

# Rethinking the Group-Based Nature of Oppression

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## I. Standard View: Oppression is Group-Based

- a) Groups are the primary subjects of oppression (it is groups that are oppressed)
  - i. Frye: birdcage metaphor for oppression, “The “inhabitant” of the “cage” is not an individual but a group, all those of a certain category”
  - ii. Young: “oppression is a condition of groups”
  - iii. Cudd: oppression is a social injustice that is done “on social groups by social groups”
- b) Individuals are only oppressed as members of a social group (it is because you are G)
  - i. Frye: “One is marked for application of oppressive pressures by one’s membership in some group or category. Much of one’s suffering and frustration befalls one partly or largely because one is a member of that category”
- c) Oppression organizes groups into a hierarchical relationship along a social axis (privileged group > oppressed group)
  - i. Illustration: Men who are oppressed are not oppressed *as men*

## II. Intersectional Critique

- a) Single-axis picture of oppression doesn’t capture inseparability of gender, race, class, etc.
  - i. Devon Carbado: “The claim that Black men experience discrimination based only on one marginal category obscures that Black men experience discrimination (e.g., in the criminal justice system) precisely because they are Black and men—not because they are Black in some ungendered sense or because they are marginalized as Black but not as men.”
  - ii. Converse point can also be made about, e.g., white women
- b) Falsely universalizing

## III. First Revision to Standard View: Group-based, but more fine-grained groups

- a) Helps with:
  - i. Capturing differences/ avoiding falsely universalizing claims
  - ii. Moving away from single-axis picture and capturing the inseparability of race, class, gender, etc. (e.g. police violence faced by Black men)
- b) Problems:
  - i. Note: do need to let go of binary/ fixed-hierarchy conception of oppression
  - ii. Regress worry (end up dissolving groups?)
  - iii. Ignores similarities – theoretically and strategically important

## IV. Second Revision: Abandon groups as primary subjects, hold on to “oppressed(/privileged) because G”

- a) Circularity problem – circular relationship between group membership and oppression
- b) Group membership doesn’t do the explanatory work (e.g. white-passing person of color)

## V. Quick Sketch of Proposal (if time)

- a) Introduce *Sorts* – roughly/ first pass: ideological conceptions of a social group; social categories
- b) Different ways of being associated with a Sort
- c) More fine-grained and more coarse-grained Sorts
- d) Holistic social positioning – cluster of Sorts one is associated with
- e) Individuals oppressed on basis of social positioning
- f) Collective oppression – patterns of injustice explained by association with a particular Sort