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Standing up for yourself (and others):
other-regarding aspects of the duty of self-respect

1. Introduction

In 'Ticket to the Fair,'[1] David Foster Wallace recounts a visit to the Illinois State Fair. He is accompanied by a local female friend, whom he dubs 'Native Companion' in this anthropological foray into the Midwest. Much of the essay is devoted to describing various activities at the fair (there is an extended meditation on the swine barn and a distressed squealing pig, which later becomes relevant). At one point, the essay turns to Native Companion's desire to ride the Zipper, 'a kind of Ferris wheel on amphetamines,' where individually caged cars can spin on their own axes as they go around. Native Companion is strapped in and the ride begins: she is screaming as she 'tumbles like stuff in a clothes dryer' (although this is not like the swine squeal). When her car reaches the top, however, the operator stops the ride: Native Companion is hanging upside down and left there while the male carnies look up her dress. They move the Zipper back and forth rapidly so that her car continues to spin around on its axes, while she screams (as though she is being 'slow-roasted'). When she eventually comes down again, however, Wallace is stunned to see that she is exhilarated by the ride, chatty with the carnies, and laughs off a comment laden with sexual innuendo ('Oh *you!*'). When Wallace asks her whether she sensed "something kind of sexual-harassmentish going on," she responds "So if I noticed or didn't, why does it have to be *my* deal? What, because there's assholes in the world, I don't get to ride the Zipper?"

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[1] David Foster Wallace, 'Ticket to the Fair,' *Harper's Magazine* (July 1994). Available at: https://harpers.org/wp-content/uploads/HarpersMagazine-1994-07-0001729.pdf.

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Carol Hay explores this anecdote in her work on victims' duties of self-respect and the duty to resist their oppression.[2] Hay asks whether, by not confronting the carnies, Native Companion lets herself down. Hay argues that sexual harassment expresses and entrenches oppressive norms, which undermine the autonomy of victims; insofar as properly self-respecting persons should value and seek to protect their self-respect, then victims have a *pro tanto* duty to resist these norms, including by confronting harassers. This duty is limited, of course, and can be defeated, for example by considerations of costs, and it does not minimise or displace the obligations on others, for example, men, to also oppose sexual harassment. In the context of sexual harassment, however, Hay argues the nature and distribution of duties differs: women owe a duty to themselves to confront sexual harassment; men owe a duty to women.[3]

Native Companion joins a pantheon of italicised individuals whose conduct has occasioned an inquiry into self-respect: *Deferential Wife*, *Uncle Tom*, *Self-Deprecator*,[4] *Shreya*, and *Chloe*[5], to name a few. *Deferential Wife* fails to form her own preferences and projects, instead fully taking on her husband's as her own; *Uncle Tom* is obsequious to white people, offering no complaint or seeing anything amiss when he is unfairly treated, saving his ire instead for other Black people; *Self-Deprecator* is so filled with shame at his various shortcomings that he tolerates other's mistreatment, even when this mistreatment has no connection to any of his shortcomings; *Shreya* is a racialized female

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[2] *See* Carol Hay, *Kantianism, Liberalism, and Feminism* (Palgrave MacMillan 2013) and 'Whether to Ignore them and Spin: Moral Obligations to Resist Sexual Harassment,' *Hypatia* (2005) 20(4): 94–108.
[3] Hay, 'Whether to Ignore,' at 105-106. In case you are wondering whether Wallace confronted the carnies, he tells us that when Native Companion first commences on the ride, "[his] neurological makeup (extremely sensitive: carsick, airsick, heightsick) makes just watching this an act of great personal courage;" that once she is stuck at the top, "[he] summon[s] the saliva to step in and really say something stern," but by this time she is on her way down, and that when the carnies are laughing, he clears his throat twice. This might not pass muster. *See, e.g.*, T.E. Hill, Jr, 'Moral Responsibilities of Bystanders,' *Journal of Social Philosophy* (2010) 41(1): 28-39.
[4] *See* T.E. Hill, Jr., "Servility and Self-respect," *The Monist* (1973) 57(1): 87-104.
[5] *See* S. Khader, 'Self-Respect under Conditions of Oppression,' in *Respect: Philosophical Essays*. Edited by Richard Dean and Oliver Sensen, Oxford University Press (2021): 232-251.

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attorney who is given various 'housekeeping' tasks in the firm and expected to provide emotional labour without recognition or recompense; *Chloe* acquiesces to sex with her husband even when she does not want to in order to avoid conflict. These examples are used to explore what self-respect requires, and much of the discussion turns on whether or not the conduct under scrutiny necessarily reflects a failure of self-respect, and if it does, whether it might be justified or excused.

I am interested in some of the other (imaginary but plausible) characters in these stories, who for the most part remain off-stage: [6] *Deferential Wife's* children, especially her daughter; *Shreya's* female and racialized colleagues; *Uncle Tom's* Black neighbours. When someone lets herself down, does she also let others down? And do these others have the standing to call her to account? As a matter of everyday practice, we judge people to have let themselves down and we hold them to account, expressing disappointment, resentment, perhaps even shame. This extends not only to our intimates, but to strangers who belong to our racial group, our nation, or our religious community. There is widespread scepticism amongst philosophers, however, that there exist self-directed duties—scepticism that arises in large part because such duties lack accountability mechanisms, leaving the duty-bearer to waive a self-directed duty at will.

In this paper, I explore the other-regarding aspects of duties of self-respect. I argue that others can be implicated in an individual's self-respect such that they have the standing to hold her to account. At least in some cases, then, self-directed duties can be other-regarding so as to ground interpersonal accountability. I begin with the context of

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[6] Where others in the story are considered—the harassing carnies, the entitled husband, the unthinkingly exploitative colleagues—it is usually to acknowledge that perpetrators or beneficiaries also have duties and that their duties may well be more onerous.

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oppression—the routinised subordination of some groups and the privileging of others[7]

—for a few reasons. First, I take this context to the be the default condition of political life, and so a fitting point of departure. In doing so, I follow theorists, such as Judith Shklar and Charles Mills, who distinguish standard contexts from ideal contexts.[8] Victims of oppression are not a special case but might better be recognised as a norm. Second, self-respect is especially salient in this context. Oppression militates against respect for victims, and against victims' respect for themselves. That victims of oppression come to see themselves as stupid, ugly, over-emotional, and unreliable is not merely incidental to oppression but integral to it: oppression operates more efficiently when victims are servile rather than self-respecting. Unsurprisingly, self-respect often is invoked in discussions of how to respond to oppression. Self-respect features in anti-colonial movements, with self-respect understood as a necessary precursor to the capacity for self-rule.[9] Fostering self-respect was urged by some Black political thinkers as a way to command respect from others.[10] And contemporary political philosophers have grounded a duty to resist oppression in victims' duties of self-respect.[11]

Attributing duties of self-respect to victims of oppression raises a few concerns. Some of these concerns arise from the focus on victims. Victims of oppression may lack the agential capacities for self-respect and therefore not be subject to duties of self-respect; even when they are subject to such duties, the costs of performance may be excessive;

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[7] Oppression can be overt, when it is enshrined in law and policy (e.g. apartheid South Africa) or structural, when it persists through social and cultural norms, attitudes, and the legacy of past laws and policies. *See* I.M. Young, 'Responsibility and Global Justice: a Social Connection Model,' *Journal of Social Philosophy* (2006), 23, 102-130.

[8] J. Shklar, *The Faces of Injustice* (Yale 1990) and C Mills, '"Ideal Theory" as Ideology' *Hypatia* (2005) 20(3):165-183. Not only does this conflation obscure particular topics or agents from normative scrutiny, but it can also be obfuscatory, concealing the extent to which the non-ideal is standard.

[9] *See, e.g.*, K.R. Manoharan, 'In the path of Ambedkar: Periyar and the Dalit question,' *South Asian History and Culture* (2020): 11:2: 136-149 (on Periyar's Self-Respect Movement).

[10] *See, e.g.*, T. Shelby, 'Two Conceptions of Black Nationalism: Martin Delany on the Meaning of Black Political Solidarity,' *Political Theory* 31(5) (2003): 664-692.

[11] Hay, *Kantianism.*

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v.1.0 *as of* 24.08.2023

and in any event, focusing on victims' duties may devolve into 'victim-blaming' or succumbs to 'respectability politics.' Surely, it is better to dwell on the beneficiaries and perpetrators of oppression.[12] Another set of concerns question the very existence of duties of self-respect. That we can owe things, such as self-respect, to ourselves widely is accepted in everyday morality—as Joseph Raz notes, this has a 'sort of obviousness'[13] to it. Other than as a Kantian anomaly, however, duties of self-respect generally are regarded with scepticism by philosophers: because the duty is not owed to any other agent, the bearer of the duty can unilaterally waive or define performance. Defenders of self-directed duties have responded to this concern by denying the importance of waivability or denying the extent to which self-directed duties are waivable. These various defences largely concede, however, that self-directed duties cannot ground interpersonal accountability.

In this paper, I question that concession. By exploring the other-regarding aspects of duties of self-respect, I have two aims. The first is to provide a more complex account of self-respect that elaborates on its interpersonal and collective features, especially in non-ideal circumstances; the second is to show that other-regarding duties can ground interpersonal accountability and to thereby help make sense of the ordinary moral practices of holding someone to account when she has let herself down.

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[12] I address these concerns elsewhere. In brief, insofar as victims of oppression remain moral agents, then they remain subject to moral requirements. Addressing these duties might seem to distract from the more urgent business of perpetrators' and beneficiaries' duties. Focusing on the latter, however, fails to adequately recognise the fact that it is victims' moral and political agency that is essential to resistance efforts, and recreates the unfortunate assumption that victims are moral patients rather than agents. Indeed, insofar as such a focus is action-guiding, it can be counterproductive: resistance efforts led by non-victims may be misguided or inadequate. Attributing duties to victims does not let others off the hook; it simply does not focus on these others as the sole or most important agents. *See, e.g.,* A. Vasanthakumar, Epistemic Privilege and Victims' Duties to Resist their Oppression,' *Journal of Applied Philosophy* (2018) 35(3): 465-480 and 'Recent Debates on Victims' Duties to Resist their Oppression,' *Philosophy Compass* (2020) 15(2): 1-8.

[13] J. Raz, 'Liberating Duties,' *Law & Philosophy* 8(1989): 3-21, 16.

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2. Self-Respect

I define self-respect as a *robust appreciation of one's worth*, which encompasses the two kinds of self-respect commonly identified in the literature: recognition self-respect and appraisal self-respect.[14] Recognition self-respect focuses on whether an individual appreciates her moral status relative to others and the treatment to which she is therefore entitled; appraisal self-respect turns on whether an individual meets standards of conduct and character, going beyond her moral duties, that she has come to endorse. Recognition self-respect means that an individual appreciates her intrinsic worth; appraisal self-respect means that she appreciates that she is the 'kind of person' she would like to be.

An individual's appreciation of her self-worth must be *robust* in that it can endure some adversity. Self-respect should not collapse at the first failure or insult.[15] Indeed, we might think that such fragility is an indicator of someone whose apparent self-confidence is not undergirded by self-respect. Robustness does not mean that a self-respecting individual is impervious to others—on the contrary, I argue that self-respect an only be fostered with others—but only that her self-respect does not falter at the first sign of adversity or insult.

Second, one's worthiness is an objective matter: an appreciation of one's *worth* constitutes self-respect only when that appreciation is not based on mistaken beliefs. When an individual's appreciation of her worth is based on morally irrelevant or morally objectionable factors, her appreciation is based on mistaken moral beliefs. Or these mistaken beliefs may arise from distorted judgment, for example, through self-deception

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[14] These are two distinct kinds rather than competing conceptions of self-respect. *See* Stephen Darwall, 'Two Kinds of Respect,' *Ethics* 88(1) (1977): 36-49 and C. Schemmel, 'Real Self-Respect and its Social Bases,' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* (2019) 49(5): 628-651.

[15] Schemmel, 'Real self-respect.'

A. Vasanthakumar (ashwini.vasanthakumar@queensu.ca)
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v.1.0 *as of* 24.08.2023

or arrogance. Self-respect requires a clear-eyed view of oneself and one's place in the world, including one's flaws and failings.[16] The smug philosopher who over-estimates his talents, the devoted servant proud of her grovelling self-abnegation—such individuals may have a number of positive self-regarding attitudes, such as self-esteem and self-confidence, but they will lack self-respect.[17]

Finally, *appreciating* one's worth requires more than holding a secure conviction that one has worth; it is to feel one's worth: to experience one's worth and "feel[] the truth of what is experienced."[18] Self-respect often is treated as purely cognitive, with emotions acting merely as indicators of self-respect. Properly self-respecting individuals feel indignant when they are slighted, and shame when they fail to meet the standards they set themselves, but these emotions only provide evidence that they properly recognise their worth. Emotions, however, are *constitutive* of self-respect. Robin Dillon argues against conceiving of self-respect as purely cognitive. She argues that undergirding recognition and appraisal self-respect is *basal self-respect*, a primordial form of self-respect that colours the interpretive lens through which individuals assess their own worth.[19] This experiential, rather than simply cognitive, understanding is essential for an *appreciation* of one's worth. When I appreciate some fact, I do not merely believe that it is true; I am also able to see some of its implications, adopt appropriate affective

[16] J. Didion, 'On self-respect', *Vogue* (1961).
[17] I therefore reject a purely subjective account of self-respect. *See* Stephen J. Massey, "Is Self-respect a Moral or a Psychological Concept?" *Ethics* 93 (2) (1983): 246-261. This might suggest that recognition self-respect is prior to appraisal self-respect. It also might seem to place too great a constraint on the 'kinds of person' self-respecting individuals can aspire to be. Following Jean Hampton, I think there is an important distinction between selflessness and a loss of self; only the latter is incompatible with self-respect. *See* J. Hampton, 'Selflessness and the Loss of Self,' *Social Philosophy & Policy* (1993) 10(1): 135-165.
[18] R.S. Dillon, "Self-Respect: Moral, Emotional, Political," *Ethics* 107(2) (January 1997): 226-249, 239.
[19] Although Dillon labels this as a third type of self-respect, because it is essential to both recognition and appraisal self-respect as I understand it, I incorporate it into my general definition of self-respect.

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v.1.0 *as of* 24.08.2023

attitudes[20], and orient myself around this fact. Self-respect is not only a propositional belief that one holds about one's worth; it is an orientation, a way of being in the world. If self-respect is necessary to leading an autonomous and flourishing life, then only believing *that* one is worthy is not enough; one must believe *in* one's worth.

3. Self-Respect and Social Groups

Our sense of self, and of self-worth, is developed socially: through relationships with intimates, the formal political and economic resources at our disposal, the social groups[21] with which we identify and with which we are identified by others, and the prevailing cultural norms and tropes that structure social interactions and institutional life. Ideally, these different domains work in tandem to furnish the resources for self-respect[22]: political and social institutions provide the material and cultural resources for individual self-respect, providing the background conditions for respectful interpersonal relations. In this ideal context, an individual's self-respect may well be robust against the occasional racial epithet, the sneering colleague, the annoying spouse.

This is less obvious under conditions of oppression. A robust appreciation of one's worth requires epistemic and experiential resources that are withheld from victims of oppression. In the same way that self-respect and a just social order are mutually reinforcing, so too is oppression and a lack of self-respect: one of the pernicious harms of oppression is to diminish and deform victims' self-respect, and through this

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[20] A. Srinivasan, "The Aptness of Anger," *Journal of Political Philosophy* (2018) 26(2): 123-144. A similar distinction is made by A. Margalit, who distinguishes 'knowledge that' from 'knowledge of', where the latter signifies knowledge that arises from firsthand experience. A. Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Harvard 2003).

[21] Social groups include nations, what J. Raz and A. Margalit refer to as 'encompassing groups.' Members' self-respect is one basis for justifying the self-determination of nations. A. Margalit and J. Raz, 'National Self-Determination,' *Journal of Philosophy* (1990) 87(9): 439-461.

[22] Resources is broader than what widely is understood to be included in Rawls' 'social bases of self-respect,' because resources include prevailing norms, tropes, and stereotypes.

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v.1.0 *as of* 24.08.2023

diminished self-respect, to enlist victims in their own oppression. To be clear, victims of oppression are not condemned to have no self-respect or to have damaged self-respect; they are only more vulnerable to such damage.

Victims' vulnerability arises from their membership, affirmed and imputed, in subordinated social groups.[23] Social groups have three components:[24] a *social conception* of the group, wherein some characteristic, for example, race or sex, is associated with being a certain 'kind of person'; *identification* with the social group from at least some of its putative members, whose identification with the group informs their personal identities; and *patterns of treatment* directed towards those who are deemed to be members, regardless of whether or not they identify with the social group. Social groups provide a range of options from which individuals can forge an identity, identifying with some groups and not others and identifying in particular ways that might challenge or comply with dominant social conceptions. Even with a limited range of options, then, individuals have some authorial autonomy. Furthermore, individuals are not limited to extant social groups; they can seek to establish new social groups by pointing to some characteristic as having significance, they can seek access to a social group by establishing that they have the relevant characteristic properly understood, or they can establish coherence between two social identities deemed to be incompatible, for example by challenging the social conceptions associated with each. Individuals therefore retain a considerable degree of authorial prerogative over their identities;[25]

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[23] Although oppression is group-based, its delivery mechanisms can be more diffuse. In *Deferential Housewife*, *Shreya*, and *Chloe*, for example, group-based oppression can shape interpersonal and intimate relations in ways that can powerfully affect identity and self-respect.

[24] K.A. Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton 2005).

[25] The narrative conception of identity still allows for incoherence and after-the-fact affirmation. It does not require the planning agent that Margaret Urban Walker argues is too demanding, especially under conditions of oppression. *See* M.U. Walker, *Moral Understandings: a Feminist Study in Ethics* (Oxford 2007).

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v.1.0 *as of* 24.08.2023

however, understanding identity as dialogical means that they rely on the recognition

of particular others and are correspondingly vulnerable to their misrecognition.[26]

These three components help to illustrate some of the mechanisms by which oppression

can undermine or damage victims' self-respect.[27] When victims identify with a social

group for which a demeaning social conception prevails, their recognition self-respect is

undermined: this demeaning social conception may be expressed formally and enshrined

in law and through political institutions, or it may circulate informally as a 'master

narrative,'[28] generating cultural tropes and stereotypes that structure social interactions

and shared social interpretations. Even when victims do not identify with a social group,

they are still vulnerable to the patterns of treatment directed towards that group: a

demeaning social conception might inform institutional and interpersonal interactions,

in turn undermining victims' recognition self-respect. In addition, by restricting the

options available to victims and hindering their pursuit of these options, negative

patterns of treatment can undermine their appraisal self-respect. Finally, there may be

dissonance between an expressly endorsed social conception and persistent patterns of

treatment. For example, the equal moral worth of a racial minority may be embraced

officially and earnestly by political and legal institutions, but social norms and

institutional practices may express and enact the opposite.[29]

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[26] *See* C. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Harvard 1992) and *Sources of the Self: the Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge 1992).

[27] There are various ways to define and categorize this damage. *See, e.g.*, Carol Hay, *Kantianism, Liberalism, and Feminism* (Palgrave MacMillan 2013) (Hay distinguishes more enduring *damage* to victims' rational capacities from *restrictions* on victims' capacity to exercise these capacities); Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Cornell 2001) (Lindemann Nelson refers to *deprivation of opportunity* and *infiltrated consciousness*); and Ashwini Vasanthakumar, 'Repairing Self-Respect' (referring to *faltering, incoherent,* and *compromised* self-respect).

[28] *See* Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities,* at 6-7. Master narratives are "stories found lying about in our culture that serve as summaries of socially shared understandings. Master narratives are often archetypal, consisting of stock plots and readily recognisable character types, and we use them not only to make sense of our experience but also to justify what we do."

[29] This dissonance leads to what I have called *incoherent self-respect.*

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v.1.0 *as of* 24.08.2023

Two objections might be raised to the account thus far. The first is that it exaggerates the extent to which individuals' self-respect is vulnerable to others. Perhaps stoicism is the appropriate response to a world in which you are treated with contempt, casually dismissed, and denied valuable opportunities and options. Self-respect, after all, is a *robust* appreciation of one's worth: to fail to maintain one's sense of self-worth in the face of unjustified mistreatment and disrespect, the stoic may claim, is only a sign of one's own moral weakness.[30] Like *Native Companion*, we should all just ignore them and spin.[31] Whatever the attractions of the stoic ideal, it is not clear to me that it is a sign of moral weakness for one's sense of self-worth to be vulnerable to *persistent* mistreatment and disrespect, or indeed, given this persistent mistreatment, to be unable to develop a robust sense of one's worth in the first place. Under conditions of oppression, victims do not have secure resources with which to foster a sense of self-worth. Again, this is not to say that victims of oppression necessarily have damaged self-respect, but only that their ability to foster and maintain self-respect is systematically burdened in ways that individual stoicism cannot rebuff, just as no amount of bootstrap-pulling can overcome economic precarity. Even stoicism needs its own resources.[32] Those who deny that they are vulnerable to the mistreatment of others and insist that they can maintain their equanimity in the face of insult or the occasional setback may simply be the beneficiaries of a social order that re-affirms, in word and deed, their worth.

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[30] *See* C. Bird, 'Self-Respect and the Respect of Others,' *European Journal of Philosophy* (2008) 18(1):17-40, 19.

[31] After his exchange with Native Companion, Wallace muses that 'the core value informing a kind of eroto-willed political stoicism on [her] part is [her] prototypically Midwestern appreciation of fun.'

[32] Perhaps I am too quick to dismiss the stoic ideal. My worry is that in the context of oppression, the stoic ideal may act as a weapon that the privileged wield against victims of oppression, blaming victims for their lack of self-respect and treating this lack as evidence that they were not worthy to begin with. And insofar as it encourages victims to ignore, rather than complain about, their mistreatment, it seems oddly convenient to some at the expense of others.

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v.1.0 *as of* 24.08.2023

This brings me to the second objection: that I exaggerate the extent to which there is a master-narrative that produces a dominant social conception capable of determining patterns of treatment. Even where individuals are vulnerable to how others treat them, this treatment is not so uniform or exhaustive as to always undermine their self-respect. Even in contexts of overt oppression (*e.g.* apartheid South Africa, Jim Crow) *dominant* social conceptions and patterns of treatment are not *exhaustive*. Alternative conceptions circulate that can provide a different self-understanding of the group and an alternative account of its subordination. If master-narratives help sustain the conditions of oppression, then 'counter-stories'[33] or 'hidden transcripts'[34] can provide alternative epistemic resources—not only to help victims foster self-respect (or remain stoic in the face of persistent insult), but also to lay the ground for resistance efforts.

I am happy to concede this objection, and think it helpfully illustrates how victims repair damaged self-respect and sustain resistance to oppression.[35] To my mind, though, it only reiterates the importance of social groups and interpersonal relations in fostering and maintaining self-respect. Alternative conceptions do not come out of nowhere. They are sustained by *alternative communities*, which can be found or chosen.[36] Found communities are those into which individuals are born and raised, such as families, religious groups, social groups, nations and neighbourhoods, and chosen communities are those that individuals seek out or create, such as political and civil society groups, friendship groups, trade unions and workplace associations, and families.[37]

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[33] Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged*, 150-88.

[34] *See* J.C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Yale 1990).

[35] Vasanthakumar, 'Repairing Self-Respect'.

[36] M. Friedman cited in Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged*, at 9-11.

[37] The distinction between found and chosen communities is not a hard and fast one. Chosen communities can be created within found communities, for example when residents of a neighbourhood, employees at a workplace, or members of a racial group create a smaller group—a reading group, a group of parents carpooling to do the daily school run, an organising committee for an annual event. A chosen community might replace its found equivalent: an individual might change

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Conference in Honour of J. Raz
v.1.0 *as of* 24.08.2023

Found and chosen communities can both aid in repairing self-respect and countering oppressive norms. Victims' oppression often arises from their membership in found communities, but these very same communities may be a resource in repairing victims' self-respect. Found communities can sustain counter-stories that repair victims' self-respect by providing the requisite epistemic and experiential resources. In some cases, the counter-stories they sustain might help to undermine the authority of master-narratives but may nevertheless enshrine their own oppressive practices. Here, chosen communities potentially compensate for these shortcomings. For so-called minorities within minorities—women, sexual minorities, religious non-conformists—it often will be through their chosen communities that they can counter the oppression they face both from within their found communities and within the larger social order, and to identify the continuities and discontinuities between these various forms of oppression.[38]

Although the term 'community' suggests a stable and enduring entity, alternative communities can be ephemeral, coming together through chance and then dissipating, or be informal and unspoken.[39] Even if they do not take the form of a 'consciousness-raising group,' alternative communities generate counter-stories, challenge social conceptions, provide a space in which victims are recognised by different terms and subject to different types of treatment, and model alternatives ways of being in the world.

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her religious beliefs or lose the family into which she was born, coming to rely instead on a family of choice. And many found communities, such as a workplace or a religious community, involve an element of choice. Broadly, however, we can distinguish between communities over which victims have relatively little control and those communities that they can seek out, create, or abandon.

[38] *See, e.g.*, K-Y. Taylor, *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Haymarket 2017).

[39] Women in a workplace can be an alternative community even when they do not expressly or even self-consciously see themselves as one. For example, Lindemann Nelson opens with the example of nurses working in a particular ward.

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Conference in Honour of J. Raz
v.1.0 *as of* 24.08.2023

4.   The Duty of Self-Respect and Interpersonal Accountability

I take a duty to have the following key features: it informs the duty-bearer's practical reasoning by reducing her discretion in how to act, pre-empting some reasons and outweighing others, and it places the duty-bearer in relations of accountability.

As Paul Schofield notes, there is widespread scepticism that self-directed duties exist beyond a "quirk" of the Kantian canon—even as, in everyday moral practice, self-directed duties are taken as a given.[40] This scepticism arises principally from the absence of a second agent. Duties paradigmatically are dyadic: a duty-bearer owes a duty to someone else. The interpersonal nature of duties enables the accountability practices that are characteristic of duties and account for their strictness: because the duty is owed to some other person, only that person can release the duty-bearer from the duty or waive performance. When a duty is owed to oneself, however, the duty-bearer can release herself from the duty. The ability to unilaterally waive a duty eviscerates the sense of a duty as an imperative, unravelling the bonds of accountability that help to ensure a duty appropriately guides an individual's practical reasoning. Because of this waivability, self-directed duties often are dismissed as incoherent.

A number of responses are available. The first is to deny the importance of waivability.[41] In his essay, 'Liberating Duties,' Raz argues against the tendency to subordinate duties to rights and to treat duties merely as derivative of or in service of rights.[42] Challenging this orthodoxy, he aims instead to "to give duties a central role in our understanding of moral and political life, which is independent of their role in protecting and promoting

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[40] P. Schofield, *Duty to Self: Moral, Political, and Legal Self-Relation*, (Oxford 2021) at 10.

[41] *See, e.g.*, J.D. Schaab, 'On the Supposed Incoherence of Obligations to Oneself,' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (2021) 99(1)Y: 175–89.
[42] *See, e.g.*, M.G, Singer, 'On Duties to Oneself,' *Ethics* (1959) 69(3): 202-205.

A. Vasanthakumar (ashwini.vasanthakumar@queensu.ca)
Conference in Honour of J. Raz
v.1.0 *as of* 24.08.2023

rights…."[43] Raz argues that duties, such as duties of self-respect, are intrinsic to individual well-being even when they are not related to anyone else's rights. Even when there is no corresponding right-holder to hold an individual to account, then, she can still be said to owe a duty to herself.

Others have sought to limit the extent to which self-directed duties can unilaterally be waived. For one, not all duties are waivable. The duty to treat others with moral respect, for example, is not waivable, including by those to whom this duty is owed. Just as an individual cannot waive the duty that *others* owe to treat her with respect, so too can she not waive the duty *she* owes to treat herself with respect.[44] Or, not all duties *unilaterally* are waivable. Kanygina argues that there are normative constraints on how an individual can release herself from a self-directed duty.[45] Schofield defends self-directed duties by appealing to individuals' multiple practical identities, which mimics to some extent dyadic duties.[46] These limits on waivability still rely on intrapersonal methods of accountability, which mean that the duty-bearer can determine the content of the duty, whether the duty has been performed, and whether the conditions for release have been met. So, the underlying concerns surrounding waivability might seem to remain—or indeed may be exacerbated in the context of oppression, with the increased likelihood of self-deception and adaptive preferences.[47]

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[43] J. Raz, 'Liberating Duties,' *Law & Philosophy* 8(1989): 3-21, 4.

[44] *See, e.g.*, A. Hills, 'Duties and Duties to the Self,' *American Philosophical Quarterly* (2003) 40(2): 131-142.

[45] Y. Kanygina, 'Duties to Oneself and their Alleged Incoherence,' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (2022) 100(3): 565-579.

[46] Schofield, *Duties to Self.*

[47] Hay argues for overt acts of resistance in part because she worries that the problem self-deception is especially acute in the context of oppression. *Native Companion*, Hay worries, may have internalised oppressive norms, may be acting in bad faith, or may be subject to other forms of self-deception. Hay, *Kantianism*, 143-144.

A. Vasanthakumar (ashwini.vasanthakumar@queensu.ca)
Conference in Honour of J. Raz
v.1.0 *as of* 24.08.2023

In any event, these responses seem to accept that self-directed duties cannot ground interpersonal accountability. At least in some cases, however, a duty of self-respect can invite accountability from third parties even when that duty is not directly owed *to* them. First, as we see in *Native Companion*, everyone is open to an inquiry: they are potentially answerable to anyone who makes an inquiry, where all that is needed is knowledge of the duty and its possible breach.[48] Answerability falls short of accountability, however, because the duty-bearer does not owe a response: Native Companion could simply ignore the inquiry or refuse to respond.[49] There are, however, third parties who are not entire strangers to the duty. Call them stakeholders. Stakeholders stand in a special relationship to the duty-bearer such that they are affected by her non-performance. Take *Deferential Wife's* daughter or *Shreya's* female and racialised colleagues. When *Deferential Wife* or *Shreya* conduct themselves in ways that seem to show a lack of self-respect, how does this have consequences for stakeholders? There is the familiar Kantian concern that individuals who are not properly self-respecting will fail to be properly self-respecting to others—perhaps *Deferential Wife* routinely treats her daughters as second-best to her sons, or *Shreya* burdens her female and racialised colleagues with 'housekeeping' duties. But these are not the scenarios in which I am interested.[50] Rather, I am interested in the possibility that *Deferential Wife* and *Shreya's* conduct undermines stakeholders' self-respect.[51] It can do so, I think, in two ways. First, it reinforces oppressive norms—both

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[48] To be clear, Wallace does not frame his query in terms of self-directed duties; his inquiry seems straightforwardly to be a request for information.

[49] Native Companion and Wallace are high school friends, and Native Companion is accompanying Wallace in part to guide him; although this might account for why she responds it is not clear that she owes him a response.

[50] In any case, in these scenarios *Deferential Wife* and *Shreya* have failed to perform an other-directed duty which would directly ground interpersonal accountability. The failure to be self-respecting merely explains why there has been a failure to perform an other-directed duty.

[51] I focus here on stakeholders who are fellow members of subordinated groups but there may be other classes of stakeholders. For example, our intimates might have a stake in our self-respect. *Deferential Wife's* daughter may also be a stakeholder *qua* child and not only *qua* female, and the *Deferential Wife* might be a role model *qua* mother and not only *qua* woman.

A. Vasanthakumar (ashwini.vasanthakumar@queensu.ca)
Conference in Honour of J. Raz
v.1.0 *as of* 24.08.2023

society-wide and also within the microcosms of the workplace and the family—which encourages others' compliance with oppressive norms and thereby hinders stakeholders' capacities for self-respect. Second, it fails to model alternative modes of interacting and to generate alternative social conceptions and norms.[52] Put another way, there are two audiences to *Deferential Wife* and *Shreya's* conduct: non-victims, whose assumptions and behaviour go unchecked, and who may then go on to treat stakeholders in a similar manner, and fellow victims, who have a role model that fails to model self-respecting behaviour, and who lose a possible resource with which to repair *their* self-respect.[53]

To be clear, *Deferential Wife* and *Shreya* may be entirely justified in their conduct. Their conduct may result from, as Khader suggests, a 'double bind' of oppression, or it may reflect a deliberate tactic of furthering their own ends and even resisting oppression.[54] The upshot only is that they owe an account to particular others. When *Shreya's* female and racialised colleagues complain, she cannot simply dismiss or ignore them.

Widening the scope of accountability might raise the opposite concern animating the issue of waivability: not of insufficient accountability but its excess. In the context of duties of self-respect, for example, virtually anyone could inquire whether a course of conduct is consistent with an individual's self-respect, and that individual would be further liable to the disappointment and criticism of any number of stakeholders. While a duty-bearer would be aware that she was answerable or accountable to third parties, she would not necessarily know *which* third parties. One virtue of restricting

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[52] I think of these as two sides of the same coin. Treating these as two distinct modes only works if we assume there is some possible conduct that is neutral between reinforcing and countering oppressive norms. I don't have a settled view on this.

[53] This is a very preliminary sketch of the argument. Just as members of subordinated groups can be conscripted informal political representatives, so too might they be as involuntary role models. I need to expand this section to address this is in more careful detail. *See, e.g.*, W. Salkin, 'The Conscription of Informal Political Representatives, *Journal of Political Philosophy* (2021) 29(4): 429-455.

[54] Perhaps *Shreya* bites her tongue and pretends to be a team-player, biding her time until she makes partner and can pursue real change.

A. Vasanthakumar (ashwini.vasanthakumar@queensu.ca)
Conference in Honour of J. Raz
v.1.0 *as of* 24.08.2023

accountability to the individuals to whom a duty is owed is that the sources of accountability are limited and known *ex ante*; on my account, duty-bearers potentially are answerable to anyone at any time.

These concerns are compounded in the context of oppression. Mere answerability can instantiate features of oppression. When a non-victim, say an over-zealous ally, makes an inquiry, it risks replicating the presumptuousness, entitlement, and victim-blaming that can characterise relations between privileged and oppressed groups more generally. Insofar as these requests, however sincere, function to educate the relatively privileged, they may amount to epistemic exploitation.[55] While I share these misgivings, however, I do not think they tell in favour of a restrictive approach to accountability. That is, these misgivings do not point to limits on who has the standing to hold an individual to account, but rather, to countervailing reasons that tell *against* holding someone to account in a given context or that informs *how* to hold someone to account. Simply because one can make an inquiry does not mean that, all things considered, one ought to make an inquiry. The over-zealous ally may simply have to bite their tongue.

5. Conclusion

All this talk of accountability obscures the fact that duties of self-respect redound to the benefit of the duty-bearer and aid in her capacity to lead a flourishing life. Concerns about waivability arise from an interpersonal conception of duties in which the duty-bearer carries the burdens of the duty, the discharge of which benefits the recipient. On this conception, the duty-bearer cannot be trusted to honour her duties without the threat of sanction—the duty is, as Raz notes, 'a fetter' and must operate as such.[56] This

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[55] N. Berenstain, "Epistemic Exploitation," *Ergo* (2018).
[56] Raz, 'Liberating' at 9.

A. Vasanthakumar (ashwini.vasanthakumar@queensu.ca)
Conference in Honour of J. Raz
v.1.0 *as of* 24.08.2023

approach does not translate perfectly to the context of self-directed duties, or indeed, to any number of duties that individuals take on to others, to themselves, and to particular goals and values, which give value and meaning to their lives, and which are essential to their leading a good life.[57] Not all duties are burdens that intrude into the plans and projects of those who bear them.

Indeed, in the context of oppression, victims' duties, especially their duties of self-respect, are necessary precursors to their ability to pursue projects and plans. Given this, and given the obstacles to fostering a sense of self-worth—demeaning social conceptions and patterns of treatment, double-binds, inadequate epistemic and hermeneutic resources—deliberations with fellow victims can provide clarity, reassurance, strategy, and consolation. Importantly, these deliberations can guard against self-deception and self-sabotage—against unthinkingly laughing off an insult out of fear or habit. Seen in this light, relations of accountability to fellow victims are enabling rather than burdensome, and standing up for oneself is not an exercise in self-indulgence.

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[57] *See, also,* S. Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances* (Oxford 2003).

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Conference in Honour of J. Raz
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