and treatment as a result of (a); and (c) occupy a particular positionality marked by specific forms of violence as a result of both (a) and (b).

The overarching kind 'polygyne' encompasses persons whose regular experience with intrinsicist gender beliefs is contextually variable. For instance, someone might be polygyne classed if they are perceived and treated as an intrinsic 'man' at work and an intrinsic 'woman' at home. 'Polygyne' tracks the unique sort of meta-positionality that emerges from regularly occupying different positionalities in different contexts. This meta-positionality cannot be encompassed by a contextually sensitive 'monogyne' kind.<sup>15</sup> This is because regular contextual variability is accompanied by its own set of norms and penalties for disconformity that do not attend monogyne classed persons. For instance, in the preceding example the person may be subject to an intrinsicist belief that they should 'out' themselves at work. A monogyne classed person experiences no such belief or pressure.

The overarching kind 'androgynous' encompasses persons who are regularly perceived to lack a determinant intrinsic gender. For instance, someone might be androgynous classed if their presentation mixes cues from different intrinsicist kinds in order to disrupt others' scripts for kind categorization. 'Androgynous' tracks the unique sort of positionality that emerges from

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<sup>15</sup> I have in mind here Haslanger's (2013, p.235) contextually sensitive adjustments to their gender kinds.

regularly being excluded from all intrinsicist gender kinds. This phenomenon cannot be encompassed by the 'monogyne' or 'polygyne' kinds. The norms and sanctions experienced by androgyne classed persons are driven by intrinsicist scripts on how to treat disconformity with entire intrinsicist systems of gender, rather than disconformity with particular intrinsicist gender kinds (i.e. monogyne disconformity) and the intrinsicist expectation of a monogyne lifestyle (i.e. polygyne disconformity).

Each of these three overarching positionalist kinds is designed to accommodate the construction of subsidiary gender kinds that track more precise positionalities. This enables a positionalist to adjust focus between the broader implications of identity beliefs to narrower outcomes. Subsidiary gender kinds retain the insights from their overarching gender kind while providing additional insights into the more particular circumstances of individuals. An example of a more particular gender kind demonstrates the scalability of positional kinds:

'S' is a *monogyne woman* iff they (a) are regularly and for the most part perceived as being an intrinsic 'woman'; (b) are subject to operative beliefs that condition their expected behavior and treatment as a result of (a); and (c) occupy a particular positionality marked by specific forms of violence as a result of both (a) and (b).

This subsidiary gender kind incorporates the overarching way that monogyne persons are positioned while drawing attention to the more precise expectations that attend perceived membership in the intrinsicist kind 'woman'. A more detailed exposition of this kind might point e.g., to the biological essentialist belief that females are naturally suited to homemaking and implicate that operative belief in monogyne women being disproportionately denied access to careers. The more particular the subsidiary positionalist kind, the more detailed an expositional account of its criteria will be.



#### *II.iv. Positionalism in Practice: Implications and Applications*

Having demonstrated what positionalism looks like in theory I now discuss what positionalism looks like in practice. In application, positionalist kinds direct us to resist identity-based violence by opposing ourselves against the operative beliefs about identity that produce that violence.<sup>16</sup> For instance, the positionalist kind ‘monogyne woman’ can be used to implicate biological essentialist beliefs about perceived females in the financial precarity it tends to dispose monogyne women to. This is because the positionalist kind tracks the biological essentialist belief from its application, through its enforcement, and to its effective conclusion. What emerges from positionalist kinds is not merely a critique of identity-based violence. Such violence is already acknowledged by the desideratum as something to be resisted. Rather, what emerges from positionalist kinds is a mode of relating critically to operational beliefs about identity that enables resistance against identity-based violence.

Membership in a positionalist kind is always undesirable because it means that one experiences identity-based violence, is complicit in others experiencing such violence, or (as is usually the case) both.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, we should resist the operational beliefs that generate these positionalities and the violence which demarcates them. For instance, because biological essentialist beliefs about gender are implicated in identity-based violence we ought not to identify ourselves or others through biological essentialist conceptions of identity. One should

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<sup>16</sup> Although subtly different in important ways, this implication is not entirely original. See Haslanger (2013, p.242).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

e.g., deny that one is a biologically essential ‘woman’ or a biologically essential ‘man’ and one should refuse to identify others in these ways as well.<sup>18</sup>

Importantly, intrinsicist theories of identity can neither implicate operational beliefs about identity in identity-based violence nor motivate resistance against those beliefs. This is because intrinsicist kinds do not track the processes by which operational beliefs about identity position people in relation to one another. Recall that intrinsicism conceives of identity kinds as something to do with persons in and of themselves. This limits the function of intrinsic theories to their positioning influence on persons, without offering a theoretical means of evaluating that influence. Although some intrinsicist theories of identity may appear to fill the functional role of positionalist theories this is because they incorporate or reference positionalist analyses. For instance, Jenkins’ intrinsicist account regards intrinsic ‘women’ as persons with mental maps that guide them through their social existence as people belonging to the kind ‘monogyne women’.<sup>19</sup> It is only because Jenkins’ intrinsicist kind ‘woman’ incorporates a positional kind that it can leverage a critique against the identity-based violence experienced by monogyne women. Positionalism is a more desirable theoretical approach to resisting identity-based violence because it is uniquely capable of explaining and motivating resistance against the causal origins of that violence.

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<sup>18</sup> Implicating biological essentialist beliefs in violence is well-covered ground. Whether alternative intrinsicist kinds – like Jenkins’ (2016) mental maps based kinds or Bettcher’s (2009) first-personal based kinds – are also implicated in identity-based violence and therefore also subject to resistance is something I do not take up in this paper.

<sup>19</sup> Jenkins (2016, 410). Notably, Jenkins does not describe their position in these terms. My representation of their views here is translated into the language of my analysis, largely to avoid confusion by moving between two systems of meaning given for the same set of words.

### III. Anticipated Objections

In this section I anticipate two objections based on Jenkins' critique of Haslanger's positionalist theory.<sup>20</sup> The first objection is the *inclusion problem*, which concerns the wrongful exclusion of persons from kinds into which they ought to be included.<sup>21</sup> The wrongfulness of exclusion depends upon whether it is consistent with the ameliorative desideratum. I argue that Haslanger's positionalist theory does have an inclusion problem. However, I demonstrate that this is not for the reason that Jenkins claims. I then show that my positionalist theory does not wrongfully exclude anyone that it ought to include, given the desideratum of resisting identity-based violence. The second objection is the *respect problem*, which concerns the wrongful exclusion of persons from the kinds that they intrinsically identify themselves with.<sup>22</sup> Although Jenkins treats the respect problem interchangeably with the inclusion problem, I present it as a distinct concern because it answers to a particular desideratum that is at odds with the desideratum of resisting identity-based violence. First, I argue that positionalism cannot exclude people from the kinds they identify with. I suggest that this is a unique advantage of positionalism over and against intrinsicism. Second, I argue that the respect problem is misguided because extending respect is implicated in identity-based violence; consequently, it is not a concern to which positionalism must answer. I suggest that positionalist abstention from respect is another unique advantage over and against intrinsicism.

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<sup>20</sup> Jenkins (2016, 397-406).

<sup>21</sup> Jenkins (2016, p.394-396, 398-402). The inclusion problem does not originate with Jenkins, although they are the first to apply it to positionalism. See Haslanger (2013, 228) for additional discussion of the inclusion problem.

<sup>22</sup> Jenkins (2016, p.396). The respect problem also does not originate with Jenkins, although again they are the first to apply it to positionalism. See Bettcher (2007) for an analysis of respect and intrinsic transgender identity.

### *III.i. The Inclusion Problem*

A theory of identity has an inclusion problem if it wrongfully excludes someone from an identity kind into which they ought to be included.<sup>23</sup> Given an ameliorative inquiry, this wrongfulness is determined by reference to the guiding desideratum or desiderata of a project. Membership in theoretical kinds – both positionalist and intrinsicist – informs how and to whom we extend theoretical consideration and political attention. When exclusion from an identity kinds causes someone not to receive the consideration and attention which a desideratum entails they ought to receive, then there is an inclusion problem. One strength of positionalism is that it expressly constructs identity kinds to be sensitive to the normative considerations of desiderata.<sup>24</sup> However, this means that any failure to include persons into (the correct) positionalist kinds is a failure to extend (the correct) theoretical consideration and political consideration.<sup>25</sup>

Jenkins argues that Haslanger wrongfully excludes some intrinsicist ‘transgender women’ from their positionalist kind ‘woman’.<sup>26</sup> Jenkins describes a variety of scenarios involving intrinsicist ‘transgender women’ in order to demonstrate that some of those people will be excluded from Haslanger’s positionalist kind ‘woman’.<sup>27</sup> Further, Jenkins argues that because the identifications of some intrinsicist ‘transgender women’ are private it will not be

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<sup>23</sup> Jenkins (2016, p.394-396, 398-402). The inclusion problem does not originate with Jenkins, although they are the first to apply it to positionalism. See Haslanger (2013, 228) for additional discussion of the inclusion problem.

<sup>24</sup> Haslanger (2013, p.228-229).

<sup>25</sup> Jenkins (2016, p.399, 401-402) makes this analysis specific to the inclusion and exclusion of transgender women.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid (p.399-402). As earlier, I have translated Jenkins’ analysis here and throughout this section into my terminology while striving to retain their original meaning. One particular word choice of note is that where Jenkins discusses “transgender women” I refer to “intrinsicist ‘transgender women’”; although inelegant, my phraseology is intended to retain clarity about the sort of identity kind that “transgender women” refers to (i.e. an intrinsicist kind).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid (p.399-401).

possible for a publicly oriented positionalist kind ‘woman’ to ever include all intrinsicist ‘transgender women’.<sup>28</sup> Up to there, I agree with Jenkins. However, Jenkins then argues that these exclusions are wrongful because they fail to include some intrinsicist ‘transgender women’ into the identity kind they identify with. I will have more to say about this in the next subsection where I address the respect problem. For now, I limit myself to observing that this is not the reason that these exclusions would be wrongful. The guiding desideratum stipulates that exclusions are wrongful iff the exclusions are inconsistent with resisting identity-based violence.<sup>29</sup>

An exclusion is inconsistent with resisting identity-based violence iff it fails to extend (the correct) theoretical consideration and practical attention to people who experience identity-based violence, either as recipients or perpetrators (or both). Haslanger’s positionalist theory only extends theoretical consideration and practical attention to the identity-based violence experienced by ‘women’ in which ‘men’ are complicit.<sup>30</sup> This is because Haslanger understands identity-based violence as a phenomenon that manifests itself between the positionalities of ‘woman’ and ‘man’.<sup>31</sup> Haslanger only acknowledges one form of identity-based violence, that of the subordination of ‘women’ to ‘men’.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, any intrinsicist ‘transgender woman’ who is excluded from Haslanger’s positionalist kind ‘woman’ is not theoretically considered as someone experiencing identity-based violence and will therefore not receive the political attention they ought to receive. Although Jenkins was incorrect about

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid (p.404-405).

<sup>29</sup> Although this is my desideratum both Haslanger (2013, p.226) and Jenkins (2016, p.394) answer to the equivalently broad desiderata of ‘fighting against injustice’ and ‘ending oppression’, respectively.

<sup>30</sup> Haslanger (p.229-230).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

why Haslanger's positionalism has an inclusion problem, it is nevertheless true that such a problem exists on Haslanger's account.

My positionalist theory adopts a different conception of violence. Specifically, I do not delimit the experiences with or complicity in identity-based violence to any particular kinds. A 'monogyne woman' is someone who both experiences gender-based violence and is complicit in others experiencing that violence, in ways that are particular to the operative identity beliefs monogyne women are subjected to. Likewise, a 'monogyne man' is someone who both experiences and is complicit in gender-based violence. All of my positionalist kinds will incorporate this conception of violence. We see that this resolves the inclusion problem when we consider e.g., an intrinsicist 'transgender woman' who has membership in the kind 'monogyne man'. Such kind membership tracks the reality that others perceive this person as an intrinsic 'man'. It also tracks the reality that this person is therefore subject to relevant beliefs about how this person ought to behave (e.g., in conformity with intrinsic 'man'-ness) and how this person is treated (i.e., with violent retaliation for any disconformity with intrinsic 'man'-ness). Finally, this tracks the reality that this person is positioned as someone who experiences the violence of cisnormativity. Far from being inconsistent with the desideratum of resisting identity-based violence, the inclusion of such an intrinsicist 'transgender woman' into the positionalist kind 'monogyne man' informs both why that person experiences gender-based violence and how it can be resisted. The exclusion of intrinsicist 'transgender women' from the positionalist kind 'monogyne woman' therefore does not constitute an inclusion problem.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> This does not necessarily mean that my positionalist theory of identity has no inclusion problems. For instance, it is possible that my overarching gender kinds fail to include someone whose positionality is marked by violence. Despite considerable reflection, I cannot imagine anyone who would be wrongfully excluded in this way. Perhaps I

### *III.ii. The Respect Problem*

A theory of identity has a respect problem if it excludes someone from the identity kind that they identify themselves with.<sup>34</sup> The reasoning behind this problem emerges from Jenkins' interest in the theoretical treatment of intrinsicist 'transgender women', although it can be generalized from there. Specifically, Jenkins claims that theories must respect the identifications of intrinsicist 'transgender women' because the failure to do so is implicated in identity-based violence.<sup>35</sup> This can be generalized to other intrinsicist identities, although the degree of violence that results e.g., for an intrinsicist 'cisgender woman' will be different and arguably lesser. Consequently, Jenkins argues that ameliorative theories must abstain from disrespect by engaging in respect.<sup>36</sup> There are two reasons to doubt that this is true, particularly for positionalist theories. The first is that the respect problem simply does not apply to positionalist theories. The second is that the respect problem is misguided.

First, applying the inclusion problem to positionalism critically misunderstands positionalist kinds. Positionalist kinds conceive of identity as positionality and not as anything about people themselves. Therefore, positionalist kinds can neither include nor exclude persons from the identity kinds with which they identify themselves. For instance, when an intrinsicist 'transgender woman' says "I am a woman" this is an intrinsic claim. The corresponding

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am lacking in imagination, though. That being the case, however, there is still no principled reason that my positionalist kinds cannot be modified or added to in order to remedy such an error.

<sup>34</sup> "Respect" here is a technical term that only describes the practice of including someone into the intrinsicist kinds they identify with. It does not encompass the full range of attitudes and behaviors that our everyday meaning of "respect" usually encompasses. Consequently, in this context a theory that does not respect someone it not necessarily a theory that e.g., treats someone with incivility such as by swearing at them, denying them services, slandering them, etc.

<sup>35</sup> Jenkins (2016, p.396). See also Bettcher (2007), whose work founds Jenkins' claim.

<sup>36</sup> Jenkins (2016, p.396, 401).

exclusion would be from an intrinsicist kind 'woman', not the positionalist kind 'monogyne woman'. Positionalist theories necessarily abstain from disrespect, not by engaging in respect but because they can neither disrespect nor respect persons' intrinsic self-identifications. The respect problem therefore does not apply to positionalist theories.

However, there may be an analogous problem; one could point out that while people cannot identify themselves with positionalist kinds they nevertheless can associate themselves with positionalist kinds that they are denied membership in. For instance, someone might mistakenly believe that they have membership in the kind 'monogyne woman' because they have a false belief that they are regularly perceived as an intrinsicist 'woman'. However, cases like this do not translate into an analogous respect problem because there are no analogous harms incurred. The disjunction between the positionalist kind someone associates themselves with and the positionalist kind they belong to (if any) is just an epistemic error on the part of that person. This does not obviously implicate the positionalist theory in any kind of identity-based violence. Therefore, positionalism also lacks an analogous respect problem.

Second, the respect problem is misguided because it incorrectly presupposes that respect is a necessary and desirable solution to disrespect. Jenkins treats abstention from disrespect interchangeably with engagement in respect.<sup>37</sup> This makes sense when we consider intrinsicist theories; abstaining from disrespect and engaging in respect are two sides of the same coin because anything short of inclusion into the intrinsicist kind one identifies with constitutes an exclusion therefrom. However, as demonstrated above, positionalism abstains from disrespect without engaging in respect. That disrespect and respect come apart in this

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<sup>37</sup> Jenkins (2016, p.396, 401).



way signals trouble for Jenkins' commitment to respect. We now have cause to question whether engaging in respect is the (most) desirable solution to the identity-based violence of disrespect. If the answer is no, then this means that a commitment to respect is at best unnecessary and at worst opposed to a desideratum of resisting identity-based violence. That respect is not necessarily a compliment to the desideratum is also why the respect problem is distinct from the inclusion problem (i.e., the respect problem answers to a different metatheoretical commitment).

Theories committed to respect are implicated in identity-based violence and are therefore undesirable given the desideratum of resisting identity-based violence. Despite intuitive appearances, engaging in respect is not a desirable solution to the identity-based violence caused by disrespect. Constructing a theory in order to respect persons' identifications adopts the view that persons' self-conceptions are not self-authorizing. Although the motivating intention is to resist disrespect, the consequence is that the theory legitimizes the very metatheoretical grounds from which disrespect advances: the authority of second parties on matters of first-personal intrinsic identity. In developing a theory of identity that e.g., respects the identifications of intrinsicist 'transgender women' it is necessarily the case that the theory participates in a metatheoretical negotiation of competing intrinsicist claims about that person. It becomes mutually accepted grounds that intrinsicist self-identifications are open to debate, and therefore to disrespect.<sup>38</sup> A commitment to respect is therefore inconsistent with

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<sup>38</sup> Worse, because intrinsicist gender non-conforming identifications are more frequently disrespected it will be the case that respecting theories are more frequently brought to bear on such people. This tacitly endorses the belief that intrinsicist gender non-conforming identifications are less self-sufficient than intrinsicist gender conforming identifications.

the desideratum of resisting identity-based violence. This is a problem for intrinsicism because intrinsicist kinds necessarily engage in (dis)respect given their metatheoretical concern with what people are.

Fortunately, positionalism offers a non-respectful alternative to intrinsicism. The positionalist response to the violence of disrespect is to altogether abstain from making claims about what people are. Importantly, this does not mean that positionalism fails to extend theoretical consideration to people who experience the violence of disrespect. Recall that e.g., the positionalist kind ‘monogyne man’ can track violent retaliation against intrinsicist ‘transgender women’ with membership in that kind. This includes the violence of disrespect. In practice, positionalism directs us to resist the violence of disrespect not by matching it with in-kind respect but by denouncing and opposing the intrinsicist beliefs that generate the kind ‘monogyne woman’ (including the intrinsicist belief in the authority of second party opinions). Positionalism therefore offers a solution to the violence of disrespect without implicating itself in the identity-based violence caused by respect discourse. Consequently, what Jenkins alleges is a problem with positionalism turns out to be one of its decisive advantages over intrinsicism.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

My immediate project has been to develop and defend a positionalist theory of identity as a preferable alternative to intrinsicist theories of identity. I have argued that we are better able to resist identity-based violence when we adopt a theory of identity that implicates operational beliefs about identity in the violence that they generate than if we adopt a theory of identity that conditions our treatment of beings on their perceived ontology. Neither the

inclusion problem nor the respect problem give us cause to disprefer positionalism to intrinsicism. To the contrary, both problems ultimately suggest the preferability of positionalism as a solution to the inclusion problem and for its non-reliance on and abstention from respect discourse.

There is considerable work that remains to be done on my positionalist project. For my positionalist account of gender to be really useful, more subsidiary kinds will need to be developed (although I do also intend to leave it open to others to use the basic infrastructure of my account to generate subsidiary kinds that are of interest and use to them). Relatedly, some account needs to be developed for the intersectionality of operational beliefs across different families of identity; gender cannot be properly understood as a discreet positionality unaffected by operational beliefs about e.g., race, ability, class, etc. (and neither can those positionalist kinds be really useful without addressing gender). Additionally, this project would benefit from a continued and more detailed exploration of its applications and implications. I am particularly interested in pursuing a defense of (intrinsicist) identity abolitionism, an interest which I set aside in this paper for the purposes of first spelling out positionalism as more broadly appealing account of identity. Overall, much work remains to be done. However, I hope here to have accomplished a rudimentary foundation for positionalism and some preliminary reasons to prefer it as an alternative to intrinsicism.

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