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# "A Woman First and a Philosopher Second": Relative Attentional Surplus on the Wrong Property*

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One theme in complaints from those with marginalized social identities is that they are seen primarily in terms of that identity. Some Black artists, for instance, complain about being seen as Black first and artists second. These individuals can be understood as objecting to a particularly subtle form of morally problematic attention: "relative attentional surplus on the wrong property." This attentional surplus can coexist with another type of common problematic attention affecting these groups, including attentional deficits; marginalized individuals and groups themselves are routinely insufficiently attended to in virtue of the surplus attention given to their social identity properties.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sometimes, our identities are not fully recognized by others. On the more egregious end of the scale, trans people, for instance, are routinely misgendered; in such cases, their (gender) identities are not recognized at all.[1] There is also, however, a subtler type of case. Even where one's identity is acknowledged, it might not be given the level of salience that it deserves. Instead, the "wrong" aspect of one's person is made one's most

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1. See Stephanie Kapusta, "Misgendering and Its Moral Contestability," *Hypatia* 31 (2016): 502–19, for a discussion of the harms of misgendering.

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salient identity. A woman's gender might be more prominent than her career, for example, in the minds of her colleagues. In this article, I build on a growing literature investigating the ethical dimensions of attention,[2] to clarify one particular form of morally problematic attention, which can capture these subtle cases of improper identity recognition: *relative attentional surplus on the wrong property*.

I begin in Section II by canvassing some common complaints about identity recognition, made by those from marginalized groups. In Section III, I offer a broad diagnosis of these complaints: drawing on existing research, I suggest that these individuals are suffering from a form of problematic attention—namely, they are wronged or harmed by what others find salient about them. In Section IV, I offer a taxonomy for evaluating attention. This taxonomy allows me in Section V to make a more specific diagnosis of the complaints in Section II: these individuals are suffering from what I call "relative attentional surplus on the wrong property." This form of attention can be morally problematic, I suggest; it can constitute a subtle way of disrespecting an individual's personhood. Finally, in Section VI, I utilize this taxonomy to explain how attention sometimes seems like a good thing and sometimes like a bad thing. Individuals and groups routinely receive attentional deficits—meaning that more attention on them is required—in virtue of the attentional surplus on their social identity properties, which calls for less attention on those properties.[3]

## II. INTRODUCING THE TESTIMONIES

Jean-Michel Basquiat once said, "I am not a Black[4] Artist. I am an artist."[5] This statement indicates Basquiat's frustration with how he was treated in the art world—as othered, fetishized, and so on. Such experiences with the art world are common among artists from marginalized backgrounds. In their book *Old Mistresses*, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock discuss how artists from marginalized backgrounds commonly complain about

2. See, e.g., Sebastian Watzl, "The Ethics of Attention: An Argument and a Framework," in *Salience: A Philosophical Inquiry*, ed. Sophie Archer (Oxon: Routledge, 2022), 89–112; Susanna Siegel, *The Rationality of Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Georgi Gardiner, "Attunement: On the Cognitive Virtues of Attention," in *Social Virtue Epistemology*, ed. Mark Alfano, Colin Klein, and Jeroen de Ridder (New York: Routledge), 48–72; and Jessie Munton, "Prejudice as the Misattribution of Salience," *Analytic Philosophy* 64 (2023): 1–19.

3. I thank an anonymous *Ethics* reviewer for this concise way of putting the point.

4. In this article, I follow what is a growing convention to capitalize the *b* in 'Black' while keeping the *w* in 'white' lowercase (unless quoting someone who does not follow this convention). For more information, see Associated Press, "Associated Press Changes Influential Style Guide to Capitalize 'Black'," *Guardian*, June 20, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/jun/20/associated-press-style-guide-capitalize-black.

5. Jean-Michel Basquiat, quoted in Dieter Buchhart and Tricia Laughlin Bloom, *Basquiat: The Unknown Notebooks* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 2015), 20.

being seen primarily in terms of their gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, race, and so on; as Basquiat indicated, such artists might get referred to as (for example) a "Hispanic artist" in a review of their work, while another (white) artist will simply be referred to as an "artist."[6] Unlike the (white, male) artist, the Black artist and the woman artist are not artists proper. They are other.

Sometimes, the issue is not so much about being seen in terms of one's (perceived) racial (ethnic, national, etc.) identity per se, but rather about where that identity takes precedence over one's other identities. Reflecting on Basquiat's statement, Zoe Kravitz says this: "Happy to be black. Just don't need to say it in front of everything."[7] Here Kravitz seems to be complaining about the relative salience her Blackness receives in language, insofar as it is mentioned before her other traits. This objection to the wrong ordering of one's traits is in the background of testimonies from some racially marginalized individuals working in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). One participant in LaVar Charleston and colleagues' study on this topic says, "My belief is that . . . I am seen as a Black person *first*."[8]

Similar issues are raised by those from marginalized genders. Monica Esopi, a doctoral candidate in chemical engineering, talks about the relief that she felt moving into a department that openly and earnestly discussed diversity-related issues. Interviewed for an article on women in science, she says, "I no longer feel like I'm seen as a woman *first*; I am just a researcher, a scientist, an engineer."[9] Physicist Helen Mason, interviewed for the same article, echoes this preferred ordering, saying, "I am first and foremost a scientist, but of course I am also a woman."[10]

One anonymous philosopher discusses her concerns about being seen primarily as a woman. She says, "You [women philosophers] will always end up philosophically on the subject of your gender simply because you will be seen as a woman first and a philosopher second."[11] Philosophers

6. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1981), xix.

7. Zoe Kravitz, quoted in Kiersten Willis, "Zoe Kravitz Responds to Criticism over 'I Am Not a Black Artist' Image by Proclaiming '#ArtIsArt,'" *Atlanta Black Star*, July 16, 2017, https://atlantablackstar.com/2017/07/16/zoe-kravitz-responds-criticism-not-black-artist-image-proclaiming-artisart/.

8. LaVar J. Charleston et al., "Intersectionality and STEM: The Role of Race and Gender in the Academic Pursuits of African American Women in STEM," *Journal of Progressive Policy and Practice* 2 (2014): 274–93, 281; emphasis added.

9. Monica Esopi, quoted in Science Careers Staff, "Celebrating Women in Science," *Science*, February 9, 2018, https://www.sciencemag.org/careers/2018/02/celebrating-women-science; emphasis added.

10. Helen Mason, quoted in ibid.

11. Anonymous, "Women in Philosophy," *Soycrates* (blog), 2015, https://soycrates.tumblr.com/post/106289289268/i-went-into-philosophy-thinking-that-it-would-be.

Rebecca Buxton and Lisa Whiting also comment on this concern. Reflecting on the association between philosophy and maleness, they say that "a result of this is that women are often remembered as women first: they are seen more as women than they're seen as philosophers. . . . we forget that they are principally *philosophers*."[12] In an effort to correct for this, Buxton and Whiting wrote *Philosopher Queens*, a book that captures outstanding contributions from women philosophers over time. They comment on the predictable irony of then finding their book placed in the "women and gender studies" section of their local bookshop, as opposed to the section on "philosophy."[13]

Similar testimonies are not hard to find in the context of disability,[14] with a recurring complaint being that one is not "first and foremost" someone with a disability, contrary to how those with disabilities are regularly perceived. Kristine Stebler offers this advice to counselors: "I hope that from the time you meet and assess your first and your last client/patient that first and foremost you will remember that I am not a disabled person, but a person who happens to be disabled."[15] In a *New York Times* article compiling readers' experiences of disability, Nathan Liu comments on the frustration of his blindness eclipsing the fact that he is just a person. He says, "All I need are a few accommodations, and, as long as I get them, there's no problem, or reason to discuss my condition. I tried to prove this to people by getting perfect grades, acting in theatre productions, and joining tons of clubs. But that never seemed to make any difference. I was still, first and foremost, 'the blind kid.'"[16]

On the basis of testimonies like this, various disability-focused institutions, such as the National Disability Authority (NDA) and the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN), have recommended "people-first" language when talking about individuals who are disabled, such as "person who is blind" instead of "blind person."[17] EARN says, "Rather than defining people primarily by their disability,

12. Rebecca Buxton and Lisa Whiting, "Women or Philosophers?," *Philosophers Mag*, February 4, 2021, www.philosophersmag.com/essays/230-women-or-philosophers.

13. Ibid.

14. The term 'disability' is contentious. I have chosen to use it here, as there are many in the community in question who prefer this term, and the alternatives (such as 'different ability') are even more contentious. See, e.g., Simi Linton, *My Body Politic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), for a discussion.

15. Kristine Stebler, quoted in Irmo Marini, Noreen M. Glover-Graf, and Michael Jay Millington, *Psychosocial Aspects of Disability: Insider Perspectives and Counseling Strategies* (New York: Springer, 2012), 396.

16. Nathan Liu, quoted in "What Disability Means," *New York Times*, August 25, 2016, Opinion, www.nytimes.com/2016/08/25/opinion/what-disability-means.html.

17. Salience in language has been discussed elsewhere. See, e.g., Rachel Fraser, "Narrative Testimony," *Philosophical Studies* 178 (2021): 4025–52; and Ella Whiteley, "Salience Perspectives" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2019).

people-first language conveys respect by emphasizing the fact that people with disabilities are first and foremost just that—people."[18] EARN is suggesting, then, that disability be given less salience in language, with the hope that this will be echoed in how others view, perceive, and treat individuals with disabilities.

There may be similar concerns raised by those with other marginalized identities; for instance, individuals may feel that their social class or immigration status is made relatively more salient, perhaps by proxy of their accent, than other more meaningful traits.[19]

## III. A BROAD DIAGNOSIS OF THE COMPLAINTS: MORALLY PROBLEMATIC ATTENTION

In what follows, I suggest that one way of understanding these statements is through the lens of attention; these individuals feel that the wrong parts of their identities are being made salient in the attention of others. Here I borrow from existing accounts that evaluate attention. I use this work as scaffolding for the central claim that I make in this article, namely, that there is a specific form of problematic attention that requires elucidation: relative attentional surplus on the wrong property.

Imagine standing on a street corner. In a given moment, you might be seeing several cars and a bus; hearing birdsong, some music, and a distant ambulance siren; thinking about the loudness of sirens; and feeling warm (in addition to a great many other mental states). You cannot attend to everything equally in this scene. Some mental states will be dimmer in your experience; perhaps you are only vaguely aware of your perception of the cars and birdsong. Others will stand out; perhaps your feeling of warmth is more central in your attention.

According to Sebastian Watzl's influential theory, attention is the activity of structuring an individual's occurrent mental states so that

18. "People-First Language," Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion, https://askearn.org/topics/retention-advancement/disability-etiquette/people-first-language/. Interestingly, since accessing this blog post, EARN has removed this quote, suggesting simply that one ask the individual in question which kind of language they prefer. Indeed, "people-first language" has its critics; see, e.g., Cara Liebowitz, "I Am Disabled: On Identity-First versus People-First Language," *The Body Is Not an Apology*, March 20, 2015, https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/i-am-disabled-on-identity-first-versus-people-first-language/.

19. Anne-Sophie Deprez-Sims and Scott B. Morris, "Accents in the Workplace: Their Effects during a Job Interview," *International Journal of Psychology* 45 (2010): 417–26, 418, comment on how "accents can be salient in the same way as ethnicity, age, gender, and skin colour." See Saray Ayala-López, "Outing Foreigners: Accent and Linguistic Microaggressions," in *Microaggressions and Philosophy*, ed. Lauren Freeman and Jeanine Weekes (New York: Routledge, 2020), 146–62, for a related discussion about the salience of foreignness in relation to accents and accent-related comments.

some are more central and others more peripheral—a type of mental management.[20] Those mental states are various—perceptual, cognitive, conative, and so on—meaning that attention "crosscuts the usual divisions of the mind: between the cognitive and the conative, the perceptual and the intellectual, the active and the passive, the epistemic and the practical."[21] A mental state is more central when it is selectively prioritized, relative to other states. This priority relation, in virtue of which different forms of attention count as a unified phenomenon, is phenomenologically familiar; as with the example of the street scene above, Watzl suggests that "we are acquainted with the reflection of priority in our conscious experience, as a kind of prominence or centrality in consciousness."[22]

Watzl believes the priority relation itself to be primitive, in the sense that it lacks a reductive identification; no account of what the relation is can be given in terms of biological or computational facts, for example. However, a reductive explanation of priority is possible, in the sense that "facts about a subject's priorities likely supervene on and are metaphysically explained by biological and computational facts about their brain."[23] Indeed, Watzl suggests that there are some cases for which we are aware of the facts that correlate with having a certain priority structure in one's attention. He gives an example relating to a subject perceptually attending to a tiger in the woods, where the tiger is selectively prioritized.[24] The prioritization of the tiger in this case is correlated with the visual representation of the tiger having higher acuity than for other aspects of the subject's visual field; the subject being more likely to reason about, and remember the tiger, than other features of the woods; and so on. None of these facts are, in Watzl's words, "*what it is* to prioritize seeing the tiger over other mental states," but they do correlate with having an attentional pattern that places a tiger at the center of one's attention, indirectly helping us to get a handle on what the priority structuring of attention is.[25]

One can be disposed to have certain priority structures.[26] This might be relative to a certain environment or stimuli. Unsurprisingly, I may be disposed to make the sound of fire alarms central in my consciousness when I hear them. It might also be relative to an activity. When I am thinking about my friend Amir, I might be disposed to prioritize thoughts about his ditziness over his intelligence.

20. For a fuller articulation of his account of attention, see Sebastian Watzl, *Structuring Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2017).

21. Ibid., 2. Siegel, *Rationality of Perception*, 7, discusses attention in similar ways.

22. Watzl, *Structuring Mind*, 77.

23. Ibid., 93.

24. Ibid., 93–94.

25. Ibid., 94.

26. Ibid., 98.

There is a growing consensus that attentional patterns (i.e., priority structuring of mental contents) are evaluable along ethical lines.[27] Elsewhere, I have offered one way of evaluating attentional patterns as morally problematic.[28] Consulting statements from individuals who have experienced rape, I argued that attending to these individuals in a way that makes their experience of rape particularly salient can be a way of disrespecting their personhood. One representative statement is from Monika Korra, a Norwegian track-and-field athlete who was kidnapped and raped when she was out on a run. Korra has said that she wants to be known as a runner, not a rape victim. Calling running her passion, she describes it as "the thing that gave me identity in life."[29] She continues, "It [the rape] doesn't have to identify you. It's not who you are, it's something that happened to you—a crime committed against you. Who you are is what you are passionate about and what you love."[30] While many complex issues about identity, and the "victim" status in particular, no doubt play a role in Korra's thoughts, one way of understanding statements like Korra's is as claims about (in this case, metacognitive) attention. Korra plausibly does not want the fact that she was raped to be the thing that others attend to (i.e., selectively prioritize) the most. Instead, she wants her running to be her most salient feature.

Korra's statement echoes a theme that is commonly raised by those who have experienced rape; these individuals typically draw attention to their passions, interests, achievements, and so on. As noted, Korra refers to her running in this regard. Her identity as "runner" is something that she has chosen, that she has exercised control over, that demonstrates her personality and achievements, and so on. In this way, it is a trait that showcases Korra's personhood. To be recognized as an agent with personhood is to be recognized as an agent with traits like rationality, a capacity to

27. See, e.g., Watzl, "Ethics of Attention"; Iris Murdoch, as discussed in Christopher Mole, "Attention, Self and the Sovereignty of Good," in *Iris Murdoch: A Reassessment*, ed. Anne Rowe (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 72–84; Siegel, *Rationality of Perception*, 157–69; Gardiner, "Attunement"; and Munton, "Misattribution of Salience." Munton's focus is on what she calls "salience structures," namely, "a default accessibility ordering over a space of possible information" ("Misattribution of Salience," 13). Munton suggests that salience structures are not the same as attentional patterns; indeed, she finds that the former are responsible for problematic (e.g., prejudicial) patterns of attention (ibid., 11). However, she does suggest that those patterns of attention can themselves be evaluated (as, e.g., prejudicial).

28. Ella Whiteley, "Harmful Salience Perspectives," in *Salience: A Philosophical Inquiry*, ed. Sophie Archer (Oxon: Routledge, 2022), 193–212. There I built on Elizabeth Camp's ("Perspectives in Imaginative Engagement with Fiction," *Philosophical Perspectives* 31 [2017]: 73–102) work on salience in the mind—work that continues to influence the ideas in this article.

29. Monica Korra, quoted in C. Todd Lopez, "Following Rape, 'Runner' rather than 'Victim' Defines Survivor's Identity," *U.S. Army*, April 22, 2016, https://www.army.mil/article/166506/following_rape_runner_rather_than_victim_defines_survivors_identity.

30. Ibid.

set and pursue one's own ends, individuality, integrity, and personality.[31] One way to respect another's personhood is to attend primarily to their personhood-related traits. Conversely, attending to an individual so that their non-personhood-related traits are their most salient feature is a way of disrespecting their personhood—something that is constitutively bad.

While the subject matter is importantly different, the testimonies in Section II exhibit some structural similarities to Korra's statement, insofar as the "wrong" trait is identified as being made too salient (I return to these structural similarities in Sec. V). I suggest that one fruitful way of understanding those testimonies is as complaints about morally problematic attention. (While I focus on 'disrespect' throughout this article, I choose the broad term 'morally problematic' here in order to remain open to alternative diagnoses of what the moral problem consists in; certain attentional patterns might be harmful, unjust, or wrongful, for instance.) The various individuals in Section II are plausibly objecting to how others (metacognitively)[32] attend to them, insofar as the wrong thing is being made problematically salient in the attention of others—including their gender, racial identity, or disability. Indeed, the recurring appeal to notions relating to order—for example, of being "first (and foremost)" a woman and "second" a scientist—makes this reading of attention, given its structural nature, particularly plausible.[33]

I am not claiming that there are no other grounds on which to understand those testimonies. In fact, some of the individuals in Section II, in their full statements, explicitly touch on issues that clearly go beyond attention. For instance, Nathan Liu comments on teachers treating him

31. The first two features of this list are borrowed from Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (New York: Harper & Row, 1963). The later features come from Andrea Dworkin, "Against the Male Flood: Censorship, Pornography, and Equality," in *Feminism and Pornography*, ed. Drucill Cornell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19–38, 30–31; and Sandra Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 130, who expand on Kant.

32. The attentional pattern seems to concern cognitive mental states; the thought about, for instance, someone's gender is more central than the thought about their career.

33. While Basquiat and Kravitz are ostensibly objecting to utterances, the problems with those utterances plausibly lie in the attentional patterns they invite in the audience (and perhaps imply of the speaker), making the problems with the former at least partially parasitic on the problems of the latter. Fraser, "Narrative Testimony," and Whiteley, "Salience Perspectives," for instance, suggest that salience patterns in language can be problematic in virtue of the problematic attentional patterns that they activate in the audience. Whiteley ("Salience Perspectives") suggests that the order in which information is communicated (a salience pattern in language), such as where one makes Blackness too salient by introducing a person as "Black" before their other traits, can be problematic for invoking an attentional pattern that mirrors this ordering in language (namely, where one attends to a person's Blackness more so than their other traits). While Basquiat and Kravitz might be read as objecting to certain utterances, then, it is possible to read them as also objecting to attentional patterns (indeed, the specific attentional patterns described in this article)—these can provide an explanation as to why the utterances are problematic.

very differently by continuously asking if he was OK and generally implicitly communicating that they saw disabled students as those who were to be "hidden away in 'special' classrooms."[34] Here Liu might be referring to wrongful (explicit and implicit) beliefs harbored by his teachers, as well as harmful practices that marginalize and oppress people who are disabled. Other aspects of Liu's testimony point to a subtler theme, however—echoed across the various statements discussed in Section II—relating to the wrong aspect of one's identity being treated as one's most prominent feature.

Of course, even this specific issue may be understood as a complaint about something other than attention. For instance, some might be (in part) objecting to issues of classification (where one is wrongly categorized as, for instance, a "disabled person" instead of a "student," or a "woman philosopher" instead of a "philosopher"). Again, though, I do not deny that there are diffuse complaints that people have, and some individuals will be referring to multiple problems at once. My purpose here is to focus on one plausible—and overlooked—explanation of the testimonies. Further, offering the "morally problematic attention" explanation is important, as it captures the distinctive phenomenology of one type of complaint; at least sometimes, it feels (to some individuals) that something problematic is occurring which is distinctively minimal and subtle. One might not want to suggest that there are substantive beliefs, codes of interaction, or classificatory systems which are at fault. The issue instead feels simply to be a matter of inappropriate emphasis on the wrong trait. While subtle, the complainant feels uneasy about it and lacks the resources to make sense of that feeling. Offering the tools of morally problematic attention is intended to correct for that lack of resources.[35]

34. Liu, quoted in "What Disability Means."

35. Another reason to offer this diagnosis of morally problematic attention is that it plausibly requires different tests than for morally problematic classification. One might use eye-tracking studies to measure attention on perceptual contents (measuring which aspects of an individual's environment their eyes linger on more). Kathrin Karsay et al., "Adopting the Objectifying Gaze: Exposure to Sexually Objectifying Music Videos and Subsequent Gazing Behaviour," *Media Psychology* 21 (2017): 27–49, and Sarah J. Gervais, Arianne M. Holland, and Michael D. Dodd, "My Eyes Are Up Here: The Nature of the Objectifying Gaze toward Women," *Sex Roles* 69 (2013): 557–70, for instance, use eye-tracking studies to measure which parts of a person's body study participants are paying more attention to. Memory tests might indirectly measure attention on cognitive content—the sort of attention discussed in this article. One might ask what a test subject remembers about Korra, to see whether "person who experienced rape" is well remembered. Elsewhere (Whiteley, "Salience Perspectives"), I have discussed how contents that are salient in attention are often communicated first in language, meaning that if "person who experienced rape" is listed before other of Korra's traits in a memory test, one might infer a parallel attentional pattern. These methods do not seem appropriate for testing for a person's classification system, which might instead require things like an "Implicit Association Test," to assess how

In summary, I have suggested that we can look to the notion of "attention" to illuminate the source of the complaints in Section II.

## IV. A TAXONOMY FOR EVALUATING ATTENTION

Can we be more precise about the specific type of attention that is plausibly generating problems in the specific cases described in the testimonies? In this section, I offer a taxonomy for evaluating attention, distinguishing different features of attention that might be evaluated along ethical lines. This will enable me to develop my central thesis: that there is an important and overlooked form of attention that can be morally problematic, "relative attentional surplus on the wrong property"—something that more precisely captures the complaints in Section II. Contrasting this type of problematic attention with others, this taxonomy not only makes the former clearer but also gives me the tools to respond differentially to different kinds of cases of morally problematic attention, as I do in Section VI. There are also more general reasons to offer this taxonomy. It lets me organize experience (of problematic attention) in a structured, principled fashion and allows me to make more precise existing claims about the evaluability of attention.

Here I build on a taxonomy for evaluating attention offered by Watzl.[36] Many ways of evaluating attention involve evaluating the manner of attending to certain contents.[37] Take first the content of attention. For Korra, the issue is the content (the object) of others' attentional dispositions: these are "person who has experienced rape" and "runner."

### *A. Contents of Attention: Properties versus Individuals versus Groups*

The contents of our attention are myriad. In Korra's case, they are the properties of an individual thing: the attributes of a single person, Korra.

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one groups (classifies) different things; indeed, Wilhelm Hofmann and Manfred Schmitt, "Advances and Challenges in the Indirect Measurement of Individual Differences at Age 10 of the Implicit Association Test," *European Journal of Psychological Assessment* 24 (2008): 207–9, 207, say that "the IAT employs patterns in reaction time that people need for the *classification* of stimuli . . . according to their *category membership*" (emphasis added). Different interventions might also plausibly be required for mitigating morally problematic attention versus problematic classification, but I will not investigate this suggestion further.

36. Watzl, "Ethics of Attention." There are three key differences with Watzl's taxonomy. First, unlike Watzl, I taxonomize the "contents" of attention. Second, I offer an alternative name and explanation for Watzl's "manner vs. content" distinction, which fits better with my project (see n. 40 for further details). Third, I grant two distinctions touched upon in Watzl's discussion of "content"-based norms their own levels in the taxonomy. The first is the distinction between attentional surpluses and deficits. The second is framed as a subdivision of this last distinction: "relative versus absolute in/attention."

37. There may be other ways of evaluating attention. Perhaps, for instance, the manner of some attention can be morally problematic in a way that has nothing to do with the contents of that attention.

In this category might also be properties of other individual things. This could include the properties of individual animals, like those of Bob the cat, or the properties of individual objects, like those of a particular document or table. In other cases, the contents might be the properties of groups. Our attention might be on the skin color of a certain racial group. In this category might be properties of other kinds of groups, like the properties of cats or tables. In other cases still, the contents might be the individuals or groups themselves. Instead of the attributes of Korra, the content of our attention might be Korra herself; perhaps she is more salient in our attention than her friend. Following a similar logic, we might reflect on which groups we are attending to. The middle-class students, as a group, might stand out more than working-class students to their teacher (I return to this example below). This is not intended as an exhaustive list of the possible contents of our attention, but it does capture key categories of attentional content that are relevant to this article.

Returning to Korra, then, the issue is the attention on her properties. To fully grasp the problem with the particular attentional pattern on her, it is necessary also to explain the manner of the attention on those properties. In particular, there is too much focus on the property "someone who has experienced rape" and not enough focus on the property "runner." In what follows, I make this claim more precise by spelling out different ways in which the manner of attention on some contents might be wrong.

### *B. Manner of Attention: Qualitative versus Quantitative*

When we talk about the manner of attention on some contents, we are examining the way in which a person attends to those contents. This can mean different things.

First, we might evaluate the manner of attention by assessing its qualitative nature. For instance, I might attend to the right contents, such as to an individual's conversational contributions, but do so in a superficial, uncaring way. Sebastian Watzl gives one example of a qualitative manner-based way of evaluating attention, which builds on Iris Murdoch's writings. We might say, he suggests, that "morality requires that a person should pay attention to the concrete other subjects she is engaged with (a 'just and loving gaze directed on an individual reality,' p.33 [Murdoch, 1970]). Staring, perceptually, at others plausibly is not a way of fulfilling that normative requirement."[38] Qualitative manners of attention, I suggest, are best understood as involving "thick" descriptors, which encompass both descriptive and evaluative concepts.[39] Attention may be loving, creepy, insightful, lewd, and so on.

38. Watzl, "Ethics of Attention," 102.

39. Brent G. Kyle, "How Are Thick Terms Evaluative?," *Philosophers' Imprint* 13 (2013): 1–20.

Evaluating the manner of attention on qualitative grounds is certainly an interesting project, but it has less relevance to the notion of attentional patterns, as I have defined them.[40] I am seeking a way to evaluate the structural dimensions of attention, where we can evaluate the ordering of our attention, such that some contents receive more attention than others.

In contrast to asking about the qualitative manner of attention, then, we might understand 'manner' in a more quantitative way. This means measuring the attention; how much is one attending to those contents? Is it a problem that one is giving more attention to *x* over *y*? Below, I address two further subdivisions of the "manner" of attention, which fall along this quantitative dimension.

### *C. Quantitative Manner of Attention: Surplus versus Deficit*

In Korra's case, it looks like the wrong content—namely, her experience of rape—is attended to in the wrong way; there is too much attention on that trait. We can refer to this as an attentional *surplus* on the wrong content. Further, the right content—namely, her passion for running—is granted too little attention. We can call this an attentional *deficit* on the right content. These are manners of attention that pertain to quantitative measures of (in)attention.

A complaint about attentional surplus need not come with a correlate complaint about attentional deficit (and vice versa). Consider an individual who complains that her achievements and credentials are insufficiently attended to by her colleagues. There might not be a specific trait, or even set of traits, that she is complaining is receiving surplus attention—her issue is specifically with a deficit of attention being paid to the right things.

40. We might ask various questions about qualitative manners of attention, such as whether the pattern of attention in question is constitutive of some affective state. I do not address these questions here, as qualitative manners of attention are not relevant to my project. I mention them in the interests of being comprehensive. Further, the notion of the "manner of attention" is interpreted differently by Watzl, "Ethics of Attention," which is important to highlight. Watzl distinguishes manner-based norms from content-based norms of attention. The latter assess *what* a person attends to; they are "what is described when we say that a person should pay more attention to X than to Y," for instance (ibid., 101). Manner-based norms instead describe the *way* in which a person attends to something. This captures a wide range of things, from the type of mental state prioritized (e.g., staring perceptually at others vs. reflective thought about them) to the way in which a subject's priority structures are regulated (e.g., passively vs. actively). One difference between our accounts, then, is that Watzl does not include the "how much" questions about attention as pertaining to the manner of attention; he instead discusses them in the context of content-based norms. I suggest that these "how much" questions do concern (what I call the "quantitative") manner of attention, however; they pertain to the (excessive or insufficient) *way* in which one attends to certain contents. Another difference between our accounts lies in my description of what I call the "qualitative" manner of attention. Unlike Watzl's definition of manner-based norms, I describe these as involving "thick" descriptors, to capture a significant theme in work on attention deploying such descriptors, exemplified by Murdoch's quote above.

Attentional deficits might also pertain not just to certain properties of individuals or groups but to the individuals or groups themselves. Leonie Smith and Alfred Archer's work on "epistemic attention deficits" highlights the "unjust scenario in which someone is paid less *epistemic* attention than they *ought* to be paid," such as where a teacher focuses on middle-class students at the expense of working-class students in a classroom.[41]

Conversely, an individual might complain about surplus attention on the wrong things, without necessarily identifying other traits that she believes deserve more attention. Jessie Munton's example of a Black woman reacting to white people placing too much attention on her afro might be a complaint specifically about surplus attention, without a correlate complaint about an attentional deficit on something else.[42]

### *D. Attentional Surplus and Deficit: Relative versus Absolute*

Within the category of attentional surplus vs. deficit, there is a further subdivision, relating to the degree of (in)attention. As I have described it, the form of problematic attention suffered by Korra is particularly subtle. It involves a person paying relatively more attention to *x* (in this case, her experience of rape) than to *y* (in this case, her identity as a runner). Both *x* and *y* are attended to; the problem arises because the relative levels (or degrees) of *x* and *y* in one's attention are wrong in some way.

Relative in/attention can be compared to other, less minimal kinds of problematic attention. Consider again the case of attentional deficits. Instead of paying relatively less attention to something than one ought to, one might wrong or harm by failing to attend at all to something to which one ought to attend. Here the problematic attention is more extreme. If I ignore your conversational contributions to our discussion, for instance, then it seems clear that I have wronged you. Korra might be wronged in this way too if others fail to attend at all to her identity of "runner." Further, the individuals or groups themselves may be ignored. This would count as an extreme form of attentional deficit: an attentional *omission.*[43]

Conversely, the absolute end of surplus attention is *fixation. Only* paying attention to an individual's body, for instance—so that one lavishes

41. Leonie Smith and Alfred Archer, "Epistemic Injustice and the Attention Economy," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 23 (2020): 777–95, 779.

42. Munton, "Misattribution of Salience," 10, refers to this case as one of "excessive" attention. I instead chose the term 'surplus', in part to avoid confusion with my later discussion of "absolute" in/attention, which I describe as "extreme."

43. Munton (ibid.) notes that what I call "attentional omission" can be involved in generating what Charles Mills calls "white ignorance"; white people routinely fail to attend at all to information about other races, which leads "to a systematic pattern of ignorance about those groups and their experiences." For other discussions of morally problematic attention that consists in entirely ignoring something important, see, e.g., Richard Yetter Chappell and Helen Yetter-Chappell, "Virtue and Salience," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 94 (2016): 449–63; and Siegel, *Rationality of Perception.*

their attention on it to an extreme amount—looks to be a particularly clear case of morally problematic attention. Indeed, one common form of sexual harassment, which involves attending exclusively to a person's body and/or face, might be understood in this vein.[44] Another form of attentional fixation might be the extreme excess of attention many people with visible disabilities receive; one testimony from a social worker with cerebral palsy compares their experience of being disabled to being a celebrity: "Because being *famous*—I assume without being famous myself—means that you receive a *high level* of attention whether you like it or not and in every possible situation."[45] In other words, the issue here may be more absolute than others paying relatively more attention to one's disability than one's other traits. Complaining about attentional fixation will routinely come with a complaint about the qualitative manner of that attention; excessive attention to a person's body, for instance, often goes hand in hand with attention that is unkind, creepy, or some other qualitative descriptor. Nevertheless, fixation in a quantitative sense can meaningfully be separated from fixation in a qualitative sense.

The attention on certain contents, then, might go wrong in virtue of its qualitative or quantitative manner. Quantitatively, it might exhibit an attentional surplus on the wrong contents and/or an attentional deficit on the right contents. This attentional surplus or deficit might take either a relative or absolute form.

A final distinction relevant to this article, however, requires taking a step back. All of the various kinds of attention discussed so far might be evaluated *instrumentally*, according to its consequences, or *constitutively*, independently of its consequences.[46] Evaluating attention instrumentally or constitutively will also require a standard by which to make the relevant judgments. Perhaps one can judge an attentional pattern by whether it leads to good epistemic results. Instead, I focus on a different "normative source," as Watzl refers to it, for these evaluations: moral considerations.[47] For me, what makes attention count as a surplus or deficit is answered by considering whether that attentional quantity is instrumentally or constitutively morally problematic in some way, such as whether it involves disrespect, wronging, or harm.[48]

44. For discussions of this sort of sexual harassment, see, e.g., Anita Allen, *Uneasy Access: Privacy for Women in a Free Society* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988), 131.

45. Nanna Mik-Meyer, "Othering, Ableism and Disability: A Discursive Analysis of Coworkers' Construction of Colleagues with Visible Impairments," *Human Relations* 69 (2016): 1341–63, 1342; emphasis added.

46. While I do not explore this option here, one might also consider attention that is "derivatively" problematic. Siegel, *Rationality of Perception*, 158, persuasively argues that an attentional pattern can inherit the irrationality of an attitude that led to it, for example.

47. Watzl, "Ethics of Attention," sec. 5.8. Outside of ethical and epistemic grounds, Watzl also investigates evaluating attention on prudential grounds.

48. Ibid., 107.

### *E. Instrumental versus Constitutive Evaluation*

First, the attention in question might be problematic instrumentally because of its upshots. Returning to Korra, I argued that having "person who experienced rape" most salient in one's mind when thinking about Korra may be sufficient to trigger prevalent and cognitively accessible harmful associations, beliefs, and ideologies associated with those who experience rape, including victim-blaming ideologies.[49] I defended this suggestion by drawing on psychological research into "order effects." We might also worry about patterns of attention leading to harmful actions; finding a woman's body more salient than her personality, for instance, may lead to one acting in harmfully objectifying ways. Attentional patterns might have other types of negative downstream costs. On a hiring panel, finding Black candidates' weaknesses more salient than their strengths (and vice versa for white candidates) may lead to their being unfairly discriminated against in the hiring process, causally contributing to unjust outcomes for black people.[50] A student who is aware that her regional accent is treated as her most salient feature might avoid speaking in class, which can have various negative consequences, such as reducing her enjoyment of, and ability to succeed in, her education.[51] While these cases are diverse, they have in common a pattern of attention that is instrumentally morally problematic. The problem with the attention is derivative of the harm of something else (e.g., a wrongful belief, an unjust negative impact on one's education).

Attentional patterns might also be morally problematic in and of themselves. For instance, we might follow Watzl and Siegel in suggesting that some attentional patterns are partially constitutive of an irrational outlook, or some other "feature or state that can itself be evaluated non-instrumentally," such as a moral vice.[52] Alternatively, we might suggest that the attentional pattern itself counts as a subtle form of disrespect to personhood, as I have suggested elsewhere.[53] As we heard in Section III regarding Korra's case, attending more to Korra's non-personhood-related trait than to her personhood-related traits counts as a way of disrespecting her personhood. Since disrespecting someone's personhood is considered intrinsically bad,[54] this means that an attentional pattern that counts as a way of disrespecting someone's personhood is also bad in and of itself.

49. Whiteley, "Harmful Salience Perspectives."

50. Siegel, *Rationality of Perception*, 3–13, and Watzl, "Ethics of Attention," 101–6, give examples along these lines, looking at ways of criticizing this attentional pattern on both instrumental and constitutive grounds.

51. Smith and Archer, "Epistemic Injustice."

52. Watzl, "Ethics of Attention," 105.

53. Whiteley, "Harmful Salience Perspectives."

54. Kant, for instance, treats (dis)respect of personhood in this way. Writing about Kant's account of respect, Robin S. Dillon, "Respect," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed.

Here I reserve the terms "attentional wrong" and "attentional harm" for attentional patterns that are constitutively wrongful or harmful; this helps to highlight how the wrong or harm is distinctive of attention and is not derivative of more familiar types of wrong or harm, such as false beliefs, discriminatory behaviors, and so on. The terms "wrongful attention" and "harmful attention" can be used as broader categories, capturing attention that is wrongful or harmful on both instrumental and constitutive grounds.[55]

In sum, the patterns of attention discussed above—of attentional deficits and surpluses, for instance—are problematic for instrumental or constitutive reasons. Either they have negative downstream costs, or they are morally bad in and of themselves.

## V. A SPECIFIC DIAGNOSIS OF THE COMPLAINTS: "RELATIVE SURPLUS ATTENTION ON THE WRONG PROPERTY"

All of the statements in Section II exhibit a resistance to the level of salience granted to one's disability, race, gender, and so on. I have suggested, in Section III, that we can understand this as a resistance to a type of morally problematic attention. In Section IV, I offered a taxonomy for evaluating attentional patterns. This means that I am now in a position to offer a more precise diagnosis of the complaints in Section II; which specific type of attentional pattern is at issue? Here I begin by offering my precise diagnosis: these individuals are suffering from a "relative attentional surplus on the wrong property." I then clarify this proposal by responding to three objections.

### *A. Precise Diagnosis of the Testimonies: "Relative Attentional Surplus on the Wrong Property"*

These individuals appear to be objecting to the manner in which others are attending to certain contents. First, as discussed, these individuals appear to be objecting primarily to what others are attending to about them. The attentional content at issue includes certain properties of an individual—their race, gender, and disability. More specifically, the manner (way) in which these contents feature in the attention of others is central to the complaint.

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Edward N. Zalta (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2018), https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/respect/, sec. 2.2, says, "Our fundamental moral obligation, then, is to respect persons; morally right actions are thus those that express respect for persons as ends in themselves, while morally wrong actions are those that express disrespect or contempt for persons by not valuing them as ends in themselves."

55. Similarly, Rima Basu and Mark Schroeder, "Doxastic Wronging," in *Pragmatic Encroachment in Epistemology*, ed. Brian Kim and Matthew McGrath (New York: Routledge, 2019), 181–205, 181, reserve the term 'doxastic wronging' for cases where "the wronging lies in the belief, rather than in, or at least, over and above, its effects."

Is the problematic manner of attention qualitative or quantitative? Instead of being complaints that use qualitative descriptors for the attentional pattern (so that the attention is condescending, creepy, or so on), the individuals broadly look to be objecting to quantitative issues regarding how much these contents are attended to.[56]

In particular, the suggestion is that there is surplus attention on these wrong contents. The philosophers, for instance, were objecting to being seen as women first, indicating that too much attention was placed on their gender. Many of the individuals also indicated a related issue with insufficient attention on the right things, such as their career, personality, and so on. The philosophers picked out their identity as philosophers as being granted an attentional deficit; it was this that deserved the primary focus of others.

Third, these individuals look to be objecting to the relative levels of attention that are being granted to these attributes, indicating that a relative (as opposed to extreme) form of problematic attention is at stake. The issue that these individuals raise is not (always) that others see them only as a minority ethnic group, as a woman, or as a disabled person. In other words, attentional fixation does not seem to be the issue indicated by most of the testimonies. Relatedly, attentional omission does not seem to be what is at stake; the statements do not seem to suggest that the right content (such as the individuals' careers) is entirely ignored (although many have objected to attentional fixation and omission, in relation to their marginalized social identities, as touched on in Sec. IV). The language used in these testimonies refers to something subtler. It refers to the ordering of attention: the issue is putting "Black" "in front of everything," being seen as a woman "first" and philosopher "second," and being "first and foremost" a person who is disabled. This indicates that the problem is with one's identity as a minority ethnic group or woman (for instance) taking relative precedence over one's other identities—identities that are more important or meaningful. The levels or degrees of attention are wrong, with the wrong things receiving relatively more attention than the right things.

Broadly, the suggestion seems to be that this order should be reversed. Though Basquiat's statement perhaps indicates that his Blackness ought not to be attended to at all, at least in key relevant contexts ("I am not a Black artist. I am an artist"), the suggestion of a reversed ordering of salience captures many of the other statements. Kravitz's statement seems a particularly clear indication of this; she objects not to her Blackness being attended to ("Happy to be black") but to her Blackness

56. These individuals might also object to the qualitative manner of the attention on certain traits of theirs. Again, I am focusing on one way of explaining the complaints.

being given more salience than her other attributes ("Just don't need to say it in front of everything").

What about the final category of problematic attention, as laid out in Section IV, namely attention that is instrumentally versus constitutively morally problematic? There certainly seem to be potentially unjust upshots to the attentional patterns alluded to in the testimonies. For instance, having one's gender more salient than one's philosophical achievements could plausibly unjustly hurt one's career trajectory.

Problems might also arise simply from these attentional patterns contravening these individuals' preferences regarding how they want to be attended to. Many of the individuals mentioned in Section II want to be known primarily as philosophers, as artists, or simply as people. This might mean wanting their professional achievements to be more salient than the color of their skin, or wanting their central passion to be at the top of people's minds instead of their gender when others think of them, contemplate their behavior, and act toward them. Why should this be a desire that we honor? Well, it matters to us how we are attended to. The literature on social recognition demonstrates that people can be wronged when they fail to be attended to in the way that they wish. According to Axel Honneth, for instance, we cannot experience self-realization, or the development of our capabilities, unless others around us respect our identity.[57] We might be able to expand on Honneth's ideas, then, to demonstrate that one subtle way in which our chosen identities can be unjustly disrespected is by others not attending to that identity in the right way—namely, by failing to make our chosen identity our most salient one.[58] Perhaps identity

57. Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995). Other philosophers have made similar points. For instance, one might look to Christine Korsgaard's (*The Sources of Normativity* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996]) notion of practical identity to explain this type of harm. An agent's practical identity is their sense of self or, in Korsgaard's words, "a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking" (ibid., 101). This can include one's status as "father," "Brit," or indeed "athlete." Others have a duty to respect our practical identity, according to Korsgaard.

58. Inevitably, this proposal would need to be made more precise. There may be ways of clarifying and defending it that mirror those given for the "disrespect of personhood" proposal, developed in Sec. V*B*. For instance, whether a person is wronged or harmed by others not attending to them in the way in which they wish will likely depend on certain contextual features being in place. For instance, a white male hipster who desires for others to attend primarily to his meticulously oiled beard is unlikely to be wronged or harmed when others fail to make his beard his most salient feature. Thanks to Paulina Sliwa for offering a variation of this example. Features of the background context—most notably, the social privilege enjoyed by white men—make it such that this hipster is likely not wronged or harmed in this scenario. Similar points are inevitably made in the social recognition literature (see, e.g., Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*), and I defer to them here. This is an aspect of my proposal that deserves much more discussion, but I lack the space for it here.

disrespect is problematic for instrumental reasons, such as it leading to poor self-esteem. Alternatively, if we find disrespect of an individual's identity to be intrinsically bad, then this attentional pattern could count as constitutively problematic.

Another way in which we might understand the problem with these attentional patterns, however, is through the ideas mentioned in Section III, which offer more objective grounds. These attentional patterns might count as subtle ways of disrespecting the personhood of these individuals and group members. We might suggest that attending to a person so that their race or ethnic identity is more salient than their career can count as a subtle way of disrespecting their personhood. Despite the fact that alternative moral evaluations can be given, I expand in what follows only on the latter proposal. First, it is the proposal that I sketched in Section III, which provides the scaffolding for this article—a proposal I defend below as a credible explanation of the testimonies in Section II. Second, developing just one proposal lets me better illustrate how my central claim—that the testimonies can be understood as referring to a specific form of attention which is morally problematic—can be defended.

### *B. Objections and Clarifications*

The proposal, then, is that the individuals in Section II are suffering from "relative surplus attention on the wrong property" and that this form of attention is plausibly morally problematic insofar as it disrespects these individuals' personhood. Here I respond to three objections to this proposal: first, the proposal is implausible since there are many contexts in which attending primarily to a person's (for instance) racial identity is clearly not morally problematic; second, it is implausible because it implies that racial identity, gender identity, disability, and so on, are non-personhood-related traits, which is absurd (read: incorrect and offensive); and third, even if it survives the preceding critiques, a broader issue remains, namely, that any problems with these attentional patterns are, due to the attentional patterns' minimal nature, too trivial to matter.

*The context objection.*—Attending primarily to a person's (for instance) racial identity cannot be morally problematic, so goes this critique, since there are many contexts in which this pattern of attention is not wrongful or harmful. Consider a CEO whose Blackness is their most salient feature. It may be the case that the relative salience of their racial or ethnic identity helps to foreground the struggles that Black people endure in securing such positions of power and status.[59] Perhaps the relative prominence of their Blackness enables them to be a role model to other individuals from racially and ethnically marginalized backgrounds, helping those individuals realize that they, too, can accomplish what this Black CEO has

59. My thanks to Michael Diamond-Hunter for discussion of this point.

accomplished. In cases like this, it seems that facts about the role that attending primarily to Blackness performs, of highlighting and perhaps helping to overcome racial inequalities, make it so that drawing attention to this individual's Black identity plausibly does not enact a wrong or harm. Indeed, perhaps by drawing attention to this identity other morally desirable goals are being served, such as the decentering of whiteness in this particular domain.

In my previous work, I conceded that context matters when judging whether a given attentional pattern is morally problematic. While an attentional pattern that makes an individual's (e.g.) racial identity (or identity as a person who has experienced rape, in the other case) their most salient feature is a red flag, indicating a potentially problematic form of attention, I argued that information about the particular case and context is needed to be able to judge whether that form of attention is indeed morally problematic.[60] This, I suggested, is a familiar qualification made in the literature on sexual objectification.[61] Consider a doctor who "reduces" her patient to his body. While reducing an individual to their body is a paradigmatic way in which morally problematic sexual objectification can occur, features of this particular case and context—notably, the role of a doctor, and the patient's interest in improving their health—indicate that this case is morally innocuous.[62] The same qualification applies to the claim that attending primarily to an individual's (e.g.) racial identity is morally bad.

While I maintain the view that context affects whether the sorts of attentional patterns described in Section II constitute harm, I think that alternative interpretations can be given for different cases. Perhaps for the doctor case, contextual considerations suggest that the attentional pattern does not constitute harm at all. Indeed, we might go further and suggest that, far from this attentional pattern constituting harm in this context, not attending to the patient's body would be harmful. We might imagine parallel cases relating to social identity properties like race. If you are trying to get me to understand the problems that you have faced as a racially marginalized individual in your job, then not attending to your race

60. Whiteley, "Harmful Salience Perspectives." There I argued that such attentional patterns were harmful. Here I leave the specific moral diagnosis more open.

61. See, e.g., Martha Nussbaum, "Objectification," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 24 (1995): 249–91; Rae Langton, "Feminism in Philosophy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Frank Jackson and Michael Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 231–57; Lina Papadaki, "What Is Objectification?," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 7 (2010): 16–36. See also Monnica T. Williams, "Microaggressions: Clarification, Evidence, and Impact," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 15 (2020): 3–26, for a similar point regarding microaggressions.

62. There are exceptions. Patients can be harmfully objectified by their doctors where their emotions and personal perspectives on their health are ignored.

(at all, or sufficiently) might wrong you; perhaps it might count as a type of epistemic injustice.[63]

In other cases, however, we might insist that the attentional pattern in question—which involves attending primarily to an individual's racial or gender identity—is constitutively morally problematic, and yet that these problems are overridden by (an)other consideration(s). We might even suggest that certain wrongful or harmful attentional patterns are instrumental in delivering a certain benefit. Consider, for instance, Women in Philosophy initiatives. A philosopher, call them Arya, might find these ambivalent. She might find that they perpetuate a problematic pattern of attention, which makes these philosophers' genders too salient, and yet recognize the attentional pattern's instrumental utility in creating safe spaces and a network of solidarity. Indeed, it might be instrumentally beneficial in working to rid the discipline of the very attentional pattern to which Arya objects, meaning that the initiatives are read as sacrificing what is hoped to be a short-to-medium-term cost in making their members' genders problematically salient, in order to create a movement that can reform the discipline so that, in the long term, it can overcome the tendency systematically to make these philosophers' genders their most salient trait (and thus, in the long term, mitigate injustice).[64] This would mean suggesting that the attentional pattern constitutes an unjust attentional surplus insofar as, in the short to medium term, it counts as a subtle way of disrespecting these individuals' personhood, while suggesting that, relative to the long-term (hoped-for) mitigation of injustice, the attentional pattern does not constitute an unjust attentional surplus. Whether the attentional pattern constitutes a morally problematic surplus in this case depends on the temporal scope one adopts.

Ultimately, this is to say that it will sometimes be difficult to ascertain whether (and in what sense) a given pattern of attention is morally problematic (in a particular case, all things considered, relative to an immediate harm, relative to long-term mitigation of harm, etc.). This should come as no surprise, however, given that this is routinely the case when attempting to diagnose injustices more broadly. Again, the feminist debate regarding objectification is a clear parallel here; theorists come to different conclusions about whether a given way of treating a person as an object is constitutively harmfully objectifying yet overridden in a given case by other considerations, whether those other considerations show that the objectification does not in this case constitute harm, and so on.[65]

63. Smith and Archer, "Epistemic Injustice."

64. We might consider "positive discrimination" or "affirmative action" programs in light of the issues discussed here—something I leave for future research. Thanks to an anonymous *Ethics* reviewer for highlighting this connection.

65. For contrasting views, see Langton, "Feminism in Philosophy"; Nussbaum, "Objectification"; and Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*

As for the testimonies in Section II, there is still a lot to investigate, then; it could be that other considerations reveal that the attention on these individuals' demographic traits does not, all things considered, add up to a morally problematic attentional surplus. We should note, though, that the cases in Section II do not seem to have any obvious features that either cancel or override the problems that I propose are constituted by the attentional patterns in question. The cases do not obviously mirror the case of the doctor, for instance; while the patient arguably benefits from an attentional pattern that is usually associated with moral problems, it is not obvious how the individuals in Section II could benefit from having their demographic properties made salient in these cases. Neither does it seem that these attentional patterns can mitigate injustices in the long run, unlike with the directed, intentional activism of the Women in Philosophy group.

To be clear, my aim in this article is to argue that a particular sort of injustice exists and that it can help to explain a certain type of complaint commonly proffered by marginalized individuals. I leave it to future research to better characterize the phenomenon. This future research will explain exactly how the phenomenon works—precisely when attention to a social identity might be wrongful, harmful, or apt, and indeed what precise quantity or kind of attention is called for. The examples in this article (particularly in Secs. II and V.*B*), as well as the taxonomy in Section IV, can guide this further work. For instance, I have suggested that one way of judging when a pattern of attention that makes social identity traits particularly salient is morally problematic or apt is by considering the following distinction: directed, intentional activist adoption of the attentional pattern (apt) versus its uncritical adoption (problematic). This helps us to distinguish the case of the Women in Philosophy group (directed, intentional activism) from the wider philosophy department case discussed in Section II (where plausibly faculty members are simply uncritically adopting the attentional pattern in question).

*The non-personhood-related trait objection.*—Another concern, however, might arise for the reader. My account seems to propose that a person's

(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987). Debates about gender harms like objectification also highlight how the preferences of the object of attention might count as one of the contextual variables influencing the overall justifiability of that attention. Consider a case of objectification, where a woman wants to be treated like an object. Are her preferences always the overriding normative concern settling whether treating her in this way wrongs or harms her? Or might we do greater harm to this woman by respecting her preferences, if they result from an internalized oppressive ideology that fails to give due respect to her personhood (see, e.g., Nancy J. Hirschmann, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom," *Political Theory* 24 [1996]: 46–67)? Asking questions like this might help to illuminate how the "disrespect to personhood" diagnosis of the attentional patterns that I make here might clash or be made consistent with the alternative diagnosis mentioned briefly in Sec. V.*A* relating to the subjective preferences of the object of attention. See Whiteley, "Harmful Salience Perspectives," for a brief discussion of these issues.

race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and so on, are non-personhood-related traits, which is incorrect and offensive. Many find their identity as women, as Black, or as disabled to be incredibly affirming of their personhood.

What counts as a (non-)personhood-related trait, however, is something that cannot be decided in the abstract, but rather must be decided on the basis of how the trait in question is functioning in a given context. I do not claim, therefore, that a person's race, ethnicity, gender, and so on, are essentially non-personhood-related traits. In some contexts, one's race, gender, disability, and so on, might be functioning to reflect one's personhood. Perhaps this is the case for the Black CEO above; their Blackness might be functioning to foreground their agency and capacity to set and pursue their own ends—evidenced in their struggle to succeed in a domain saturated in white privilege. This could be one reading of a woman working in the Women in Philosophy activism group; Arya's gender identity may be functioning to highlight her informed activism—something that she has, to a certain extent, chosen, and which demonstrates her agency and rationality.[66]

Related to this issue regarding social group membership and personhood, Françoise Baylis and colleagues discuss the concept of "relational personhood," aimed at capturing the idea that one's identity, autonomy, and self-determination (among other aspects of one's personhood) depend on one's connection to social groups;[67] for instance, it might be argued that an individual's agency depends on one's social group uniting, and that their group helps to clarify which ends that individual can pursue. Some notions of personhood, then, incorporate aspects of social group membership, meaning that one's social group identity might in many cases function as a personhood-related trait.

The proposal regarding the testimonies in Section II, then, becomes this: in the specific cases and contexts described in those testimonies, the race, gender, and disability of those individuals are not functioning as personhood-related traits—and this could be the source of the problem. In support of this reading, consider how, across many of the testimonies in Section II, the individuals in question encourage attention on their careers and passions. Basquiat is indicating that he wants others to see him as an artist. The statements from women commenting on a surplus of attention

66. We might also apply this to the subject of those who have experienced rape. A person who has experienced rape may go on to create support networks for others who have had similar experiences, to help others cope with those experiences, to petition for greater protections for women, and so on. The identity "person who has experienced rape" might, in this woman's specific context, in an important sense be functioning as a personhood-related trait (showcasing her personality, rationality, ability to choose and set her own ends, and so on).

67. Françoise Baylis, Nuala Kenny, and Susan Sherwin, "A Relational Account of Public Health Ethics," *Public Health Ethics* 1 (2008): 196–206.

on their gender instead reorient the audience to their careers as philosophers, engineers, and so on. It is not hard to see how these traits can be demonstrative of these individuals' personhood; they are things that those individuals have chosen, and thus demonstrated their personality in, exercised control over, and so on. Their identities as Black, as a woman, and as disabled are plausibly not functioning, in these specific cases, to demonstrate these things. They may instead be functioning as non-personhood-related traits.

In part, what makes them function in this way might come down to how dominant social narratives frame traits like Blackness, womanhood, and disability. Consider, for instance, disability. Liu comments on wanting to push back against the social narrative that, for those with disabilities, "their disability somehow diminishes their personhood."[68] In other words, while Liu might take his disability to be powerfully connected to his personhood, the fact that wider society paints it as a non-personhood-related trait (indeed, as a personhood-diminishing trait) means that his disability routinely functions as a non-personhood-related trait.

The source of moral evaluation proposed here, of disrespect to personhood, is simply one suggestion, then. Others may want to propose other normative sources that they find more persuasive. For instance, one might want to focus on instrumental problems; a philosopher's career can be negatively affected if their philosophical achievements are less salient than their gender. One might also want to focus on alternative constitutive problems; these attentional patterns might constitute subtle ways of *tokenizing* certain individuals or groups.[69] Perhaps they are subtle ways of alienating them. Suggesting that these attentional patterns can constitute minimal forms of disrespect to personhood, however, is a diagnosis with wide scope; disrespect to personhood is routinely identified as the core moral issue in many pernicious phenomena, from sexual objectification[70] to *othering*, a phenomenon whereby individuals or groups are treated as an out-group in some way.[71]

*Too minimal to matter?*—At this point, a critic might say, "Even if we do grant that these attentional patterns are morally problematic, perhaps because they disrespect these individuals' personhood, that injustice is small. You are making a mountain out of a molehill." Indeed, the attentional pattern proposed in this article is a form of the most minimal type of morally problematic attention, where the relative degrees of attention are wrong. Perhaps this critic might concede that there is some plausibility to seeing

68. Liu, quoted in "What Disability Means."

69. Emmalon Davis, "Typecasts, Tokens, and Spokespersons: A Case for Credibility Excess as Testimonial Injustice," *Hypatia* 31 (2016): 485–501.

70. See, e.g., Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*; Dworkin, "Against the Male Flood."

71. Ellie Anderson, Cynthia Willett, and Diana Meyers, "Feminist Perspectives on the Self," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2021), https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-self/.

attentional fixations and omissions as problematic. Many would acknowledge that fixating on a person's body (or skin color, etc.) while wholly ignoring their conversational contributions (or personality, etc.) can be wrongful or harmful. In many of the testimonies that I have surveyed, however, these more meaningful attributes are not being ignored; they are simply given relatively less salience than certain other things. So, our critic might say, "You're being a bit over the top! What does it matter really, if someone found these individuals' appearances/races/genders/disabilities a little more attention-grabbing! It's not like they *ignored* what those individuals said / their careers / their personalities; they *did* pay attention to those things!"

This kind of criticism surfaces routinely for microaggressions, referring to subtle and often brief everyday events that denigrate individuals on the basis of their group membership.[72] For instance, it is often suggested that a person of color living in a primarily Caucasian country faces a microaggression when they are asked, "Where are you (really) from?" This is a subtle way of reinforcing the idea that this person is not really from that country—that they are a foreigner in their own land. The subtlety of microaggressions is also considered to be their undoing, however, as microaggressions are criticized for being too "micro" to matter. Mere attentional patterns that make one's race relatively more salient than one's career—much like the question "Where are you (really) from?"—seem to pale in comparison to overt racism, for instance, such as the use of racist slurs.[73]

Building on the arguments of those who defend the significance of microaggressions,[74] I propose replying to the critic above in the following way: we often do not notice, let alone articulate, the ways in which we or others attend to people and social groups. If our attentional patterns really can be morally problematic, then their subtle, rarely noticed, and rarely articulated nature gives them an insidious power, not least insofar as it makes them difficult to challenge. Indeed, we cannot challenge an injustice that we do not notice occurring, meaning that this injustice can continue unchecked—and will likely persist for a long time.

When we do notice and articulate our or others' attentional patterns, they are easily dismissed as trivial. Consider someone who feels that

72. Derald Wing Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2010), xvi.

73. Lawrence Blum, "Racism: What It Is and What It Isn't," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 2 (2002): 204–18.

74. My responses here are influenced primarily by Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life*; and Catharine Wells, "Microaggressions in the Context of Academic Communities," *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 12 (2013): 319–48. Further research might clarify the relationship between morally problematic attention and microaggressions. Munton, "Misattribution of Salience," 10, has recently suggested that a certain kind of "problematic . . . attention also lies behind a certain form of microaggression," which is a suggestion deserving further attention.

they are being wronged by another's attentional dispositions—perhaps they feel that their skin color is being attended to more than their career or achievements. This person risks being told that they are overreacting if they express this concern. If they confide in a friend about this concern, they might worry about getting the dismissive reaction above. The worry about getting this sort of reaction can function to silence the individual being wronged. They might preempt these sorts of negative reactions and so silence themself by not speaking. As Catherine Wells says, "A microaggression does not just bring injury, but also brings the practical need to pretend that the aggression never happened. If one is left angry, speechless, or hurt, one must hide that fact as best one can. Better to be seen as stumbling and inarticulate than to be seen as sensitive in irrational ways."[75] This is a form of silencing that Kristie Dotson refers to as "testimonial smothering"—a kind of coerced self-silencing that happens when "the speaker perceives one's immediate audience as unwilling or unable to gain the appropriate uptake of proffered testimony."[76]

Alternatively, the individual may articulate the wrong that they have experienced but be silenced insofar as their complaint is not respected. This is a form of what Rae Langton has referred to as "perlocutionary silencing," where one speaks, but one's objection, while heard, doesn't have the intended effect—in this case, of being registered as a valid complaint.[77] This ultimately contributes to the insidious power of morally problematic attention, including its most minimal forms; problematic attentional patterns can remain effectively unchallengeable, even when they are noticed and articulated. Their minimal nature gives them a sort of invincibility. Ultimately, the type of morally problematic attention identified in this article—namely, relative attentional surplus on the wrong property—should not be dismissed as morally insignificant. The strength of it lies precisely in its subtle nature.

To summarize, my specific diagnosis of the complaints in Section II is that these individuals are suffering from a "relative attentional surplus on the wrong property." One plausible story for how this specific attentional pattern is problematic is that it constitutes a particularly subtle way of disrespecting those individuals' personhood. The qualifications addressed above make this proposal more precise. First, while making a person's race, gender, or disability their most salient feature might not, in every context, constitute a subtle way of disrespecting their personhood, it plausibly does in the circumstances described in Section II. Second, this is

75. Wells, "Microaggressions," 329.

76. Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," *Hypatia* 26 (2011): 236–57, 244.

77. Rae Langton, "Beyond a Pragmatic Critique of Reason," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 71 (1993): 364–84.

because the race, gender, and disability of these individuals are likely functioning as non-personhood-related traits in those specific circumstances (as opposed to these social identity traits inherently constituting non-personhood-related traits). Third, the minimal nature of the attentional pattern in question—insofar as personhood-related traits are simply being paid relatively less attention than non-personhood-related traits, instead of the latter being absolutely fixated on or the former ignored—does not render any injustice it constitutes trivial; its minimal nature can give it power, in the form of an immunity from criticism.

## VI. ATTENTION: FRIEND AND FOE?

So far, I have canvassed a variety of testimonies that share a theme, that the wrong trait of these individuals is being made more salient than the right trait. Further, I have argued that this can be understood as a claim about a certain pattern of attention: "relative attentional surplus on the wrong property." In this section, I respond to an objection, namely, that I seem to be recommending less attention be paid to already-attention-deprived groups, which simply further entrenches the unjust attention deficits they face. Responding to this objection will help to demonstrate the utility of the taxonomy introduced in Section IV. Further, it will allow me to make a wider point about why identifying forms of morally problematic attention is so important—namely, such attention is plausibly widespread for those from marginalized backgrounds and thus requires deeper investigation so that we can correct for this pervasive injustice.

### *A. The Attentional Deficits Objection*

To understand this objection, let's first consider how the individuals in Section II are all marginalized, at least in the domains in which they are speaking.[78] They are marginalized in the sense that they do not represent "the norm" in those domains. We can interpret "the norm" in at least two senses: statistical and normative.

First, these marginalized individuals, as well as the marginalized social groups of which they are members, are statistically outnumbered. The majority of artists, philosophers, and engineers—or at least the majority of those who are represented in the history books and mainstream art shows, or who populate philosophy and engineering faculties, businesses, and journals—are white, able-bodied men.[79] Indeed, one might argue that white, able-bodied men are the statistical norm in mainstream culture more

78. See, e.g., Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

79. Defense of this claim can be found by following the various references in Sec. II.

broadly, in the sense that they are more numerous in mainstream TV, advertising, media, and so on.[80]

Second, the individuals in Section II are not the norm in the sense that they do not set the normative standard of socially valued behavior, presentation, and so on, in the domains discussed. Take, for instance, the art world. Many have claimed that white, able-bodied men are the normative norm in this domain.[81] We might see this in the economic valuation of art; an audit of art auction sales in 2012 found that all artworks in the top 100 auction sales in London from that year were painted by men.[82] We might see this in the overwhelmingly white nature of "the Western canon," which collates the most "important," "good" art. Again, one might argue that white, able-bodied men are the normative norm in mainstream culture more broadly; this might manifest, for instance, in beauty standards matching white bodies.[83] Similar claims might be made about the other marginalized traits discussed in this article.[84]

This plausibly functions to make the white, able-bodied men themselves more salient than marginalized individuals and groups. A similar point is made by Munton, who comments on white individuals constituting the statistical norm in the domain of film directing. She says, "[A given attentional pattern][85] is . . . in part determined by thoroughly mundane facts about the organisation of the subject's environment. If there are fewer books written about Black film directors, or if those books are only available in specialist bookshops, then that information is less accessible to the subject than information about white film directors."[86] We might take this to imply that it is the white film directors who are accessible—who are salient in attention. Returning to the examples above, white artists are plausibly the ones whom curators generally better notice, or think of first, when

80. Dino-Ray Ramos, "Film and TV Diversity: What Changed in 2019 and What's Next in 2020," *Deadline*, January 1, 2020, https://deadline.com/2020/01/hollywood-diversity-2009-strides-film-tv-representation-inclusion-1202817299/.

81. Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses*.

82. Ami Sedghi, "The London Art Audit: How Well Are Female Artists Represented?," *Guardian*, May 24, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2013/may/24/london-art-audit-female-artists-represented.

83. Kathy Deliovsky, "Normative White Femininity: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Beauty," *Atlantis* 33 (2008): 49–59.

84. Various authors cited in this article build on these claims about whiteness, maleness, able-bodiedness, and so on, as the norm in various domains; see, e.g., Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses*; Selin Kesebir, "Word Order Denotes Relevance Differences: The Case of Conjoined Phrases with Lexical Gender," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 113 (2017): 262–79; and Young, *Politics of Difference*.

85. While I have paraphrased her as talking about attentional patterns, Munton instead talks about "salience structures" in this quote. For how Munton sees the relation between attentional patterns and "salience structures," see n. 27.

86. Munton, "Misattribution of Salience," 12.

those curators are making decisions about which artists to include in an exhibition. Smith and Archer's findings, discussed in Section IV, corroborate this general idea. Referring to another vector of privilege—class—Smith and Archer comment on research suggesting that teachers attend more to middle-class students than to their working-class counterparts; we might suggest that if knowledge and education domains in society are dominated by middle-class individuals, then middle-class children will plausibly stand out more in those domains.[87] As Smith and Archer point out, this can result in members of marginalized groups (in their particular case, working-class students), as well as the groups themselves, suffering attentional deficits (perhaps even attentional omissions in some more extreme cases). This plausibly negatively affects them in various ways; for instance, Smith and Archer claim that such attentional deficits in the classroom, suffered by working-class students, can constitute a minimal form of epistemic injustice, where a person is not paid the attention they are due in their role as an epistemic agent.

We are now in a position to make the criticism explicit: I seem to be recommending less attention be paid to already-attention-deprived groups, which simply further entrenches the unjust attention deficits they face. The situation described above indicates that attention is a good thing: it helps to make visible individuals and groups that society renders invisible. Black artists, for instance, need to be more salient to curators when they organize exhibitions.

The point that I wish to make, however, is that things are generally different when we switch from talking about attention on the individuals and groups themselves to discussing attention on their group membership properties—something that the taxonomy in Section IV allows us to do. While the white artists themselves might be made more salient than Black artists in many contexts, those white artists do not generally have their racial identity made salient—in other words, their group membership properties are not their most prominent feature. As suggested in Section II, this is indicated by the fact that they are referred to not as "white artists" but simply as "artists."

Things are different for those from marginalized backgrounds. In the domains above, these individuals are not the norm. They are "other" (statistically, normatively, or both). The properties of being Black, being a woman, being disabled—these characteristics are all made salient, in the sense of being striking, in a domain that treats these things as markers of "the other." These attributes draw attention in virtue of their not reflecting the norm. This helps to explain the tendency to say "Black artist" or "woman philosopher"; Blackness and womanness are salient in virtue of their statistical and normative abnormality in the contexts of art and philosophy.

87. Smith and Archer, "Epistemic Injustice."

In other words, then, the culture in which we live exhibits social inequalities, and these inequalities structure our attention. One way this manifests is in finding white, able-bodied men as individuals and groups more salient, at least in the domains discussed above. The surplus attention that these privileged individuals and groups receive translates into attentional deficits for marginalized individuals and groups. Another way that this manifests, however, is in giving surplus attention to the properties that mark an individual out as belonging to a marginalized group; in a domain characterized by whiteness, the Blackness of an individual in that domain will stand out and be made more salient. One way of putting this point is that marginalized folk are rendered invisible as individuals and groups in virtue of the hypervisibility of certain of their demographic properties. The taxonomy in Section IV makes this explanation particularly clear: an attentional surplus on certain demographic properties has a nonarbitrary connection to the attentional deficits suffered qua individual and/or group.

### *B. Morally Problematic Attention as Widespread*

Making this point helps me to highlight how widespread morally problematic attention is for those from marginalized groups. Given that culture shapes our attention, most of us generally develop the sorts of attentional dispositions described above. If this is the case, then it means that those from marginalized groups are likely systematically attended to in ways that are problematic.[88]

In Section V.*B*, I suggested that the minimal nature of the sort of morally problematic attention discussed in this article in no way makes it trivial. The fact that such problematic attention is plausibly widespread—that is, systematic and routine—for those from marginalized groups

88. This means that large-scale changes to our culture may be necessary to avoid morally problematic attention. Liu, quoted in "What Disability Means," indicates this outcome: "And, to be perfectly honest, I don't think I'll ever be anything but 'the blind kid' to other people until we start changing the narrative; the narrative that persons with disabilities are defined solely by their disability; that their disability somehow diminishes their personhood." Discussions about overcoming the perpetuation of other kinds of identity-based injustices, though, are instructive here. For instance, Jules Holroyd, "Responsibility for Implicit Bias," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 43 (2012): 247–306, and Jenny Saul, "Scepticism and Implicit Bias," *Disputatio* 5 (2012): 243–63, discuss techniques for individuals to use to overcome the implicit biases that they inherit from a prejudiced society. Seeing implicit biases (and, I suggest, attentional dispositions) as habits means looking to various habit-breaking techniques for a solution. In addition to seeking wider cultural changes, then, we might look to the implicit bias literature for advice for individuals regarding how to alter the problematic attentional dispositions that they have inherited. We might also look to this literature for discussions of our control over (and relatedly our responsibility for) our attentional patterns; Holroyd, "Responsibility for Implicit Bias," 284, for instance, discusses the "long-range" control that we have over the skills, habits, and biases (and, I suggest, attentional patterns) that we cultivate over time.

makes the problems generated by these attentional patterns even worse. If these patterns of attention have implications regarding whether we disrespect, wrong, or harm a person or group, then the pervasive nature of attentional patterns is all the more concerning—we might be disrespecting, wronging, or harming others (and perhaps ourselves) much more regularly than we think. There is likely to be a cumulative effect of the problems with these attentional patterns. Even if a critic succeeds, then, in showing that the individual instances of morally problematic attention are not so egregious, the injustice nevertheless significantly intensifies once those various moral problems relating to attention are added up (as Chester Pierce suggested in the context of microaggressions).[89] This helps to demonstrate how important it is to investigate attention and the different forms it can take.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Individuals from marginalized backgrounds routinely complain about being seen primarily in terms of that background. Instead of being an artist, philosopher, even simply a person, they are first and foremost disabled, a Black person, a woman. In this article, I have drawn on the concept of "morally problematic attention" to offer a broad diagnosis of these complaints: these individuals can be understood as referring to morally problematic attentional patterns that make the wrong trait too salient. Drawing on a taxonomy for evaluating attention, I then made this claim more precise: these individuals are suffering from "relative attentional surplus on the wrong property." This represents a criticism of the quantitative manner of attention on the properties of these individuals. The group membership properties of these individuals receive a surplus of attention—a surplus of a distinctively minimal nature, not so that those properties are fixated on, but rather so that they receive relatively more attention than other more meaningful properties of these individuals. One way of explaining how this pattern of attention can be morally problematic, I suggested, is by showing how it can count as a subtle way of disrespecting the personhood of these individuals.

Finally, I argued that my taxonomy helps to illuminate why attention is sometimes good and why it is sometimes bad. Those from marginalized groups tend to suffer too little and too much attention in different ways, something that becomes clearer once we clarify the alternative contents, as well as the alternative quantitative manners, of our attentional patterns. As individuals and groups, those who are marginalized suffer morally

89. Chester Pierce, "Stress Analogs of Racism and Sexism: Terrorism, Torture, and Disaster," in *Mental Health, Racism, and Sexism*, ed. Charles V. Willie et al. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 277–93, 277.

problematic attentional deficits, which increased attention can help to mitigate. This is consistent with those individuals and groups suffering morally problematic attentional surpluses on their demographic properties, which is mitigated by lessening attention on those properties.

Both of these problematic attentional deficits and surpluses are the product of entrenched inequalities in our society; given that the society in which we live structures our attention, these problematic attentional patterns are plausibly widespread, meaning that those from marginalized groups are likely systematically being attended to in a way that disrespects, wrongs, or harms them.