



# The Physiology of Sexist and Racist Oppression (Studies in Feminist Philosophy)

*Shannon Sullivan*

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While gender and race often are considered socially constructed, this book argues that they are physiologically constituted through the biopsychosocial effects of sexism and racism. This means that to be fully successful, critical philosophy of race and feminist philosophy need to examine not only the financial, legal, political and other forms of racist and sexism oppression, but also their physiological operations. Examining a complex tangle of affects, emotions, knowledge, and privilege, *The Physiology of Sexist and Racist Oppression* develops an understanding of the human body whose unconscious habits are biological. On this account, affect and emotion are thoroughly somatic, not something "mental" or extra-biological layered on top of the body. They also are interpersonal, social, and can be transactionally transmitted between people.

Ranging from the stomach and the gut to the hips and the heart, from autoimmune diseases to epigenetic markers, Sullivan demonstrates the gastrointestinal effects of sexual abuse that disproportionately affect women, often manifesting as IBS, Crohn's disease, or similar functional disorders. She also explores the transgenerational effects of racism via epigenetic changes in African American women, who experience much higher pre-term birth rates than white women do, and she reveals the unjust benefits for heart health experienced by white people as a result of their racial privilege. Finally, developing the notion of a physiological therapy that doesn't prioritize bringing unconscious habits to conscious awareness, Sullivan closes with a double-barreled approach for both working for institutional change and transforming biologically unconscious habits.

The *Physiology of Sexist and Racist Oppression* skillfully combines feminist and critical philosophy of race with the biological and health sciences. The result is a critical physiology of race and gender that offers new strategies for fighting male and white privilege.

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