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Self-Control and Moral Security

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Self-Control and Moral Security*Jeanette Kennett and Jessica Wolfendale***Introduction**

Self-control is integral to successful human agency. Without it we cannot extend our agency across time and secure central social, moral, and personal goods. But self-control is not a unitary capacity. In the first part of this paper we provide a taxonomy of self-control and trace its connections to agency and the self. In part two, we turn our attention to the external conditions that support successful agency and the exercise of self-control. We argue that what we call *moral security* is a critical foundation for agency. Parts three and four explore what happens to agency when moral security is lacking, as in the case of those subject to racism, and those living in poverty. The disadvantages suffered by those who are poor, in a racial minority or other oppressed group, or suffering mental illness or addiction, are often attributed to a lack of individual self-control or personal responsibility. In particular, members of these groups are often seen as irresponsibly focused on short-term pleasures over long-term good, a view underwritten by particular psychological theories of self-control. We explore how narratives about racism and poverty undermine moral security, and limit and distort the possibility of synchronic and diachronic self-control. Where moral security is undermined, the connection between self-control and diachronic goods often fails to obtain and agency contracts accordingly. We close with some preliminary reflections on the implications for responsibility.

2.1 Self-Control

The problem of self-control in its most stripped-down form—and the form in which it appears in the psychological literature—can be characterized as the competition between smaller sooner (SS) rewards and larger later (LL) rewards. Rationality dictates that we will do better if we (mostly) forgo the

SS rewards in favour of LL rewards. However, the presence of SS rewards places the agent in a situation of conflict and requires the exercise of self-control to overcome the temptation and secure the larger reward. This was the set-up of Walter Mischel's famous marshmallow experiments where young children were offered the choice between one marshmallow now, or two marshmallows if they waited until the researcher returned to the room. And, equally famously, the children who were able to generate and successfully employ various strategies of self-control to wait for the two marshmallows did better on a variety of measures later in life, including education, drug use and delinquency, and conscience (Shoda et al. 1990; Eigste et al. 2006).

On a standard folk psychological view however, self-control has an explicitly normative dimension, not captured by the SS versus LL rendering. Temptation is viewed not just in terms of a simple competition between goods which arrive at different times, but as a conflict between values and mere desires. Self-control is called for in the face of temptation, which inclines you toward something you judge it *better not* to do. When we think of temptations we usually think in terms of appetitive desires or urges—for junk food or alcohol and so forth. We exert self-control when we resist that extra slice of chocolate cake because we value health, or leave a party early to prepare for an important talk for the next day, or restrain an urge to punch someone who has angered us. Minor failures of self-control are tolerable and probably inevitable, but a person who persistently fails to exercise control over their appetites and impulses in key areas of life, and so fails to shape their lives in accordance with their values, tends to attract moral condemnation. But what is involved in the exercise of self-control, and how may this help us understand impairments of self-control and of agency?

2.1.1 Strategies and Techniques of Self-Control

Let's consider first simple situations of temptation and the conflict between smaller sooner and larger later rewards. Take the rewards of snoozing for an extra half hour in my warm cosy bed versus getting up and having an early morning run that will leave me energized and invigorated. How do I get myself out of bed? I could just grit my (mental) teeth and do it. I could exert willpower. Or I could adopt some strategies to increase my desire to go for a run. I could imagine myself glowing with health and receiving compliments

on how well I look, or I could think about how annoyed with myself I will feel if I stay in bed again. I could promise myself an additional reward if I go running or, if this is a regular failing of mine, I could post a pledge on social media to raise the cost to myself of failing. These strategies have something in common. They all attempt to manipulate or make more vivid the value of the rewards on offer. Another set of strategies focus on avoidance of temptation either by manipulating the environment in advance or by distraction. If I know that I can't stop at the recommended two squares of dark chocolate after dinner I may choose not to buy any at all. If I'm a recovering alcoholic I'll probably avoid after-work drinks. If despite my best efforts I do find myself in the presence of temptation I may try to distract myself from it. This was what the successful children did in the marshmallow experiments. They avoided looking at the marshmallow at all. They danced, they told themselves stories, they thought of other things. They switched the focus of their attention away from the marshmallows (Mischel et al. 1972). Trying to resist the siren song of the one marshmallow while focusing on its consummatory delights was generally unsuccessful. Willpower is both a limited and fragile resource.

2.1.2 Diachronic Self-Control and Mental Time Travel

This brief account of some of the ways in which self-control may be exercised reveals two important distinctions. First there is a distinction between exerting willpower and implementing strategies. Second there is a distinction between *synchronic self-control* which is exercised in situations of temptation or conflict, and *diachronic self-control* which is exercised in advance of or in the absence of temptation and so need not involve the direct psychological conflict between desire and values that folk accounts focus upon. Both forms of control are important for human agents, but the exercise of self-control diachronically, and the strategies that secure it, helps to constitute us as diachronic agents and as the particular agents that we are. Without the capacity to exercise control over ourselves across time through planning and strategies we could not access and secure some of the most important human goods—those that require sustained attention over time such as friendships, careers, and creative endeavours—or shape our lives in accordance with our values.

The diachronic exercise of self-control is sustained operationally by the capacity for *mental time travel*. This is a form of controlled activity which

may be undertaken for the purposes of evaluating the past and planning for the future. It includes both episodic remembering, where a person replays a past experience in which she was personally involved, and prospection, in which we simulate and mentally rehearse possible future events. We focus here on prospection.

There are two aspects to mental time travel. First there is an executive control aspect. I must have the capacity to generate and voluntarily attend to possible future scenarios involving myself. Second, I must respond to this representation as being of *myself*. I must have a sense of being personally present in the episode. This temporally extended self-awareness, known as auto-noetic awareness, seems to be a necessary condition of the kind of reflection on the type of person we want to be and on the worth of our future plans, and provides us with reasons that extend across time and whose motivating force is thus independent of, and in a position to compete with, our immediate wants.

Mental time travel also facilitates the coordination necessary for carrying out temporally extended projects and makes available important techniques of self-regulation. These aspects of mental time travel and motivation for self-control will become particularly important as we go on.

2.1.3 Agency and Self-Control

Besides the various methods of self-control there are three *levels* of control which correspond to increasingly developed and extended agency.¹

(i) Intentional Control

Intentional control is the control I exercise over particular actions in order to do what I intend. The capacity for intentional control is clearly required in order for one to count as more than a very minimal agent. But this may not always draw upon what we would think of as self-control resources or techniques.

When I perform familiar or habitual actions I am in control of what I do, though this may not require any or much explicit effort on my part. Making

¹ These levels of control need not always involve the exertion of the specific strategies or techniques of self-control outlined above. We exercise self-control strategies in the face of an actual or anticipated challenge to our control. But control of the self—over our actions, emotions, desires, and direction—is something we do *qua* agent. It does not only happen in the face of internal conflict.

tea, brushing my teeth, typing these words—are all things I do intentionally, though much of the control or regulation of the actions is delegated to the automatic system. I think about what to say but not about where to place my fingers on the keyboard. I drive home intentionally while thinking of something else entirely. But if an action is novel, or difficult—say threading a needle, adopting a new yoga pose, or solving an equation—or I am tired or stressed, more in the way of conscious attention and effort is required for success. Self-control in the form of willpower may be required to sustain effort and successfully complete the action. The self-controlled *person* however will seek to develop good habits that delegate control to the automatic system so as not to draw too heavily on what are limited cognitive resources.

(ii) Instrumental Control

Instrumental control involves the more sophisticated capacity to plan and carry out an extended sequence of actions to secure a goal. These goals may be relatively short term, such as baking a cake, or longer term, such as planning a wedding. Planning usually involves a set of steps which must be undertaken in a particular order. If I want to bake a cake I need to first buy the ingredients, then heat the oven, then get out the bowl, cream the butter and sugar, break the eggs, measure the flour, and so on. I won't be successful if I don't follow a plan. Mental time travel is clearly critical to success here but instrumental control may also involve the use of the various self-control strategies outlined above to ensure my plan stays on track in the face of distraction, or the temptations of a more immediate pleasure. Perhaps I decide to keep the TV off during the afternoon so that I won't get distracted by my favourite soap opera and forget to take the cake out of the oven.

Instrumental control may be exercised in the service of projects I value, such as baking a cake for a charity sale, or to secure something I want but don't value such as my next hit of heroin—which might require that I do something emotionally quite difficult like beg money from strangers or plan and execute a car break-in. Though evidence of the capacity for instrumental control is often taken as sufficient evidence that a person meets a threshold of self-control required for moral responsibility, and so as sufficient to justify blaming her if she does not exercise it, there is another critical level of agential control which will be our main focus here.

(iii) Normative Control

While the capacity for intentional control over one's actions is required in order for one to count as an agent at all, and the capacity for instrumental

control is required for us to extend our agency over time, normative control is required to constitute us as flourishing, autonomous, self-governed individuals. It is control over the self—its shape and direction—and not just over particular actions that a self might perform. It should be obvious that, while many of the techniques of self-control described are common between the levels, a person might be strong willed and might exercise intentional and instrumental control over their actions while lacking self-control at the normative level. The weak-willed or compelled person fails to govern themselves in accordance with their values. It is in *this* respect we say that they have lost control. Their actions are not responsive to the reasons that flow from their *values*. When we say of an addicted person, for example, that her life is running out of her control, we don't mean that she is incapable of responding to local contingencies and initiating successful intentional action or action plans. (Indeed, many addicted people describe themselves as both strong-willed and lacking in control (Snoek et al. 2016).) We mean that her life (and her particular actions) is no longer governed by her values, and so lacks the shape and coherence that this brings.

2.1.4 Self-Control, Diachronic Agency, and Flourishing Lives

This returns us to the question of what self-control is for and why it is valuable. We have suggested that self-control is a necessary condition of access to a variety of goods that help constitute a life as meaningful, as flourishing, and, importantly, as one's own. Through the adoption of particular plans and projects, the taking on of professional and personal roles and commitments, we in significant part shape who we are. We join clubs and community groups, advocate politically, study for a degree, get married, become parents, make friends, take up hobbies, write papers, run businesses, and so on. All of these activities require sustained attention and commitment across time for success. All will require the exercise of self-control in the inevitable face of competing motivations or obstacles to achievement.

But possession of the diachronic goods also reinforces and supports normative control of the self. Our diachronic plans, projects, roles, and commitments provide a narrative structure that obviates the need for constant decision making and choice. Important decisions are already made and do not need to be revisited unless circumstances change. Diachronic goods such as loving relationships, absorbing work, and interesting

hobbies protect one against passing temptations and provide motivational resources for the exercise of self-control when required. The person with a rich array of interests, relationships, and commitments can remind herself of all she has to lose by giving in to temptations that threaten those goods. The person who lacks those goods is not so protected.

We exercise normative control, then, when we act so as to regulate our lives and activities in accordance with what we value. If we are unable to do so, in an important sense we lack control over ourselves. So understood, normative control, like intentional control, is to some degree hostage to fortune. Both internal and external circumstances may challenge or undermine it.

2.1.5 Self-Control Undermined

Our control over our actions may be undermined or thwarted by a variety of internal and external factors that have little to do with what we want, intend, or value. In the remainder of this section we will explore some relevant, mostly psychological factors, that tend to undermine control. In the section 2.1.6 we will expand on this by introducing the broader notion of moral security which identifies a class of external factors which shape, scaffold, or undermine, agency and self-control.

Some of the internal factors that undermine self-control or make it much more difficult to do what we would most value doing include cognitive load, cravings, shyness, anxiety, fear, anger, grief, or lack of confidence (see Kennett 2001, 2013).

When we are under cognitive load, (i.e., distracted by other tasks) or our attentional resources are depleted due to fatigue, stress, and so forth, our judgments and behaviour will be more strongly influenced by our automatic affect-driven attitudes and less in line with our goals and values. There is evidence, for example, that when we are tired or distracted we are more likely to judge and be influenced in our behaviour by ingrained stereotypes rather than, say, by our explicit egalitarian principles (Kennett and Fine 2009, Fine 2006).²

A key internal factor that may undermine the capacity for self-control, seen most vividly in the case of addiction, is appetite or craving. Cravings may force themselves upon, and come to dominate, our attention. Controlling the

² But see Dijksterhuis and Van Olden (2006) for an opposing view.

focus of our attention requires cognitive effort and this may wear out when we are trying to combat repeated intrusive, appetitively driven thoughts. But while very strong desires may impede the successful implementation of strategies of self-control, it is less well recognized that other internal factors are equally or more important in explaining failures of control in addiction or elsewhere. Sometimes we fail to do what we intend, not because we don't want to do so strongly enough but because our decisions and desires are defeated by other psychological factors. The new waiter's attempt to serve my coffee without slopping it into the saucer may be spoiled by the nervousness which makes his hands shake.

Some of these failures can be forestalled by better forward planning and shaping of our environment. Making sure we get enough sleep, attending therapy to learn techniques of calming nerves, avoiding triggers, are all part and parcel of becoming a normatively self-controlled agent. Others may be less easy to avoid or to manage.

A particularly critical impediment to normative exercises of control involves lack of confidence or self-belief. In her mental visits to the future, the agent must see the valued future as one which is open to *her*. She must be able to project *herself* into the future, not as a mere fantasy or wish, but as a live option. Otherwise this option will lack motivational force. It would be a nice future for someone—but that someone doesn't feel like *her*. This lack of belief in a valued future is one of the most significant barriers to recovery from addiction. The exercise of diachronic self-control cannot get off the ground in its absence.³

Finally we need to consider the role of external circumstances in supporting or undermining agential control. A wide range of situational external factors can interfere with my ability to successfully complete my actions, and thereby undermine my control. This could occur in at least two ways. Firstly, external circumstances could erode my internal capacity for self-regulation by undermining my cognitive and emotional resources, as in the cases mentioned above of stress, sleep-deprivation, cognitive overload, and so forth. Secondly, external factors may directly block my ability to successfully complete the actions I intend to carry out. I might be setting out to do precisely what I wish to do (and so my capacity to exert control over

³ This theme came up frequently in interviews with users in a recent project on Addiction and Moral Identity led by Kennett. For example, one respondent said this about their struggle to stop using: "It was hard, like before I wanted it, I wanted you know to get my family back and to have my health and all that but it was . . . *it just seemed so far away or that I just didn't want it because there was no point. Like I felt sort of hopeless* a bit, hopelessness, a bit of hopelessness" (interviews conducted by Anke Snoek, emphasis added).

my desires and competing values may be, in an important sense, unhindered) but the success of my actions may nonetheless be out of my control. For example, I intend to be on time for an important appointment but my train is late, a patron bumps into the waiter as he pours my drink, the wind blows as I try to hit the target, a phone rings just as I reach the punchline of a joke. Sometimes I can regulate the external conditions I face or adjust for those conditions—the archer can't prevent the wind from blowing but she can make allowances for it as she takes the shot, I can catch an early train as a precaution against cancellation.

However, I cannot always adjust for external conditions so as to do what I intend or value. If the wind is very gusty my attempts at target shooting may be pointless and I become discouraged. We often need the world to cooperate with our endeavours if we are to have any realistic prospect of successfully achieving our goals. But there are important differences in the relationship between *how* the world may fail to cooperate with my endeavours, and my capacity for self-control at the normative level. As will become apparent, some kinds of external impediments, particularly those arising from hostile social and structural environments that reflect people's intentional actions (and inactions), may not only impede my ability to complete my actions but also undermine my normative self-control by, for example, undermining my confidence or sense of self-worth. This is a point we take up in more detail in section 2.3.

2.2 Moral Security and Moral Injury

Moral security refers to the degree to which we believe that our welfare, our lives, and our projects are valued by others and by our society. We feel morally secure when we believe that others take our moral standing to limit what may be done to us, and when we believe that social, political, and legal institutions in our society regard our interests and welfare as morally important and protect them, for example through the attribution and enforcement of our legal rights and the punishment of serious crimes against us (see Wolfendale 2017).

Moral security supports the development and exercise of full human agency.⁴ Loss of moral security, as we demonstrate, can have extremely

⁴ While human beings may be able to act as minimal agents in the absence of moral security, in the sense of acting intentionally or instrumentally in response to environmental conditions, such minimal agency is not sufficient for basic human flourishing. In our view, moral security

serious consequences for a person's ability to exercise fundamental forms of normative control over their lives. Below, we explain the connection between moral security and moral agency in more detail.

When we are morally secure, we assume that we are in control of our lives and that our planning and efforts have a fair chance of being successful. Moral security thus underpins confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-control. It permits planning and co-ordination and promotes mental health and flourishing. The significance of moral security to agency means that we can injure each other by failing to give each other due recognition, respect, and goodwill (as well as by intentional malicious acts). By their actions and their attitudes, others can vividly demonstrate to us that they don't see us, or the group with which our identity is bound up, as morally significant; that our pain and our suffering are not important, or that our values and choices are morally inferior. Such messages can be reinforced through social and political narratives expressed in the media, and through public policies, the educational system, and the criminal justice system. When another person's actions and attitudes, or the social structures under which we live, undermine our moral security, we have been *morally injured*: we have been injured as agents.

Most of the time, we're not consciously aware of the importance of moral security to our wellbeing and agency. We go about our day-to-day lives assuming that other people are not intending to harm us, that our interests and our welfare are taken to matter, and that our testimony about our experiences, our intentions, and our needs will be believed.⁵ Often, it is only when our moral interests are disregarded or ignored that we become aware of the significance of moral security. If we are victims of malevolent violence, for example, not only do we suffer immediate pain and shock, but our basic trust in others' goodwill toward us is profoundly shaken. It is no surprise that victims of serious physical attacks often report an ongoing inability to trust other people.⁶ Acts of malevolent violence can also, in some cases, undermine our belief in our own moral worth. We may even come to

protects a necessary condition for *flourishing* human agency. We thank an anonymous referee for encouraging us to clarify this point.

⁵ Lawrence Becker describes this as a form of "nongognitive trust." We exhibit nongognitive trust of a person "when we are disposed to be trustful of them independently of our beliefs or expectations of their trustworthiness" (1996: 50).

⁶ e.g., see Brison 2002.

feel that perhaps we deserved the treatment we received—feelings of shame and guilt are common among survivors of sexual abuse, and among people who are mistreated due to a stigmatized identity, such as an LGBTQ or drug-user identity. If our testimony about our experiences is doubted, this further undermines our moral security by showing us that others refuse to recognize or acknowledge our epistemic authority (see Daukas 2006, and Fricker 2009).

The different ways in which loss of moral security affects us suggests that moral security requires, at a minimum, four kinds of moral recognition: recognition of our basic physical needs and welfare; recognition of our status as morally accountable agents and rights-bearers;⁷ recognition of our epistemic authority in relation to our testimony regarding our needs and experiences; and recognition of our chosen and unchosen identities.⁸

This last form of recognition refers to the degree of subjective authority we are able to exercise over the meaning of important aspects of our identity within our society. As will become clear, oppressive social and political practices often undermine the ability of members of oppressed groups to exert control over the meaning of their behaviour, speech, and actions. Important aspects of their identity may be interpreted through the lens of social and political narratives that sustain and reinforce negative social identities.⁹ For example, in a patriarchal society a woman's "'no' [in the context of sex] may be read as performing an act with the force of affirmation," thereby rendering her speech "inert" (Anderson 2017: 144 (see also Langton 1993.)) In such cases her speech (and her attempts to control the meaning of her words) are effectively silenced—a form of what Rebecca Kukla calls "discursive injustice" (Kukla 2014):¹⁰ her words are

⁷ Honneth (1995) refers to this as cognitive respect.

⁸ In Wolfendale 2017, only the first three forms of moral recognition are discussed.

⁹ Miranda Fricker argues that *negative identity prejudice* occurs when an agent's social identity (e.g., their racial and gender identity) undermines their credibility in the eyes of others, and their ability to effectively convey knowledge about their experiences (Fricker 2009: 27–8). Our analysis explores the impact of identity prejudice beyond the epistemic injuries that are the focus of Fricker's analysis.

¹⁰ This point has been made by others. Talia Mae Bettcher (drawing an analogy between how women's avowals are denied first-person authority in a patriarchal society, and how the narrative of transpeople as "deceivers" likewise denies transpeople first-person authority) writes, "there is no room for genuine avowal. A "no" means "yes," and a "yes" means "yes": it is impossible for a woman to say "no" and mean it . . . there is no room in the dominant context for her to *intend* to refuse; a legitimate "no" is not an available [option] to her" (Bettcher 2009: 114. Emphasis in original).

being interpreted through the lens of her social identity in such a way as to deprive her of agential control.

The loss of subjective authority over the meaning of one's actions may extend to many ordinary activities. For example, *all* of an addicted person's behaviour tends to be viewed through the lens of the stigmatized addict identity: ordinary acts such as seeking medical treatment for injury or illness may be interpreted as drug seeking (AIVL report 2011), and reaching out to friends and family may be viewed as motivated by the desire for money rather than the desire for personal connection. This means that the addict's stigmatized identity makes certain actions effectively impossible for her to perform. Seeking medical help, for example, needs to be recognized as such. When it is not, people often give up the attempt to care for their health. They don't merely fail to get what they want; they lose control of the meaning of their actions and thus of a fundamental aspect of their well-being.¹¹

2.2.1 Moral Security Undermined

The forms of moral recognition discussed above may be communicated not only through our interactions with others, but also through political and social narratives, institutions, and practices. For example, public recognition of our basic moral standing can be expressed through the law, particularly through the ascription of legal rights. Denial of legal rights to specific groups or individuals is an explicit denial of moral recognition (Honneth 1995: 129).

But moral security can also be undermined in less obvious ways. Social and political narratives that minimize or dismiss harms against certain individuals and groups, and criminal justice practices that fail to address such harms, express a lack of moral recognition for the needs, welfare, and identity of those individuals and groups. In many countries, including the United States and Australia, perpetrators of sexual violence against women are rarely punished (and rarely punished severely), and victims are frequently shamed in the press for their behaviour, outfits, and sexual histories (Harding 2015). This undermines the moral security of sexual assault

¹¹ A number of studies found that "negative staff attitudes . . . [are] a barrier to accessing care with drug users often encountering 'hostile judgmental attitudes' in general practice and being 'often made to feel not worthy of receiving help' in hospital settings" (Gilchrist et al. 2011: 1115).

victims by undermining the credibility of their testimony, denying the reality of their experiences, and prioritizing the interests of perpetrators of sexual assault. A similar pattern is evident in the United States in the response to police killings of unarmed African-American men and women. Very few such killings have resulted in punishment for the perpetrators (Lee and Park 2017), even in cases where there is incontrovertible evidence that the victim was not a threat. This sends the message that the lives of African-Americans do not warrant the same consideration as the lives of others and that it is reasonable for police officers to see African-Americans (particularly African-American men) as inherently dangerous (Yancy and Butler 2015).

The above analysis of moral security provides insights into the sources of our sense of moral security, and the ways in which we may be harmed as agents through actions and practices that deny our moral value. Our belief in our own moral value is strongly affected by how others treat us, and by the political and social narratives that shape our social, political, and legal institutions and practices. In the following sections, we explore the connection between moral security and self-control in two contexts: race and poverty.

2.3 Race, Moral Security, and Self-Control

There is substantial evidence that experiences of oppression have negative psychological (and even physical) effects on individuals (Paradies and Cunningham 2012: 1). A study of indigenous Australians found that “[s]tress, lack of control and feeling powerless as a reaction to racism emerged in multiple mediation models as significant mediators of the relationship between racism and general mental health” (Paradies and Cunningham 2012: 7). This study found that experiences of racism had a particularly damaging effect on the mental health of individuals who are already low in control (Paradies and Cunningham 2012: 8).¹² A US study of adolescent African-American boys reported similar findings: exposure to discrimination was correlated with a loss of self-control and a greater likelihood of substance abuse (Gibbons et al. 2012).

¹² These negative effects were mitigated when individuals had access to positive social connections.

However, these (and similar) studies focus primarily on the effects of racism on *synchronic* self-control: the ability of individuals to resist immediate temptations such as drugs and alcohol, rather than on the relationship between racism and the ability to exercise self-control across time.

Here, we want to explore the relationship between racism, moral security, and *diachronic self-control*—specifically, the ways in which racism undermines the ability of those exposed to it to shape their lives in accordance with their values in the way required for effective normative control. Racism is characterized by the belief that the needs, welfare, and interests of the targeted group are less morally important than those of the dominant group. Racism is therefore an attack on the moral security of all members of the targeted group. This is most obvious in cases of racist policies and propaganda that explicitly deny the moral standing of the targeted group, but the relationship between racism and moral security plays out in more insidious ways as well. As we will argue, one of the most pernicious aspects of racism (and one that is most likely to be internalized by the targets of racism) is the demand that the victims of racism exhibit self-control at the same time that they are blamed for lacking self-control.

2.3.1 Respectability Politics and the Demand for Self-Control

African-Americans have long been told that if they only dressed well and behaved politely, they could avoid discriminatory treatment. For example, in 2011, in response to recent violence committed by a “flash mob” composed of young African-American men, the Mayor of Philadelphia (himself African-American) told a church congregation the following:

If you want all of us—black, white, or any other color—if you want us to respect you, if you want us to look at you in a different way, if you want us not to be afraid to walk down the same side of the street with you, if you want folks not to jump out of the elevator when you get on, if you want folks to stop following you around in stores when you’re out shopping, if you want somebody to offer you a job or an internship somewhere . . . then stop acting like idiots and fools, out in the streets . . . take those doggone hoodies down . . . Pull your pants up. (Harris 2014: 35)

This narrative—commonly described as “respectability politics”¹³—has been articulated both by prominent African-Americans, such as Bill Cosby,¹⁴ and by white commentators. This narrative places the responsibility for avoiding discrimination squarely in the hands of the victims of discrimination.

In *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates describes the toll of trying to live up to this narrative:

All my life I’d heard people tell their black boys and black girls to “be twice as good,” which is to say “accept half as much.” These words would be spoken with a veneer of religious nobility, as though they evidenced some unspoken quality, some undetected courage, when in fact all they evidenced was the gun to our head and the hand in our pocket. This is how we lose our softness. This is how they steal our right to smile. No one told those little white children, with their tricycles, to be twice as good It struck me that perhaps the defining feature of being drafted into the black race was the inescapable robbery of time, because the moments we spent readying the mask, or readying ourselves to accept half as much, could not be recovered. (2015: 90–1)

The demand to be “twice as good,” to “pull your pants up,” is a demand for a level of diachronic and synchronic self-control that is not demanded from members of other, more privileged groups. This narrative locates the sources of systemic and widespread oppression and discrimination in the behaviour of those most affected by it and holds out the promise of rewards (jobs, respect) for being “good.” But (because oppressed people are not in fact responsible for their own oppression) these supposed rewards do not materialize. Indeed, as Brittney Cooper argues, these rewards have *never* materialized:

Black folks have already tested out [the] theory of respectability. We’ve been trying to save our lives by dressing right, talking right, and never, never fucking up since about 1877. That shit has not worked.

(Cooper 2015)

¹³ This phrase is credited to Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1993) in her discussion of the “politics of respectability” adopted by African-American women in an attempt to minimize the threat posed by white society.

¹⁴ In his speech at a 2004 NAACP event Cosby blamed poor Black people for not living up to the promise of the Civil Rights Movement (Serwer 2015).

An African-American man may still be shot dead in his car by a police officer despite politely and carefully following his instructions.¹⁵ A woman may be raped even if she wears modest clothing and avoids strange men. This is the double-bind that characterizes oppression (Frye 1983).

2.3.2 The Impact of Respectability Politics on Self-Control

The narrative of respectability politics undermines the foundations of effective self-control across several dimensions. Firstly, psycho-social disadvantages, such as those caused by racism, can lead to impairments of the capacities required for synchronic self-control and the exercise of willpower (Raver 2012, Sinha 2008). For example, trying to live up to the demands of respectability while preparing oneself for the possibility of racist treatment requires a high level of vigilance (Lee and Hicken 2016: 2). One African-American woman described “having to put on her ‘shield’ just before she leaves the house each morning... she said that for more than six decades, as she leaves her home, she has tried to be prepared for insults and discrimination in public places” (Lee and Hicken 2016, 2). This kind of constant vigilance and its resultant stress places the agent under a cognitive load which reduces both willpower and planning capacities and, according to one study, “plays an important role in the well-documented racial inequalities of health” (Lee and Hicken 2016: 7). Thus, paradoxically, the self-control demanded by respectability politics, combined with the failure of the supposed rewards of such “good behaviour” to materialize, can erode the very capacities that are necessary for both synchronic and diachronic self-control. Thus, members of oppressed groups may well exhibit actual lapses of self-control, which are then taken as further evidence of their fundamental unfitness.

Secondly, respectability politics undermines the foundations of normative control with profound implications for the development and exercise of diachronic agency. The demand that victims of racism exhibit self-control and other moral virtues in order to avoid racist treatment, in a context in which no level of self-control will actually mitigate or prevent racist treatment, is likely to undermine the motivational force of the excursions into the

¹⁵ Philandro Castile was shot dead by a police officer during a traffic stop. His girlfriend and four-year-old son were in the car with him. The encounter was filmed by his girlfriend. The police officer was acquitted of all charges.

future that are necessary for diachronic normative self-control. If being good—working hard, being polite, dressing respectably—is no protection against arbitrary and discriminatory treatment, then what is the point of working hard, being polite, and dressing respectably? A person subject to racist treatment may be able to *imagine* a future in which she can pursue her plans unhindered by discrimination; a future in which she reaps the fruits of her self-control and can exert a reasonable degree of control over the shape and meaning of her life. But, in the face of the reality of racist discrimination, such a projected future might not seem available to her in any meaningful sense, and so may not provide the motivational resources necessary for normative self-control. Pursuing such a future may well seem pointless if she is aware that she must constantly spend time “putting on her shield” to negotiate a world in which she is a target for discrimination. This is the “robbery of time” described by Coates in the above quote.

A valued future might also feel out-of-reach because a member of an oppressed group may be painfully aware that, at any time, her social identity can be taken to determine her moral value, and even the meaning of her behaviour, speech, and comportment. It need not be the case that she is subject to a constant barrage of racist stereotypes for this to occur. A single experience may be sufficient to send the message that her subjective authority over her identity is tenuous at best. For example, one study of professional African-American women found that many of those surveyed reported feeling sexually “fetishized” by white colleagues, regardless of their outfits and behaviour (Wingfield 2010).¹⁶ White colleagues tended to interpret these women’s behaviour and outfits as sexualized regardless of the intentions of the women themselves, thus usurping these women’s ability to exert subjective control of the meaning of their own behaviour.

Similarly, a study of African-American male college students in predominantly white campuses found that many develop strategies of emotional restraint in order to appear non-threatening and moderate, so as to avoid been viewed by their fellow white students as “angry Black men” obsessed with racism (Wilkins 2012). This form of “identity work” (Wilkins 2012: 36)

¹⁶ This sexual “fetishization” of African-American women reflects a long history of depicting African-American women as “naturally” sexually aggressive and insatiable. This stereotype originated in the slavery era, where it served to provide an ideological justification of the sexual abuse of African-American women by White slave owners (see Collins 2000, Chapter 4). The stereotype persists today, and affects not only African-American women, but girls as young as five. One study found that “black girls were perceived to know more about adult topics and are more knowledgeable about sex than their white peers” (Green 2017).

is time-consuming, emotionally demanding, and restricts and undermines the ability of those subject to it to freely determine the shape and meaning of their lives and identities in the way that others take for granted.

The loss of normative control that can occur in these kinds of cases is partly analogous to the archer's loss of control in the face of a strong wind, discussed in section 2.1.5. In the case of the archer, external forces hinder her ability to bring about an outcome that reflects her values (hitting the target), and to that extent these external forces cause a loss of normative control. But the wind doesn't undermine her *capacity* for normative self-control or threaten her belief in the value of the goals to which she is committed—her capacity to integrate her (intended) actions with her values and identity may be as strong as it ought to be. So, she might learn to better account for the wind in her future actions to have a better chance of succeeding in her goals. In one sense, the African-American men and women described above seem to be behaving in a way that is analogous to the archer dealing with the wind. Faced with external impediments, they adjust their behaviour to ameliorate the effects of such impediments and so better achieve their goals. However, unlike the impersonal external impediments faced by the archer, these men and women face impediments that arise from intentional human actions, that communicate a message about their identity and perceived worth. Thus, the African-American women described above desire to be taken seriously as professionals in their workplaces, but their outfits and behaviour are interpreted as sexually provocative by the men with whom they interact regardless of their intentions. The cumulative impact of such messages can thus come to constitute an *internal* impediment to normative control by undermining the confidence of these men and women in their ability to control the meaning of their behaviour in ways that reflects their values. It may even cause them to give up on the attempt.

2.3.3 Whose Self-Control Matters?

A third connection between racism and self-control is the way in which racist narratives characterize losses of self-control. On the one hand, a person's frustration and anger at experiences of racial discrimination may be criticized as a blameworthy loss of self-control (as opposed to, say, a fitting response to circumstances). The stereotypes of the "angry Black woman" and the "angry Black man" illustrate this narrative—stereotypes that depict the anger of African-American women as shrill and hysterical,

and the anger of African-American men as dangerous and frightening (hooks 1987). In both cases, any legitimate causes of such anger are ignored and dismissed.

On the other hand, the “bad behaviour,” or *actual* lapses of self-control, of white men and women may be excused in contexts in which similar lapses of self-control by an African-American person would not be, such as in a school setting. Studies on school discipline have consistently found that African-American children of both sexes are punished more frequently and more harshly than white children who commit the same offences (Rudd 2014). In relation to the anger of white men, Amy Wilkins argues that “white men’s situational anger signals and shores up their control, but black men’s anger signals their lack of control” (2012: 38) and positions them as dangerous and threatening.¹⁷

In summary, racist narratives undermine the exercise of self-control both synchronically and diachronically, in at least three interrelated ways: by requiring mental and physical vigilance, which leads to long-term chronic stress (which itself threatens the internal capacities necessary for self-control); by undermining the epistemic authority of members of oppressed groups and depriving them of reasonable subjective control over important aspects of their identities; and by disproportionately punishing members of oppressed groups for perceived failures of self-control. Each of these facets can lead, independently, to the erosion of the capacities needed for synchronic and diachronic exercises of self-control and the subsequent loss of normative control over the shape and direction of one’s life. The conjunction of these attacks on moral security constitutes a profound form of moral injury.

2.4 Poverty, Moral Security, and Self-Control

You have to understand that we know that we will never not feel tired. We will never feel hopeful. We will never get a vacation. Ever. We know that the very act of being poor guarantees that we will never not be poor. It doesn’t give us much reason to improve ourselves.

(Tirado 2013)

¹⁷ Indeed, in some contexts, merely *being* a Black man is interpreted as a sufficient danger to warrant the use of force, as has been the case in a number of police shootings of unarmed Black men (Yancy & Butler 2015).

Unlike the case with racism, there is no necessary link between poverty and loss of moral security. In societies where there is universal health care, affordable housing, decent public transport and education, opportunities for respected social roles, and forms of leisure and social participation that don't require wealth, people on low incomes can still trust that the world will co-operate with their endeavours. Poor people in developing societies that lack a social safety net may still possess a measure of moral security, provided that they are not stigmatized or blamed for their condition.¹⁸

However, in modern neo-liberal societies, social and political narratives about poverty undermine moral security and distort self-control in ways that are similar to the effects of racism discussed above. And (as we shall see) narratives about poverty, race, and gender intersect in particularly damaging ways. In the US, the UK, and Australia there is a long-standing tradition of depicting welfare recipients (and people living in poverty in general) as lazy, imprudent, and lacking in self-control. Common perceptions of people living in poverty are captured in a report from a combined churches taskforce in Britain: poor people are lazy and just don't want to work: "They' are addicted to drink and drugs: 'They' are not really poor—they just don't manage their money properly: 'They' are on the fiddle: 'They' have an easy life on benefits" (Baptist Union of Great Britain et al. 2013). All of these myths imply that some lack of self-control is the cause of poverty and that, were it not for their moral failings, a person would not be living in poverty.

¹⁸ An anonymous reviewer suggested that stigmatized groups can live a life that is "just fine," so long as they have access to basic goods such as healthcare, physical safety, and educational opportunities. However, this misses an important point. We are not claiming that a lack of moral security makes a basically decent human life impossible, or that stigmatized groups are unable to have any kind of good life. But, the security of stigmatized groups is tenuous precisely because of their stigmatization. For a stigmatized group, their entitlement to the conditions of a decent life depends on the largesse or toleration of the privileged group—a largesse that may be withdrawn at any time, for almost any reason. This is a pattern that has occurred many times: a stigmatized group (such as African-Americans or Jews, for example) is separated from the larger society (sometimes forcibly). Such separation is often, but not always, enforced through the law. Within that segregated community individuals may sometimes flourish. However, if the privileged group perceives a threat to their status, or experiences economic or social pressures, or views members of the stigmatized groups as "stepping out of line", the stigmatized character of the out-group leaves them vulnerable to attack, a fact that members of stigmatized groups are likely to be extremely conscious of. Conditional security is not real security at all. This pattern also clearly affects the poor (who may also be members of several oppressed groups). Where poverty is stigmatized and people are blamed for their poverty in the ways we describe it is a very short step to tightening up on welfare, cutting benefits, placing impossible demands on beneficiaries, humiliating them, and so forth. We see this over and over again in advanced neo-liberal economies. To be stigmatized is to lack moral security.

We argue that people living in poverty do not on the whole lack the capacities for self-control in comparison to more privileged individuals though the stresses of poverty may present both internal and external challenges to the development and exercise of self-control.¹⁹ Rather they lack moral security; their agency is externally undermined through social and political narratives that deny them important elements of moral recognition. Because they cannot exert control over their circumstances to secure central diachronic goods we can say that they lack normative control over their lives.

2.4.1 Poverty and Self-Control

A closer examination of the circumstances of people living in poverty suggests the following conclusions, which we expand on in the following sections:

(A) The poor, and welfare recipients in particular, are subjected to demands for unreasonably high standards of self-control. They are expected to be grateful, compliant, and self-denying while facing financial hardship, illness, malnourishment, and stigma. If they fail to live up to these exacting standards they are deemed undeserving, blamed for their circumstances, and often subjected to further deprivation as punishment.

(B) Poverty narratives portray everyday actions, including attempts at strategic self-control, as further evidence in support of the myths outlined above. Yet there is no good evidence that poverty itself is explained by poor choices or a lack of willpower or self-control.

(C) Diachronic self-control has both a possibility condition and an identity condition. A preference for SS rewards may be rational when LL rewards seem out of reach, not evidence of a lack of self-control. As in the case of racism, motivation to pursue diachronic goods requires sufficient identification with the future self who enjoys those rewards.

Below, we discuss each of these in more detail.

¹⁹ Though sources cited above about the effects of psychosocial deprivation and stress on self-regulatory capacities provide evidence that children growing up in poverty may suffer impairments in the development of the capacities required for self-regulation.

2.4.1.A The Demand for Self-Control and the Expectation of Gratitude

People living in poverty are simultaneously portrayed as *incapable* of self-control (which supposedly justifies the imposition of paternalistic and punitive policies such as mandatory drug testing)²⁰ yet also as *capable* of self-control—which is why they are held accountable for their supposed inability to rise out of poverty. Paradoxically, some paternalistic and punitive welfare policies actually *undermine* the efforts of people living in poverty to overcome their disadvantages through long-term plans and diachronic self-control. For example, US welfare policies after 1996 often forced women to drop out of educational programs in order to accept low-paying and unskilled work, even though it is well known that education is one of the best methods of getting out of poverty (Hancock 2004: 127–8). Similarly, a more recent study of Australian welfare-to-work policies found that “Rather than increasing financial security, welfare to work created day-to-day and longer-term financial insecurity for the women we interviewed” in part by pushing women into insecure employment, thus inhibiting their ability to find long-term employment that matched their skills (Henriques-Gomes 2018). Thus, policies based on the belief that people living in poverty are undeserving and lazy have the effect of preventing hardworking and disciplined women from getting out of poverty.

Moreover, poor people who are welfare recipients are required to display self-control and gratitude in the face of extensive and petty bureaucratic requirements that seem designed to humiliate and punish. These requirements, common in the United Kingdom and Australia at least, are vividly portrayed in the recent Ken Loach film, *I, Daniel Blake*. In one typical scene a single mother, Katie, whom Daniel befriends, arrives late for her appointment at the Department of Work and Pensions. She has just been relocated to Newcastle hundreds of miles away from her family and friends in London and she got on the wrong bus and became lost. Because she is late she will be referred for sanctions—the withdrawal of her benefit for a period of time as a punishment—and in the meantime her payment is suspended. She has

²⁰ According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, at least fifteen US states have passed legislation requiring that some or all welfare recipients undergo mandatory drug testing (NCSL 2017). There are two reasons to believe that these policies are discriminatory and punitive measures aimed at the poor: such policies are never aimed at well-off recipients of public funds, such as legislators, public servants, and businesses getting tax breaks; and administering these policies costs more than is saved in cancelled benefits (ANCD 2013, Cunha 2014).

almost no money to feed her children. When she tries to explain why she was late, her explanation is dismissed and she is ejected from the building by a security guard (*I, Daniel Blake* 2016).

Despite being put in an impossible situation, and despite offering an excuse for being late that would, if offered by a wealthy or middle-class person in any other circumstances, likely be accepted, Katie's distress is interpreted as unreasonable, as "making a scene" and as further evidence that she lacks the ability to appropriately regulate her behaviour.

2.4.1.B Poverty, Willpower, and Strategies of Self-Control

Behaviour that would be judged as normal, as evincing self-control, or even as a deserved reward for effort, in wealthy or middle-class individuals is often interpreted as evidence of poor judgment, weakness of will, and self-indulgence in the poor. If only "they" could delay gratification and exercise self-denial, the narrative goes, they would be able to "get ahead," pay their bills, buy a house, and so forth—when the truth is that for most poor people no amount of self-denial will deliver the promised rewards.

People living in poverty are struggling to cope with challenges that more privileged individuals can often avoid, and with vastly reduced resources. So, for example, while both well-off and poor people use strategic rewards to support both synchronic and diachronic self-control, it is judged very differently in the poor. Academics may eat chocolates to get through a tedious marking session and go to the pub when they finish without facing any criticism. Linda Tirado (quoted above), who titles her blog post "Why I Make Terrible Decisions, Or Poverty Thoughts," reveals her awareness of the stereotypes to which she is subject but also describes the strategies she uses to support her willpower and meet her obligations:

I smoke. It's expensive. It's also the best option. You see, I am always, always exhausted. It's a stimulant. When I am too tired to walk one more step, I can smoke and go for another hour. When I am enraged and beaten down and incapable of accomplishing one more thing, I can smoke and I feel a little better, just for a minute. It is the only relaxation I am allowed. It is not a good decision, but it is the only one that I have access to. (2013)

Despite the fact that testimony like Tirado's demonstrates that people living in poverty understand the importance of developing strategies of self-control and are quite capable of exercising synchronic and diachronic self-control, one of the features of poverty narratives is that their testimony is

viewed as unreliable. The social identity associated with people living in poverty, like racist social identities, can usurp their ability to determine, to a reasonable degree, the meaning and significance of their lives, choices, and plans. Tirado explains her choice to smoke in terms of allowing her to achieve other important goals and obligations; but her choice is likely to be viewed by others as wasteful and indulgent—as evincing a lack of control. Similarly, a choice to eat out now and again is not an understandable way of getting some pleasure in a dreary life, but a shameful waste of money. Thus, the epistemic authority of people living in poverty and their ability to control the meaning and normative significance of their lives and choices is denied moral recognition. This denial of recognition is, as we discussed earlier, an attack on moral security.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the stereotype of the single mother who is “mooching” off welfare. In the United States, the stereotype of the “welfare mother”—the single, poor, usually African-American, mother—dominates political and media discussions about welfare and shapes policy responses (Hancock 2004: 24; Kelly 2010). The stereotype incorporates long-standing racist and sexist tropes about African-American women (Collins 2000: 77–9) and feeds on the broader hostility toward the poor described above. This stereotype “has two organizing dimensions: ‘hyper-fertility and laziness’” (Hancock 2004: 25). The welfare mother is sexually promiscuous, careless, manipulative, and a bad mother. In the United Kingdom, depictions of welfare recipients are similarly moralized and gendered: the single mother is portrayed as “never-married, young and socially irresponsible” (Wolfinger 2014: 3). Similar stereotypes occur in Australia and provided apparent justification for punitive welfare reforms that specifically target single mothers (Wolfinger 2014).²¹

The stereotype of the welfare mother intersects with racist and sexist narratives to undermine the moral security of women living in poverty in several ways. Firstly, women on welfare (and welfare recipients in general) are depicted as less deserving of some of the diachronic goods typically judged to be central to a rich human life. Despite the widespread belief that having children is an important, if not essential, component of a good human life, poor women are often criticized for having children—a popular bumper sticker in North Carolina in 1998 read “Can’t Feed ‘Em, Don’t

²¹ While male welfare recipients are subject to the general hostility to the poor described above, the gendered nature of these stereotypes is evident from the lack of a corresponding stereotype of male welfare recipients as bad fathers out to manipulate the system.

Breed ‘Em’ (Hancock 2004: 52). This sends the message that poor women are not entitled to the basic human good of a family; that their desire for loving relationships and their desire to be mothers need not be regarded as morally important or valuable. More generally, poverty narratives imply that poor individuals do not deserve other fundamental aspects of a decent human life, such as recreation, play, fulfilling work, or safe sexual relationships. Attempts by people living in poverty to achieve these elements of a decent life and thereby exert some normative control over the meaning and value of their lives are interpreted as *failures* of self-control and moral virtue rather than as attempts to *exercise* control.

2.4.1.C Possibility, Identity and Normative Self-Control

We argue that successful diachronic and normative self-control depends on two related conditions. The agent must believe that the valued outcomes are attainable via her own efforts. This is the *possibility condition*. Second, she must identify with the future self who enjoys these goods. She must feel that this future is *her* future. This is the *identity condition*. When these conditions are not met—and they are not met when moral security is profoundly lacking—self-control may lose its point.

Cheshire Calhoun says, “When exercising one’s agency has ceased to be reliably connected to producing intended effects, deliberation may well seem pointless and the future hopeless” (Calhoun 2008: 205). In such circumstances agency contracts, we stop trying to act in accordance with values that seem unachievable and may instead focus on the here and now. Thus, what appears to more privileged observers as a culpable lack of prudence and self-control may be *rational*: it is rational to go for smaller sooner rewards over larger later ones that are unlikely to ever arrive. Trust is an important factor in self-control and delay of gratification. A 2013 follow-up study to the marshmallow experiments found that “children’s wait-times are modulated by an implicit, rational decision-making process that considers environmental reliability.” They waited longer when they judged the experimenter to be reliable. The experimenters concluded that this reflected “reasoned beliefs about whether waiting would ultimately pay off” (Kidd et al. 2013). Poor people in insecure, untrustworthy social environments make the same calculations:

I make a lot of poor financial decisions. None of them matter, in the long term. I will never not be poor, so what does it matter if I don’t pay a thing and a half this week instead of just one thing? It’s not like the sacrifice will result in improved circumstances; the thing holding me back isn’t that

I blow five bucks at Wendy's It is not worth it to me to live a bleak life devoid of small pleasures so that one day I can make a single large purchase. I will never have large pleasures to hold on to. (Tirado 2013)

Normative reflection and choice is undertaken in an autobiographical context. To the extent that we cannot in reflection or imagination realistically project ourselves into a particular future, it is not a practical guide for our current choices. Poor people are not poor by and large because they value the wrong things or lack ordinary capacities for self-control. But they cannot see themselves belonging to and enjoying the fruits of a middle-class existence. They feel, on good evidence, that this is not for them. Tirado again:

We have learned not to try too hard to be middle class. It never works out well and always makes you feel worse for having tried and failed yet again. Better not to try We don't plan long term because if we do we'll just get our hearts broken. It's best not to hope. You just take what you can get as you spot it. (2013)

People living in poverty may thus justifiably come to believe that they cannot, by their own efforts, control their lives in accordance with their conception of what a flourishing life would be. Even if they try to be "good"—get an education, improve themselves—they may find that they are subject to policies and punishments that deprive them of those possibilities. When their mental excursions into the future reveal nothing but bleakness, when the diachronic goods of home, career, hobbies, and respected roles seem more like fantasies or descriptions of someone else's life, than goals available to *them*, the motivation required for diachronic self-control will not be generated. In these circumstances individuals living in poverty may give up on deliberating, planning, and acting on the basis of those values. This contraction of their agency is appropriately characterized in terms of a loss of normative control over the self.

2.5 Conclusion

Our analysis of the intersection between racist narratives, poverty narratives, self-control, and moral security reveals the significance of moral security for the foundations of normative self-control and agency. When moral security is undermined, individuals may lose normative control over their lives and

this leads to a contraction of agency that is, we argue, a form of moral injury. Our insights into the social foundations of self-control thereby challenge standard individualized accounts of self-control.

In addition, we suspect that our account has implications for Strawsonian conceptions of moral responsibility that locate moral responsibility in the expression of, and receptiveness to, the reactive attitudes. While we cannot argue for this claim in detail here, we believe that where moral security is lacking, as in the cases of poverty and racism examined above, people may be subjected to increased behavioural demands and face a pattern of undeserved blame and resentment. Behaviour in members of oppressed groups that triggers resentment in others would often not trigger resentment if performed by a member of privileged groups. For example, behaviour that might be viewed as cheeky or sassy in a white girl is viewed as aggressive or delinquent in an African-American girl (Anderson 2016). Members of oppressed groups may be expected to feel gratitude for minimally decent treatment and be seen as pushy if they assert their own claims to goodwill. They may also feel guilt and shame as they try and fail to meet the (unreasonable) standards to which they are held. This suggests that in oppressive social conditions, both other- and self-regarding reactive attitudes are not reliable guides to appropriate forms of interpersonal regard for others' moral standing. Rather, the reactive attitudes may be tracking and enforcing relationships of privilege and oppressions that are based on the denial of full moral regard to members of certain groups. If that is right we cannot recover a theory of responsibility via a careful description of our practices. Instead, the norms governing appropriate blame must be argued for independently. This suggests a need to re-examine the value of reactive attitudes such as resentment; what they are for, why and when they should be accorded moral or epistemic weight, how they should be regulated, and their proper connection to responsibility practices.

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