

Penultimate draft. Published in the *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X21000254>

FURTHER DEFENSE OF THE RACIALIZATION CONCEPT

A Reply to Uyan

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Abstract

In my *Racialization: A Defense of the Concept*, I argue that ‘race’ fails as an analytic category and that we should think in terms of ‘racialization’ and ‘racialized groups’ instead (Hochman 2019c). I define these concepts and defend them against a range of criticisms. In *Rethinking Racialization: The Analytical Limits of Racialization*, Deniz Uyan critiques my “theory of racialization” (Uyan 2021). However, I do not defend a *theory* of racialization; I defend the *concept* of racialization. I argue that racialization is a useful idea, but I do not advance a theory to explain or predict the phenomena it describes. While Uyan’s critique therefore misses its mark, it raises important questions about the explanatory scope of the racialization concept. Ironically, I may be even more skeptical of the prospects of any general theory of racialization than Uyan. I argue that while we ought to develop theories to explain particular instances of racialization, we should not develop a general theory of racialization, because it is simply too varied in the agents that drive it, their intents, the mechanisms through which it operates, and the outcomes it produces. While hope for any general theory of racialisation should be abandoned, I argue that the racialisation concept is still extremely useful. It offers a necessary alternative

to race realist concepts, allowing us to point to the wide-ranging effects of belief in race without falsely implying that race itself is real. Uyan does not focus on my arguments against racial realism. However, the theoretical failures and normative risks of racial realism motivate my defense of the racialization concept. In this paper, I reiterate my arguments against racial realism and offer further defense of the concepts of ‘racialization’ and ‘racialized group’.

Keywords: Racialization; Racialized Groups; Racism; Race; Racial Formation

INTRODUCTION

The concept of racialization has received increasing uptake by race scholars in recent years, but there has been what Karim Murji and John Solomos call “a mini-backlash against the idea” (Murji and Solomos 2005, 2; see Barot and Bird 2001; Goldberg 1992; Gonzalez-Sobrino and Goss 2019; Rattansi 2005). In my *Racialization: A Defense of the Concept*, I offer a stipulative definition of racialization and argue that when the concept is defined as I recommend, the criticisms of it are unsuccessful (Hochman 2019c).

The racialization concept can be used when talking about groups, individuals, social structures, and a range of other phenomena (e.g., hairstyles, styles of dance). In my article, I focused primarily on the racialization of groups. I defined the racialization of groups as *the process or processes through which a group comes to be understood to be a major biological entity and human lineage, formed due to reproductive isolation, in which membership is transmitted through biological descent*.

The reason racialization is a concept worth defending is that it offers a way of talking about the various processes through which groups come to be understood as races *without* implying that they actually *are* races. Racial formation, on the other hand, implies a process through which “races” are formed. Where “racial formation” is understood to form “races,” racialization can be understood to produce racialized groups—groups mistakenly believed to be races.

There would be no need to have concepts such as racialization and racialized group if races were real—we could just talk about racial formation and race instead. As such, I dedicated a substantial part of my defense of the racialization concept to defending anti-realism about race. Specifically, I defend anti-realist *reconstructionism* about race. The term ‘anti-realist’ indicates that race is an illusion. The term ‘reconstructionism’ adds that the groups people think of as “races” are better understood to be racialized groups.

Deniz Uyan (2021) has written some welcome criticism of my defense of racialization, and I thank her and the *Du Bois Review* for the opportunity to defend and clarify my views on this complex and important topic. Uyan critiques what she describes in numerous places as my “theory” of racialization. However, I do not defend a *theory* of racialization, but the *concept* of racialization. To be clear on the distinction, a *concept* is a broad idea, whereas a *theory* brings together ideas to explain or predict things.

One may wonder whether racialization actually qualifies as a concept. After all, people mean so many different things by this term. Is it my claim that they are all talking about the same thing? No, it is not. My definition is *stipulative* (Hochman 2019). I’m saying that my definition is how we *ought* to understand the concept, rather than that it captures how it is generally understood. Another way of putting this is that there may be many conceptions of racialization, but that doesn’t mean there is no concept of racialization. As Elisabetta Lalumera explains, “conceptions stand to concepts as do many to one, and conceptions can be wrong, and get corrected” (Lalumera 2013, 73). I am trying to correct problematic conceptions of the racialization concept.

The idea that racialization is a theory, and not just a concept, is not unique to Uyan. Phrases such as “racialization theory” and “theory of racialization” are indeed quite common in the literature (e.g. Bobo 2011; Casey 2021; Haider 2020; Yarbrough 2010). I notice that I have even used the phrase “theory of racialization” in one of my papers, though not the one that is Uyan’s main target (see Hochman 2017). There I was not confusing theory with concept, but rather theory with *framework*. Unlike theories, frameworks do not explain or predict things, but offer a lens through which one may explain or predict things.

Loose use of these terms is commonplace and may generally be of little consequence. However, Uyan’s misinterpretation of my defense of the racialization concept as a defense of some theory of racialization highlights the importance of maintaining a clear distinction. Her criticisms fail to hit their target, because she is arguing against a theory when what I have defended is a concept. Critiquing a concept for its failure as a theory is like blaming a spanner for not fixing the kitchen sink.

Uyan identifies what she believes to be a series of problems with my “theory” of racialization (some of which overlap with the critiques advanced by other racialization skeptics). First, she argues that it fails to name or describe the agents and mechanisms of racialization (Fields 2001, 50). Second, that it does not clarify the relationship between racialization and racism (Goldberg 2005; Rattansi 2005). Third, that it naturalizes racialization. Fourth, that it is *groupist*, assuming the homogeneity of people within racialized groups. Fifth, that it cannot help us to identify the origins of racialization.

I will respond as follows. First, a general definition of racialization should not attempt to name or describe the agents and mechanisms of racialization, because the agents and mechanisms are different in different contexts. Second, a definition of racialization should not attempt to describe the relationship between racialization and racism, because there is no simple or singular relationship. Third, my work does not naturalize racialization, and I have argued directly against naturalistic accounts of racialization elsewhere (Hochman 2013b). Fourth, my definition is not groupist, and the idea of racialization actually serves as a bulwark against groupism. Fifth, my definition of racialization can indeed help us to identify the origins of racialization, and drawing on this definition I have argued that it first occurred in fifteenth-century Spain (Hochman 2019a).

I will begin, however, by offering a very brief overview of my case for anti-realist reconstructionism about race. Uyan does not engage with my arguments for this view, and she assumes a version of racial realism. However, the viability of race as an analytic category is the issue that motivates my defense of the racialization concept. Uyan’s avoidance of this aspect of my paper is a problem, because we cannot separate the usefulness of the racialization concept from the ontological question about the reality of race.

After reiterating my case against racial realism, adding a critique of Uyan’s preferred version of the view, I will describe and respond to her five major arguments against my defense of racialization. As I will show, these arguments fail, and the racialization concept emerges from the debate unscathed. I hope that what follows helps to persuade Uyan and other ‘racialization’ skeptics that this is a highly valuable concept for specialists and layfolk alike.

AGAINST RACIAL REALISM

Anti-realism about race is the *raison d’être* of the racialization concept. The reason I want to reiterate the arguments in its favor is that Uyan, in her reply, does not engage with my arguments for anti-realism or seem to appreciate that the value of the racialization concept depends largely on whether race is a viable analytic category.

Uyan writes of my “commendable efforts to move the anti-realist agenda research program forward,” but it is unclear *why* she thinks it is commendable (Uyan 2021). It doesn’t seem to be because she thinks anti-realism about race is *correct*, because she is a race realist. She claims, for example, that “race ... must be analyzed as a technology of social control” (Uyan 2021). Elsewhere she writes that, “Race is a condition that only becomes legible as a biologically inheritable trait because of the material imperative of a particular historical location” (Uyan 2021). If race were either a technology or a condition—these seem like very different claims—then race would be real.

Uyan neither accepts nor rejects my arguments against racial realism, and when she does allude to them, she sees me as “maintaining a critical distance so as not to reify race as a transhistorical category” (Uyan 2021). However, anti-realism about race makes an ontological claim, not a historical claim. The anti-realist rejects the idea that race exists at any historical moment. In her discussion of my work, Uyan often interprets my position as a form of racial realism. This is puzzling, because I emphasized my anti-realism repeatedly, I worried *ad nauseum*!

For example, Uyan claims that my “conceptualization understands inheritable race as not an ideological, but factual outgrowth” (Uyan 2021). However, this can’t be right. I conceptualize race as an illusion,

not as something either factual or heritable. In another place, she interprets me as claiming that “racialization racializes races differently in different contexts,” but this is similarly incompatible with racial anti-realism: it would be impossible to “racialize races” if there are no races (Uyan 2021). To give a final example, she writes that, “For Hochman, it would seem that race and racism are produced independently of each other”—but I do not believe that race is produced at all (Uyan 2021). Racialization is produced, and racism is produced, but “race” is not.

It is now widely—though not universally—accepted among specialists that there are no human biological races. There is broad scientific agreement that we are a fairly genetically homogenous species, that our biological traits are generally smoothly distributed across geographic space, that there are no major human lineages, and that conventional “racial” classification is not scientifically privileged (Keita et al. 2004; Serre and Pääbo 2004; Templeton 2013). Any biological theory of race must either distort these facts or weaken the meaning of race to such an extent that it becomes trivial (Hochman 2016, 2019b).

The dominant academic view at the time of writing is that race is socially real, rather than biologically real (Diaz-Leon 2015; Haslanger 2012; Msimang 2019; Omi and Winant 2015; Taylor 2013). On a surface level, this sounds plausible. The effects of being racialized are certainly real, whether they be felt on a visceral level in terms of discrimination and violence or enjoyed, often unknowingly, as a set of privileges and advantages (Smedley and Smedley 2005). Yet we should be careful not to infer the existence of race from the existence of racialization and racism, which do not require races, but only the *belief* in races.

Philosophers tend to think of race as a *social kind*, which can be understood using an analogy to kinds in the physical sciences (like gold). I have argued elsewhere that race does not qualify as a social kind (Hochman 2019c, 2020). That is not at all to say that racialization is socially unimportant—it is clearly of tremendous social importance. Rather, it is to say that there are no set of social properties that reliably distinguish racialized groups from other sorts of groups. To justify this claim I run an *inflation argument*

against a social kind approach to race, which says that if we try to define race using social properties alone, too many groups start counting as races.

Uyan does not discuss this argument, but I will run through it briefly, because it helps motivate my anti-realist position. I’ll use what I believe to be the most well-developed social kind definition of race in the literature—the one offered by Phila Msimang (2019). Msimang argues that the “characteristics of a social race are that they are stereotyped groups” about which there is a “presumption that racial identity is fixed” and a “belief that race is a genealogical and heritable kind of group belonging” (Msimang 2019, 15).

Msimang’s three conditions of *stereotyping*, *fixity*, and *genealogy* offer a promising account of the social properties unique to “race,” but they turn out to be met in many sorts of groups that we wouldn’t usually think of as races. Consider the following example: schizophrenics. Matthias Angermeyer and Herbert Matschinger find—and this won’t surprise the reader—that there are *stereotypes* about schizophrenics (2004). There is also a common belief in the *fixity* of schizophrenia: Angermeyer and Matschinger found that only 33.5% of their subjects agreed with the statement that “With modern treatment methods these days, many patients with schizophrenia can be cured” (2004, 1053). What about the *genealogy* condition? Angermeyer and Matschinger (2005) found that 60% of their subjects attributed hereditary factors as a cause of schizophrenia. As such, it appears that schizophrenics would constitute a “race” on Msimang’s social kind account of race. (Note that, on his account, it wouldn’t matter whether or not these beliefs about schizophrenics are actually true.)

This is just one example of what I am calling the inflation problem with the social kind approach to race. Perhaps it can be fixed, but I doubt it. However, this isn’t the kind of racial realism that Uyan endorses. Uyan claims that race “must be analyzed as a technology of social control and a category that developed out of the constraints and imperatives of specific social relations” (Uyan 2021). (She also says that race is a “condition,” but I won’t respond to this, because I don’t know what it means).

The idea of race as a technology is popular among race theorists (Coleman 2009; Chun 2012; Jones and Jones 2017; Lentin 2020). However, “race” does not *have* to be understood as a technology, as Uyan

claims. In fact, I believe that the idea of race as a technology conflates “race” with racialization and racism. Racialization and racism are technologies, or tools. They do things in the world. They serve a range of different purposes in different contexts. I do not believe anything is added to the claims that racialization and racism are technologies by claiming that “race” itself is also a technology.

Except, perhaps, confusion. If we say that race “must be analyzed as a technology of social control and a category” we make clear communication about this important topic exceptionally difficult (Uyan 2021). If we think of race as a technology and as a biological category, then race is real in one sense, but an illusion in another. This is a recipe for confusion. Given the long history of race as a biological category, non-specialists are likely to interpret ‘race’ biologically when they hear the term.

There is a substantial body of evidence that shows that attempts by specialists to reimagine race as non-biological (e.g., as a social kind or as a technology of power) have been largely unsuccessful in changing how non-specialists understand the concept. Most people still understand “race” to be a biological characteristic, and this form of racial realism is associated with having racist attitudes (Brown et al. 2009; Condit et al. 2004; Donovan 2014; Shulman and Glasgow 2010). If my arguments against racial realism are correct, and this research is right, then we have both theoretical and normative reasons to understand race as an empty biological category and to adopt alternative concepts like racialization and racialized group.

Uyan argues, convincingly, that “the task of sociological analysis is the task of interrogating how and why a person may come to be legible as a particular racial or ethnic identity in the first place, rather than take as given that identification as a category of analysis” (Uyan 2021). I find the distinction between a *category of practice* and a *category of analysis* immensely useful. I am familiar with it through the work of Mara Loveman (1999), whom Uyan cites approvingly. Categories of practice are those categories that non-specialists use in their day-to-day lives, whereas categories of analysis are those that specialists adopt to analyze the world.

Uyan applies this distinction to racial and ethnic *identities*, and while it does apply there, it can also be applied to the category of race itself. Indeed, Loveman applies it in this way, arguing that, “To

investigate and explain the causes, dynamics, and consequences of ‘race’ as a category of practice, social scientists would be better off eliminating ‘race’ as a category of analysis” (1999, 898). While Uyan rejects racial *identities* as categories of analysis, she accepts “race” itself as an analytic category when she claims that “race” must be analyzed as a technology of social control. I have argued that this is a mistake: we are better off ditching race as a category of analysis altogether, replacing it with categories such as racialization, racialized group, and racism.

It is my anti-realism about race—my rejection of ‘race’ as an analytic tool—that drives my defense of ‘racialization’ and ‘racialized group’ as categories of analysis. While Uyan does not engage with my critique of racial realism, it is relevant, because to properly evaluate the racialization concept we must compare it to alternatives. The most popular alternatives are race realist concepts (such as race-as-social-kind or race-as-technology). However, if my arguments are good, race fails as an analytic category. ‘Racialized group’ isn’t just a trendy term, it represents a promising alternative to a deeply flawed concept that has been used to justify some of the worst events of human history, and which continues to be used to justify deadly violence and inequality.

The Agents and Mechanisms of Racialization

The racialization concept offers an attractive alternative to race-realist concepts, and ought to be evaluated in light of the failures of racial realism, but that does not make it immune to criticism. Uyan levels a range of charges against my definition of racialization. One of these is that my definition does not name or describe the agents and mechanisms of racialization. “What is left unclear” in my definition, writes Uyan, “is how, when, by whom, and why exactly particular processes of racialization are instigated. Delineating the causal mechanisms and agentic forces that drive racial group formation processes is key to the analytical capacity of racialization, especially if the term is to be productively applied to social science research” (Uyan 2021).

Uyan is right, of course, that these “how, when, by whom, and why” questions are important if we are to understand instances of racialization. Without these clarifications, racialization functions as a “stagnant category of analysis” (Uyan 2021). Worse still, Uyan believes that “in the absence of locating

an agent or mechanism, the concept is tautologized: racialization, with an inability to locate a mechanism, offers itself up as the mechanism” (Uyan 2021). We cannot explain why a group is understood to be a race by saying “they have been racialized.” Such reasoning is circular.

This much is right. The important question is whether it is a problem for my definition of racialization that it does not tell us “how, when, by whom, and why exactly particular processes of racialization are instigated” (Uyan 2021). If racialization operated in one single way, at one unique time, instigated by one individual or group, and for one reason only, then we could bake all of this into a definition of the concept. However, as I will show throughout this paper, none of the above is true. As such, my definition of racialization retains a level of generality, and this is a *benefit* of the definition.

It is the task of the researcher to answer the how, when, by whom, and why questions in their attempts to understand instances of racialization—the racialization concept cannot do these things. Uyan is correct that appealing to the racialization concept to explain *why* a group is racialized is unproductive. However, she is wrong to claim that this is the racialization concept offering “itself up as the mechanism” (Uyan 2021). ‘Racialization’ is a general concept which points to something unified—a form of biologization—taking place in multiple contexts and through multiple mechanisms. Determining the specific mechanisms involved in particular cases of racialization is up to the researcher, not something the concept can achieve.

Conceptual animism is a recurring problem in Uyan’s reply. She writes, for instance, of the “concept’s inability to locate a specific agent in the process of racialization” (Uyan 2021). However, concepts do not have abilities; they cannot locate things. The key question is whether *people using* the racialization concept can perform these tasks. What matters is whether there is some underlying problem with the racialization concept that renders it a poor conceptual resource. I do not believe that Uyan shows this.

While I argue that a definition of racialization must retain a level of generality because of how diverse the phenomenon is, Uyan believes that, on my view, “racialization is said to be a process without a specific mechanism or agent” (Uyan 2021). This is a misinterpretation. There are always mechanisms

or agents involved. My point is very simple: the racialization concept cannot specify what or who these are—that is the task of the researcher.

Uyan criticizes my phrase “racialization works differently in different contexts” because she sees it as suggesting that “racialization—a thing out there in the world—does *its work* differently in different contexts” (Uyan 2021). This is a misreading. If I say, for instance, that “racism works differently in Brazil and South Africa” I am not implying that there are no racists or racist institutions in these countries, and that racism is some mysterious force that does its work automatically there. Rather, that sentence is the *beginning* of an explanation.

That said, claims like “racialization works differently in different contexts” do *some* explanatory work. Uyan argues that this claim is “as explanatory as the sentence: wind blows differently in valleys than it does in mountains” (Uyan 2021). But that is a perfectly fine sentence! It *is* explanatory. Wind *does* blow differently in the valleys and the mountains. The sentence doesn’t tell us *why*—one would need a paragraph to explain this. Similarly, the sentence “racialization works differently in different contexts” is explanatory, but it is just a starting point.

Uyan critiques what she calls my “theory” of racialization. However, as I’ve already noted, I do not defend a *theory* of racialization, but a *definition* of racialization. This misunderstanding helps to contextualize Uyan’s criticisms. If I were offering a theory of racialization, it would be an awfully thin theory, and it would deserve some of the criticisms Uyan levels. But definitions are very different from theories. A general theory of racialization is undesirable for the reason Barbra Fields has identified: “Not all racializers do the same thing when they racialize” (2001, 50).

Because my article was a defense of the racialization concept, rather than an exploration of a case-study, I did not discuss particular instances of racialization in any great detail. One case I did briefly discuss was the racialization that occurred in fifteenth-century Spain, where Jews and the Moors were labelled as *razas* with “impure blood.” Returning to this example, we can consider how we could begin answering the how, when, by whom, and why questions in relation to this context. We might begin roughly like this:

How: The Purity of Blood Statutes, among other measures
When: Beginning in the first half of the fifteenth century
By Whom: The old Spanish Christians (or, more accurately, a subset of them)
Why: To take power from new Christians—former Jews and Moors who had converted to Christianity (Nirenberg 2009)

The *concept* of racialization may be unable to answer how, when, by whom, and why questions, but that does not mean that people using the concept cannot answer them.

Uyan criticizes “the absence of locating an agent or mechanism” in my definition of racialization, but there is no single agent or mechanism responsible for all instances of racialization. Historically, racialization has been predominantly performed by White people—people who self-racialize as White. However, this isn’t universally true. Consider the work of two prominent African American philosophers of race who defend de-essentialized and anti-racist versions of biological racial realism: Michael Hardimon (2017) and Quayshawn Spencer (2019). We can answer the four questions again, looking at their work:

How: Academic and public-facing work, drawing on philosophy of biology and genetic anthropology
When: The 21st century
By Whom: Michael Hardimon and Quayshawn Spencer
Why: Out of a belief in the scientific respectability and usefulness of de-essentialized, non-hierarchical accounts of race

The high variability in the answers to the how, when, by whom, and why questions should make us skeptical of the possibility of any general or universal theory of racialization. However, this does not detract from the usefulness of the racialization concept. The fact that racialization is complex does not mean that there is nothing that unites all cases of racialization. That thing is a particular kind of biologization. Because of how misleading and dangerous this form of biologization has been

historically, it is essential that we can name racialization when it occurs. Naming racialization will not tell us how, when, by whom, and why it occurs, but that is simply because there are no universal answers to these questions, not because the concept is somehow faulty.

The Relationship Between Racialization and Racism

The second of Uyan’s major criticisms regards the relationship between racialization and racism. Uyan charges me with what Karen Fields and Fields call the “race-racism evasion” (2012, 95). They explain that this evasion occurs when there is a slippage between “*racism*, something an aggressor *does*, into *race*, something that the target *is*” (2012, 17). Fields and Fields offer a useful example. “Consider the statement ‘black Southerners were segregated because of their skin color’—a perfectly natural sentence to the ears of most Americans, who tend to overlook its weird causality” (2012, 17). Of course, Black Southerners were segregated because of anti-Black racism on the part of Whites, *not* because of their skin color.

Uyan claims that the race-racism evasion is “is highly operative in Hochman’s definition” (2021). However, she does not provide any direct evidence for this charge. Rather, she focuses on the fact that I avoid any categorical claim about whether racialization is inherently racist. Uyan notes that my “theory of racialization”—actually my *definition* of racialization—“has ‘no mention of racial hierarchy’” because I believe that the “outcome of racialization ‘is complex’” and “not necessarily racist” (Uyan 2021). She continues, “What is puzzling in this elaboration is Hochman’s theorization of race as a category without necessary connection to racism” (Uyan 2021).

Distinguishing racialization from racism *conceptually* is different from the race/racism evasion. Of course, nothing is stopping someone from using the racialization concept and committing the race/racism evasion. For instance, someone might say something misguided like “they were attacked because of how they are racialized,” which is similar to saying that “they were attacked because of their dark skin.” However, I do not say anything like this, and my definition does not encourage this evasion of racism.

Indeed, I have been a vocal critic of the race/racism evasion. For instance, I’ve argued elsewhere against the use of “race” as a euphemism for “racism” (Hochman 2020). There is no “race-based violence,” on my view, only racist violence. There are no “racial attacks,” only racist attacks. In fact, I believe that when Uyan claims that “race... must be analyzed as a technology of social control and a category that developed out of the constraints and imperatives of specific social relations” she is evading racism (Uyan 2021). Racism, not “race,” is a technology of social control. We should, I believe, name racism instead of euphemistically referring to “race.”

The race/racism evasion charge fails, but underlying it is a worry or confusion about the relationship between racialization and racism (see also Goldberg 2005; Rattansi 2005). Here is how I see the relationship. If racialization is the process or processes through which groups come to be understood as biological races, and biological races can be understood in a non-hierarchical manner, then non-racist racialization is possible. This is the kind of racialization biological race realists such as Hardimon and Spencer perform, for example. Brett St Louis puts it plainly: “while all racism is predicated on the understanding of difference, not all understandings of difference lead to racism” (2002, 662).

One might disagree with this, but Uyan says she finds it “puzzling.” It is unclear why. One hint is found when she describes “the mechanism through which race is *imposed* on someone (racism)...” (Uyan 2021). In this sentence, Uyan defines racism as if it were the racialization process itself, as though the process of racially classifying someone *constitutes* racism. I find this definition of racism unhelpful. Racism is a form of prejudice and discrimination; it is not merely racial classification. To identify racism with the racialization process itself is to take the moral force out of racism. Surely many people racialize because they are taught to, and not out of prejudice. But if one *were* to define racism in this way, it *would* be puzzling to then divorce racialization from racism, since they would be more or less the same thing.

Uyan believes that there is “a very fundamental disjuncture in Hochman’s articulation of the racialization concept from other theorists of race: for him, racialization can happen without racism; or, racism does not necessarily produce race; or, since Hochman does not make the order of causation clear,

it is very possible that one could understand his theory [*read*: definition] here to suggest that *racialization causes racism*, rather than *racism causes racialization*” (Uyan 2021). To clarify, I believe the causality goes both ways. Racialization can cause racism, just as racism can cause racialization. Notice the conditionals. Uyan is after definitive claims, but none can be made.

Racialization often causes racism. Much racialization has a hierarchical component, and so is directly racist. It directly causes racism. What about the other way around: can racism cause racialization? On my understanding of racism, racialization is *required* for racism to occur.¹ If racialization is a prerequisite for racism, then it would seem as though racism cannot cause, but must always follow, racialization. That is not to suggest that racialization is not motivated by prejudice, but that before racialization occurs, that prejudice is not properly understood as racism (for instance, it could initially be ethnisism, colorism, nationalism, or religious discrimination, before it turns into racism as racialization is performed). Nevertheless, there is a sense in which racism does cause racialization. Racist individuals and institutions *spread* racialization. They spread the message, through their racist actions, that certain groups and individuals belong to certain “races.”

So, racialization can cause racism and racism can cause racialization. However, they do not always do these things. Above I cited work by Hardimon and Spencer. Their work is racializing, according to my definition, because it spreads the belief in the existence of human biological races. However, their work is anti-racist. The same applies to much work in biomedicine, which is racializing—spreading belief in the existence of human biological races—but anti-racist (Msimang 2020). Racialization does not always cause racism.

Similarly, racism does not always cause racialization. Lawrence Blum makes a distinction that will help me to explain this point. He differentiates between fully and partially racialized groups. A partially racialized group is partly or only sometimes understood to constitute a race. Think, for example, of Muslims (Selod and Embrick 2013) and Latinos (Blum 2002, 152; cf. Chávez-Moreno Forthcoming). Racism against these groups can cause racialization—it can further racialize them. However, once a

group is fully racialized, racism cannot racialize them any further (although it may play a role in maintaining their racialization). As such, racism does not always cause racialization.

Given that racialization does not always cause racism, and racism does not always cause racialization, racism plays no proper role in a definition of racialization. Note that rejecting the claim that all racialization is racist is different from *sanitizing* racialization. As I explained in the article Uyan critiques, racialization has, historically, gone hand-in-hand with racism, even if some racialization is not racist or is even anti-racist (Hochman 2019c).

Is Racialization Natural or Predictable?

Uyan’s next criticism of my work is that I naturalize “race” and racialization. “Without locating an agent instigating a racialized condition,” she contends, “Hochman’s conceptualization understands group formation process as a natural...phenomenon, rather than phenomena generated and re-created within particular social context and history” (Uyan 2021). She argues that my work ultimately “disseminates, if only implicitly, an ideology about the biological realism of race” which is “harmful for the anti-realist agenda” (Uyan 2021). Worse still, she argues that I “unknowingly co-sign racist American logics of the past, regurgitating their tenants [sic] without subjecting them to critical inquiry” (Uyan 2021). Yuck.

This interpretation came as a surprise to me, given that—drawing on my training in the philosophy of biology—I have published extensively on the failings of race as a biological category and the fallacies of racist logics (Hochman 2013c, 2013a, 2014, 2016, 2019b, 2020). Notice that Uyan writes that my “conceptualization understands group formation process” as natural, rather than that I *myself* conceptualize racialization as natural. She knows that I do not (I even have a paper critiquing naturalistic accounts of racialization and racism—see Hochman 2013b). Rather, she believes that a naturalistic understanding of racialization is a logical consequence of my work. As evidence, Uyan draws on a different paper of mine, in which I propose a new framework for understanding racialization: *interactive constructionism*. Before returning to Uyan’s critique, I will need to briefly describe this framework.

Interactive constructionism offers an alternative to the dichotomous (biological vs social) approaches to “race.” It also offers an alternative to racial realism, because it is ‘interactive constructionism about racialized groups’—not “races.” There are a wide range of factors that are involved in racialization, including (but not limited to) biological and social factors. Race may fail as a biological category, but it is undeniable that a person’s biological characteristics (skin color, hair texture, eye shape, etc.) play a role in how they are racialized (by other agents). This is possible because racialization practices pick up on some patterns of human biological variation even though, as I argue, “race” is an overall poor and misleading guide to that variation. And, of course, social factors influence racialization, even though racialized groups are not a social kind in the sense of being distinguishable from other sorts of groups by a set of social properties (Hochman 2017, 2019c, 2020).

The factors involved in racialization include, but are not limited to, the following: administrative, biological, cultural, economic, geographic, gendered, historical, lingual, phenomenological, political, psychological, religious, and social (Hochman 2017). A racialized group is a group misunderstood to be a biological race, but factors such as these are involved in determining whether and how racialization operates (see also Ludwig 2019). Each factor interacts with the others and plays more or less important roles depending on the context.

In devising interactive constructionism, I drew inspiration from developmental systems theory (DST)—a biological framework for understanding development, inheritance, and evolution (Griffiths and Hochman 2015; Oyama 2000). The name ‘interactive constructionism’ comes from DST. In that literature *constructive interactionism* refers to the epigenetic processes by which a wide range of developmental resources interact to construct the phenotype. That overlapped with my point about the variety of interactants involved in racialization. Moreover, developmental systems theorists are skeptical of dichotomous thinking (e.g., nature vs. nurture), and I was arguing against dichotomous biological kind vs social kind accounts of “race”—another way in which DST inspired my framework.

Uyan finds the connection I draw between my framework and DST problematic. She writes that “carrying a theory from biology into sociology presents a troubling teleology of social life: the

‘racialization of groups’ becomes analogous to the ‘development of cells,’ classifying racialization as if it is a biological condition of human development” (Uyan 2021). There are two problems with this response: it mischaracterizes how I draw on DST, and it belies a misunderstanding of DST.

Drawing inspiration from DST in the creation of my own framework and offering a DST explanation of racialization are very different things. I only did the former. From DST, I drew on the constructive interactionism idea and the rejection of dichotomous thinking. I was not seeking to offer a DST explanation of racialization. Such an approach would fail miserably. As I wrote above, DST is a framework for understanding development, inheritance, and evolution. Racialization is far outside of its explanatory scope. I never argued that racialization is analogous to the “development of cells” and so is a “biological condition of human development,” and this is not implied by my work.

Even if I were to draw more heavily on DST, it would not support the conclusion Uyan wants to draw: that a DST explanation of racialization would be deterministic and naturalize the phenomenon. As Susan Oyama explains, from a DST perspective:

There is no central organizer, no repository of goals or instructions, no prime mover. In DST “nature” is not a phantom reality standing behind the phenotype: the phenotype in its surround is all the nature there is, and this is plenty. It is always a nurtured nature—that is, a changing organism located in time and space: in short, in a world. (Oyama 2000, 341)

From a DST perspective, development is not predetermined, and the nature/nurture dichotomy is untenable—all nature is nurtured. As such, even if I were to offer a DST explanation of racialization, the consequences would be different from those Uyan imagines. DST—more than any other approach in biology—emphasizes contingency in development and evolution. A change in one part of the developmental system (sometimes a surprising part) can have profound consequences. Developmental outcomes cannot be taken for granted. DST is a modern form of *epigenesis*, not *preformationism* (Griffiths and Hochman 2015). Uyan misunderstands DST and how I draw on it, and in doing so mischaracterizes my understanding of racialization.

Racialized Groups Without Groupism

‘Racialized group’ is racialization’s companion concept. Uyan critiques my use of this concept, arguing that, “The term ‘racialized group’ is only analytically meaningful if one investigates under what historical and social conditions groupness is formed, and how this groupness maintains its boundedness across time” (Uyan 2021). I disagree with this claim. When correctly applied, the concept tells us that a group is being misinterpreted as a biological race. It *is* analytically meaningful, even if the amount of information the concept can convey is extremely limited. This should be expected though. It is just a concept. The real work, as Uyan herself suggests in the quote above, is down to the investigator.

Uyan focuses on what she sees as “analytical confluences of groupness and category” in discussions of racialized groups. The fact that there is a racialized *category* does not indicate that there is a *homogenous group* attached to that label. I agree with this. While Uyan does not use the term *groupism*, that is how this problem is usually described. Rogers Brubaker describes groupism as “the tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis” (2002, 164).

Uyan’s article is written as a reply to my defense of the racialization concept, but when she turns her focus to groupism she switches her attention to a fellow philosopher whose work I admire, Lawrence Blum. Uyan argues that Blum’s (2010) understanding of the racialized group is groupist. I will not evaluate this charge, because my aim in this paper is to defend my definition of racialization, not Blum’s. Uyan interprets Blum’s work as relevant due to my “direct reliance and citation of [his] conceptualization” of ‘racialized group’ (Uyan 2021). To be clear, I see myself as developing Blum’s work on the topic, not as endorsing it in its entirety.

It is unclear why Uyan discusses Blum but not my own work dealing with this subject. I respond directly to the worry about groupism in the paper Uyan targets (Hochman 2019c, 1258). I argue that the category of the racialized group does not lend itself to groupist thinking and that it actually serves as a bulwark against groupism. This can be seen when we consider the fact that while a “race” is something one supposedly *has*, “racialization is something that is *done to* a group, *by* some social agent, *at* a certain

time, *for* a given period, *in* and *through* various processes, and *relative to* a particular social context” (Garcia 2003, 285). Given that racialization falsely biologizes large populations—which will often not have some pre-existing groupness—it is reasonable to assume that those groups are internally diverse in many respects. My definition of ‘racialized group’ only requires one commonality between members of racialized groups: that they are racialized the same way. That is not to suggest that there are no further commonalities—there often are—but my definition does not assume them.

One might argue that it is groupist to use the term ‘racialized group’ without first checking for high entitativity, group cohesion, or groupness. I think that this would be a mistake. The concept of the group can be understood minimally. When we use this term in ordinary speech, we often talk of groups this way. For instance, we might refer to a *group* of people when the only known aspect of their groupness is their collective physical proximity. If I mention “that group of people over there” and you respond by saying “they are not really a group, they are really different sorts of people,” then you have misunderstood the meaning of the term group, falsely assuming it implies high entitativity.

Uyan might reply by saying that this is a demonstration of how the term ‘group’ functions as a category of practice, but that does not imply that it is a useful category of analysis. This would be a good response, but I do think a minimalist account of the group concept is analytically useful. The concept of the group, and in particular the racialized group, plays an important role in conceptual space. When Uyan writes of “analytical conflation of groupness and category,” I interpret her as suggesting that we should call racialized groups *racialized categories* instead. However, this would be misleading. Black, White, Asian, etc. are indeed racialized categories. However, *Black people*, *White people*, *Asian people*, etc. do not form categories, any more than a group of people standing in close proximity of each other form a category. Rather, they form groups, minimal as they may be in their groupness.

If we put the charge of groupism against Blum to one side and look at my definition, there is nothing to suggest groupism, unless the mere use of the term group is groupist—but I’ve already warned against such an assumption. Groupism is a problem, but I do not believe that the solution is to stop talking about groups, any more than sexism is solved by not talking about sex. Groupism is, in my view, a

misunderstanding of the metaphysics of groups. As such, we should try to be clear about what we can infer when we are talking about groups, rather than avoid using the term.

Identifying the Origins of Racialization

The last of Uyan’s major criticisms of my definition of racialization is that it cannot help us to identify the origins of racialization. I have already responded to Uyan’s argument that, “The most recent definition of the concept cannot, and does not try to, account for a mechanism for the process of racialization” (Uyan 2021). I mention this again because she argues that, “Such an accounting is a necessary component of any conceptualization that aims to help identify the origins of racialization” (Uyan 2021).

Just as Uyan argues that my definition of racialized group is groupist without considering my argument for why it isn’t, she argues that my definition of racialization cannot help us to identify the origins of racialization without discussing my own attempt to identify those origins. Guided by my definition of racialization, I argue that the first instance of the phenomenon occurred in fifteenth-century Spain (Hochman 2019c, 1549). This took place, I argue, with the racialization of the Jews and the Moors by the old Christians (who started calling themselves “natural Christians”). I discuss this briefly in the paper Uyan responds to, and in more detail in *Is “Race” Modern? Disambiguating the Question*, which is published in this journal (Hochman 2019a).

Uyan claims that it is necessary for a definition of racialization to “account for a mechanism for the process of racialization” in order to help us identify the origins of racialization. However, the assumptions (a) that there is a single mechanism of racialization and (b) that one would be necessary to help us locate the origins of racialization, are both mistaken. All that is needed is a good definition of racialization and a good knowledge of history.

Recall that I define the racialization of groups as *the process or processes through which a group is understood to be a major biological entity and human lineage, formed due to reproductive isolation, in which membership is transmitted through biological descent*. As David Nirenberg (2009) explains,

...words like *raza*...were already embedded in identifiably biological ideas about animal breeding and reproduction in the first half of the fifteenth century...the sudden and explicit application of this vocabulary to Jews coincides chronologically (the 1430s) with the appearance of an anti-converso ideology...which sought to establish new religious categories and discriminations, and legitimate these by naturalizing their reproduction (2009, 252).

It appears that this is the first time in history that a group was racialized in the sense I define above.

Some scholars locate racialization earlier. For instance, Geraldine Heng focuses on thirteenth-century England and writes that:

In England...the Jewish badge, expulsion order, legislative enforcements, surveillance and segregation, ritualized iterations of homicidal fables, and the legal execution of Jews are constitutive acts in the consolidation of a community of Christian English—otherwise internally fragmented and ranged along numerous divides—against a minority population *that has, on these historical occasions and through these institutions and practices, entered into race* (2018, 31).

What Heng shows is that some of the mechanisms of racialization were established before racialization first occurred. However, using my definition, she does not show that racialization was practiced in thirteenth-century England. Jewishness was biologized during this period (consider of the myth of Jewish male menstruation). However, Jewishness was not biologized as *racial* during this period (“Jewish male menstruation” was “curable” through conversion).

This example suggests that focusing on the *mechanisms* of racialization, as Uyan recommends, can actually lead us astray if we are trying to determine the origins of racialization. The Jewish badge (the yellow star) identified Jews in both thirteenth-century England and fifteenth-century Spain. However, it was only a mechanism of *racialization* in fifteenth-century Spain, where it was interpreted as indicating Jewish *raza*. In other words, the same mechanism operated as an instrument of (unracialized) anti-Jewish prejudice in thirteenth-century England and (racialized) anti-Semitism in fifteenth-century Spain.

Overlooking my account of the origins of racialization, Uyan claims that any attempt to engage with the history of racialization on my part would be limited by my “implicit acceptance of a certain folk wisdom derived from a particular and unique American history” (Uyan 2021). I am not sure how she arrives at this conclusion. I argue that the race concept first developed in late Medieval Spain and was turned into a scientific category in Germany in the late eighteenth century. America does not play any explicit or (as far as I can tell) implicit role in my definitions of ‘race’ and ‘racialization.’ As such, it is unclear to me why Uyan believes that my “definition unknowingly cosigns a uniquely American logic of racism, a logic that requires a biologically essentialized understanding of race” (Uyan 2021). I do not see what, specifically, is supposed to make my definition *American, racist* (I think that for it to cosign racist logic it would have to be racist), or *essentialist*.

Let me go through these claims, one by one. First, I argue that the category of race is European in origin, not American. Second, I argue that racist claims are empirically untenable and morally reprehensible. And third, I argue that essentialism is not “essential” to the concept of race (early scientific race theory was predominantly *typological* rather than essentialist, and current scientific race theory is predominantly *statistical* rather than essentialist). I do argue that we should understand ‘race’ as a biological category, *but one which fails to refer*, so it is hard to see how I am “cosigning” *any* version of racial realism, let alone a racist version.

Uyan worries that “race, as theorized in the latest definition of racialization, lies outside of the *racist* interests of the planter class in the case of the U.S.” (Uyan 2021). However, racialization *does* initially lie outside of these interests. ‘Race’ is a European import to the Americas. The concept of race itself is not originally or inherently tied to these interests. Indeed, in Australia—where I live—racist logics have historically operated very differently. It was a part of the White Australia policy to “breed out” Aboriginality (Carlson 2016). This racist logic is starkly at odds with the racist logic of the one-drop rule.

Uyan claims that, “Only within the exploitative arrangements of chattel slavery and in conditions where property ownership over another human being were legal did the ‘value’ of an inheritable ancestry take

on social meaning” (Uyan 2021). This is untrue. There have been meaningful heritable identities throughout recorded history, long before racialization first occurred. But even if we focus on racialization, its “value” preceded the trans-Atlantic slave trade—think again of inquisitorial Spain and the racialization of the Jews and the Moors. It may be Uyan, not me, who overemphasizes the Americas in the origins of racialization.

Rather than limiting our ability to explore the history of racialization, or reproducing American racist logics, my definition of racialization can help us to identify the origins of racialization and to explore its manifestations in a range of contexts, all while maintaining critical distance from those logics.

Conclusion

I hope to have shown that my definition of racialization survives Uyan’s critique, and I thank her again for the chance to defend and clarify my views. The main reason that her critique is unsuccessful is that she treats my *definition* of racialization as if it were a *theory* of racialization. In her conclusion, however, she steps back and wonders “whether racialization is valuable for its theoretical, and thus explanatory power, or whether it is useful on the level of a descriptive concept—something that can help broadly understand, but that cannot posit fundamental causes for, a social phenomenon” (Uyan 2021). I can answer this question: racialization is a descriptive concept, not a theory.

Correct application of the racialization concept tells us one thing for sure: that a group is being understood to be a biological race. Uyan seems to want a theory of racialization—something with real explanatory power. Interestingly, she wants a theory of racialization for the very reason I am skeptical about the possibility of any such thing. She wants engagement “with the actual mechanisms that instigate either forcible conscription or self-identification into racial categories” and “the historical specificities of racism” (Uyan 2021). I want these things too, but racialization is so complex—so varied in the motivations that drive it and the outcomes that it produces—that I doubt there could be any decent general theory of racialization. That’s not to deny the possibility or desirability of theories of *particular* instances of racialization: theories about why racialization occurs or occurred in any given historical context. Yet the desire for a general theory of racialization—a theory that tells us who is doing the

racializing, why they are doing it, how they are doing it, and whether or not it is racist to do it—should be relinquished, given what we already know about racialization.

Uyan refers to me as a “scholar,” rather than a philosopher, but disciplinarity is important with regards to the current debate. When Uyan does mention philosophy, she claims that while my approach to racialization might be useful to philosophers, it is not useful “for sociologists carrying the burden of explanation” because ‘racialization’ and ‘racialized group’ are “descriptions that can help schematically categorize, but that alone do not and cannot explain causality” (Uyan 2021).

Unlike Uyan, I do not see philosophy as somehow at odds with sociology. Sociologists, and not only philosophers, want “descriptions that can help schematically categorize.” They are not only interested in causally explaining particular events, but also in how such events fit into general patterns. This can only be done by schematically categorizing the world. And sociologists, like philosophers, are presented with a range of options. Should we think in terms of “race,” for instance, or in terms of racialization and racialized groups?

Descriptions, and not only explanations, matter. Clearly, sociologists of race do not want to misdescribe the world. I argue that race fails as an analytic category, whether race is defined biologically, as a social kind, or as a technology, as Uyan recommends. If my arguments are good, then ‘race’ is a misdescription, and one that carries great risks. We should abandon race as an analytic category and think in terms of racialization and racialized groups. These concepts do not meet Uyan’s desiderata of having great explanatory power: their proper application will not tell us who is racializing, why they are, and how they are doing this. Rather, these concepts are valuable because they avoid the implication that race is real, while offering a language with which to describe the wide-ranging effects of false belief in race.

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¹ That is, racism is distinguished from other forms of discrimination and prejudice by the fact that its victims are racialized, rather than by any set of wrongs that constitute racism. This approach seems necessary in order to distinguish racism from other phenomena such as ethicism and religious discrimination/persecution, because the mistreatment of racialized groups overlaps significantly with the mistreatment of other groups.