Oppression and (un)intelligibility: 
resistance, moral agency, and the 
remaking of social identities

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the idea that reinvention of their social identities is a possible means for members of subordinate social groups to demonstrate competencies in moral agency. As well as being considered morally inferior in the wider community, members of subordinate social groups may experience diminished moral agency as a result of external social constraints and the internalisation of negative stereotypes. Since a person's social identity is implicated in both their oppression and their potential for resistance, identity is problematised by positing that all persons have a multiplicity of identities, as proposed by Maria Lugones, including both privileged and oppressed identities. Social identities are further conceived as both mutable and possessing fluid boundaries. Being able to reinvent themselves depends upon persons developing feelings of self-worth and a sense of self-respect, which in turn rely upon the acquisition of appropriate self-knowledge through situational awareness. Crossing over the boundaries among their different identities and situating themselves critically in the margins provides oppressed persons with the social and discursive space to lay claim to new and reinvented selves. Since self-knowledge and self-direction are key to developing capacities in moral agency as well as to self-definition, I suggest that, rather than rely on political force to effect change, individual group members are able to resist systematic oppression based on their group memberships by making their social identities, relationships, and practices intelligible in their moral accounts. Limitations on self-knowledge and the possibilities of others attending to us, however, mean that these accounts can only be partial, and that persons with non-standard identities also expose themselves to the moral risk that their identities, relationships and practices may be unintelligible to others because they lack a shared interpretive framework. Nevertheless, it is argued
that the imperfect nature of these moral accounts does not invalidate the potential of self-reinvention as a tool to enable the development of the competencies necessary for the exercise of moral agency.
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Introduction

*Oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story.*

(bell hooks 1989, 43)

This thesis explores the possibility that persons whose moral competence has been compromised by oppression may be able to develop the skills necessary for moral agency, and take responsibility for their choices, by asserting the value of non-normative identities, relationships and practices in their moral accounts of their choices and identities. In this project I am mainly concerned with persons who, as a result of their membership of particular social groups, for example, women, the aged, racial and ethnic minorities, lesbians, gays and transgendered, and people with disabilities, frequently either experience diminished moral competency or are perceived by others to have diminished moral competency, which impedes their ability to act. I will be arguing that problematising social identities through self-defined group standpoints (Collins 2002, 208) may allow persons whose social identities are constrictive in terms of their capacity to exercise moral agency to challenge the stereotypical identities of mainstream categorisation. Although this project advocates the disruption of social categories, in practice it is enormously difficult to use real-life examples of social identities without reference to mainstream categories of identity. Post-structuralist approaches, particularly the influential theories of Judith Butler (1990) on gendered identity, suggest a way around this difficulty by rejecting the idea of identity as a reflection of a person's essential nature.
and arguing instead that it is an effect of a person's actions, and therefore that identity categories are fluid and provisional, and can be either reinforced or destabilised through performance. However, rather than pursue this direction I have chosen to follow the discourse that emphasises the 'real' nature of social identities (Alcoff 2006) because of its currency and meaningfulness in the examination of everyday struggles with identity. Therefore, I will continue to describe social identities in terms of these social categories, although I am keenly aware there is a tension between my necessity to make use of this language and my criticism of social categorisation as a contributory factor in oppression.¹

Persons belonging to social groups whose members are subject to oppression and social and political powerlessness may experience diminished moral agency as a result of social constraints on what is considered appropriate behaviour for members of that social group or due to psychological barriers to expressing themselves in specific contexts. Members of other social groups, for example, mainstream socially dominant groups in given contexts, such as men, white people, heterosexuals, and able-bodied people, may perceive members of subjugated social groups as less morally competent as a result of negative expectations and assumptions attached to particular social identities, for example, that women are not assertive enough to make good leaders.² These prejudiced perceptions may result in these persons being considered of lesser moral worth and not of equal standing in the moral community, and this negative perception by others may inform the person’s own feelings of self-

¹ Because I am principally concerned with the implications of social identity for agency some aspects of moral theory, particularly with regard to how oppressive practices affect specific dimensions of agency such as that found in theories of practical reasoning, are beyond the scope of this work. For an overview of practical reasoning and the approaches found in Aristotle, Hume and Kant the reader is referred to Audi (2006).

² I will be using the terms 'subjugated', 'subordinate(d)', and 'oppressed' interchangeably to refer to persons whose social identities as members of particular social group(s) diminish both their social power and moral standing in the wider community.
worth. However, even if persons do not internalise the negative perceptions of others the fact that others view them as morally inferior may diminish their capacity to exercise moral agency effectively and appropriately. In addition, unreasonable normative expectations about the kind of behaviours associated with members of subordinate groups may operate to curtail the kind of actions available to members of these groups, for instance, the idea that gays and lesbians cannot raise well balanced children may affect gays and lesbians acting on their aspirations to be parents. Persons whose moral worth is often questioned by others may lack the kind of social conditions necessary in which to demonstrate full moral agency or take responsibility for their actions. I argue that there is resistance potential for members of subjugated groups in taking responsibility through the moral accounts of their practices, relationships and identities if the person giving the account has attained a critical perspective in relation to the choices they make and the identities they espouse.

Identity is posited as multiple, mutable, and with fluid boundaries (Lugones 1990b, 503), so that persons possess any number and combination of oppressed and privileged social identities as a result of their membership(s) of different social groups. These multiple identities do not fragment the unity of the self since the authenticity and integrity of a multiple self is understood as being attained through ongoing activity, particularly through exercising autonomy skills (Meyers 2000, 172), rather than through the integration of the different aspects of the self.³ Since the self is conceived of as both embodied and inter-relational, the exercise of autonomy skills depends upon our relationships with others as these either facilitate or diminish the development of self-worth and moral competency that are necessary for the

³ See Chapter Three for more discussion of the integrated self and Chapters Four and Five for what it means to show integrity in terms of a person’s dependable responsiveness to others and in the moral accounts they give.
exercise of moral agency. Understanding moral agency through the lens of the plural, relational self makes possible the notion of resistance as the reinvention of social identities by the critical positioning of the self in regard to these identities, as well as the potential (un)intelligibility of these reimagined identities by others.

The idea that moral agency requires persons to be self-aware and have knowledge of their authentic desires, values, beliefs, and emotional states, is supported by Diana Tietjens Meyers's (1989) description of the skills necessary for autonomous choice: self-discovery, self-direction, and self-definition. The acquisition of relevant self-knowledge and effective moral reflection for a person's self-definition is dependent on being valued and acknowledged by others. Consequently, persons have to develop feelings of self-worth and self-respect in order to see themselves, and to be seen by others, as capable of making worthy moral choices and able to provide credible explanations for those choices. However, this may be difficult in inequitable societies in which some persons are devalued on the basis of their social identities; therefore, practices that facilitate the development of self-worth and self-respect may also be productive of moral agency for persons whose moral worth has been devalued by others.

By extension, it can be seen that the way persons make sense of moral problems and express their choices is by constructing a narrative of explanation, that is, a story of the values a person has relied upon in making their choices, and that the communication, interpretation and evaluation skills which are necessary for narrative competency presuppose those of autonomous competency (Atkins 2008, 136–37). Limits on self-knowledge, for example, the partial nature of what we can know about ourselves given that we are constructed relationally, operate in concert with the constraints of oppressive social practices and institutions to prevent persons who are
members of certain social groups from fully achieving this goal. This occurs as we have seen above, where group memberships attract constraints on action, such as constraints on affectionate displays by gays and lesbians in public places, or where social expectations about group members impact their ability to develop the competencies necessary to exercise full moral agency or take responsibility for their choices, as when women develop emotional receptivity at the expense of self-direction (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, 18).

In inequitable social contexts the categorisation of persons into social groups and the social identities assigned persons may also contribute to oppression by making it difficult for certain groups to exercise full moral agency where mainstream assumptions about the homogeneity and stereotypical behaviour of group members arises from understanding social identities as fixed and immutable. Consequently, one response to dominant methods of categorisation is to argue for the relevance of multiple (or 'intersectional') identities—the idea that we are always members of multiple social groups, some of which may be privileged and some oppressed—which require persons to be self-reflective and to situate themselves critically with regard to their social identities. This response is central to the way I take up my concern with moral competency because, as I shall argue, claiming plural situated identities is one way for members of subordinate groups to avoid the difficulties attendant on taking up or reclaiming demeaning mainstream stereotypes, although the latter is another possible resistance strategy in some contexts.

Claiming plural situated identities is also important given that the social and discursive spaces we inhabit, or are permitted to inhabit, are factors in oppression and consequently in resistance. Persons who are marginalised by inequitable social practices and hegemonic discourses—mainstream narratives, also called master
narratives, which affirm and entrench the status quo and exclude the experiences of subordinate groups—may consider that resistance equates to either the establishment of a separate 'home' space or movement towards the centre of social and political life. However, I argue that where persons have multiple social identities, some privileged and some oppressed, they have to be able to move into the boundary zones between different social groups and into the margins of social discourses in order to achieve the critical positioning necessary to unsettle established social categories. Knowledge systems provide a framing device for understanding information about the world and therefore function to maintain a world view; challenging the dominant explanatory framework by crossing over social and discursive boundaries makes alternative, situated epistemologies possible.

Although the resistance potential of making oneself intelligible through moral accounts has been suggested by a number of theorists,\(^4\) I believe I am alone in suggesting the liberatory potential of self-definition through the critical positioning achieved by inhabiting multiple perspectives of self-understanding. Developing awareness of their situated multiple identities allows persons to achieve the critical perspective necessary to interrogate assumptions and expectations about social identities arising from group memberships and to question the privileging of some identities achieved by subjugating others. In systems of oppression, both the construction of a person's social identity by dominant forces and the internalisation of negative attitudes toward a social identity may function to distort a person's sense of self. Consequently, it may be difficult for persons subjected to domination to construct a narrative of identity that is true to their authentic selves, that is, an account of themselves that reflects the person's authentic desires and hence is

\(^4\) See, for example, Babbitt (2001) and Nelson (2001a; 2001b).
morally credible (Meyers 2000, 158), rather than one conforming with desires that have been generated by their internalisation of external forces, such as normative expectations associated with the social identity they have been ascribed. Undertaking the kind of self-discovery and self-definition required to reveal the authentic self in these constrained situations requires persons to position themselves in the margins, in-between their different social identities, between self and self, and between self and other, since it is in these threshold places that self-transformation is possible (Anzaldua 2002, 1). It is my contention that moral accounts from the margins of social spaces function to question the notion of difference as a means of marginalising and disempowering the oppressed, and therefore that these moral accounts present a challenge to the way identities are categorised under systems of social domination. Because situated narratives may not be fully understood using the dominant knowledge scheme, those seeking to understand may also have to adopt a new or an alternative interpretive framework, and hence to question the epistemological certainties of domination.

Oppressive practices and social institutions based on group memberships lead both to the diminution of moral agency arising from expectations about the moral capacity of persons with certain social identities, and to incomprehensibility about their actions and choices as a result of a lack of epistemic credibility in mainstream discourses. Consequently, a person's ability to create a narrative of their self re-conceptualisation or self-definition, as well as revealing their capacity to function as a moral agent, also becomes a means of challenging negative expectations about members of their group by making their practices, identities and relationships intelligible to others. Such an activity brings with it a moral risk, that the person's moral life will be misunderstood (Calhoun 1999a). However, I am in agreement with
Susan Babbitt's (2001, 82) contention that sometimes it may be necessary for persons to take the risk of being unintelligible to others in order act in ways that are commensurate with seeing themselves as a certain sort of person, someone with moral worth, even if such a valuation is contrary to how they are seen by others.

In this thesis I defend the view that before persons are able to exercise moral agency they first have to acquire skills in moral competency. Moral competency consists of developing a diverse skill set that enables persons to undertake the kinds of practices necessary for demonstrating moral agency (Walker 2007, 10). Moral agency itself is not simply the capacity to act but instead is considered to be a person’s ability to act in accordance with their own deliberated choices that arise from and fulfil their own authentic desires. Whether their desires are authentically arrived at depends upon a person’s ability to value themselves and to see themselves as worthwhile individuals who are entitled to be treated as equal members of the moral community, and this may be influenced by how they are seen by others. Additionally, some persons may be unable to differentiate their own authentic desires from the normative expectations associated with members of their social group by others. For example, a woman may have difficulty in identifying whether her desire to have a child is authentically hers or not. Consequently, for persons belonging to some social groups significant internal and external barriers exist that may diminish their ability to exercise full moral agency.

My claim, then, is that a person’s ability to develop the skills in moral competency, necessary for full moral agency, is influenced by the social identities they are assigned or assume, since these identities are socially constructed and come with normative expectations and assumptions which serve to constrain the exercise of moral agency for members of some social groups. This constraint on moral agency
occurs because a person’s ability to develop competencies in moral agency is, to some extent, contingent upon whether they see themselves as morally worthy and develop feelings of self-respect, and this, in turn, depends to some extent upon how others perceive them. Therefore, it is my contention that resistance to oppressive social constraints for persons whose group identities are devalued by others involves persons recognising the existence of multiple perspectives arising from their multiple group memberships, and critically examining these situated perspectives in order to re-evaluate and redefine these identities. Further, I argue that such a project may involve persons valuing their own identities and insisting on the meaningfulness of their relationships and practices, regardless of how these are perceived by others, in particular members of privileged groups.

Structuring the thesis proved difficult because the chapters are interconnected thematically, and it has been challenging to develop the argument in a linear fashion while keeping track of its complex interrelated concerns. In order to maintain some order, generally speaking Chapters One to Three are concerned with the effects of social identities on the development of moral agency, while Chapters Four to Six examine how identity impacts upon persons exercising moral agency.

In order to trace the key arguments of this thesis—that resistance depends upon developing self-worth and the capacities necessary for moral agency by claiming pluralist situated identities and making these intelligible to others through the moral accounts persons give—and to elucidate these themes, I begin in Chapter One by considering some ideas about the social forces of domination. I propose a definition of oppression that supports my proposal for possible means of resistance. Teresa de Lauretis (1990) has suggested that the different ways in which power is viewed leads to conceptions of resistance; my own understanding of the possibilities
for resistance depends upon an understanding of power as relational, rather than a force that is held in the hands of specific individuals and institutions and which acts upon one from outside. This approach relies on Michel Foucault's (1981, 94) description of power as a force which circulates through the social field and that is revealed when it is exercised; and further, that resistance is intrinsic to the exercise of power (McLaren 2004, 217–18), making the relationships between persons and between persons and social institutions the focus of resistance. My understanding of oppression in a civil or social context also owes a debt to earlier conceptions of power, particularly socio-psychological understandings such as those found in the work of Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor (Fraser 1996, 14) that suggest that oppressive forces undermine persons' sense of self-worth; and, I would further claim, that distort what persons can know about themselves and the world. Combining these understandings of power and resistance with the idea that persons are oppressed in relation to social identities which arise from their assignment to subordinate social groups, I arrive at a view of oppression as social constraints directed at members of these social groups which hinder their capacity to develop the competencies necessary for exercising full moral agency. In this chapter I also briefly consider the way social group formation contributes to oppression by the homogenising and stereotyping of members of out-groups leading to the objectification of persons belonging to these subjugated cohorts.

I consider the aspects of social identities arising from group memberships which contribute to oppression in more detail in Chapter Two. In particular, I focus on the way the operations of social powers, including identity power, help to normalise unjust social practices in the creation of some social identities, especially in inequitable societies. I continue the discussion of social identities by considering
Maria Lugones's (1994, 460) contention that dominant processes of categorisation actively contribute to oppression, and her inference that resistance to these processes may require renewed thinking by all involved, both advantaged and disadvantaged, about the kind of social categories to which persons are assigned. The chapter concludes by considering Lugones's proposal of claiming multiple identities as a means of resisting for those whose opportunities and agency are diminished by the identities they are assigned by the dominant social order. Before doing this, however, I pick up the epistemic aspect of social oppression again when I consider how the situated knowledges of the subjugated may assist in their resistance and how privilege-cognizance—that is, awareness that in inequitable societies some social identities accrue advantages regardless of any individual merit—may help create the potential for resistance by revealing to those with privileged identities how their privilege is contingent upon practices of exclusion and discrimination.

Having raised the possibility of a person's self-definition being a means for them to resist oppressive categorisations in Chapter Two, I consider in Chapter Three some aspects of the self that are necessary for exercising this autonomous behaviour, using as my basis Marya Schechtman's (1996) notion of narrative self-constitution. I begin examining the relational nature of moral agency by considering what aspects of the self are essential for full moral agency, emphasising the development of skills in autonomy competencies (Meyers 2004, xvii) which itself requires feelings of self-worth and self-respect that can only be obtained by being valued as a person by other members of the moral community. I adopt Meyers’s argument that the notion of the unified, integrated and authentic self is not at odds with the idea of multiple identities if an integrated self is thought of as one in which the distinctive set of qualities making up a personality unite the disparate elements of the self (1989, 70), and
authenticity is understood as the exercise of autonomy skills and integration as the intelligibility of a person’s autonomous self-definition and self-discovery (2000, 172). Before this I suggest that the project of self-definition may require persons to unsettle their ideas about fixed boundaries of the self and of social identities and that such an idea requires a concept of social space, or space within power relationships, in which it is possible to conceptualise ideas of self and identity outside the dominant interpretive framework. Consequently, the second part of the chapter concentrates on how social spaces operate to constrain persons, through either social practices or expectations, and how this constraint is related to their embodiment. I also look in detail at actual social spaces and the power relationships involved, particularly how the notion of 'home' or 'homeplace' as a place of safety and empowerment is at odds with many persons' actual experiences, observing that conceptual understandings of public and private space are closely related to ideas about autonomy and agency. As a result of this investigation, I reject the idea that persons are able to act as full moral agents when they are in a 'safe' space, arguing that notions of safety and home entail an idea of the self that is too static. Instead, I return to the notion of boundary crossing between social identities.

In Chapter Four I move on from the discussion of how moral agency may be constrained in situations of oppression to consider how it may be exercised given the constraints outlined in the first half of the thesis. I focus on the aspect of taking responsibility for personal choices and identities, given that practices of responsibility are central to how we practice morality (Walker 2007, 16–17), although acknowledging the problematic nature of responsibility-taking for persons whose agency has been diminished by oppression. I consider two different but complementary approaches to taking responsibility: making oneself intelligible to
others through the explanations given for one's choices (Hoagland 1988), and committing to a project, values or relationship by actively standing behind practices, identities and relationships (Card 1996). Both approaches require persons to be self-reflective and to develop appropriate self-knowledge and self-understanding, and they therefore rely upon them demonstrating skills in autonomy and narrative competency in order to give coherent moral accounts of themselves. Being able to give a moral account of one's choices and actions is a basic element of responsibility-taking, since moral self-accounting may be demanded of us or we may demand it of others for their actions and choices. In addition, we understand moral problems by way of the moral accounts given by those involved. However, unless those attending to these moral accounts situate themselves so as to listen with a non-judgemental attitude, then there is room for those giving the accounts to be misunderstood or be unintelligible, particularly if they stand behind non-normative practices, identities and relationships.

Given that one of the risks of giving moral accounts is being misunderstood, I begin Chapter Five by considering the conditions required for a moral account to be intelligible to others. The key factor in determining whether a person's moral account is intelligible is whether they share a moral framework with others about what constitutes living a good life within which the person's behaviour is meaningful to those others. Where persons stand behind non-normative behaviours, identities and relationships they may lack this shared interpretive framework, with the result that their choices and ensuing explanations are unintelligible to others. I suggest that whether there is social uptake, in the sense that a person's choices or behaviours are meaningful, and hence intelligible, to others, depends upon whether that person, because of their group affiliations, has the good moral luck to be a member of a
social group which has some credibility. In the second half of the chapter I consider the argument that when a person's claims are unintelligible to others then the person is taking a moral risk, that is, the risk that they may not see themselves as possessing self-worth, or have the expectations appropriate to persons possessing self-worth, because the meanings they stand behind are not socially validated (Babbitt 2001, 4).

Persons risk their actions or choices being misunderstood when they either stand behind non-normative identities, relationships and practices or when they belong to a social group whose members are denied certain kinds of moral agency, in other words, when they are perceived by others as not being full members of the moral community. Although being misunderstood or unintelligible to others can be interpreted as evidence of moral failure (Calhoun 1999a), I argue that acting in ways commensurate with one's feelings of self-worth, and contrary to the negative valuations of others, may gain acknowledgement of one's value from those others, even if one's choices and actions themselves are unintelligible.

In the final chapter I bring together the idea that persons can resist the negative perceptions and expectations which are present in dominant categorisations of their social identities by valuing themselves and insisting on the meaningfulness of their practices, identities and relationships. I argue that self-worth can be built by re-envisioning social identities, but I caution that such an undertaking requires challenging the dominant interpretive framework and consequently may result in a person's actions and choices being misunderstood by others. Re-creating one's sense of self involves developing the skills in autonomy and narrative competency which I described in Chapter Three; however, it also presupposes that persons inhabit social and discursive spaces that enhance the development of these essential moral competencies. Also such re-imaginings of the self are necessarily partial since there
are significant external and internal limitations on a project of self-invention (Mackenzie 2008), particularly where oppressive forces distort the kinds of social identities available. Despite these limits, however, I suggest that when persons are valued as equal members of the moral community their practices, identities and relationships are considered meaningful even when these are not fully intelligible to others.

I offer the thesis that taking responsibility for one's choices by claiming plural situated identities and making these identities and one's relationships and practices intelligible to others through the moral accounts one gives as a tentative first step towards resisting the demoralising effect of oppressive social forces. Such moral accounts are necessarily partial given that self-knowledge and self-understanding are incomplete; moreover, such accounts risk unintelligibility if persons stand behind non-normative identities and behaviours, impairing their potential social uptake. Consequently, such accounts are limited in their transformative power. The main impact of such accounts would seem to be in their ability to empower the person giving the account by giving them a means to assert their moral worth and to demonstrate moral competency. However, as some of the examples given will show, the social costs of standing behind non-normative identities and behaviours may outweigh potential benefits. Further work needs to be done to establish how transformative moral accounts can be, perhaps through an investigation of such accounts and their social impacts.
1. Oppression and relationships of power

For every oppressed group there is a group that is privileged in relation to that group.

(Iris Marion Young 1988, 276)

Introduction

In this chapter I develop a conceptual understanding of oppression in which membership of different social groups becomes the justification for privileging some social identities at the expense of others, where social identities are conceived as multiple, fluid and inter-relational, so that degrees of both oppressed and privileged social identities may co-exist in the same individual. Historically, the conceptual shift from political to social analyses has allowed socio-psychological aspects of oppression to emerge as significant barriers to resistance. Chief among these for my purposes are social expectations about moral capacity which lead to the diminishment of effective moral agency, particularly in persons who are members of less privileged groups. Several feminist theorists, for example Marilyn Frye (1983, 10–11) and Ann Cudd (2006, 23), support a view of oppression expressed by Iris Young as "the inhibition of a group through a vast network of everyday practices, attitudes, assumptions, behaviours, and institutional rules" (1988, 275), resulting in systematic harms unjustly perpetrated on group members. The distortion and

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5 A number of theorists either reject the notion that social group memberships influence identity to the degree suggested here, or argue that the effect of social group memberships on identity is so profound that no unified identity can emerge. See Meyers (2000, 158–59, 162–63) for a detailed discussion and rebuttal of these two positions. I would also argue that identities arising from group membership(s) do not exclude the possibility of a unified self, and, although social group memberships are significant in terms of the formation of identity, these are not the only factors involved. For example, see Fricker (2007, 14–17) for the role of identity power in social identity formation.
The ossification of power relationships between members of different social groups is central to the construction of a resistance strategy, since any attempt at resistance needs to acknowledge the web of interconnected and interdependent relationships any one individual has, and how, given the co-existence of privileged and oppressed social identities, these relationships may both disempower and empower them to effect change. The complexity of social power relationships in conjunction with the multiple nature of social identities means that any strategy for resistance must be equivocal about the possibility of success; however, the intricate interplay itself suggests the possibility of resistance, albeit with these reservations.

History and development of concepts of oppression and resistance

I will briefly consider some historical approaches to oppression theory in Western thought, drawing on work done by feminist theorists, in particular Cudd (2006) and Nancy Fraser (1996), before considering the role of social groups in relation to oppression in more detail. As Cudd shows, the concept of oppression has undergone a number of significant changes since gaining momentum with the advent of liberalism and the notion that human beings should be treated equally. It was conceived in quite different ways by different theorists until, in the modern period, it began to refer to arbitrary or unjust laws causing economic or physical deprivation (Cudd 2006, 7). In the nineteenth century the concept was broadened by social movements, such as first wave feminism, so that rather than referring only to political subjugation of a people by a ruler, oppression could also encompass the

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6 See Cudd (2006) for a detailed outline of how the concept has changed over time.
7 As mentioned by Cudd (2006, 5–6), Hobbes, Rousseau and Locke offer quite distinct understandings of what it means to be oppressed. Cudd sums these up as the understanding of oppression as synonymous with domination and tyranny and suggesting "rule by an arbitrary or opposing will, and resulting in the abrogation of liberal political rights, economic deprivations, and physical brutality" (2006, 7).
notion that one social group may be oppressed by another. Additional conceptual shifts occurred during the nineteenth century resulting in more nuanced understandings, including the idea that expectations based on social conventions and prejudices could themselves be injurious to specific social groups. By focussing on the mutual need for recognition between master and slave, Hegel's work on slavery suggested another, psychological, account of oppression (Cudd 2006, 11). A further shift occurred with Marx's analysis of oppression as fundamentally the economic exploitation of labour by capital (Cudd 2006, 12–15).

Fraser (1996) makes the useful—although perhaps overly simplistic—distinction between theories which categorise oppression as economic deprivation and those that focus on cultural deprivation. According to Fraser, theories of oppression can be divided into two main streams according to the responses demanded by them: materialist conceptions which focus on economic deprivation, such as Marxism, and cultural or symbolic understandings, which I describe as socio-psychological, such as that found in Honneth and Taylor which build on Hegelian ideas, in which exclusionary and marginalising social practices diminish the moral worth of the oppressed. In the first case the situation of those who are oppressed can be relieved by economic redistribution so that, for example, they have access to jobs and schools, higher wages and professions previously denied them. In the second case the goal is for the oppressed to gain social acceptance, which may be achieved by gaining recognition from those with more power so that their voices are heard and

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8 In her critique of Fraser's division Young queries whether the category of powerlessness can be ascribed to maldistribution, given that it is described "both in terms of the division of labor and in terms of norms of respect" (1998, 54). Young further suggests the imposition of two categories is arbitrary since Fraser fails to justify the reduction to two categories over the five suggested by Young (1988). I discuss Young's pluralist approach later in this chapter.

9 Fraser (2005) has since suggested a third division based on the exclusion of women from the political framework, which has representation as the response demanded.
their identities, relationships and practices given credence. In both cases the world is seen as being divided into a number of sub-groups under two over-arching main groups: the privileged and the oppressed. In later chapters I will be arguing for an understanding of social identities as both multiple and changeable, which would suggest it is overly simplistic to divide the world in this way. However, the language of oppression and privilege has a long history in feminist theory and provides a useful framework for a discussion of social injustice which targets a group or category of people.\(^{10}\)

Cudd (2006, 21) critiques early theoretical approaches for failing to provide a starting point for dealing with oppression. In doing so she indicates a further way such theories can be divided, and another way of thinking about resistance. On the one hand, Cudd argues, are those theorists such as Marx and Hegel, who suggest a collective, functionalist approach is required for change, a future social form in which such injustices are removed. The difficulty with such an approach for a person finding themselves oppressed is how to act on an individual level. Conversely, Cudd argues that Rousseau and Mill posit individualist theories that fail to include the systemic nature of social injustices against an individual who is a member of a social group, and that such an omission makes it unclear what is preventing individuals from resisting by an act of will. Neither of these approaches is adequate, in Cudd's opinion, because what is needed is a theory of oppression which acknowledges that social oppression is perpetrated and maintained by social institutions but also "posits mechanisms through which social phenomena work at the individual level" (2006, 21), and hence allows for individuals to respond.

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\(^{10}\) Lugones (1994) suggests that the dualistic division of the social identities of the oppressed by the privileged is integral to domination, denying as it does the necessarily multiplicitous nature of social identities. I will consider this argument and its implications in more detail in Chapters Two and Three.
Fraser (1996, 13) makes a further distinction between two kinds of remedies, affirmative and transformative, available to correct injustices of recognition or distribution. Affirmative remedies, such as the welfare state, aim at correcting inequitable outcomes with regard to injustices of distribution without addressing the underlying political structure, whereas transformative remedies, such as socialism, attempt to address the framework which allows the injustice to occur. Where injustices of recognition occur, affirmative remedies, such as multiculturalism, aim at the cultural re-valuation of a social group whereas transformative remedies seek to deconstruct the opposition between privileged and oppressed by reconceptualising the subject. Fraser (1996, 28), in noting that some of these pairings are incompatible because they aspire to opposing goals—for example, the redistribution of materials to some groups via the welfare state is in tension with the deconstruction of social identities—hints at the difficulties inherent in constructing a coherent approach to resistance which is responsive to both the problem of recognition and the problem of redistribution.

Other feminist approaches to oppression

Cudd (2006, 19) identifies a number of strands in recent feminist theorising on oppression: those that owe their methodology and conceptual bases to Hegel, Marx and Mill, that is, to failures of recognition, economic equality and legal equality, as well as psychoanalytical analyses of oppression. Not limited to feminist theory are approaches which focus on racial or ethnic oppression, the oppression of the Jews as a result of the Holocaust, heterosexist oppression of gay, lesbian and

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11 Kelly Oliver (2001, 50–51) argues that the distinction made by Fraser is not as marked as she would claim since, although Fraser argues for a transformative approach which is not a simplistic binary/oppositional approach of the affirmative approach, her analysis is a continuation of that tradition.
transsexual minorities, the oppression of the disabled, and the oppression of both the elderly and children. Among feminist approaches to oppression, Jean Harvey's (1999) suggests that the underlying relationships are fundamental to oppressive situations, and it is the distorted nature of these relationships between members of different groups that results in harm to some group members. This is an important observation: it is not the imbalance in power between members of different groups per se that makes for oppression, since many unequal power relationships are for the most part healthy (parent-child, teacher-student, employer-employee, for example). Rather, it is "power-laden but distorted relationships" (Harvey 1999, 39), which are founded on accepted social practices, that result in harm to some individuals. For example, if a parent makes decisions for a teenage child without consultation, even if these decisions are in the child's interests and accord with their desires, the "continual nonconsultation constitutes a significant distortion of what the relationship should be" (Harvey 1999, 21). As a result, resistance commonly involves the revelation of the underlying power relationships which have ossified to support forces of domination (Young 1988, 275).

The contingent and unstable nature of social identities and their primacy in feminist analyses of oppression has resulted in a focus on moral agency, since agency, at least as it is understood here, is considered as being "concerned with the social conditions for and requirements of action, as well as with the internal and external barriers to action" (Deveaux 2000, 15). Given the feminist presupposition of the compromised nature of autonomy and agency in the context of oppression, resistance theories often emphasise how individuals may be able to demonstrate moral and agential capabilities through affirmation or reclamation of social identities in spite of diminished effective moral agency. For example, Claudia Card (1996) has
argued for the importance of 'standing behind' identities, relationships and practices as a lesbian as a means of taking responsibility for one's choices and the endorsability of one's values, and I will return to this idea in Chapter Four. Similarly, many third-world and feminists of colour emphasise the significance of re-evaluating social identities, particularly those constructed by dominant social institutions. Lugones (1994, 473), for example, has suggested that reducing plural identities to a singular unity is a form of psychological oppression, insofar as it impels these individuals to see themselves as fragmented selves, and resistance, therefore, requires rethinking social categories as well as reconstruction of the identities themselves. Given the complex nature of social identity construction—which I will explore in the next section—and the difficulties involved in self-definition arising from our dependency on others for knowledge of ourselves, which I will also revisit in later chapters, the project of reconstructing identity, implicating as it does the need for mutual intelligibility, becomes problematic.

Whether overtly or covertly most accounts of oppression refer to the different ways oppression is experienced, and it might be more accurate to talk of cases of cultural oppression, physical oppression, economic oppression or psychological oppression, rather than of a general experience of oppression. Young (1988) describes these varying manifestations—exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence—as the "five faces of oppression". Although it is possible for an individual to experience all five if they are subject to extreme forms of oppression, such as slavery, and some forms are more likely to be experienced in some situations than others—cultural imperialism arising from colonisation, for example—more commonly individuals experience a combination of several of these 'faces'. Consequently, Young (1988, 276) argues that because
oppression is experienced in different combinations of different factors by different groups it is not possible to arrive at one account of oppression which covers all cases; it is, however, possible to use a combination of the five aspects to describe the circumstances of the oppression of any one group. Young's pluralist approach is notable because it makes an attempt to include in the theory the complexity of multiple oppressions arising from multiple group memberships, a point central to my approach to oppression.12

Another way of thinking about the experience of oppression is that it is manifested differently in different spheres. In the social realm oppression is typically experienced via practices of discrimination, marginalisation and/or exclusion from public life; psychologically, the internalisation of oppression can be perceived as loss of self-respect, or belief that one lacks the capacity for autonomy (Bartky 1990, 29–30); and, in discourse, oppression may be evident as the silencing, exclusion or distortion (Morgan 1987) of some moral voices.

Finally, oppression can be approached by considering who benefits from its continuation, expressed best in Sandra Bartky's insight that "the kinds of alienation" generated by oppression "serve to maintain a vast system of privilege—privilege of race, of sex, and of class" (1990, 32).

12 Unlike Young, however, I am not concerned with an account of oppression that describes every possible kind of oppression in every possible circumstance. In particular, although I may allude to them, I am less concerned with those instances of oppression that stem from colonisation—for example, the subjugation or physical or cultural elimination of indigenous groups, physical or economic enslavement—or state-sanctioned programs for eradication of whole groups, for example, through ethnic cleansing, such as pogroms against the Jews and Romany. Two reasons constrain my choice of examples of oppression: firstly, I have to draw the line somewhere or be overwhelmed by the number of cases of oppression; and secondly, and most importantly, the instances mentioned here often involve formal justification of the program of oppression, such as laws which describe members of a group as non-citizens, and hence resistance must be undertaken to change legal standing as well as to change the way in which the moral worth of the individuals is viewed. My principal concern in this thesis, however, is the way individuals are viewed as members of the moral community, and the experiences I am most concerned with are those that diminish the moral capacity and agency of individuals through exclusion and/or marginalisation rather than physical harm caused by overt violence or exploitation.
In summary, an adequate conceptual understanding of social oppression must point in the direction of a resolution to the injustices identified (Cudd 2006, 20–21), while at the same time being complex enough as to require neither an overly individualistic nor collectivist response. In addition, given the complexity of the construction of social identities, any account of social oppression should avoid a simplistic binary approach. It should provide individuals with the possibility of resistance while not burdening them with the responsibility for changing social institutions; and, instead of simply deconstructing oppositions between subject groups it should anticipate the conceptual change needed for transformation to occur.\textsuperscript{13} The account I am going to proffer here is that \textit{oppression is the unjust or unfair treatment of individuals on the basis of their membership of social group(s), which results in feelings and experiences of diminished moral worth and potentially in the reduction of moral capacity and agency.} In other words, I am concerned with oppression that is the result of unfairly privileging one group over another, such that the internalisation of oppression as a result of unjust treatment may impact on moral capacity and agency. Consequently, the focus of my thesis is on the socio-psychological aspects of oppression as my main concern is how the oppressed can gain recognition of their moral worth given the way their moral capacity is compromised as a result of how their social identities are viewed.

Group membership is important to my understanding of oppression insofar as social identities contribute to oppression because individuals are identified as belonging to particular social groups whose members have identities that often attract negative descriptors. As Frye has put it: "If an individual is oppressed, it is in

\textsuperscript{13} Although I do not consider deconstructive approaches to oppression here, I have found useful Oliver's (2001, 51) suggestion that, rather than limit themselves to the oppositional logic of binary analysis, responses to oppression should provide an alternative conceptual framework to be truly transformative.
virtue of being a member of a group or category of people that is systematically reduced, molded, immobilised. Thus, to recognise a person as oppressed, one has to see that individual as belonging to a group of a certain sort” (1983, 8). Consequently, the nature of social groups, particularly how they are constructed, is key to my understanding of oppression, and I will consider this briefly in the rest of this chapter before moving on to explore the nature of social identities and oppression in detail in Chapter Two.

**Social group membership**

Although there is disagreement about the nature and formation of social groups, or even that they exist (Cudd 2006, 34), the concept of group membership is such a useful way of understanding human interactions that I believe it would be a mistake to discard it prematurely merely because it is contested.\(^{14}\) I am aware there is a tension between my use of the term and the implications of unity and coherence that may not obtain for some groups, but it will be assumed for the purposes of my thesis that social groups exist, and that they are significant in terms of social structure and interpersonal interactions.\(^{15}\) However, because social groups may result from established social practices and norms they may not be visible, even to individual members of the group. Additionally, the multiplicity of group memberships for individuals with multiple social identities may obscure recognition

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\(^{14}\) Cudd (2006, 34–35) divides theorists into those who accept the existence of social groups and those who deny that the term has any usefulness. She further broadly divides those who accept that social groups exist into intentionalists, whose main focus is the social club, modern state or conversational pair, and structuralists, who describe social groups as the result of implicit and explicit social forces such as rules, norms, and practices.

\(^{15}\) Here I am in agreement with Alcoff, who argues that “group identities can be misnamed, misrecognized, or misrepresented, but they are real entities, and thus are not inherently or inevitably incorrect descriptions. They are not illusions, or reducible to the machinations of power, or stable and fixed with closed borders and clear criteria of inclusion” (2006, 121; italics in original).
of the oppressive nature of some group memberships, for example, the gendered oppression of white women who are privileged by race identity.\textsuperscript{16} However, it is important to remember that at any point any single person usually belongs to several groups, "their identities fuse axes of harm with axes of advantage", so that individual subjects may be privileged and/or oppressed multiple times, and/or both privileged and oppressed on the basis of group membership, dismantling "the stark opposition between dominant and subordinate positions" (Meyers 2000, 160).

In order to examine how group membership contributes to oppression I will utilise the ideas of a number of theorists, in particular those of Young (1988) and Cudd (2006), on how social groups arise and how key features of social groups are relevant to an understanding of oppression.\textsuperscript{17} Firstly, Cudd claims that social group formation is externalist; that is, group formation is not related to the inner workings of individuals, or what they feel about themselves, but instead to objective facts about the world (Cudd 2006, 36). In other words, social groups are the result of political and social realities not psychological states. Although I agree with Cudd that social group formation is externalist and the resulting social identities must be endorsed by others, I also argue in the following chapters that an externalist view is neither wholly deterministic nor does it preclude the possibility of self-definition. For example, a member of the gendered group 'woman' is able to some extent to pick and choose which of the characteristics associated with being a woman she will take up and which she will reject. Which aspects of an identity are sufficient for the person to

\textsuperscript{16} Tom Robinson's accuser, Mayella Ewell, in \textit{To Kill a Mockingbird} falls into this group; Harper Lee (2006) reveals this duality by showing that Mayella has power over Tom because of her race, while her gender simultaneously makes her a victim of her father.

\textsuperscript{17} Cudd’s discussion on social groups makes use of empirical research and approaches in social psychology which are outside the scope of this thesis. For relevant studies in this area the reader is referred to Tajfel (1981), Oakes et al (1994), and Branscombe (1998); and for recent scholarship on theories of the self in social psychology to Baumeister (1999), Sedikides and Spencer (2007), and Leary and Tangney (2012).
claim or be assigned a social identity varies depending on both the time and place and the identity itself, for example, a person can be a 'woman' without being born one but must be born an Indigenous Australian.\textsuperscript{18} It should also be noted that not every social identity is the result of social group formation. Cudd argues further that an internalist view of social group formation is not sufficient because it does not account for those who may not self-identify with the group to which they find themselves involuntarily assigned. I will consider voluntary versus non-voluntary group membership in more detail later in this chapter.

If we are who we think we are because others believe us to be so then identity depends on how others define us, and such definitions are in terms of social groups which have associated with them specific attributes, stereotypes and norms which then affect one's sense of identity. Young suggests that although one finds oneself a member of a group it does not follow that one cannot change one's group membership, and that "such changes in group affinity are experienced as a transformation in one's identity" (1988, 274).\textsuperscript{19} Our sense of having a particular identity is dependent upon the affirmation of others. For example, believing oneself to be gay is not the same as coming out to others at a Mardi Gras which involves making claims about oneself which are then authorised by others. One can believe any number of things about oneself and one's identity but these do not normally contribute to a social identity unless they are given credence by others.\textsuperscript{20} Although

\textsuperscript{18} I have used the terminology 'Australian Aboriginal person' or 'Indigenous Australian' throughout in deference to the perception that the term 'Aborigine' has negative connotations connected to white colonisation which perpetuate racism and discrimination against this group. However, the reader should be aware that these two expressions are general terms used to refer to a heterogeneous grouping of many different tribes of mainland Indigenous Australians.

\textsuperscript{19} The reverse can also hold: changes in one's relationships can change one's identity and hence one's group memberships.

\textsuperscript{20} I am thinking here of situations where someone may believe they belong to a group in good faith but discover later they do not; for example, they may believe they belong to a particular culture but discover as an adult they were adopted from a culture with different values. One can also believe the opposite: that one belongs to a group from which one is rejected, such as girl believing she is a
there is some leeway for difference within a group, and how an individual acts may influence the way all members of the social group are viewed, in general social identities are social because they are culturally derived rather than solely constructed by an individual.\textsuperscript{21}

The existence and constitution of social groups reflect changes to the way social identities are constructed across space and time. The notion of what constitutes a racially distinct group, for example, varies both historically and geographically. In the United States (US) Latin American immigrants are labelled by race or ethnicity depending on both their country of origin and which city or state they reside in, labelling which often reflects ideas of class as well as race. For example, Mexicans in California are labelled by race, whereas Argentinians in the US may escape any racial connotations at all (Alcoff 2006, 241). Not only are patterns of group differentiation fluid but the internal differentiation of groups reflects the wider society (Young 1988, 274) so that, for example, language, religion, nationality and culture mediate understandings of skin colour and race (Alcoff 2006, 245).\textsuperscript{22} While discrimination on the basis of race, sex or class may be overtly expressed through official depictions of group membership, for example, race definitions in South Africa during the period of Apartheid, mostly these understandings are implicit and, rather than being enshrined in formal legislation, are reflected at the level of social practices.

\textsuperscript{21} As I discuss in more detail in Chapter Two, members of in-groups are permitted differences in behaviour and practice, whereas members of out-groups tend to be defined homogeneously.

\textsuperscript{22} In the Dominican Republic 'black' refers only to Haitians, and dark-skinned Dominicans self-identify as Indian or mestizo; however, when they move to the US they find they are considered black by American race standards (Alcoff 2006, 269).
Group construction may involve identification through physical markers on the body, but sometimes the organisation of social identities in socially negotiated spaces is fundamental to the origins and nature of the social group. Patricia Hill Collins (2002) suggests social groups are created via two main mechanisms: either exclusionary or inclusive social practices. Commonly, social groups are formed via exclusionary social and political practices that result in segregated places of employment, education, housing and public facilities. The physical separation between one group and another emphasises both the absence of commonality and the oppositional relationship that exists between them, particularly where a hierarchical power relationship is involved. Notions of purity and separation, whether they occur in geographical space, occupation or housing, or in school curricula, appear to be central to how unjust power relations are maintained (Collins 2002, 214). Indeed the attempt to separate out cleanly the different identities is the way oppressive societies structure social categories (Lugones 1994), something I will investigate in more detail in Chapter Two. Typically, race and class groups are formed in this way, so that poor neighbourhoods and ethnic ghettos are not simply artefacts of group formation but function as key elements in the construction of the group. The construction of social groups via exclusionary practices is in contrast to the creation of gendered groups which depend upon inclusive strategies; women typically live in

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23 Both Collins and Young qualify the notion of class as a social group. Young (1988, 274) distinguishes two ways of looking at class, either as the definite example of social group or as an abstract structural concept that ignores subjectivity and identity, and concludes that class can be both of these. Collins (2002, 215) agrees that class is not a thing but instead describes an oppositional relationship among social groups unequal in power, in fact the paradigmatic example of a mutually constructed privileged–disadvantaged relationship between social groups. Since the social groups produced are the result of a power relationship they are both constant and changeable historically and geographically.

24 In extreme cases the separation of groups includes physical barriers to create separate spaces—for example, the Israeli West Bank barrier, the Berlin Wall and the Warsaw Ghetto—in which difference is demarcated by walls and maintained by force. Anyone who occupies that space is identified ideologically as belonging to a separate group regardless of race, class, or ethnic, or religious affiliation, so that the husbands and wives of Jews who remained with their spouses during the Nazi era gave their Jewish spouses pseudo-Aryan credentials. See Klemperer (1998).
close proximity to men and are encouraged to develop "a commonality of interest with men" (Collins, 2002, 211). Given that women may not see themselves as having separate concerns, beliefs and interests to men of their class and/or race these differences in the mechanics of group construction may explain why for some women gender identity is less salient than class or race.

The salience of social identities

The examples given above suggest another aspect of group membership which is important, particularly in relation to hierarchical societies, and that is whether one's membership of a group can be described as voluntary or not (Cudd 2006, 36). If membership of a social group is freely chosen then it is less likely to be implicated in oppressive social identities than if the individual is assigned to the group, particularly as a result of visual characteristics such as skin colour or gender. I say 'less likely' because situations exist where freely chosen affiliations can also result in oppressive social identities, and it may be misleading to divide social group memberships into those that are voluntary and those that are assigned. It is sometimes the case that persons choose to voluntarily move into a group which would normally be an assigned, non-voluntary group, such as when someone decides to have sexual reassignment surgery. Marilyn Friedman's understanding of the differences between social groups may be helpful here since she divides group affiliations into 'communities of choice', or those we enter voluntarily, and 'communities of place', or those communities which are "found, not entered, discovered, not created" (1990, 152). This distinction would allow for persons

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25 I prefer the term 'found communities' to describe these, since I believe it suggests the non-voluntary nature of these affiliations better than communities of place which seems less specific. In addition, in later chapters I consider the importance of spaces, both social and discursive, in the exercise of moral agency.
undergoing sexual reassignment surgery to choose to be members of a group by entering a community of choice which for other group members may be a found community.

However, for the purposes of this discussion I accept Cudd's distinction that there are social groups which are entirely freely chosen and those whose memberships are at least partially determined by external forces, in part because the voluntary/non-voluntary group distinction drawn by Cudd is another way of saying that some social identities may be less important in terms of the story of resistance.26 Similarly, sometimes there will be a hierarchy of features of identity and sometimes they will be equally salient (La Caze 2004, 268), and, depending on the situation one finds oneself in, one's sex, race, or class identity may not be equally compelling factors in regard to oppression and resistance (Moi 1999, 201).27 However, where discrimination exists, the aspect of one's identity that is foregrounded is often not the aspect one would deem germane in the particular situation. For example, a woman scientist may feel that her gender is not relevant in being considered for a promotion, but the possibility that she may have children in the future may be considered relevant by the persons considering her for the position, when a man's potential fatherhood would not. Those who decide whether race or sex or class identity is pertinent at a particular time or in a particular place are usually members of social groups that benefit from the subjugation of another group, not the members of the subjugated group themselves. Therefore, being able to decide for oneself when one

26 Young describes non-voluntary group membership as having "the character of what Heidegger calls 'thrownness', one finds oneself as a member of a group" (1988, 274).
27 Toril Moi suggests that for Simone de Beauvoir "to say that the sexed body is the inevitable background for all our acts, is at once to claim that it is always a potential source of meaning, and to deny that it always holds the key to the meaning of a woman's acts" (1999, 201). In some situations sex will be less important than class or race but in other situations it will not be; this neither suggests nor denies a hierarchy of oppressions.
wants to highlight one's sex or class or race identity may be important in terms of resistance, since, just as one may be compulsorily assigned a social identity, one may also be prevented from claiming an identity at a particular moment or in a particular situation.\textsuperscript{28}

**Visibility and stereotyping**

Oppressive social identities bring with them the apparently antonymous reality of being simultaneously highly visible and highly invisible. For example, women experience being both highly visible in terms of their sexuality whilst simultaneously being overlooked and ignored in other situations, as middle-aged women trying to obtain service in shops frequently discover.\textsuperscript{29} This is not to say that the visibility of social identities per se is the problem since in some cases one may desire to be seen as owning a particular identity. However, some social identities are constructed to be highly visible and oppressive, as the assimilated Jews of western Europe discovered during the years of Nazi control.\textsuperscript{30} The most pervasive way in which people categorise others is to divide the world into those who belong, or the in-group, and all others, or the out-group. Those in the in-group are seen as individuals with positive attributes while those not belonging are typically seen as

\textsuperscript{28} Moi puts it this way: "In certain situations I wish my female body to be considered as the insignificant background of my claims or acts ... My wish does not represent an attempt to escape my particularity ... It represents, rather, a wish to deny that the fact of being a woman is of any particular relevance to my understanding of trigonometry" (1999, 204).

\textsuperscript{29} My partner discovered a (highly visible) way to obtain attention as a middle-aged woman. After she stopped removing her facial hair she discovered she was not only attended to but was frequently remembered—as the only female client with a beard! By confounding the stereotype of how women should present themselves in public she seems to have discovered a way around the invisibility of reaching middle-age. Of course, subverting or destabilising social identities does not always result in positive outcomes, and I return to moral risk taking and the potential for unintelligibility in Chapter Five.

\textsuperscript{30} Western European Jews commonly thought of themselves as members of their respective nations rather than as distinguished by their religion. The Nazi persecution of them as Jews sometimes changed this sense of self-identity. In Primo Levi's words, transcribed in Poli and Calcagno's 1992 biography, the racial laws and the Lager made him a Jew. "Since then, I am Jewish. They sewed the star of David on to me, and not only on to my clothes" (quoted in Anissimov 1998, 258).
having a homogeneity of negative characteristics (Cudd 2006, 70). The visibility of members of subjugated groups results from their identification as members of out-groups; difference and exclusion from the mainstream renders the social identities of the oppressed more visible. What makes these social identities problematic is not so much that they are visible but that this visibility is accompanied by stereotypical ascriptions designed to generate hostility and negative expectations in others.

Stereotypes are generalisations about members of a particular social group, which usually stem from ascribed, mainly visual indicators, and extend to further inferences about group attributes and behaviour (Cudd 2006, 69), for example, all Jews are acquisitive, or all Asians are good at mathematics. Stereotyping relies on broad conceptualisations of individual behaviour frequently based on external visual markers—such as black skin colour—which are believed to indicate sameness of characteristics and abilities among all the members of that group. Stereotypes tend to be embedded within mainstream discourses, affirming, for example, that women are natural care-givers or that gay men are naturally flamboyant.31 Expectations arising from stereotyping tend to override experiential evidence of the world, so that even if we know from our own experience that particular groups contain non-stereotypical members we may continue to see the stereotype instead of the individual, something members of these groups are often aware of and responsive to.32 In these situations

31 Television programmes and films are especially prone to this kind of shorthand to suggest character, taking advantage of the viewer's predisposition to see a whole range of traits and behaviours in particular groups.

32 For example, Brent Staples's 1986 essay, "Just Walk On By" (quoted in Bailey 2007a, 150), describes how white female pedestrians respond fearfully to a black man walking near them, changing their body language and hunching protectively over their purses as if in anticipation of an attack, solely on account of his skin colour. And Audre Lorde (1982, 5) recounts an encounter with a frightened white woman who flags down her car but when the woman sees the driver is black she chooses to remain with the danger outside rather than enter a physical space with a coloured woman. The white woman in Lorde's story is a significant example of the damage stereotypes can do; she is more frightened of the risk presented by difference than she is of a real threat to her safety.
individuals cannot reveal the multiplicity or complexity of their identities to others because they are perceived only in stereotypical ways as a member of a group which is feared and/or hated by members of other groups.

It might be argued that the inferences associated with stereotyping are a cognitive shorthand which make it easier for human beings to respond quickly to others and their environment. However, this does not explain why positive characteristics are normally assigned to members of in-groups and negative characteristics to members of out-groups, since stereotyping does not distribute negative and positive qualities evenly among all groups as it would otherwise be expected to do, unless the explanation is simply that members of in-groups self-define. Psychological research suggests it is more likely that stereotyping operates as a kind of socio-psychological rationalisation by the dominant for injustices inflicted on minorities, since studies show stereotypes not only operate as a way of grouping others but also to bolster "the valuation of one's self-identity" (Cudd 2006, 73).

Although there are doubtless negative stereotypes about those whose group membership is voluntary, such as the 'red neck' stereotyping of members of the Shooters Party in New South Wales and Victoria, members of these groups can always deflect these attitudes because they are able to dissociate from the group either by disclaiming membership or by leaving the group. Because voluntary groups have members who have willingly chosen to affiliate themselves for the purposes of some commonly shared belief, attitude, and/or action and have expressed their willingness to join together (Cudd 2006, 39), then the act of disaffiliating is a relatively simple matter. In contrast, although members of some found communities

33 For example, the headline "Shooters Party—fanatical red necks pushing for open season in National Parks" ("Shooters Party" 2009), or the description of members of another political party as "trying to out-redneck the rednecks in the Shooters Party" (quoted in Brown 2014).
34 Some voluntary group memberships are less easy to disaffiliate from: some religious sects, and
may be able to 'pass' as members of other groups, for example, some Australian Aboriginal persons may be able to pass as white, the vast majority have visible markers that identify them as members of a particular sex or race. Consequently, these individuals may find it difficult to respond to unfair or inaccurate generalisations intended to disempower—all Muslims are terrorists or all women are weak, for example—since they cannot simply deny membership or cease to be members of the group, even when they feel no particular association with that group.

Additionally, social identities, particularly those which manifest in markers on the body, such as racial or gendered identities, are fundamental to our sense of self (Alcoff 2006, 6), and therefore to our capacity to function as moral agents. Found communities have an important role to play here, at least in the constitution of a person's initial 'given' identity, since, by harbouring "ambiguous, ambivalences, contradictions and oppressions" (Friedman 1990, 153), they may impact negatively on the constitution of a person's identity. Stereotyping is potentially harmful to developing an authentic sense of self because the negative imagery involved can be internalised if it is not rejected; even when aspects of a social identity are rejected doing so may compromise both a person's sense of self and their capacity to function as an effective moral agent. The process of choosing which aspects of an identity are appropriate to a person's sense of self involves capacities for autonomous moral reflection which may be implicitly denied someone possessing that identity, making the possibility of self-definition important for both resistance and moral agency. However, given the constraints imposed upon self-definition by the mutual construction—that is, the construction between self and society—of social identities, which I will explore in more detail in Chapter Two, it may be useful here to consider outlaw groups, such as bikie gangs, come to mind.
some aspects of the role played by social forces.

**Constraints and power**

Because of the institutional nature of oppression we have to be concerned with practices of power, where power is best understood in the relational sense suggested by Foucault (1981, 94), whose existence is revealed when it is exercised. Group memberships, whether voluntary or not, bring social penalties and incentives for their members. These penalties and rewards form constraints on individual behaviour, where constraints are best understood as limits upon actions rather than as barriers to action (Cudd 2006, 42). This suggests an alternative way of understanding a social group as "a collection of persons who share (or would share under similar circumstances) a set of social constraints on action" (Cudd 2006, 44; italics in original). Some constraints arise not from social factors but instead stem from the biological (having to eat and drink), physical (not being able to live at great pressures, such as in ocean depths), or the psychological limitations of being human. Although some social constraints may be rewarding, constraints upon members of oppressed groups tend to contribute to curtailing choices and freedoms, even if there is some benefit accruing from group membership. For example, in Western societies women are often rewarded with financial security by dressing and behaving in ways deemed appropriate although these may be physically constrictive or uneconomic to maintain. Some social constraints may arise through what appear to be unintentional means, such as paying women lower wages and making it difficult for women to obtain loans, with the outcome that they continue to be economically dependent upon

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35 Cudd describes social constraints in non-normative terms as "facts that one does or ought to rationally consider in deciding how to act ... or facts that shape beliefs and attitudes about other persons" (2006, 41).
men. However, I would argue that the majority of social constraints are linked to underlying normative values and have as their rationale expectations about what is deemed appropriate behaviour for members of different social groups. I will consider the role of social expectations in more detail in Chapter Five. For those burdened with oppressive identities, the earliest awareness of belonging to an oppressed group is accompanied by restrictions on behaviour, frequently in the form of social prohibitions, for example when it is no longer cute for a little girl to dress in her brother's trousers.

Constraints such as these are not the problem, as without some social constraints there would be no curb on people doing as they wish and society would be too chaotic. The difficulty arises when some social groups are disadvantaged by unjust constraints related to their involuntary membership of a social group.

Intentional social constraints which arise from normative assumptions, including stereotypes, about the way members of different groups should behave, by setting limits on the actions of some groups, maintain ossified power relationships. Not only do such limitations prevent members of some groups from living fulfilling lives or demonstrating their full capacity as moral agents, in many instances the constraints placed upon members of these social groups operate to the advantage of members of privileged social groups. It is in the maintenance of inequitable power relationships between members of different groups that social constraints on action function as

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36 The argument made after women began to move into the workforce in numbers following World War II was that men not women were the main breadwinners for their families and needed higher wages, whereas women were taking home a second wage. This was never the case for African American families in the US which frequently had women as the main wage earner and who had also been present in the workforce in large numbers (Scarborough 1989, 1457–61). Implicit in the argument is the conception of a family as one that is white and heterosexual, and like the writings of many white second wave feminists, such as Betty Friedan, this argument largely ignores non-white and poor white women as well as women without men (hooks 2000, 1–3). See Collins (2002, 218) for more on the way in which the conception of ‘family’ as a nuclear unit, by assuming a sexual division of labour, assumes the separation of family and work.
adjutants to the discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion of the subjugated.

Conclusion

Oppression involves the constraint and disadvantage of individuals on the basis of social group memberships, and this socio-psychological constraint leads, as we shall see in more detail in Chapter Three, to the diminishment of effective moral agency in group members. Social oppression is both systemic and structural, operating through social practices sanctioned by entrenched institutions, and therefore involves the co-option of individuals in their own subjugation. The centrality of group membership to my conception of oppression means that the nature of social identities arising from group membership, and how individuals are assigned or acquire membership, is core to my understanding of oppression. Social groups are complex phenomena which can be delineated in a number of different ways but conceptually they are nevertheless a useful tool for understanding how some individuals are excluded or marginalised from mainstream experience and discourse. Because group memberships form the foundation of oppression as it is understood here, questioning the nature of the social identities assigned to group members may be fundamental to resisting oppression. In subsequent chapters I will consider in more detail the way social identities impact upon a person's ability to develop the competencies necessary for moral agency. I will begin in Chapter Two by discussing some aspects of social identity formation, how these may contribute to oppression, and why the possibility of self-definition, which is sensitive to the constraining internal and external forces described here, may offer a means of resisting.
2. The political salience of social identities

How are you going to deal responsibly with the unalterable facts of who and what you are, of having or not having privilege and power?

(Barbara Smith 1984, 77)

Introduction

Central to my argument in this chapter is the understanding that social identities constructed in hierarchical societies, although distorted by inequitable power relationships, are not solely the product of exclusionary and unjust social systems, and therefore can potentially be resisted and transformed. Social identities in inequitable societies reflect and reinforce the degree to which someone is privileged and/or oppressed, depending upon their group memberships. Of importance to my argument is the way negative and/or oppressive identities are constructed in societies whose social hierarchies contain inequalities in standing, which result in unjust or unfair outcomes for some members as a result of their social identities. In order to examine how it is possible to redefine negative social identities, I will be considering some aspects of group formation mentioned in Chapter One, in particular the use of stereotyping of others in order to create a seemingly homogeneous out-group. I will contend that when social categorisation itself becomes a form of social control it becomes an act of resistance to reject identities constructed through processes of domination and assert the legitimacy of self-definition as a means of establishing social identities. The perception that members of some social groups possess identical characteristics and traits, and hence desires
and needs, is threatened when the oppressed insist upon a multiplicity of identities, both privileged and oppressed, arising from multiple group memberships. I will argue that it may be possible for the oppressed to resist by developing a critical perspective as a result of having multiple social identities, making it possible for them to creatively re-imagine themselves and their lives otherwise. I will also suggest that the epistemic advantage conferred by the 'outsider within' status of the oppressed, in conjunction with the perspectives gained from multiple identities, provides a useful conceptual tool to see through the dominant framework of pure social identities and across the boundaries separating privileged from disadvantaged. I argue that self-definition becomes the means by which the oppressed make who they are intelligible to others via the (re)creation of new social identities. Before considering how self-definition might benefit the oppressed I will first look at some aspects of social identities and categorisation which contribute to the demoralisation of members of subjugated social groups.

**Social identities and power relations**

Having explored how social groups form in the previous chapter, here I will consider how identities arising from group memberships, in particular those affiliated with involuntary group memberships, contribute to privilege and oppression. I previously suggested that those group memberships we are assigned on the basis of visible identities such as sex, race or ethnicity, are most likely to be associated with privilege or disadvantage for members of those groups. Changes in our interpersonal relationships can also result in involuntary changes to group membership, which have an impact on our privileged or disadvantaged status. Complicating the lived experience of privilege and disadvantage, individuals generally possess more than
one identity as a result of involuntary membership of social groups and this results in complex power interactions that make it difficult to pinpoint specific bias or discrimination. The term 'intersectionality' was coined to describe the experience of oppression by persons with multiple group memberships, in particular how the various oppressions arising from different group memberships interact with one another to produce multiple, significant impacts on persons with multiple social identities.\(^{37}\) Whatever their origin, the social identities arising from group memberships that are beyond individual control can be damaging to members of both privileged and oppressed groups, as understanding of one's self/identity is closely linked to those visible gendered or racial identities which are filtered through stereotyping and the perceived homogeneity of group members.\(^{38}\)

What are social identities and how do they form? Social identities are those identities that are constituted in relation to others. Being identified in a particular relation to others, whether to another individual or to a particular group, is always a social experience that occurs externally to the individual. We only need think of those instances when we are accorded a social identity, not necessarily as a member of a group, to see it is something which operates upon us and not something we will into existence or that is the result of internal causes.\(^{39}\) Although social identities are a

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\(^{37}\) Although Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality, the concept of multiple interacting oppressions has been discussed previously under other terminology, including 'interlocking oppression' (Collins 1986, revised 1991; 1990), and 'multiple jeopardy' (King 1988). Recognition by black women in the US of the complexity of their social identities goes back at least to Sojourner Truth's famous “Ain't I a Woman?” speech of 1851 (quoted in Haraway 1992, 90–91); it is also the first recorded instance of self-definition by a black woman. More recent examples of theorising the complexity of black women's identity include the works of bell hooks, the Combahee River Collective (1979), Smith and Smith (1983), and Lorde (1984).

\(^{38}\) There are some involuntary group memberships which arise from relationships we enter into willingly; however, although we could be said to have freely chosen the relationship, we do not choose the associations of being labelled with a particular social identity as a result of our involuntary group membership, for example, converting to Islam or Judaism as a result of an inter-faith marriage results in certain ascriptions.

\(^{39}\) One day my partner's mother introduced me to medical professionals as her daughter-in-law although I was not, legally speaking, in this relationship to her. This act of social definition not only changed the way others viewed our relationship it also changed how I regarded myself and...
joint construct, and hence impact on and are affected by our sense of self, they do not necessarily reflect our inner sense of who we are; rather, they are predominantly how we are identified and acknowledged by others. Miranda Fricker proposes a concept I find useful in discussing the mechanics of social identity formation, and I want to develop this here to show how this might facilitate or impede the uptake of identities claimed by subjugated groups. Fricker (2007, 14–17) suggests that social identities form under the influence of a force she calls "identity power", an operation of power dependent upon a shared imaginative conception of social identity. In other words, there is widely shared conceptual agreement about what it means to be young or old, male or female, in the collective social imagination. Numerous beliefs, qualities, and values are attached to specific social identities. For example, in one culture 'elderly' may have associations of wisdom and reverence, whereas for others it may be accompanied by suggestions of dependency and burdensomeness. These collective conceptual understandings are important both because they form the basis of social interactions and because they create expectations about how others will behave. As the example above shows, the beliefs, qualities and values associated with social identities are not necessarily negative ones. However, where these associations are negative, persons who are assigned these social identities also attract numerous disadvantages, such as testimonial injustices which I will discuss later.

Moreover, this operation of power functions in tandem with other kinds of social power (Fricker 2007, 15), so that normative social practices stemming from social institutions contribute to the way in which identity power is exercised. Because the meanings attached to these identities are determined by relationships of

my sense of responsibility in relation to her. As Walker (2007, 113) suggests, and as I discuss in Chapter Four, social relationships are created and shaped in ways which produce vulnerabilities in some individuals to specific others, and these relational vulnerabilities are entrenched in social identities and the social practices attached to them.
power and privilege, the effects of identity power can be tracked by the manner in which social identities are described. By deciphering these meanings we can, in turn, track power relationships within hierarchical societies. In inequitable societies, the assumptions and expectations attached to particular social identities through identity power may operate in concert with unjust social institutions to negatively influence the way some persons experience themselves as subjects and agents by adversely affecting the development of competencies necessary for the exercise of moral agency, so that in these situations identity power may be seen as a corollary of the forces of domination.

**Visibility and intelligibility of the multiple self**

Much of the difficulty members of oppressed groups have with social identities arises out of the way these identities are constructed as uniform and stereotypical. Although membership of a social group differentiates its members from those of other social groups, it does not necessarily connote this kind of homogeneity of group members. The notion that 'others' are stereotypically similar to one another seems to be a function of the way groups are formed, and the negative imagery associated with members of some groups in the form of damaging and disabling stereotypes is apparently the result of in-group/out-group differentiation (Cudd 2006, 70), as I discussed in Chapter One. Stereotypes are not only incapacitating in terms of self-realisation but may also cause epistemic injustice, or the dismissal of a person's experiences and testimony on the basis of their social identity, which may occur when stereotypes inform our "credibility judgements".

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40 I have adapted the term 'multiple self' from Lugones, who describes persons that have multiple intersecting identities as either multiplicitious or plural. "I am giving up the claim that the subject is unified. Instead I am understanding each person as many" (Lugones 1990b, 503).
(Fricker 2007, 31).

As previously mentioned, the high visibility of some social identities, particularly those identities linked to subjugated groups, is a consequence of the way social groups are formed and the stereotyping of group members of out-groups. However, the "logic of oppression" (Lugones 2003, 77) constructs the oppressed as simultaneously both visible and invisible. Visibility reinforces dominant stereotypical conceptions and contributes to the objectification of the oppressed and, at the same time, as members of out-groups, the oppressed are frequently overlooked and ignored (Collins 1991, 45). The same individual who is highly visible in conformity to a stereotype will be both unseen and unheard in many contexts. Invisibility may bring with it some benefits, since it may be more bearable to be ignored than to be vilified or treated with violence. However, for the most part there are considerable disadvantages to any social group whose members are continually overlooked, just as there are dangers attached to being treated as an object not a subject. It could be argued that the most significant of these disadvantages is that groups whose members are objectified and ignored lack any real political influence. By tracking whose voices are heard, we can identify whose views and ways of knowing are considered important and whose are silenced.

Social visibility, then, is not necessarily a problem; in fact, to some extent, as the arguments for recognition of the oppressed suggest, making one's identity visible to others is the goal of those resisting oppression.\footnote{For example, Misha Strauss says "recognition matters to identity because it confers the 'semantic authority' necessary to the construction of one's self-understanding" (2003, 45). I discuss the concept of semantic authority later in this chapter.} As mentioned in Chapter One, one of the ways in which the subjugated respond to oppression is through obtaining recognition from the dominant as a means of resisting the way oppression renders
them invisible. Lugones (1990b, 504) describes visibility as a kind of "faithful intelligibility" and hence a precondition for the oppressed taking responsibility. Invisibility, as it is understood by Lugones, occurs when someone remembers who they are in another reality but cannot convey this knowledge in the reality they are currently in, thus rendering the meanings of their actions and the actions themselves invisible to others. For example, Lugones suggests a Latin American retains the memory of the person she is when she is among other Latinos when she works as a maid in an Anglo-American household, but she cannot convey the person from the Latino reality to others in the Anglo reality. This suggests it is not identity that shifts between different worlds so much as access to certain aspects of one's identity that are still present and available but that cannot be seen by others, perhaps due to stereotyping or 'arrogant perception', which is understood by Lugones (1987, 4) as a failure of identification and love. Lugones (1990b, 505) proposes that oppression attempts to erase other selves, as well as silencing them and, therefore, to remember oneself from other worlds is a liberatory and resistant task. But, in my view, liberation, like faithful intelligibility, depends not only upon remembering but also upon making the hidden self, the oppressed self, visible. If faithful intelligibility is as Lugones understands it and requires a person to be visible, then the invisibility of particular social identities represents a problem for intelligibility. In Chapter Four I will consider the minimal conditions for intelligibility and conclude that appropriate self-knowledge is necessary in order to make oneself comprehensible to others. However, given that it is sometimes the case

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Frye developed the notion of arrogant perception, which she describes as seeing with eyes "which organize everything seen with reference to themselves and their own interests" (1983, 67). For example, the arrogant perceiver believes that they are the animating force of attitudes towards themselves, rather than allowing that others possess desires and motivations which are their own and arise for reasons independent of the arrogant perceiver.
that "identity power at once constructs and distorts" (Fricker 2007, 55) who someone
is, then self-knowledge may be elusive and illusory. For members of some social
groups being intelligible is complicated by mainstream understandings of group
identities that rely more on stereotyping and perceived knowledge of the other rather
than real understanding. Having multiple identities further complicates a person's
ability to make themselves intelligible to others, not merely because it contradicts the
way domination categorises the oppressed or because others may be reluctant to
embrace the notion of the multiple self, but because it is difficult for a person to be
aware of, and acknowledge, the many different aspects which make up the multiple
self, much less convey this understanding to others.

**The problem with social categories**

In this section I consider some critiques of the notion of social categories.43 It
is useful to state at the outset that, contrary to these arguments, abandoning these
categories is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, whatever the merits of
criticism of social categories, it is difficult to know what to use in place of them.44
Not only that but persons belonging to disadvantaged social groups also use
homogenising terminology to describe group memberships to connect with one
another, develop political awareness, and form alliances. In addition, the highly
visible nature of some social identities, such as race and gender, by itself presents a
sound reason for not abandoning the concept on the grounds that social categories do

43 See Alcoff (2006, Part I Chapters 1–4), for a detailed examination and analysis of the various
criticisms of the notion of social identities.
44 Naomi Zack (2005, 8) suggests the notion of sharing the same 'essence', where the essence is
defined in a particular way to encompass a number of features of belonging to a particular identity.
However, the essence is "not substantive" and is not found in an individual or in the group. For
instance, "category FMP" is the category encompassing persons who share the relational essence
of being gendered women.
not necessarily reflect actual social groups. To forego the use of social categories such as race will not prevent discrimination (Collins 2002, 220), although it may obscure the reasons for the discrimination. Social categories such as race and sex are highly visible, real categories defined by real social positions (Haslanger 2005, 10–11), and to dismiss them as merely discursive is to overlook actual power relationships. I would also argue that these descriptions are not just convenient linguistic tags but represent real, albeit heterogeneous, social assemblages, which in inequitable societies reflect actual hierarchical social relationships in danger of being obscured if we abandon the terminology of social categorisation.

Sally Haslanger (2005, 15–16) has suggested a further way of thinking about categories is to consider whether a particular category of a concept or a practice should exist, and if so how it should be defined. To do this we might first need to consider what the point of the practice or concept is. Consider, for example, the historical instability of racial categories. For instance, Michael Omi and Howard Winant (quoted in Frankenberg 1993, 11) point out in 1986's *Racial Formation in the United States*, that the different conceptual understandings of 'non-white', 'Oriental' and 'Asian' in the US over time represent changes to the role played by Asian Americans in relation to the dominant white majority. Such changes to historical conceptions of social categories occur as a result of changes in social practices over

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45 One of the reasons given for disavowing social categories is to avoid the charge of essentialism, of developing universalising concepts that iron out differences within social groups, leading to exclusions and further oppression. White middle-class feminists have been charged with excluding the experiences of women of colour, working-class women, lesbians, and women with disabilities, to name a few, in conceptualising the group 'women'. Part of the problem here lies with the fact that universalising concepts are the domain of the privileged, in this case men, and in asserting their equality it makes sense that the oppressed (women) would mistakenly use the same methods to define themselves. Recently the problem of essentialism, or what I prefer to call the problem of exclusion, has been re-evaluated as a problem with the notion of social categories themselves, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section.

46 Haslanger (2005) discusses the social categories race and 'gender'. I have used the terminology 'sex' rather than gender in my discussion of her ideas to be consistent and because the change does not affect her premises.
time necessitating a revaluation of the category, including renaming and re-establishing the boundaries of the category. As well as changes to social practices affecting changes to social categories, social practices gain legitimacy and become normalised because of the way social categories are constructed, and therefore practices are a reflection of social categorisation. For example, the division of people into two sexes authorises a multitude of simple and complex social practices, from which public toilet to use to whom one may marry. To add to the complexity, concepts and the social practices they describe are "deeply intertwined" (Haslanger 2005, 13), so that the concepts that enable us to describe and structure social practices in turn influence how we see those practices, while the evolving practices themselves affect our concepts.

There are political and theoretical benefits, Haslanger (2005, 15) suggests, to asking how particular concepts structure social practices, in particular, whether such concepts confer false legitimacy on some practices. Questions about which social practices are authorised, and why, are revealing of relationships of power within a society. The meanings attached to particular concepts and practices, whose meanings dominate and why, and whether alternative meanings exist, reflect distributions of authority and power.

Not only are the meanings associated with the social categories denoting race and sex indicative of oppressive relationships, the manner in which social categories are conceptualised is itself a reflection of relationships of domination and control. Considering how social categories are conceptualised may, therefore, reveal these

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47 For example: Card (1996, 11–12) gives examples of the changing names given to African Americans and lesbians over time; and in Chapter One I mentioned the example of dark-skinned Dominicans whose race changes if they move from the Dominican Republic to the US (Alcoff 2006, 269).

48 Haslanger (2005) uses the term 'social kinds'—distinct from 'natural kinds'—to refer to race and gender categories.
underlying power relationships. Historically, social categories of race, class and ethnicity have been constructed on the basis of exclusions (Pratt 1984) or segregations (Collins 2002; Lugones 1994), which have reflected social practices of separate housing, education and employment depending on one's race and class. For example, persons of colour of both sexes in the US were limited to particular professions or jobs in the workplace (Scarborough 1989). As Collins (2002, 211) points out, gender oppression differs from other oppressions by being organised via inclusionary strategies, since women live in close proximity to men. However, Collins also argues that, by reproducing the naturalised hierarchy that "informs the self-definitions of race–class groups, the idea of family permeates both types of group organisation" (2002, 220) and functions as a means of legitimising these differing methods of control. In other words, the different exclusionary and inclusionary social practices that maintain race, class, and gender oppression are justified through reference to the same hierarchical organising principle.

One consequence of exclusionary forms of group organisation in particular is that social groups are conceived as homogeneous collections of individuals, which impacts on how others respond to them. For example, in countries with a history of colonisation the indigenous people are frequently grouped together. Consequently, government decisions tend not to address different communities' needs but to assume homogeneity across all indigenous groups in terms of needs, interests and traditions, which can lead to further inequalities of treatment. Resistance requires that members of oppressed groups make claims to social identities that others may identify with, whilst at the same time remaining aware of the dangers of creating an essentialising category, which excludes some of those who would normally identify with that group. In addition, the oppressed have to beware of inadvertently acting in the same
way as the dominant, since they may create a sense of political unity by emphasising
the homogeneity of other groups. For example, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991, 54)
argues that the use of the category 'women' in Western feminist theory has led to the
homogeneous category 'third-world women', whereas in fact there is a great diversity
among women in non-Western countries, even among those who share cultural
traditions.

A number of feminist theorists are concerned with this problem of
exclusions, or the simplification of complex multiple social identities, which results
when individuals are categorised as A or ~A, where, to use Frye's (2005, 47)
example, if A is vanilla then ~A contains everything that does not fit into the
category vanilla. This method of social categorisation makes it appear as if ~A
represents a homogeneous grouping, even when it does not. For example, where A is
the category vanilla, then ~A, in addition to including the flavours strawberry,
banana and peppermint, also contains "triangles, the square root of two, the orbit of
Haley's comet, and all the shoes in the world" (Frye 2005, 47). Frye considers the
problem arises because social categories are erroneously conceived as sets where
membership is determined by having the necessary and sufficient conditions for
belonging to that social group. Sets function as a means of sorting red grapes from
green grapes, elephants from whales: they work by taking multiplicity and reducing
it to separate unities. Since there are no necessary and sufficient conditions for
membership of social categories or, Frye (2005, 49) argues, natural or living kinds,
sorting individuals into group memberships in this way is questionable, and leads to
theoretical difficulties. According to this analysis, the problem of essentialism in
feminist thought, of the notion 'women' being conceived in a way which is not
exclusionary, arises because of how we think of social categories rather than how we
think of women. Rather than doing away with social categories altogether, Frye argues, we should be looking for alternative ways of theorising social categories, ways that do not reduce social groups to the simplicity of sets. Frye (2005, 51) suggests, as alternatives, Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance, or the idea of social webs, conceptual frameworks that allow for the retention of complexity and plurality in social categories such as women.

From the preceding discussion it will be seen how difficult it is for anyone to self-define, particularly for a member of an oppressed group, given the complex interaction between social categories and social practices, and the way in which the concepts which inform and describe these change over time. In the next section I will discuss another problem associated with categorisation, the argument advanced by Lugones that in inequitable societies social categorisation is itself a form of control. Lugones identifies the main reason for this as the conceptualisation of identity as unified and 'pure' or homogeneous, so that persons with multiple identities are forced to see themselves as singular or appear fragmented; hence, the risk of fragmentation enforces homogeneity of the group by erasing plurality. Imagining individuals with multiple identities as necessarily fragmented results from conceiving identity as unified and pure, and Lugones argues that the fragmentation that results serves the dominant and contributes to oppression.49

49 Compare Zack (2005), who argues that the concept of intersectional (multiple) identities itself leads to more fragmentation: for example, instead of using the group 'women', the notion of intersectionality results in several groups structured in terms of different intersections, for example, race+class=woman. I would argue that the problem of intersectionality leading to fragmentation of identity arises because Zack unconsciously constructs identities as additive whereas Lugones's description of multiple identities suggests it is impossible to separate out the different facets of identity—to use her analogy of curdle-separation from mayonnaise, an unstable mixture of egg and oil which when it separates does so impurely, resulting in yolky oil and oily yolk (1994, 459). For Lugones, the attempt to separate out, cleanly, the different identities is part of the process of oppression; it is the way oppressive societies structure social categories. See Ann Garry (2011) for a recent discussion of whether the notion of intersectionality fragments 'women' as a group identity.
Although Lugones was not the first to question the notion that there are "discrete, coherent and absolutely separate identities" (Martin and Mohanty 1986, 192) or to suggest that the dominant benefit from this categorisation of social kinds, her work is significant for the suggestion that social categorisation, by reducing multiplicity to unity, is itself a form of domination.\(^{50}\) By conceiving social identities as unified and pure, dominant forces ensure that members of social groups whose identity is multiple have difficulty seeing themselves as multiple rather than fragmented. If individuals are conceived of as possessing singular, fixed social identities, then any individual who demonstrates 'impurities' in identity is necessarily fragmented since identity by conventional definition is pure and unified. By reducing the plurality of others to a singular unity, the dominant force the oppressed to see themselves as flawed, fragmented beings. If what is multiple is conceived of as singular then any part that does not fit the pure, unified picture of identity results in fragmented identities and damaged psyches (Alcoff 2006, ix). By splitting people into neat, purportedly homogeneous groups, the logic of oppression forces individuals who experience themselves as having multiple identities to see themselves as singular or to experience themselves as fragmented; in either case they cannot see their own experience of who they are. Categorisation functions as a means for the powerful to force the concept of homogeneity onto others for the purposes of exerting control over them (Lugones 1994, 460).\(^{51}\)

The categorisation of social identities as unified and pure, which results in

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\(^{50}\) For example, Young says, "individual persons, as constituted partly by their group affinities and relations, cannot be unified, themselves are heterogeneous and not necessarily coherent" (1990, 48).

\(^{51}\) Although my focus here is on the concept of purity with regard to categorisation, there is of course a political aspect to defining identities as pure, especially in situations where it is used to support the segregation of races or classes in geographic, educational, cultural, and employment spaces. See, for example, Collins (2002, 214).
social group members being perceived homogeneously, leads to what Lugones (1994, 474) describes as the "transparency" of some group members. The idea of transparency is understood by Lugones as the perception that the needs, interests, and ways of some individuals within the group are identical to the needs, interests, and ways of all the members of the group. For example, white women are transparent as 'women' and black men are transparent as 'black'. In public life the inclusion of individuals from marginalised groups frequently takes for granted that the group members are a homogeneous body and the views of one are a reflection of all, thereby stifling or silencing some voices. Although membership of a social group differentiates its members from those of other social groups it does not entail homogeneity of group members; in fact, as mentioned in Chapter One, it is the differentiation into in-groups and out-groups that generates the heterogeneous in-group and homogeneous out-group distinction. Conceptualising the constitution of some social groups as homogeneous results in the erasure of anyone who is not transparently a member of that group, for example, black women are erased from the group 'women' and from the group 'black'.

Conceptualisation of some social groups as unified and homogeneous leads to a presumption that the needs, interests and ways of all members of those groups are identical, erasing the experience and acknowledgement of anyone whose needs and interests are not identical to those of transparent group members.

Another outcome of conceptualising multiple identities as fragmented is the imposition of a view of multiple identity as dual personality: in the example Lugones gives, the multiple identity that is Chicano is seen as a dual personality, the Mexican

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52 hooks says, "no other group in America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or as a present part of the larger group 'women' in this culture" (1981, 7).
American. And because the Mexican part of Chicano culture is conceived stereotypically by the Anglo as heroic and mythic it is conceived not as a living culture but as "both static and dying" (Lugones 1994, 471). Hence there is considered to be no barrier to assimilation into Anglo–American culture. The portrayal of the authentic indigenous person as "pure, unsullied, [and] fixed in time and place" (Alcoff 2006, 271) paints indigenous culture as preserved statically in a pre-colonised state, in contrast with the dynamic, evolving nature of white culture. It could also be argued that all minority indigenous cultures experience their indigenous identity filtered through the prism of the dominant culture. For example, Indigenous Australians living traditionally struggle to claim an identity in the light of the myth of the authentic 'Aborigine' as a peripatetic hunter and gatherer living off the land telling stories from the Dreamtime. As an undergraduate in 1996, I remember hearing in a lecture by Dr. Jim Kohen that local Australian Aboriginal groups were opposed to the eradication of feral cattle in the Northern Territory because in the 200 years elapsing since white settlement the cattle had become an important part of both their diet and culture. However, those in government were reluctant to accept that this practice constituted Aboriginal culture because it was not consistent with pre-white Aboriginal social practices, even though there is ample evidence of contemporary Indigenous Australian adapting and modernising traditional practices. The challenge for the dominant white culture is to see Aboriginal culture as contemporary and evolving and Indigenous Australian identity

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53 Alcoff calls these mixed or ambiguous identities and suggests they can result in "cognitive dissonance and fragmented selves" (2006, ix) if the multiple nature of the identities is denied. Meyers (2000, 159) argues further that failure to own plural identities undermines both authenticity and autonomy, and I will examine her argument in Chapter Three.

54 There is another myth of the 'Aborigine' as part of a dying race, drunk and diseased, living in squalor literally and figuratively on the edges of Anglo civilization.

55 See Kohen (1995, Chapter 9) for more detail.
in its many forms as authentic, a challenge that requires becoming privilege-cognizant with the advantages and disadvantages accruing to the victors and victims of colonialism and racism.

In this section I have argued that practising social categorisation by postulating pure, unified identities and denying multiple identities, can contribute to oppression. One of my suggestions for overcoming this is for members of subjugated groups to self-define, and by doing so dismantle the framework of categorisation that separates privileged identities from oppressed identities. However, this is a problematic strategy, and in the next section I will discuss some other problems with knowledge claims made by the oppressed which might prevent self-definition from occurring, in particular whether claims to epistemic privilege by the oppressed can overcome the disadvantage imposed by the privileging of dominant knowledges at the expense of credibility for claims made by oppressed.

**Social identity and knowledge claims**

Later in this chapter I will consider the idea that one way the oppressed can overcome the subjugating effects of being defined and categorised by others is to use the epistemic advantage gained from multiple perspectives to see through the dominant framework, which allows only pure and unified social identities, and to transform the way their social identities are conceptualised. However, before they can do this, a major problem for those assigned to subjugated social identities is how to have their identities and lives taken seriously in the credibility economy. Testimonial injustices, or injustices that occur when the speaker is not given credence by others, are more significant when they are the result of what Fricker (2007, 27) designates "identity prejudice", or prejudice linked to someone's social
identity. These "systematic testimonial injustices", in Fricker's terminology, occur not as a result of the content of what someone says, but because biases exist against particular social identities and group memberships, which affect the way group members are heard, or if they are heard at all. In Fricker's opinion, an additional injustice is done to someone when their experiences are dismissed because they possess a particular social identity.

One way in which women's knowledge claims are devalued is in terms of their emotional lives/responses, where women are characterised emotionally in such a way as to trivialise their experiences. Sue Campbell (1994, 50) suggests, by way of example, that when someone is angry at an injustice and their anger does not receive uptake—since, for social uptake to occur, their actions have to be in accordance with expectations attached to particular social identities—the lack of a commensurate response causes bitterness. The feeling of bitterness is publicly formed, according to Campbell (1994, 51), as a collaboration between the refusal of others to listen or to act and the consequent refusal of the injured party to forgive and forget. By refusing to hear the injured person in the first place, the latter's feelings can then be dismissed as mere bitterness and the original injustice ignored. In refusing to listen to and acknowledge legitimate feelings (especially feelings of anger) in response to an injustice, others can avoid any sense of responsibility for what has ensued. I will consider the problem of unintelligibility as a result of failure of social uptake in more detail in Chapter Five.

An equally problematic response is when the privileged make claims to an equivalence of experience to that of the oppressed, especially given that one of the claims made by and on behalf of the oppressed is that they are privy to knowledge not available to the privileged. For example, when in 2010 Maori–Indigenous
Australian rugby player Timana Tahu resigned from his team in response to racist taunts directed against him and other black players, actor Russell Crowe, a white New Zealander, who was clearly in sympathy with Tahu, responded that he could understand Tahu's position because he, himself, had been subject to racist slurs ("Aussie Actor" 2010). It is not clear from the article whether Crowe was claiming the same knowledge of racism that a black man has or if he was equating ethnic slurs against himself—on account of his New Zealand origins or Scottish ancestry—with the white racism directed at Maoris and Indigenous Australians. It is clear that neither of these claims stands up to scrutiny since the ethnic discrimination experienced by white groups in Australia in the last 50 years is in no way equivalent to the systemic racism directed at Maori New Zealanders or Indigenous Australians, and it could be argued that Crowe's claim is an instance of the privileged co-opting the experiences of the oppressed. Even where such claims are rejected or not given credence, they risk diverting the discourse away from the claims made by the oppressed, effectively silencing them in the public forum, and making the story told one about the privileged.\(^56\) I will return to this point in later chapters.

It could also be argued that Crowe's claim is an instance of what Elizabeth Spelman (1988, 12) called "boomerang perception", seeing oneself in the other rather than seeing the other,\(^57\) so that Crowe may have equated Tahu's experience (of racial taunting) with his own without considering whether or not they represent the same

\(^56\) For example, in a discussion on Steven Spielberg's film *Lincoln*, Aaron Bady (2012) suggests that by focusing on a minor footnote to the emancipation of black slaves the implication becomes that Lincoln is responsible for freeing them, thereby diminishing not only the long fight by white abolitionists but also the efforts of the slaves themselves.

\(^57\) The other is "just like us", in Spelman's words, "I look at you and come right back to myself" (1988, 12). This differs from Frantz Fanon's (1967) 'white gaze', where the world is seen only from the perspective of white people so that what is important or relevant becomes what is important or relevant to white people, and behaviour is contextualised on the basis of race membership resulting in inequitable judgements and outcomes for blacks and whites.
kind of experience. In this instance Tahu's own experience may disappear against the claims to knowledge made by a white man, much as the claims to knowledge made by indigenous groups may be made to seem less authoritative than claims made by a white anthropologist on their behalf.

The privileging of dominant perspectives leads to what has been termed 'epistemologies of ignorance', which can emerge either by refusing to allow the oppressed to know, the active erasure of 'subjugated knowledges', or by producing "epistemic blank spots that make privileged knowers oblivious to systemic injustices" (Bailey 2007b, 77). In other words, the erasure, co-option or derogation of some knowledges both points to and is itself an instance of unfair or unjust social practices. It would seem to follow that privileging these perspectives, foregrounding the perspectives voiced by the oppressed, is itself a form of resistance. As the example of Timana Tahu shows, the way the oppressed can resist is normally through a politics of identity, by making knowledge claims from a particular perspective, in this case laying claim to a black identity in addition to being a rugby player.

To counteract the trivialisation of knowledge claims by those with subjugated identities in mainstream discourses, it has been suggested that the "situated and embodied knowledges" (Haraway 1988, 583) of members of oppressed groups should be epistemically privileged; however, because identity is considered multiple rather than singular, such standpoints are necessarily partial. The claim made here,

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58 Crowe's claim to knowledge is unusual insofar as he claims to understand white racism as if he was a black man; it is not unusual, however, in claiming to know what the experience of blackness is like. Robert Bernasconi (2007) gives examples of two white philosophers (Sartre and Arendt) who lay claim to knowledge of the black experience in their writing.

59 Donna Haraway's terminology (1988). This is similar but not identical to Foucault's (1980, 81–83) notion of subjugated knowledges.

60 Gaile Polhaus (2012, 715) suggests another kind of privileged ignorance—"willful hermeneutical ignorance"—occurs when "dominantly situated knowers refuse to acknowledge epistemic tools" developed by those situated marginally.

61 Although the language used varies, the principle involved is the same: that there are advantages to
though, is not that epistemically-privileged knowledges represent all there is to
know, or that there is one viewpoint and that is the viewpoint of black women, or
Indigenous Australians, or lesbians. Neither do proponents of this view claim that
the content of what is revealed has been hitherto unknown. Rather, "the interpretative
framework is what gives life to the distinction between content and point of view"
(Tirrell 1999, 239). Here, what is suggested is that each of these viewpoints, like that
of Timana Tahu, represents knowledge normally hidden or ignored in mainstream
discourses, and therefore, revealing these knowledges is one means of rectifying
these epistemic omissions. Susan Wendell, discussing the perspectives of those
with disabilities, expresses this hope in the following way:

I want to say that having a disability usually gives a person experiences of a
world different from that of people without disabilities, and that being a
woman with a disability usually gives a person different experiences from
those of people who are not female and disabled, and that these different
experiences create the possibility of different perspectives which have
epistemic advantages with respect to certain issues (1996, 73).

Wendell locates knowledge of the social world securely in the identity of the subject:

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looking at the world from a particular, concrete standpoint versus the objective 'view from
everywhere'. Harding (2006, 250–54) suggests that the origins of standpoint theory can be traced
to Karl Marx, which in feminist scholarship has developed into two projects: the encouragement of
situated knowledge and the identification of epistemic privilege. See Kristina Rolin (2009) for an
analysis of Harding's methodological approach to standpoint theory.

63 Or that there is a single viewpoint which can be described as the black woman's view or Australian
Aboriginal person's view or lesbian's view. See also, Collins (1990) and Harding (1991) for
theorists who make claims to epistemic privilege reliant on notions of position, situation and/or
location.

64 The argument for pluralism can look like an argument for relativism—different meanings and
understandings of the truth are associated with different groups of people. Harding suggests that
the notion of relativism only emerged in mainstream discourses as challenges were made to
universalising concepts and relativism, and therefore reflects a problem that exists “only from the
perspective of dominating groups” (1989, 27; italics in original). Harding (1991, 113) argues
relativism and absolutism are complementary rather than contradictory positions. Similarly,
Haraway argues that such a standpoint is not relativistic because relativism is the counterpoint of a
totalising viewpoint whereas the alternative is "partial, locatable, critical knowledges" (1988, 584).
a woman with disabilities, she claims, experiences the world differently from someone who is not female and disabled, just as the black rugby player experiences the world differently from someone who is not black (or a rugby player, since different degrees of racism seem present in different sports).

The contextual nature of such knowledges means that it is the oppressed themselves who are more likely to have critical insights into their own oppression than those around them. These "insights and emotional responses" then become "a legacy with which they confront any new issue or situation" (Narayan 1989, 264). To take the example of the black rugby player again, Tahu's own experience of white racism, gained through repeated exposure to racism in the wider community, allowed him to identify the language directed towards him and other black players as racist. It is possible that non-black players were oblivious to the racist nature of the remarks because they did not possess a context of emotional and physical response to racism. Uma Narayan suggests that even those who are sympathetic may "fail to perceive subtle instances" (1989, 264) of oppressive behaviour; additionally, my claim is that they may fail to perceive oppression because it has been normalised by dominant discourses. The white players may understand the racist remarks not as racism but as part of a culture which belittles players on the basis of personal characteristics when they make mistakes during the game. The fact that the personal characteristic by which the black players are disparaged is part of a wider identity prejudice makes these comments not merely incidentally offensive but symptomatic of systemic racism. The white players' inability to recognise such blatant racism is a reflection of their own privileged identities (white, highly paid, elite sportsmen).

The knowledge the oppressed possess does not simply relate to the ability to recognise oppression. As Wendell says, the knowledge gained by the oppressed gives
them insights into certain issues others do not have access to. The way the oppressed experience the world gives insights into human behaviour not immediately available to others who, by reason of not sharing the same experience and identity, do not have access to the same knowledge. Laying claim to an oppressive identity provides an epistemic advantage in considering the choices other people make, in particular the actions of those who share the same identity. For example, the oppressed may not turn to the police if they are in trouble, perhaps because their experience of the police has been negative. Fricker gives the example of a black man in the UK whose testimony to police about an incident is not properly investigated because of identity prejudice (Saunders 2009). Another person of colour would recognise the difficulty of being heard properly by those in authority in a racist country, as well as having knowledge of them based on a shared social identity, recognition not necessarily available to persons who do not experience racism on a daily basis. I am not claiming here that only the oppressed can understand the reasons the oppressed act as they do, as I would agree with Narayan (1989, 264) that to assume as much is absurd since we patently can learn a lot about one another without having to inhabit each other's experiences. However, I would argue that in certain circumstances, such as a court of law where the outcome may be a lengthy prison sentence, or even the death penalty in some US states, it may be an additional injustice to try a person without ensuring that their experiences as subjects of oppression are fully understood by those judging them.

A special instance of the epistemic privileging of members of oppressed groups’ claims to knowledge is made on behalf of what has been termed the outsider

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65 Compare Lugones (1987, 4), who argues that we need to inhabit the other's perspective, through what she calls "world-travelling", in order to understand them. I will discuss world-travelling later in this chapter.
within. As mentioned in Chapter One, the spatial as well as the discursive marginalisation of some groups from mainstream life and discourse may include the physical sequestration of group members in ghettos. However, many of those who live in the margins are privy to what occurs in privileged households, businesses, and educational and judicial institutions, even if what occurs in these places excludes them or includes them only in marginal roles. Collins (1991) has suggested that outsider within status frequently renders such an individual invisible to those whose privilege is observed, giving the former an unprecedented advantage for bringing their knowledge as a marginalised subject to the privileged experience which they observe as a partial participant. For example, black female servants in the segregated Southern US states were privy to the domestic life of middle-class whites and therefore aware that middle-class white women were not considered as equals or treated as such by white men (Collins 1991, 43). This is not the same position anthropologists have in relation to their subjects: the outsider within is not choosing this perspective in order to gain an epistemic benefit; rather, it is the inadvertent corollary of being marginalised. Having what Narayan (1989, 265–6) calls "double vision" may give the marginalised an epistemic advantage, but this should not make theorists valorise the state of being oppressed; we should consider, instead, how the critical insight given by multiple perspectives can be made available to others.

The outsider within is believed to have an epistemic advantage because they are able to operate within two different contexts and with two sets of practices, and it is presumed this gives critical insights "because each framework provides a critical perspective on the other" (Narayan 1989, 266). Outsider within status may therefore be best thought of as a tool, a conceptual approach which allows the person to see beyond the totalising framework of domination. In order to be in this position (one of
multiple perspectives) the outsider within has to assimilate an experience which is at odds with their own lived experience. Although members of oppressed groups have to know the privileged in non-reciprocal ways in order to survive, the argument for epistemic advantage is not simply that one has to know more than the privileged to survive. Nonetheless, being oppressed actually confers an epistemic advantage, that one’s knowing is privileged in a way that the oppressor’s knowing is not. What gives the advantage in terms of knowing is the person's social identity as an outsider which may render them invisible in the social reality of the privileged. One of the best known examples is Frye's claim that because lesbians do not exist in heterosexual reality this gives them a particular epistemic advantage by being "in a position to see things that cannot be seen from within the system" (1983, 173).66 Remembering who and what we are in one social reality when we are in another is important to how we see things, in Lugones's (1990b, 504) analysis of multiple perspectives, since if we can remember who we are from one reality to another we can act based on intentions we had in the other reality. The difficulty that arises here is that actions may be misunderstood because our intentions stem from who we are in another reality. This argument is very close to the contention that our actions potentially risk moral failure if we cannot make ourselves intelligible to others. I will return to this problem and explore it in more detail in Chapter Five as it poses a direct challenge to a central theme in my thesis, that it might be possible for persons to demonstrate moral agency by making their choices, relationships and identities intelligible to others.

A number of problems have been identified with inhabiting multiple perspectives and I will look at these through the work of Narayan, whose exegesis of the difficulties of dual perspectives finds echoes in the work of other theorists as

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66 Specifically, Frye observes that lesbians see women, and seeing what is invisible to heteronormative patriarchy takes lesbians outside of this explanatory framework.
diverse as Linda Martin Alcoff, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Lugones. For example, all four theorists make the argument that inhabiting multiple perspectives can leave the individual feeling an outsider in each culture. In *Hispaneando y Lesbiando* Lugones (1990a) writes about feeling an outsider in lesbian community because of her Latina identity and an outsider in Latino culture because of her lesbian identity. Narayan (1989, 267) further identifies as a potential negative an absence of fluency, so that one is no longer perfectly adept in any culture, giving by way of example her own knowledge of the words for everyday items in Indian languages but only the English words for technical subjects, such as economics and biology. In addition, having knowledge of multiple cultures might make it difficult for the agent to satisfy their desires. For example, an Indian woman may want to wear Western clothing (either because it is comfortable, or as a sign of independence from restrictions on her as a woman in her own culture) but feel obliged to wear traditional costume to show solidarity with her own culture (Narayan 1989, 267). I would suggest that the criticism that she cannot choose to do both—to embrace the freedom of the west and validate her own Indian culture—overlooks what is important about this situation: that possessing knowledge of both cultures gives the woman a critical perspective necessitating a (political) choice about her dress. Although the woman cannot choose to do both this does not counteract the value gained by inhabiting multiple perspectives, since it was these multiple perspectives that gave her both choices in the first place.

Narayan (1989, 266) is correct, though, in stating that possessing outsider within status does not in itself generate a critical perspective. One has only to think of the idea of 'passing'—for example, a coloured person passing as white, or a gay person passing as straight—to see that outsider within status can lead to a number of
practices which are morally questionable. Narayan mentions two of the many ways in which people may respond to inhabiting multiple viewpoints. The first of these is when persons keep their multiple perspectives as separate as possible, without allowing their consciousness of another perspective to cross social spheres. Here, Narayan gives the example of the way many women live in the west, acting out traditional women's roles in a domestic context and men's roles in public life. The dichotomising of the two perspectives leads to contradictions and inconsistencies which may be troubling, but in Narayan's view such an approach also allows women to get the most out of life, having both a successful career and a successful family life. The second possible response to possessing multiple perspectives is to deny the practices of one's own culture and to embrace the practices associated with dominant groups instead. The practice of passing probably fits in somewhere here since being able to pass as a member of a dominant group means one can deny one's affiliation with, for instance, the gay community and act in a way which identifies one as a member of the heterosexual majority. Although these responses may appear benign or even positive, in that they may assist someone to have a better job or live in a better neighbourhood, each of these alternatives exacts a price which I suggest is greater than that paid by the person seeking to engage critically with multiple perspectives. Practices such as passing may cause psychological damage as a result of self-censorship and denial of those aspects of oneself which may result in one's rejection by others. For instance, Alcoff says of passing that it "causes one to dislike those aspects of self that reveal otherness" (2006, 267). In my view feeling that one no longer has a home, or feeling alienated from one's original culture, both of which may arise from viewing dual or multiple perspectives critically, is less damaging.

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67 Alcoff (2006, 266–67) gives an eloquent example from her own experience as a mixed-race Latina passing as white.
psychologically than feeling alienated from oneself as a result of disengaging from multiple selves or from passing as someone one is not.\textsuperscript{68}

While the oppressed have little choice but to understand the social practices of the dominant because these are the practices by which everyone is expected to live there is no corresponding incentive compelling the dominant to understand the practices of the oppressed, and this dichotomy presents a problem for these claims if they are understood simply as contesting dominant knowledge systems. It could be argued, as Bat–Ami Bar On (1993, 95–96) does in response to Collins's (1990, 204) argument that knowledge claims made by black women can contest white male epistemologies, that any insights generated by possessing dual perspectives have no social power to affect dominant discourses.\textsuperscript{69} In Bar On's (1993, 96) opinion the persons most likely to be convinced by knowledge claims made by the marginalised are other similarly situated persons, so that such claims merely serve as a means of empowering the marginalised themselves. While I agree with Bar On that challenges to dominant epistemologies will not necessarily be successful, I disagree that the goal of knowledge claims made by the marginalised is either to empower the oppressed or to challenge dominant epistemologies. Given that knowledge claims by the privileged are epistemically privileged over claims by the oppressed, and that subjugated knowledges can be suppressed by dominant knowledge validation processes (Collins 1990, 203–4), it is not enough for the oppressed to make a claim to some experience for it to achieve credibility and authority from society at large.

\textsuperscript{68} I will consider this in more detail in Chapter Three, including the notion that the desire to feel ‘at home in the world’ is contrary to having a critical perspective necessary for resistance.

\textsuperscript{69} Bar On refers to Collins talking about black women scholars making claims in academia. Collins (1990, 204) argues that such claims can "contest those advanced by the white male community", however Bar On refutes this on the grounds that the white male community does not have to accept the knowledge validation process on which black women's claims are based. In other words, the dominant can reject the framework within which knowledge claims made by the oppressed have validity, making the claims themselves invalid.
Indeed, Collins argues that knowledge claims made by the oppressed may be rejected on epistemological grounds because "for any body of knowledge, new knowledge claims must be consistent with an existing body of knowledge that the group controlling the interpretive context accepts as true" (1990, 204). This suggests that subjugated knowledges are best considered in ways other than oppositional to dominant epistemologies.

Bar On also argues that knowledge claims made by the oppressed are flawed for claiming to be untainted by oppression. According to Bar On, two kinds of practices are seen as authentic in claims to partial knowledge: practices which are considered integral to the group (such as the care-giving practices associated with women) which may be implicated in the oppression of the group, and practices of resistance.70 Bar On (1993, 93) claims that practices of resistance are conceptualised in two ways, firstly, as practices pre-dating oppressive culture (for example, pre-colonisation, pre-patriarchal), and secondly, as practices responsive to, and subversive of, oppression. These two approaches to conceptualising resistance can be combined. For example, Bar On (1993, 93–94) argues that in "La conciencia de la mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness", Anzaldua (2007) draws upon Chicano and American Indian culture and myth as well as challenging the oppressions found in Anglo and Chicano culture. I would dispute Bar On's (1993, 94) claim that practices of resistance are theorised as authentic only if they are untainted by oppression or indicative of a certain group. For example, hooks describes being an outsider within

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70 Bar On is writing in the early 1990s and refers to ideas in care theory from the mid to late 1980s, in particular notions of women's practices of nurturing and caring, particularly mothering, found in the work of Sara Ruddick and Virginia Held in Eva Kittay and Meyers (1987); the debate has since moved on. Bar On argues that although Ruddick and Held are sensitive to ambiguities in practices of mothering and caring they go on to develop theories that suggest these practices are uncomplicated. Bar On's point is that women’s practices of nurturing and caring for others identified by proponents of an ethics of care in the 1980s are linked to the gender roles assigned women within oppressive systems, and since they are acted upon by oppressive forces they cannot be theorised without complexity.
as having a public acceptance of the separation between margin and centre and a private consciousness of being "a necessary, vital part of that whole" (2000, xvi). While I do agree with Bar On that practices of oppression are implicated in practices of resistance, I would argue that this does not make the meanings attached to the social practices and institutions of domination unassailable. As Foucault has shown, power and resistance are always co-implicated and one cannot exist without the other (McLaren 2004, 217–18). As a result, the possibility of resistance survives even where states of domination exist and resistance is limited because power relations have become ossified.\(^7\) If the subject is both produced by power and opposed to the way it is produced by power, since one of the effects of power is resistance to productive power (Butler 2004, 189), it is impossible for theorists such as Anzaldua, Lugones or hooks, for example, to creatively imagine notions of resistance and empowerment without reference to the oppressive systems that construct both themselves and their practices of resistance. I would argue, however, that the meanings attached to these practices, while tainted by oppression, are not wholly determined by oppression.

In contrast to Bar On, I would contend that the importance of subjugated knowledges is that they are situated and embodied, and therefore necessarily partial. Such knowledges should be privileged because, as reflections of marginalised lives, they are implicated with, and indicators of, oppression. However, they are not simply oppositional to mainstream knowledges, because partial plural knowledge claims in

\(^7\) For Foucault, because "power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free", "where the determining factors saturate the whole", such as with slavery, "there is no relationship of power"; rather, "it is a question of a physical relationship of constraint" (1983, 221). However, Foucault said in "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom", that even where "power relations are fixed in such a way that they are perpetually asymmetrical and allow an extremely limited margin of freedom" there is some possibility for resistance, suggesting by way of example that women in conventional marital relationships in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could "deceive their husbands, pilfer money from them, refuse them sex" (quoted in McLaren 2004, 221).
themselves, by their very existence, dispute the totalising claims of dominant epistemologies, and this implicates them in both practices of oppression and of resistance. Claims to knowledge by the oppressed do not annihilate dominant knowledges; they challenge the notion of totalising knowledges, the claim that this is all there is. When the marginalised make knowledge claims, they argue for the existence of other, partial perspectives which are ignored by the comprehensive claims to knowledge made by mainstream epistemologies. The challenge is not to the knowledges themselves but to the dominant notion of 'truth' versus truths.\textsuperscript{72}

In summary, the situated standpoints inhabited by the oppressed have a twofold importance for resistance practices: firstly, the situated and partial claims to knowledge made by the oppressed challenge the monolithic epistemologies of domination; and secondly, the multiple perspectives inhabited by the oppressed also give them a critical perspective on knowledge claims. It is the critical positioning attained rather than the content of the knowledge claims themselves that is important for resistance, since positioning oneself in this way potentially allows persons to see alternative ways of understanding not wholly constricted by the explanatory frameworks imposed by dominant epistemologies.

\textbf{Repudiating privilege}

Theorists of oppression point out the limits to what the oppressed can do or change about the way their social identities are perceived without corresponding change from the privileged.\textsuperscript{73} In response, a number of theorists have suggested ways the privileged can be traitors to their privilege or disown their privilege.\textsuperscript{74} This

\textsuperscript{72} I will return to the notion of competing truths in Chapter Six.
\textsuperscript{73} Compare Campbell (1999), who cautions that dominant identities lack the same imperatives to change that exist for the marginalised.
\textsuperscript{74} Although the arguments in feminist theory about essentialism and lack of awareness of difference
challenge has been taken up principally by white theorists in response to race-privilege, although the theory could apply to any privileged group. One of the earliest is Sandra Harding's account of traitorous or perverse identities. Harding (1991, 103) argues that the contradictory aspects of an identity such as 'woman scientist', for example, give an epistemic advantage because of being at the centre and the margin simultaneously—in other words, being the outsider within. For Harding, having a traitorous or perverse identity involves showing disloyalty to class or race privilege.

Lynne Tirrell (1993) argues that although we commonly think of authority and privilege as identical, having authority is about having power, while being privileged is a matter of having a special benefit or exemption. This being the case, she argues that it is possible to have power and yet disaffiliate from privilege since, while privilege may be presumed by dominant groups, it is ultimately affirmed by others. But is it that simple to be a class or race traitor? Is it even possible to disaffiliate from class or race privilege, given that I suggested in the previous chapter that it is not possible to disaffiliate from group memberships which are based on visible characteristics? Alcoff (2000, 273) is less convinced by the theory of race treason because she believes race-privilege is largely left intact and there is a tendency on the part of those supposedly engaged in disaffiliating from race privilege to disavow any ongoing responsibility for race violence or discrimination. It is not clear how it is possible to simultaneously take responsibility and deny responsibility for the consequences of privilege.

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Footnote: For example, Frankenberg (1993); Narayan and Harding (2000); Sullivan and Tuana (2007).
Alison Bailey suggests the notion of traitorous identities for those whites acting with awareness of race privilege, behaviour she describes as "privilege-cognizant" (2007a, 147) white scripts. Bailey believes that privilege-evasive behaviour and speech acts enforce and support racism, and that being conscious of one's advantages as a result of racism, that is, privilege-cognizant, becomes a way for whites to take responsibility for the negative consequences of racism to people of colour. Clearly, this awareness of privilege could be applied to other social groups which are treated unequally and suffer sociopsychological discrimination. Privilege-cognizance would involve recognising when one's race or sex or age or ability or religion or sexuality privileges one in some way, and, I would argue, specifically when this privileging disadvantages someone else or some other group.

Privilege-cognizance is the recognition of exclusions, of the (discrimination, violence, treatment towards others) that have resulted in one being in the privileged position one is in, for example, Minnie Bruce Pratt's (1984) recognition of the role slavery played in the privileging of her white southern family. Pratt's autobiographical narrative unpicks the histories of oppression and resistance that shape her sense of self and belonging in three key times and places in her life: her childhood in Alabama, her marriage and lesbian coming out, and her later years as a white woman in a black neighbourhood in Washington, DC. By critically examining the details of her childhood, Pratt reveals instances of oppression that were overlooked or ignored, such as the slave house in the centre of the square in her home town. In order to see difference, Pratt has to challenge the notion that what she knows is all there is to know. She says: "I feel the need to look differently because

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76 Ruth Frankenberg (1993) developed the distinction between race-cognizant and race-evasive white scripts.
77 Adale Sholock argues that, as well as providing an obstacle to effective change, the epistemic uncertainty that attends "systematic ignorance" (2012, 701) in the privileged can "offer
I've learned that what is presented to me as an accurate view of the world is frequently a lie ... I'm learning that what I think that I know is an accurate view of the world is frequently a lie ... So I gain truth when I expand my constricted eye, an eye that has only let in what I have been taught to see" (1984, 17; italics in original).

Charles Mills has suggested that, for white people who subscribe to what he calls the 'Racial Contract', this kind of epistemic ignorance is part of learning to see the world wrongly, a kind of 'inverted epistemology' that results in "white misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race" (1997, 18–19; italics in original).78

I will argue in the next chapter that the self is produced by and productive of place. If this is so, then social selves or public identities reflect public acknowledgement of spatial occupation, lives lived, to put it another way. In the US, southern white, middle-class subjectivity is, in part, produced by the invisibility of black labour and lack of acknowledgement that white privilege is built on the lives and the spaces black slaves occupied, such as the buildings where slaves were sold. Just as Pratt comes to see that the exclusion of black slaves made her own family's privilege appear natural, privilege-cognizance amounts to acknowledging this sleight of hand, the disappearance of those whose oppression makes one's privilege possible. Recognising these omissions from one's own history requires a new way of knowing the world, a way of seeing which is seeing what or who is not there, who has been painted out of the picture, to make it possible for those present to claim a society that

78 Mills (1997, 18–19) says that in order to maintain a worldview of white superiority, whites are required to "live in an invented delusional world, a racial fantasyland, a 'consensual hallucination', where stereotypical views of other races (for example, "Tontos, Man Fridays and Sambos") are considered to be representative of real racial groups.
is just and fair and egalitarian. It is in the interplay between privilege-cognizance and the cultivation of traitorous identities, acting upon one's understanding of the exclusions of others, that one is able to take responsibility for histories of violence and discrimination that have made one's privilege possible.

Being able to make claims about oneself and society therefore requires knowledge about the world that the privileged normally hide, in order to avoid acknowledging that the advantages taken for granted as a right come at a cost to others. Privilege-cognizance, then, is a kind of moral accounting where the moral and socio-economic costs of oppressive social practices are given a value by those who benefit most. As the ones who bear the brunt of the burden, the oppressed are already aware of the unacknowledged costs of unfair and unjust social practices.

Bailey (2007a, 154–55) uses Lugones's (1987, 18) concept of world-travelling to explain what happens when persons are privilege-evasive, as well as illustrating how traitorous identities would work. World-travelling suggests that we cannot understand others without travelling 'playfully' to their worlds, where playfully implies an attitude of loving perception, allowing one to see the other in all their complexity and difference, making it possible to understand them and their choices. According to Lugones (1987, 3) the subordinate have to become world travellers in order to survive—they have to be outsiders within some other cultural context because they are marginalised from the mainstream, and, in the case of members of some subordinate groups, quite literally cannot dwell there all the time.  

As a result of their marginalised status, the oppressed experience their sense of self differently in different contexts, and "the shift from being one person to being a

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79 hooks expresses this in the following way in her Preface to Feminist Theory: "Across those tracks was a world we could work in as maids, as janitors, as prostitutes ... We could enter that world but we could not live there" (2000, xvi.)
different person" (1987, 11) is Lugones's definition of world-travelling. In Bailey's analysis, privilege-evasive scripts present a way for the privileged to avoid becoming world travellers, whereas world travel is "an indispensable strategy" (2007a, 154) for those wanting to cultivate a traitorous identity.

However, Campbell argues that those with dominant identities, that is "those identities most affirmed by current social structures" (1999, 216n1), do not have the same imperatives as the oppressed to be world travellers in this way. Campbell suggests that this is the case because of the nature of expectations which she argues are "central structures in the constitution of selves and are a way of understanding and ordering the world" because they "structure attention and memory, are interwoven with emotion, and give rise to norms" (1999, 225). Although the oppressed may need to resist the internalisation of norms causing them to challenge expectations of their behaviour, the dominant experience expectations of their own behaviour as settled in the form of apparently natural social practices and rules. Having expectations which are easily met reinforces entrenched attitudes and behaviours; such expectations, which gain normative force through being met (Campbell 1999, 223), "become psychic habits that are unselfconscious and thus protected from self-scrutiny" (1999, 216); therefore, the dominant do not have the same impetus to transform themselves or their behaviour. Campbell also suggests that "although our expectations can become apparent to us when they are not met, disruption may lead neither to their critical engagement nor to their reformulation, but rather to emotional responses that are antithetical to change" (1999, 229). In other words, challenging settled expectations may result in anxiety and an inability to know how to respond rather than in personal transformation.

Given that each person has a multiplicity of identities as a result of social
group assignments, clearly some, if not all, persons also possess privileged social identities, and there is little incentive for members of these groups for critical self-examination, thus setting a limit on potential change. In their commentary on Pratt's reflections, Biddy Martin and Mohanty (1986, 196) suggest that privileged identities are constructed by suppressing knowledge of the injustices which make privilege possible. This repression of oppression and struggles of resistance extends to the repression of difference within the self. By assuming a concept of an unchanging stable self the privileged resist acknowledging that difference exists, and by conceiving social identities as self-evident, homogeneous, fixed and unchangeable (Martin and Mohanty 1986, 193), the historical context of social injustices is hidden or denied. Members of privileged groups therefore benefit from ignoring the relationality of their autonomy and moral agency which I will discuss in the next chapter, and because their social expectations are met they have less reason than the oppressed to question the concept of the self as a coherent, unified structure (Campbell 1999, 231).

In order to discover the true political nature of her upbringing and privilege Pratt has to re-examine her childhood and reveal where the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, and the repression of difference, both outward and inward, made privilege possible (Martin and Mohanty 1986, 196), and to unsettle the notion of a fixed, coherent, completely independent sense of self. Questioning assumptions about one's privileged position in the world and about oneself as separate from and independent of others, rather than necessarily relational,  

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80 Campbell (1999, 231) argues that although Pratt challenges the notion of a "coherent and historically continuous" identity, she does not support the alternative notion of the multiple self; rather, she looks for a kind of community where community is not about shared "behaviors, feelings, and values" but rather "material and historical locations" where relationships of domination and exclusion are acted out. I will return to the idea of space and its significance for practices of resistance in Chapter Three.
requires re-examining notions of the self and who one is. Accepting the complicity of oneself and one's group in the oppression of others requires firstly acknowledging one's interdependence with others. Pratt's narrative indicates how difficult it is to unravel the complex connections between self and other, safety and harm, and privilege and oppression; for instance persons can feel at home (safe) while being harmed in situations of domestic violence. This kind of knowledge is not easy to come by for either privileged or oppressed; it requires courage and commitment to unscramble settled notions such as that only by ignoring injustices to one group can another feel safe and at home in the world. I will return to these ideas in Chapter Three.

Assuming the dominant do choose to move from the centre to the margin in the way that Pratt did, to travel to the worlds of the oppressed, it is unclear exactly what difference this would make. Travelling to the world of the oppressed requires more than seeing the other with a loving rather than an arrogant eye, although it is a start to see the other in all their complexity. Moreover, there are inherent limits to what we can know about the other, and avoiding arrogant perception while travelling to other worlds requires acceptance of these limits as well as acceptance of the epistemological limitations attached to being a member of a dominant group.

The idea of privilege-cognizance as a strategy for change raises many questions, including how awareness of injustices translates into political change. Although it is outside the scope of this project to attempt to address these here, it is worth remembering that privilege-cognizance represents a mostly untried strategy that depends upon practitioners actively seeking out information that may make them feel uncomfortable. Additionally, Campbell (1999, 219–20) suggests that although

\[81\] See Frye (1983, 74–76) for more detail on what it means to look with loving perception. I will return to this notion in Chapter Four.
knowledge is essential for identity transformation, by itself it does not give sufficient reason for dominant identities to transform themselves. I would argue, given Pratt's example, that what might make transformation possible is the multiplicity of identities, both privileged and oppressed, which inform a person's expectations and experiences. For instance, Pratt's privilege-cognizance with regard to her white race arises in conjunction with her understanding of her comparative powerlessness as a woman. If the privileged actively seek out histories of violence and repression of other groups, as Pratt has done, or travel to another's world, as Lugones suggests, to provide themselves with 'the view from there', then these acts may ultimately be instrumental in motivating social change; however, the prospects for success are tentative at best.

**Rethinking social categories**

Because the construction of social categories frequently contributes to oppression, as the preceding sections have demonstrated, then it may be difficult at first to see how re-envisioning social identities can also be a means of empowering the oppressed and enabling resistance. However, as I have shown, there is complexity to the way in which social identities are constructed, and this allows the oppressed the space to re-conceptualise the way in which social identities are seen. In contrast to the dominant, for whom social identities operate as a means of excluding and marginalising others, members of oppressed groups are able to create a sense of inclusiveness by allowing not only for differences among group members but also for diverse interpretations about who belongs within a social group. This does not mean that there is an infinite number of types who fit into a group; rather, it suggests a willingness on the part of group members to consider as belonging those with
different attributes but who identify with the group. Feminism has a long history of theorising the importance of difference and inclusion as a counter to the politics of dominance and exclusion. One way of allowing for the inclusion of difference within social groups is to promote the concept of identity as multiple in instances where domination conceptualises singular homogenised identities. To dispel the assumption that multiplicity (multiple identities) implies fragmentation of the self, social identities need to be re-conceptualised as necessarily plural and complex. Although both dominants and subordinates can be described in terms of membership of different social groups, as mentioned above, members of in-groups conceptualise themselves as individuals with differing characteristics whereas members of out-groups are perceived as having similar features. The presumption of homogeneity by the dominant deprives the oppressed not only of their individuality but also of their plurality.

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, Lugones (1994, 468) argues that not only does understanding social kinds as discrete and unitary represent a form of domination but for the oppressed to conceive of the self as impure, as mestizaje, can be a form of resistance. If the dominant insist on the purity of the self, and the consequential understanding of those with multiple identities as fragmented, then to conceptualise identity as necessarily multiple becomes a form of resistance for the oppressed. It also represents a form of self-definition available to the oppressed, the conception of social identity as plural and consequently of oppressions as multiple and interlocking or intermeshed.

Lugones (1989) talks about a self who is one person in one world and another

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82 For Lugones the term mestizaje, which means a mixed race person, refers to "an example of and a metaphor for both impurity and resistance. I hold on to the metaphor and adopt mestizaje as a central name for impure resistance to interlocked, intermeshed oppressions" (1994, 459).
person in another world. This individual is someone who, like Alcoff, may be accepted as having a different identity in a different context. As mentioned earlier, Alcoff (2006, viii–ix, 266–67) describes in Visible Identities how she was able to pass as white in the broader community because of her light skin, but how as a result of her Latina heritage she was also accepted by the Hispanic community, enabling her to be an insider in both white and Hispanic communities. Similarly, Lugones (1990a) talks of being a part of both the Hispanic community and the lesbian community. Notice that in both these cases the two identities ascribed or assumed are in tension with one another and, for Alcoff at least, one identity confers privilege while the other results in oppression. This may appear inconsistent with my previous example of the black woman, someone whose two identities are not mutually exclusive and both of which entail oppression. But what I am concerned to point out at this stage is that many types of multiple identities exist and the ascription of multiple identities does not automatically result in either privilege or subjugation. Historically, however, the confluence of the social categories male, white, and middle-class has equated to political and economic privilege.

To claim that identities and hence oppressions are singular and separate from one another is to overlook the complex way in which discriminatory forces intersect or intermesh, such as the way race is implicated in poverty. Intersectionality, or intersectional oppression, refers to the way in which "subordinating practices operate synergistically" (Meyers 2000, 154), so that—as in Kimberle Crenshaw's (1989, 149) vivid analogy of multiple vehicles arriving simultaneously at a crossroads from

83 In addition, this is not the way that persons with multiple identities experience their sense of self. Beverly Smith, in conversation with Barbara Smith, says that although it may be useful to separate out the different strands of oppression, "in reality, the way women live their lives, those separations just don't work. Women don't live their lives like, "Well this part is race, and this is class, and this part has to do with women's identities" (Smith and Smith 1983, 116).
different directions and striking a person—it is impossible to tell which oppression is responsible for the resulting harm. In societies which attempt to redress the injustices to members of out-groups, the presumption of homogeneity within marginalised groups can lead to further injustices. By assuming that identity is singular and discrete, legislators have framed anti-discrimination legislation presuming discrimination on account of a single facet of social identity, which then makes it impossible for claimants to argue in court that they suffer from multiple discriminations. For example, Crenshaw (1989) and Cathy Scarborough (1989) independently analysed a number of legal cases in the United States involving discrimination against black women and discovered inconsistencies in the judgements, which only made sense if the courts were presuming discrimination was always singular and discrete. For black women this presumption meant the legislation did not recognise discrimination on the basis of both race and sex concurrently.\footnote{The courts treated attempts to claim both discriminations as attempts to claim double the remedy, hence not what the anti-discrimination legislation intended.} Instead, in order to make a successful claim the women had to show that any race discrimination experienced also affected black men or that sex discrimination also affected white women. Conversely, the women were unable to argue that they were representative of women or blacks since the court differentiated their experiences as black women from those of white women and black men on the grounds of sex or race. Black women therefore found themselves in the anomalous position of not being able to claim discrimination as black women and not being able to claim discrimination as women, or as blacks, since they were not considered representative of their own gender or their own race. The reason for this is that implicit in the legislation is the assumption that the definition of woman is synonymous with the situation of a white woman and the definition of black is
synonymous with the situation of a black man. To use Lugones's terminology, the transparent group members of the groups 'men' and 'women' are black men and white women; therefore black women are rendered invisible within the legal system, which is implicitly looking for racist discrimination against black men or sexist discrimination against white women. When a black woman attempts to gain redress for discrimination, the legal system is unable to appropriately consider and address discrimination against her as a black woman.

In analysing the legislation and the anomalous case of black women, Scarborough (1989) and Crenshaw (1989) found that the legislation reflects an understanding of oppression and discrimination that presumes that, but for one feature of identity, the individual would have equal social access and opportunities to that of a normative subject, in other words, a white, middle-class male. Anti-discrimination legislation is constituted upon the premise that 'but for' a particular kind of discrimination an individual would be able to get that job or be granted a pay rise. Therefore, anti-discrimination legislation looks at removing the barrier of race or sex or sexuality, or whatever the aspect of one's identity that is deemed to be preventing an individual from succeeding. This problem arises in the legislation because discriminations are treated not only as singular and additive (King 1988; Scarborough 1989; Lugones 1994), or with what Lugones, calling on Spelman's vivid description, calls "pop-bead logic" (1994, 474), but also because there is a presumption of an equivalence between the different oppressions. To consider oppression in this way is to overlook the fact that sex, race and class discrimination operate as three separate systems of social control, which are nevertheless interactive.

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85 Spelman says, "one's gender identity is not related to one's racial and class identity as the parts of pop-bead necklaces are related, separable and insertable in other 'strands' with different racial and class 'parts'" (1988, 15).
(King 1988, 47). Deborah King (1988, 51) also suggests that the reduction of the complexity of black female identity to an addition problem reflects structural terms developed by Europeans and white males privileging their sex and race; in other words, it is an additional means of coercing black women by determining the language in which they can define themselves. By determining the way the oppressed are able to legitimise themselves, the categorisation of social identities is another component of domination.

One difficulty which may arise in applying the concept of intersectionality to moral problems concerns the salience of identities, which I discussed in Chapter One. Intersectionality suggests that, for those affected by multiple oppressions, trying to determine which discrimination is at fault is analogous to attempting to discover which vehicle is to blame if someone is hit simultaneously by two or more vehicles coming from different directions. However, if there is a hierarchy of features of identity and they are not equally salient in every circumstance, then the additive approach may reflect the reality of the lived experience better than an intersectional approach, particularly with regard to legal injustices rather than moral harms. 86 Intersectionality assigns no difference in weighting to the various features of identity that constitute a multiple identity, because it is concerned with the synergy of these factors; yet some of these factors may be less significant than others. For example, class and race discrimination may be much more important factors contributing to the economic and social inequities suffered by black women than sex discrimination (King 1988). However, this does not mean that intersectionality is not also relevant

86 That identities are privileged or oppressed in differing degrees may not be obvious until we provide a specific context for the privileging or oppression. Being young, female, white and childless may equate to being young, male, white and childless at a department store service counter but as an employee of a busy legal firm the man may get the important promotion because of a perception that the woman intends at some unspecified point in the future to take time out to have children.
since it may be that both these factors apply: one aspect of identity may be more salient in the discrimination and yet other factors may influence being treated differently. For example, a landlord who discriminates systematically against women on welfare may appear to be discriminating against black women if the majority of applicants denied are black because the majority of welfare recipients are black; being black in this situation is not as salient as receiving welfare but the complex interplay between poverty and race may result in what is covert racism, and the women's race may be as significant, although an unacknowledged factor, in disadvantaging them.

The concept of intersectionality used as a methodological approach to legal and social problems is "animated ... by a distinctive way into reality that captures not just the static outcomes of the problem it brings into view but its dynamics and lines of force as well", and it is this "synergistic interaction of the variables which it exposes" (MacKinnon 2013, 1023–24) which makes it truly transformative. Like outsider within status, intersectionality provides a conceptual approach which allows the person to examine critically "the dominant framework of discrimination" (Crenshaw 1989, 152).

Re-defining social identities

I am arguing that the act of self-definition, of creating and claiming a social identity or identities, constitutes an act of resistance for the oppressed. However, as these identities need to be widely recognised by others they need to be public not private identities, in order to be considered resistant identities. Since the dominant conception of group identities of outsiders is often predominantly negative, there is

87 For an overview of intersectionality as a methodology, and its critiques, see Vivian May (2013).
an issue for the oppressed in laying claim to their own positive identities. If negative connotations of a social identity exist in the wider community these will not be erased by the resistant act of re-claiming the identity; rather, identity power means the two ways of interpreting the identity will continue to exist in tension with one another. As a result, some identities may appear internally contradictory to members of the wider community and be rejected. Identities that are in conflict with normative understandings of how members of that social group should behave may also be rejected. For example, prescriptive expectations of gender are so engrained that for a woman to dress in 'man's' clothing and refuse to remove excess body hair, may result in the expectation that this individual is claiming a male rather than a female identity, even if this is not the case. The refusal by the wider community to embrace non-normative understandings of social identities can affect the self-image of the individual. This makes it more difficult for the person to insist on their understanding of their identity, since it is difficult to claim an identity if the community is unwilling to affirm a positive value for that identity.88

The most serious problem with the idea of persons making themselves intelligible through self-definition is that because social identities require uptake by others it is questionable whether the oppressed can gain affirmation from others apart from members of their own social group. It has been suggested that for the oppressed to make claims which have semantic authority the meanings attached to those claims must be able to be encompassed by the wider community, that is, they must be quasi-normative. This would seem an almost insurmountable barrier to overcome; however, the oppressed do press successfully for changes to how they are perceived, one example being the more positive public image of persons with non-hetero

88 To claim a social identity whose positive meaning(s) may not be validated by society involves taking a moral risk. I will consider this problem in more detail in Chapter Five.
sexualities in contemporary times. I would suggest changed perceptions are possible, because there exists a certain fluidity in the norms of any society since social institutions and practices change over time and the expectations attached to them also change; consequently, there can be some uptake of meanings that are unfamiliar or novel. However, social uptake of new identities is necessarily partial, because the meanings attached to the identities by the oppressed do not fully accord with normative values and expectations. I suggest that this partial uptake is all that is required for alternative meanings of social identities and practices to be introduced into mainstream discourses.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, one imperative for the oppressed is to be world travellers, to inhabit both their own marginalised culture(s) and the culture of the dominant, in order to survive. Lugones (1987, 4) argues that seeing the other in all their complexity, rather than as products of our arrogant perception, requires us to travel to their world. For example, Lugones (1987, 4–6) describes seeing her own mother as a servant and a victim as a result of seeing her arrogantly. Because she saw her mother as a servant, she equated being female in patriarchal Argentina with servitude and rejected this for herself. World-travelling provides a means of identifying with the other and allows us to see the other in all their complexity, where difference is recognised not erased. Only by travelling to her mother's world does Lugones (1987, 18) reject arrogant perception and come to realise that her mother is not solely constructed by patriarchy, and this understanding then affects how Lugones sees herself. Because we see "what it is to be them and what it is to be

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89 Lugones (1987, 9) defines a world as a place inhabited by people or which may have been inhabited at some time in the past or may be inhabited by imaginary people; it is not, however, a utopia, an imaginary place. I will come back to the notions of imagination and world travel in Chapter Six.
ourselves in their eyes" (1987, 17; italics in original), world-travelling becomes a way of discovering what we cannot otherwise know about ourselves and an important step to self-knowledge, which in Chapter Three I suggest is a precursor to making ourselves understood by others.

Lugones says we are "fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated; we are lacking" (1987, 8). The idea that we are fully dependent upon one another for the possibility of being understood, without which we are not intelligible, and that such an understanding is only reached by travelling to one another's worlds raises a problem that, given the possibly settled expectations of the dominant, there is little serious incentive for them to travel to worlds occupied by the oppressed. In my view, however, to see the problem as one of the dominant understanding the oppressed is to buy into the logic of oppression in which identity is conceived as unified and static. If, instead, all persons are conceived as having multiple identities, some of which may be privileged and some oppressed, and how these identities are perceived and understood depends upon the person's situation at any one time, then it follows that an individual's identity may be perceived and understood in multiple ways, depending upon the time and place. I will return to this point in the next chapter.

The notion I raise here, that members of subordinate groups can resist dominant understandings of the social identities—with all their concomitant negative associations—assigned to them, requires that identity power is not the implacable force it may have appeared from my discussion at the beginning of this chapter. For this to be the case it must be possible to exercise identity power in a way which
questions the construction of members of some groups as fragmented, or lacking, or as stereotypes. And this is precisely what Collins (1991, 43–44) argues when she says that through a process of self-definition, black women may be able to challenge the power dynamics that underlie the process of social definition. According to Collins, acting in defiance of their oppression by self-defining may involve black women in claiming those aspects of their social identity that are "stereotyped, ridiculed, and maligned", for example, "assertiveness and other 'unfeminine' qualities" (1991, 44) which are part of the Sapphire stereotype.\footnote{Sapphire is a stereotype ridiculing assertive black women.} Pratibha Parmar, describes this as "creating identities ... not 'in relation to', 'in opposition to', 'as reversal of', or 'as a corrective to' ... but in and for ourselves", arguing that "such a narrative thwarts the binary hierarchy of centre and margin: the margin refuses its place as 'Other'" (1990, 101). Developing positive self-images through a process of reclamation and reinvention requires skills, such as critical self-reflection, which are integral to moral agency, as I will discuss in the next chapter. When black women assert a social identity which is not recognised by dominant forces they question the credibility of established meanings for social identities. Self-definition may also challenge the forces underlying social categorisation as a means of control; for example, persons asserting a multiplicity of social identities to refute dominant characterisations of their identities as unified and discrete question the way in which social categories are constructed. Therefore, self-definition by members of subordinate groups may present a challenge to the power dynamics underlying social categorisation as a means of control. If social categorisation in the context of control is a form of domination, then challenging the external definition of oneself by asserting one's own identity and demanding recognition of multiple identities
provides a means of resisting oppressive forces.

Collins (1991) stresses the importance of self-valuation and definition for black women as a means of resisting the dehumanising effects of being objectified by external negative definitions and the internalised psychological oppression that accompanies objectification. The view of self-definition she posits presumes the oppressed already possess self-worth and the ability to self-define. There is no suggestion that black women need to reach some higher level of consciousness, to become empowered first, or to be politically conscious; rather the sense I gain is that—at least for black women—the power to self-define is not completely attenuated by external de-valuation and definition. Collins suggests that most African American women do not self-define as "mammies, matriarchs, welfare mothers, mules, or sexually denigrated women" because the "ideology of domination in which controlling images are embedded is much less cohesive or uniform than imagined" (1990, 93). Therefore, black women already possess the tools to self-define. By crediting black women with this ability Collins suggests the oppressed possess a kind of power, the creative energy necessary for self-definition, and this reflects self-valuation. I would suggest this is not necessarily the case for members of other subjugated groups and may not always be the case for black women. I will examine the role played by self-worth and self-respect in developing the skills necessary for the critical reflection that enables self-definition in more detail in the next chapter.

Collins argues that when black women refuse the status assigned by

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92 In speaking of her mother, hooks says Rosa Bell "did not allow the white supremacist culture of domination to completely shape and control her psyche" (1991, 46); and under the heading "What We Believe", The Combahee Women's Collective begin by mentioning their "shared belief that black women are inherently valuable" (1979, 364–65).
domination, by "challenging the political knowledge-validation process that results in externally defined, stereotypical images" (1991, 42), self-definition calls into question "the entire rationale for such domination" (1991, 45). I would suggest that rather than countering the knowledge base, the refusal to be completely defined by external forces poses a challenge to the fundamental interpretive framework. An example of how self-definition or re-definition might weaken a dominant paradigm is given by Frye (1983, 152–54) in her examination of the meanings attached to being lesbian. Frye demonstrates that lesbians are excluded from "phallocratic reality" (1983, 154) because the idea of lesbianism has no meaning in the dominant phallocratic conceptual scheme, and therefore the existence of lesbians represents a challenge to the dominant (heterosexual) reality. Lesbian existence represents a challenge to the dominant phallocratic conceptual scheme because the concept, lesbianism, is meaningless within the phallocratic scheme. In other words, we need a new interpretive framework, one which does not assume heterosexuality, in order to make sense of the idea of lesbianism.

Similarly, the character of Sethe in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (2006), exemplified by her making claims to having feelings for her children and by taking responsibility for her children, represents a challenge to the dominant conceptual scheme, because at that time and place slaves and the children of slaves are considered to be property and, as objects, cannot possess the emotions belonging to persons. Sethe's personhood is not instantiated in her being as it is for a non-slave,

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93 Collins argues that "if Black women—the quintessential 'other' in white, patriarchal society—refuse to accept their assigned status, then the entire rationale for such domination is challenged" (1991, 45).

94 *Beloved* (Morrison 2006) is the story of a black slave, Sethe, in the US south, who escapes from the plantation Sweet Home with her children. When she is found by her old master Sethe tries to kill her children to prevent them being taken back into slavery. Although she is only successful in killing her daughter, the eponymous character, Sethe is rejected by other ex-slaves because of her actions. The key elements from the novel that appear in this discussion are the relationships between Sethe and her children and another ex-slave, Paul D.
and her claims to knowledge—which attest to her equality as a moral agent—therefore exist in tension with the conceptual schema of slavery. We need a different interpretive framework, one in which slavery and its values are considered wrong, to interpret Sethe's behaviour as we would that of another person.

Tirrell (1993, 10) adopts Frye's (1983, 165) notion that domination does not totally define the oppressed, that there is some part of the oppressed which is undefined and unseen; and this analysis corresponds with Foucault's (1983, 221) understanding of power as something which is exercised only over free persons so that there is always some potential for resistance. The part of the person that is not defined by domination enables members of subjugated groups to resist the negative images and stereotyping of dominant discourses and interpret their own lives.

However, as I suggested earlier, in order to be intelligible to others this self-definition has to be taken up by the community, and Tirrell argues that for this to occur the oppressed must be authorised to speak. If black women authorise one another to speak, who authorises the black rugby player to speak out against racism? Tirrell argues that for the speaker to have semantic authority—which she defines as "having a say (about something) that others recognise and respect" (1993, 16)—the community must be prepared to take up the meaning. She suggests this only occurs where the norms of that community encompass that meaning. The implication here is that without normative change occurring first there can be no social uptake of non-normative values, an issue which I will consider in more detail in Chapter Five.

I will suggest in later chapters that, even if the powerful are privileged in being guaranteed a space in which to speak, public spaces exist where it is also possible for the voices of the oppressed to be heard, and hence that being authorised
is not a sufficient condition. However, if we accept that authorisation of speech is required then the issue of where the oppressed get their semantic authority presents a difficulty for theories of resistance. For instance, the concept of semantic authority would seem to demand that I demonstrate why white rugby players would listen to Tahu, heterosexuals would attend to lesbians, or slave owners respond to Sethe as if she was a person not property. It could be argued that the partially privileged are authorised to speak by means of other social identities, so that Tahu is authorised as an elite sportsman and some lesbians are authorised because they are white and middle-class. Sethe would appear to have no privileged social identity enabling her to be heard, and yet some slaves told their stories and were heard, suggesting that the authority to be heard is not wholly conjoined with social privilege. Earlier I mentioned Tirrell's argument that authority and privilege do not necessarily go hand in hand. Authority is a form of power, in this case the power to appear credible to others. It could be argued that by claiming personhood Sethe challenges not only the practices but also the power relationships of slavery in which she is an object not a person. Perhaps it is also the case that the oppressed are sometimes heard because the privileged do not always feel vulnerable to claims of equality by others and may authorise the oppressed to speak—for example, the white Australians who voted yes in the 1967 Australian Referendum for recognition of Indigenous Australians may not have felt that their own privilege was threatened by changing the status of

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95 A good example of this today is the existence of online activist communities, such as SumOfUs.org, Getup.org.au and Avaaz.org.

96 Not everybody accepts this line of argument. Kathleen Jones (1988) argues against the concept of semantic authority on the grounds that since women have been excluded by the process of authorisation in the past, therefore the concept itself is exclusionary. Bar On (1993, 96) argues that the oppressed should not aspire to epistemic authority since they do not have the power to exclude or silence the dominant and therefore they can only authorise one another to speak and persuade others, who are empowered by their like-mindedness, to their viewpoint. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Tirrell says the problem of the oppressed needing semantic authority is the result of the conflation of the concepts of authority and privilege, which should be treated separately, thus, obviating the problem.
Indigenous Australians.\textsuperscript{97}

Rather than normative values changing completely over time, perhaps what is happening is that communities can encompass meanings which are not normative but such uptake of novel meanings is necessarily partial and gradual. For example, white rugby players might allow that what Tahu experienced seemed to him to be racist abuse while simultaneously denying that the rugby league is racist, thus giving partial credence to his claims but denying their own complicity and privilege. Partial uptake of meanings does not necessarily involve public acknowledgement of the way privilege is obtained at the expense of others, but merely for particular injustices to be seen as unfair and unacceptable, as no longer normative. For example, in Australia there has never been public acknowledgement of the way white people have benefited from discrimination against Indigenous Australians. However, in the 1990s there were mass demonstrations of whites expressing solidarity with Indigenous Australians, just as the institutionalisation of white racism in Australia (in the form of legalised discrimination against Indigenous Australians and the White Australia policy to retain racial purity) did not prevent a vast majority of white Australians from voting yes in the 1967 Referendum.\textsuperscript{98}

Such mass mobilisations towards inclusiveness point towards another possibility. Tirrell (1993, 24) argues that to be heard the oppressed have to change from being members of found communities to being members of communities of

\textsuperscript{97} The 1967 Referendum, officially the \textit{Constitution Alteration (Aboriginals) 1967}, was for amendments to the Australian constitution regarding the status of Indigenous Australians to allow the Federal Government to make special laws on their behalf, but, coming at a time of increased activism for Indigenous land rights and recognition, it also had a symbolic value.

\textsuperscript{98} It could be argued that the 1967 referendum did not remove substantive barriers to equality, including some discriminatory states legislation. However, as Michael Dodson (1993), then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission, noted, "without the capacity for inclusion, albeit in a limited form, invidious and direct discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was entrenched at a constitutional level."
choice—the differences between which I discussed briefly in Chapter One—because the latter provide "models of alternative social relationships as well as standpoints for critical reflection of self and community" (Friedman 1990, 158). However, in my view this is not required and not what actually occurs, since such a formula for change suggests that change only occurs within communities of like-minded people, whereas heterogeneous societies are not uniform or static. In contrast I would argue that what were previously normatively challenging meanings, such as the equality of Australian Aboriginal people, become normalised when alternative patterns of social interactions within existing communities result in changes to the power dynamic and hence to the social roles and responsibilities of the various social identities (Babbitt 2001, 7). To take the previous example again, at some point in Australian history, a dominant community understanding emerged in which the personhood of Indigenous Australians was at least partially accepted, and this was reflected in widespread support in the 1960s for recognising their entitlement to recognition. Another way of thinking about this is that the way identity power conceptualised Indigenous Australian identities changed. Undermining systems of domination requires privileged and oppressed alike to understand the meaning of social practices differently and to change social practices to instantiate new meanings.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have argued that self-defining by claiming multiple social identities may be a means of resisting the dominant interpretive framework, which restricts members of particular social groups by assigning them negative and stereotypical classifications. Crucial to my argument is how central the complex nature of social groups is to practices of exclusion and discrimination, and
consequently to those resisting these oppressive forces. I have argued that our social identities are not simply internal beliefs we have about ourselves, but are largely social constructions, and the meanings attached to each identity determine what opportunities and choices will be available to individuals. How social categories have been historically constructed matters because these act as a means of legitimising and normalising social practices that may be unfair or unjust in hierarchical societies where the assignment of social identities operates as another form of social control. The degree of privilege attached to a social identity either creates opportunities or closes off avenues of action.

I have also argued that living under oppression generates critical insights which are not available from the dominant perspective and that this perspective on the situation is connected to the person's social identity. I have suggested that one way for the oppressed to overcome the subjugating effects of being defined and categorised negatively by others is to use the epistemic advantage gained from the multiple perspectives arising from their plural identities to see through the dominant interpretive framework. However, this is a problematic strategy, because, as I will discuss in Chapter Three, as well as requiring the oppressed to develop the moral competencies necessary to self-define, it also requires them to trust in their ability to make knowledge claims. But one effect of oppression is to undermine persons psychologically so that they may not be able to trust in or to assert the legitimacy of their own experiences or identities.
3. Marginalisation, limits on action, and capacities for moral agency

If going home is denied me then I will have to stand
and claim my space, making new culture—una cultura
mestiza—with my own lumber; my own bricks and
mortar and my own feminist architecture.

(Gloria Anzaldua 2007, 44)

Introduction

In this chapter I am concerned with the difficulty for members of subjugated
groups of developing the competencies necessary to exercise moral agency. I am also
interested in the attendant problem, for persons whose moral capacity, or their
perception of their moral capacity, has been impaired by the way they are perceived
by others, of gaining acknowledgement of their equal moral standing from other
members of the moral community. In the preceding chapters, I argued that social
identities derived from group memberships may contribute to oppression.
Consequently, I suggested that self-definition is potentially significant in terms of
resistance, but that before persons can self-define they have to first be able to see
themselves as having the moral status commensurate with being the kind of person
capable of claiming a social identity of their own choosing. However, practices of
self-definition may be compromised by a person's capacity to develop the necessary
moral competencies, particularly where a person's identity has been objectified by
forces of domination. I also argue that without a sense of acknowledgement from
others that they are capable of moral reflection and comprehension, persons are
diminished both in their ability to act as moral agents, which I will consider in this
chapter, and to take responsibility for their actions or for who they are, which I will discuss in Chapter Four. I suggest that barriers to self-definition and, by extension, the effective exercise of moral agency may be overcome by discovering social and discursive spaces, which, by allowing for the development of autonomy competencies, are productive of the authentic self. Further, I suggest that claiming multiple selves, or plural social identities, results in persons inhabiting the borderlands between realities, identities, and ways of knowing, and that being situated in this way can best be thought of as a critical positioning, where persons may be able to see through the hegemony of oppositional discourses and interrogate the normative expectations of privileged and oppressed social identities.

**Unsettling the boundaries of the self**

As mentioned earlier, a number of feminist theorists have attempted to conceptualise identity in a way which acknowledges the multiple or plural self. This project of redefinition is one way in which feminists have constructed theory that is not oppositional to dominant discourses, but which shows awareness of the difficulty of locating a space for resistance given that resistance is contained within meanings and practices of oppression.⁹⁹ Anzaldua's conception of the *mestiza*, the hybrid self, which is neither one thing nor the other—neither black nor white, neither male nor female—and which exists at the boundaries or margins, which she calls borderlands, is one such attempt at redefining the notion of the self. Although the terminology differs from one theorist to the next, I agree with de Lauretis that the *mestiza consciousness* of Anzaldua (2007, 99), 'inappropriate/d other' of Trinh T. Minh–Ha

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⁹⁹ Luce Irigaray undertook a similar project with regard to describing female sexuality, given that female gender and sex is constructed by and contained within male gender and sexuality. *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985) identifies this problem in the title.
(1987), plural or 'hybrid cultural self' of Lugones (1992, 35) and de Lauretis’s own 'eccentric subject' all refer to the marginalised self, where marginalisation is best understood as a critical positioning (de Lauretis 1990, 116). De Lauretis describes this "excessive critical position" as one "attained through practices of political and personal displacement across boundaries between socio-sexual identities and communities, between bodies and discourses" (1990, 145). These borderlands exist wherever two or more cultures, tongues, races, or classes come together and are places for transformations of many kinds, including identities and ethical values.  

Boundary crossing is similar to the notion of world-travelling which I discussed in the context of privilege-cognizance in Chapter Two and will return to later in this chapter. I would argue that the idea that one can attain knowledge of others by moving between different worlds and different identities with a particular attitude of receptiveness to the difference of others is important for suggesting not only how we can gain knowledge of others, but also how we can gain knowledge of ourselves. Self-knowledge is identified by Meyers (2000, 172) as integral to the process of developing the autonomy competencies necessary for moral agency, which I will discuss in the next section; it is also central to Lugones's approach to re-conceptualising social categories, which I discussed in Chapter Two.

Similar to the significance of the outsider within or the multiple self for interrogating dominant frameworks of social categorisation, conceptualising the marginalised self as border-dweller helps to undercut the oppositional nature of dominant discourses, giving the oppressed a tool with which to reposition themselves

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100 Borderlands cannot be conceived too broadly; they refer to any space, physical, psychological, sexual and spiritual, where, in Anzaldua's own words, "two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (2007, Preface to the First Edition).
politically. Awareness of privilege and oppression in one's social identity and seeing
the self as amorphous and inconstant allows one to conceptualise a self able to
traverse barriers between dualisms. As Patricia J. Williams makes clear: "It has to do
with a fluid positioning that sees back and forth across boundary, which
acknowledges that I can be black and good and black and bad, and that I can also be
black and white, male and female, yin and yang, love and hate" (1991, 130). For
Williams the self is not separate and well-defined but rather blurred, merged, and
indistinct. Conceiving of the self in ways no longer limited by inflexible conceptions
allows the self to cross over boundaries constructed by privilege and social
expectations.

In contrast to the way oppression categorises persons with multiple identities,
as fractured and flawed with dual personalities, which I discussed in Chapter Two,
Lugones's hybrid, or plural cultural self is necessarily impure. As noted earlier, it is
impossible to separate out the elements of group identities, just as it is impossible to
separate out the elements of mayonnaise—lemon, egg, water—into their pure
components. The 'curdle-logic' of the hybrid self is one response to Bar On's problem
with theories of resistance mentioned in Chapter Two; if it is impossible to separate
out the different elements of the self, then the oppressed and resisting self meet
Lugones's definition of mestizaje, "someone [who] is neither/nor, but kind of both"

Lugones contrasts the agency of the dual personality created by domination
with the plural cultural self. The dual personality is evident in someone who is at
home neither in one culture nor another, a hyphenated creation of the dominant
culture "animated from the outside" (Lugones 1992, 35), unable to respond and
create for themselves. In contrast, the plural cultural self exists in a space in which
the boundaries between worlds are fluid not fixed, where, in Anzaldua's words, there can be "racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization" (2007, 99) leading to the creation of a new consciousness which is the hybrid self "characterised by the development of a tolerance for contradiction and ambiguity, by the transgression of rigid conceptual barriers” (Lugones 1992, 34). This cross-cultural activity is creative of space, subjectivity and resistance. Because this self is neither one thing nor the other but exists in multiple forms in multiple spaces, it is able to resist not only external oppressions, such as racism and colonisation from dominant cultures, but also the oppressions arising from within a person’s own cultural space, or homeland, such as homophobia and sexism.

One perceived difficulty with conceptualising the self as indistinct and amorphous is that it blurs the distinctions between separate social identities and potentially undermines political arguments for particular responses to counter discrimination against specific social groups. I would argue that given the history of political activism for and by members of oppressed groups, it is unlikely that defining oneself as neither female nor male would undermine, for example, claims to equality with men made by women. More pertinent to the argument here, assuming that it is the perceived differences between the sexes, races and classes that produces different expectations about moral competency and agency, then anything which unsettles these expectations, such as claims to amorphous indistinct identities, undermines the basis on which discrimination and oppression works.

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101 Oliver (2001, 53) disagrees with my interpretation that Lugones sees these boundaries as fluid. According to Oliver (2001, 51), world travelling differs to boundary crossing insofar as Lugones's concept includes the idea of the different worlds continuing unchanged, their barriers and identities fixed, whereas Williams's conception of boundary crossing involves the dissolution of the boundaries between worlds and identities. Oliver mostly refers to Lugones’s ”World'-Travelling” (1987) whereas I believe that "On Borderlands" (1992) suggests a different interpretation by Lugones.
In this section I explored the idea that the marginalisation of social identities can be creative of a place of critical self-examination, focussing here on the notion that such a positioning is important to disrupting the concept of a unified and fixed sense of self. Conceptualising the self as multiple has political implications, since it may also be possible to unsettle established identity categories thereby undermining the foundations of discriminatory social practices and institutions. I will return to the importance of place in developing a critical perspective later in this chapter, but first I will consider the nature of the self in regard to moral agency in more detail.

The relational self and capacities for moral agency

How the self is conceived is important because the nature of the self is implicated in our understanding of moral agency. Our sense of self is closely implicated in our significant relationships and the accompanying duties and responsibilities. This may be clearer if we consider how we feel when we let others down. Expressions such as: "it wasn't like me to stand someone up" or "sorry I snapped, I'm not myself," suggest that our sense of self is closely tied to our moral understanding. Hilde Lindemann Nelson puts it this way: "Who I am, morally speaking, is in some measure a matter of who others say I am, and this has a direct bearing on how freely I am able to exercise my moral agency" (2001a, 34). How persons conceive themselves and, importantly, how their sense of self is constructed and (de)constructed by oppressive forces, therefore has a significant, though not completely determinative, impact upon their capacity for moral reflection and the exercise of moral agency.102

102 Compare Walker, who argues that even under "circumstances of subordination, oppression, or unfreedom of many types" persons are still capable of moral responses to stay "true to what they value within the confines of the situation" (2007, 129–130).
Moral agency, as it is understood here, is circumscribed in important ways by both embodiment and relatinality, as I discuss later, and efforts towards autonomous reflection and action are further complicated by a multiplicity of social identities. Conceiving of the self as plural impacts upon moral agency because it appears to belie the notion of an authentic integrated self commonly considered necessary for autonomy (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, 12). But this argument is rebutted by several feminist theorists. Meyers (2000, 172), for instance, critiques standard accounts for conflating integration with authenticity and for the notion that integration is a pre-condition for autonomy. Instead, she argues that authenticity is best understood as an ongoing activity, a practice that involves the exercise of autonomy skills which I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, and that integration should be understood as "the emergent intelligibility of an individual's autonomous self-discovery and self-definition" (Meyers 2000, 172). By re-conceptualising integration and authenticity in this way, Meyers argues that her dynamic model is consistent with multiple identities, an argument I find compelling. In contrast, as mentioned in Chapter Two, Lugones argues that the notion of a unified, integrated self is only in conflict with plurality if we categorise the multiple self as necessarily fragmented. Given the conceptual complexity of multiple selves and intersectional social identities, the difficulty arises as to how the self is able to know itself, or even if there is a 'true self' able to be known; and,

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103 "It implies that because different and sometimes conflicting group identities intersect in the formation of individual identity, many individuals do not have a unified or integrated sense of self" (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, 12).
104 Meyers uses the terminology intersectional identities or intersectional subjectivity to describe multiple identities.
105 The diagnosis of medical illnesses, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, certainly suggests that the notion of multiple selves is considered abnormal, at least in the West, given that the singularity and unity of the self is juxtaposed with the threat of madness. Of course, sometimes experiencing feelings of being multiple selves in multiple realities may indicate destructive self-conceptions, such as schizophrenia, but this mainstream understanding of multiplicity ignores the ubiquity of the experience of the self as multiple.
assuming the possibility of this critically reflective authentic self, how resistance to destructive categorisation can be achieved within the constraints imposed by dominant forces.\footnote{The notions of the true self and authentic self are contested in the literature. I will return to these two concepts and some of the difficulties attendant upon them later in this chapter.}

As mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter One, agency is concerned with the conditions necessary for, and the internal and external barriers to, action. Similarly, the capacity for critical self-reflection and the ability to act in accordance with one's deliberations, within certain internal and external constraints, is crucial to the exercise of moral agency. Underlying social forces may mean that internal and external barriers to action are significant for some persons as a result of their group membership(s), "which is why agency implies power" and refers to the capability for action rather than any intentionality (Giddens 1984, 9–10). However, saying as much does not mean that those who are comparatively powerless are thereby unable to act in accordance with their desires—a condition Meyers (1989, 212) stresses is important for both self-respect and the exercise of agency—although a lack of social status can impact upon what they can know about themselves and, therefore, their capacity to formulate and/or recognise their true desires.

Constraints upon choice are not an indication of having no choice, nor does reduced choice necessarily lead to demoralisation, understood as the undermining of one's ability to make choices and the perception of oneself as someone capable of making choices (Hoagland 1988, 212–13). Meyers even suggests that "self-chosen constraints on choice" (1989, 212) are an indication of self-respect and the ability to exercise agency, since self-respecting persons "take their own desires to be worthy of consideration, but they give these desires only their proper weight in deliberation"
Additionally, there are also few situations, if any, that are completely within our control, but this lack of control does not detract from our ability to make choices (Hoagland 1988, 12–13); indeed, it might be better to say that there are few situations, if any, in which we can be said to have no choice regardless of our comparative power. Choices made in situations in which we have limited control still count as the exercise of agency; whether they are limited by a particular ethic of behaviour, the norms of a particular society, the relationships we are in, or the constraints imposed by dominant forces in inequitable societies, they are still our choices, and as such indicate the exercise of agential power. I will return to some of these points about choice in my discussion on self-respect later in this chapter.

It seems that moral agency is as much about the choices we make as it is about our capacity to make them, since in either case it is about the exercise of agential power. Choosing one option always precludes the possibility of others, which means we commonly think of choice as limiting, but we can also think of choice as entailing creation rather than sacrifice, thereby giving it enabling power (Hoagland 1992, 198–99). By making choices, we are creating specific possibilities that are enabling of particular outcomes, and conceiving of moral agency as a set of choices allows us to imagine and act upon our authentic desires.

If control over the situation is not essential for the exercise of moral agency, what conditions have to exist to make a moral response possible? Or, to put it into the contextual framework used here, what are the capacities we need to develop in order to enable us to acquire the competencies necessary to exercise moral agency?

107 In one exercise, my students argued that they did not have to choose between a peach and chocolate cake but could eat both, and further, that they could eat both together so they did not have to choose which to eat first, a highly creative solution! But even choosing not to choose between two options precludes another, in this case the possibility of savouring the unmingled taste of either the peach or chocolate cake.
As mentioned in the Introduction, Walker (2007, 10) suggests that moral competency entails using diverse skills to undertake a "family of practices" that are "expressions of our agency and what we value". This family of practices consists of "making morally evaluative judgments", "paying attention, imputing states of affairs to people’s agency, interpreting and redescribing human actions, visiting blame, offering excuses, inflicting punishment, making amends, refining and inhibiting the experience or expression of feelings", as well as "responding in thought, act, and feeling" to any of these practices of morality. Although in this view moral agency is the consequence of those relationships and social practices people value, as well as being the result of a collaborative, interactive process between or among people (Walker 2007, 10), two points I develop further later, in inequitable societies, contra Walker (2007, 129–130), it is my view that some persons may be restricted in how they undertake any or all of these practices of morality because of the presumptions of others, and their internalisations of those presumptions, about their moral competence or incompetence based on their social identities.

Any discussion of moral agency is likewise concerned with autonomy, since to be autonomous "is taken to be the defining characteristic of free moral agents" (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, 5). This is true of feminist theorists who frequently focus on the problem of autonomy rather than agency. Although the concept of autonomy can be understood in a number of ways, it is primarily concerned with the idea of self-determination, or self-governance, or the idea of individual choice (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, 5). Given that oppression can be thought of as an "institutionalised constraint on self development" (Young 1990, 37), this makes autonomy a problematic concept for theorists interested in those persons whose sense of self has been impacted negatively by unjust or inequitable social institutions.
The concept of autonomy has a contested place in feminist theory; theorists do not want to discard the notion that agents have the capacity for critical self-reflection because this is seen as integral to moral agency, but autonomy as it is usually conceived is reliant on overly individualistic accounts of the moral agent and ignores the inter-relational aspects of human lives. Along with numerous feminist theorists my claim is that any useful understanding of moral agency needs to demonstrate an awareness that all human beings are embedded in a complex web of relationships, since embodiment and relationality create dependencies and interdependencies with others which, in combination with social institutions and practices, determine our obligations and responsibilities towards others.

Before taking up Meyers's notion of autonomy competencies, I will make use of a number of theorists in order to think about how social group membership(s) can impact agency and autonomy, finding Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (2000) especially helpful in this regard. Mackenzie and Stoljar contend that the many approaches to autonomy can be divided into two main kinds. The first, procedural, or content-neutral accounts, are those in which "the content of a person's desires, values, beliefs, and emotional attitudes is irrelevant" (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000, 13; italics in original) to whether the person is autonomous with regard to their motivations and actions; what is relevant is whether the person has subjected their motivations and actions to appropriate procedures of critical self-reflection (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000, 14). Conversely, substantive accounts, by rejecting content-neutrality, attempt to address the criticism that procedural accounts ignore

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108 See Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000, 5–12) for a summary of these positions in feminist thought.
109 Of course, social practices also construct relationships of dependency and interdependency, which may be more significant in terms of oppression. However, here I am merely making the point that independent of our social identities and group memberships we are all fundamentally involved in relationships of dependency and interdependency, which are the nexus for questions of responsibility and obligation, and which I will discuss in Chapter Four.
socialisation. If an autonomous person is one capable of critically subjecting their desires to self-reflection it is debatable whether persons in situations of oppression have the capacity to differentiate between their own authentically held desires and desires which reflect normative expectations for group members. For example, heteronormative societies generate the expectation that women desire intimate relationships with men, and individual women may assume that this is their own preference without reflecting upon it.\(^1\) Strong substantive accounts require "specific contents of the autonomous preferences of agents" whereas weak substantive accounts suggest "further necessary conditions" that function as "constraints on the contents of the desires or preferences capable of being held" (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000, 19).

Rather than attempting to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for autonomy, Meyers suggests that autonomy can be better understood as a set of competencies persons are capable of acquiring. Autonomy competency is the notion that "autonomy is a competency comprising a cluster of skills and capacities, in particular skills of self-discovery, self-direction, and self-definition" (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, 17) which all involve critical self-reflection. For Meyers, multiple selves are not a barrier to autonomy; rather it is "failure to own up to and [failure] to own one's intersectional identity" (Meyers 2000, 159) that undermines both authenticity and autonomy. The failure Meyers is concerned with here arises from a lack of self-knowledge; "impoverished, mistaken, or deluded views about one's group memberships" (Meyers 2000, 159) lead to ignorance about one's multiple identity. Meyers argues that, for persons with diverse identities, owning one's

\(^{1}\) Adrienne Rich describes the presumption, either explicit or implicit, that heterosexuality is the sexual preference of most women as 'compulsory heterosexuality', because the question is never raised "as to whether, in a different context or other things being equal, women would choose heterosexual coupling and marriage" (1986, 28; italics in original).
multiplicity is part of the active practice of authenticity, since one of the skills associated with autonomy competency is that of self-knowledge. Autonomy skills are more or less encouraged for members of different social groups, and those persons whose social identities are linked to groups whose members are discouraged from self-knowledge and self-definition may find the practice of authenticity difficult. But there are few persons, Meyers (2000, 173) argues, who cannot demonstrate some proficiency, and therefore few persons who are incapable of autonomy.

Meyers's notion of autonomy competency suggests that desires which are arrived at by the practice of autonomy skills and which reflect the authentic self are more worthy of satisfaction than those arising from uncritical acceptance of normative expectations. That is, how the desires are acquired is more important than the content of those desires. This seems to agree with Schechtman's notion of self-interested concern, which is the interest a person has in pursuing their "considered desires under conditions of full information" (1996, 82; italics in original).

I suggested earlier in this chapter that any useful understanding of moral agency must acknowledge its relational nature, and Meyers's understanding is "explicitly relational in that she argues that autonomy competency can be developed only in the context of social relationships, practices, and institutions" (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, 17). Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000, 17–18) identify three ways in which the social context is important to Meyers's concept of autonomy competency, and hence to the construction of moral agency. Firstly, it is the capacity to develop autonomy skills rather than the development itself that is important, and this capacity is influenced by the kind of social environment in which one finds oneself. Secondly, the aspects of oneself that are identified as worth developing may be those suggested by normative expectations rather than stemming from more authentic desires; and
lastly, socialisation may result in a person developing certain competencies at the expense of others. Women, for example, may develop emotional receptivity at the expense of self-direction (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, 18). In other words, autonomy competencies are formed in relation to others and, therefore, the construction of moral agency is dependent upon others. This means that the kind of relationships a person is involved in significantly effects their capacity to be self-aware, self-defining and self-directed, and hence to develop autonomy competencies.

In summary, in this section I have argued that social identities impact upon the development of a person's sense of self and agential competencies, and are implicated in both the formation of authentic desires and a person's ability to act in accordance with these desires. The social context is also important in developing feelings of self-respect, which in turn impacts upon a person's ability to choose, as well as on their ability to see themselves as a person and construct a coherent narrative of their life choices, which I will consider next.

**The addressable other and self narratives**

I have not yet addressed what it means to be an integrated autonomous person capable of self-reflection and competent to practise those autonomy skills of self-knowledge, self-direction and self-definition that are productive of authenticity. In the following discussion about the nature of the self, I am mainly concerned with those philosophical approaches to the self that focus on morally relevant features. To put it into the terminology developed by Schechtman (1996, 1–2), whose theoretical approach to self-constitution forms the basis of this section, I am less concerned with the "reidentification question", that is, what makes us the same person over time, and more with the "characterization question", or what aspects of our history and
character explain why we do what we do and, therefore, whether we can be held responsible for those actions and choices. There is interplay between the two concepts, however, and the constancy of the self, which is the focus of the re-identification question, has implications for moral development. For instance, the notion that the self is able to construct a coherent set of character traits over time, as the characterisation question supposes, relies to some extent on the fact that we retain the memories of our younger self over time regardless of whether the present self shares the thoughts, feelings, behaviours and values or shares a physical resemblance with the younger self, which points to the re-identification question. Although Schechtman (1996, 88) differentiates between the loss of a sense of self, for example, as a result of living with an abusive spouse, and a loss resulting from addiction or dementia, she argues that these are "points on a continuum" and in each case the person is deprived of their identity. It is overly simplistic to claim someone is the sum of their memories but loss of memory in the case of persons with Alzheimer's, senility, head trauma or other forms of brain damage is co-implicated with loss of self, particularly with respect to Schechtman's narrative self-constitution theory.

Schechtman (1996, 2) is concerned with how personal identity is implicated in what she calls "the four features" of personal existence: survival, moral responsibility, self-interested concern, and compensation—where foregoing some desires may put someone in a better position to fulfil others (1996, 86)—and she believes a characterisation theory rather than a re-identification theory best explains the link between personal identity and these four features. Schechtman's focus on morally relevant features is the reason I have chosen to base my discussion of narrative identity on her description and analysis rather than, for example, the work of other significant theorists in this field such as Paul Ricoeur.

This aspect of the self in terms of re-identification is important to my argument in Chapter Six, where the notion that we can imagine ourselves otherwise depends upon us being able to recognise ourselves as the same person doing the imagining.

Schechtman (1996, 114) argues that self-constitution narratives are limited by what she calls the "articulation constraint", which stresses that factors contributing to characterisation must be capable of being explicated and articulated by the agent. While agreeing that self-narratives must be articulable "to some degree", the implication that subconscious or unrecognised motivations of which the agent is unaware are considered unimportant to the self-narrative is criticised by Mackenzie and Poltera (2010, 44–46) for conflating identity with autonomy; that is, although the person may not be autonomous with respect to certain desires or motivations, these may still be important to their identity. Nelson also critiques the articulation constraint (2001a, 91) for failing to acknowledge that identity is not simply a function of self-knowledge.
Characterisation can be thought of as "a relation that holds between a person and particular actions, experiences, or characteristics" (Schechtman 1996, 77; italics in original) of that person. However, although all the characteristics of a person's history are presumed to make up the person's identity, some play a more central role and, hence, are more salient in terms of the person's life story than others. Meyers (1989, 70) describes the "distinctive set" of qualities that make up the integrated self as "characterological strands" that "unite the disparate elements of the true self". Characterological strands are "context-specific … reflective, flexible networks of attributes, desires, abilities, emotional responses, values, and so forth" which are also "the source of our normative reasons" (Atkins 2008, 130–131).

Schechtman (1996, 93) develops a theory of identity as narratively self-constituting: essentially, a person creates an identity through an autobiographical narrative, or life story, an identity which is constituted by means of the content of their self-narrative. In stories, meaning is derived from a combination of the elements of the story and the interpretation of these events by the characters in the story or, in addition, the story gains meaning from external factors, in particular its relationship to other stories (Nelson 2001a, 11–15). In some cases, the narrative of who we were is an important part of the narrative of our present (or future) self-conception (Schechtman 1996, 112–13), particularly with regard to physical or socio-economic changes. For example, when someone undergoes a weight-loss program they may continue to diet and exercise even when they are no longer overweight because they still identify as someone with weight issues. For Ricoeur, "our life ... appears to us as the field of a constructive activity, deriving from the narrative intelligence through which we attempt to recover (rather than impose from without) the narrative identity which constitutes us" (1991, 436; italics in original). Narrative self-constitution theories developed by other feminist theorists frequently rely upon Schechtman's foundational work, see, for example, Atkins (2008) and Nelson (2001a).

I will consider this in more detail in Chapter Six, especially Atkins's (2008, 119–20) suggestion
inaccurate self-narratives and those containing trivial errors are not problematic when they are at odds with external reality, unless the individual is recalcitrant and refuses to recant\textsuperscript{116} on their version of themselves in the light of evidence from outside (Schechtman 1996, 120).\textsuperscript{117}

The "organization of experience into a narrative of self-conception" changes one's sense of self (Schechtman 1996, 145), such that the creation of the "identity-constituting narrative alters the nature of an individual's experience in a way that extends consciousness over time, producing a persisting experiencer who is the primary experiencing subject" (Schechtman 1996, 149). This raises the question: what happens to the true self if the narrative of someone's beliefs, values and desires no longer coheres, for example, if the person loses the capacity to construct a coherent narrative of their life as a result of trauma or illness or ageing? Can the person be said to be narratively self-constituted if there is no coherent self-narrative, or if the person no longer knows who they are—if they no longer have memories of their younger self—or if they claim to be someone other than who they are? Using examples from both loss of self through dementia and the development of narratives in children, Schechtman (1996, 145–48) argues there are degrees of capacity to create a coherent self-constituting narrative, suggesting that some degree of personal identity and subjectivity is possible, as long as one has some capacity for narrative construction.

\textsuperscript{116} In a strange late night phone call I was claimed as a sister-in-law by an elderly woman who suffered from senility and who steadfastly disregarded the evidence I put forward that I was not who she claimed I was. I could not convince her of the falseness of her beliefs since she interpreted my denials as simple recalcitrance in the face of her assertions about our relationship.

\textsuperscript{117} Schechtman (1996, 119) calls this the "reality constraint"; as long as self-narratives cohere with reality they are identity-constituting. Schechtman separates narrative errors which impact on identity-constitution into errors of fact, for example, believing oneself to be Napoleon (1996, 121–25), and inaccuracies of interpretation, for example, believing the CIA is spying on one (1996, 126–28).
Narrative constitutions of the self rely on the possibility of an addressable other, whether this other is internalised, or whether this is a separate person from the one constructing the narrative.\textsuperscript{118} The inner witness, or what I am calling the internalised other, is described by the psychologist Dori Laub (1991, 81) as someone who can step outside the frame of reference in which events are taking place and provide an independent frame of observation. In the previous chapter I described how the situated standpoint of the outsider within may help members of oppressed groups to see through the totalising framework of domination and challenge dominant schemes of categorisation that contribute to oppression. Much like the outsider within, or world travellers, the inner witness provides a means to develop an alternative perspective to the dominant interpretation of events and may be a powerful tool for persons who are denied an audience in the actual world. I will return to the role played by departing from the dominant interpretive framework later in this chapter when I take up the discussion of boundary crossing.

For those assigned or identifying with marginalised social groups, frequently there is no external witness to hear and affirm their sense of self. The only possible witness may be their internalised other, and one effect of domination is to sometimes deny the possibility of an internal witness. Laub (1992), gives a number of examples that illustrate how the lack of an addressable other to corroborate a self-narrative, by preventing the construction of the historical self through narrative, may result in impaired agency and sense of self. For example, Laub (1992, 82) argues that the Holocaust removed the very possibility of address so that victims lacked an addressable other, either internal or external. In this way Laub (1992, 80) suggests

\textsuperscript{118} In using the terminology addressable other and internalised other I am referring to an actual person, not to a linguistic category or the discursive other. In some cases this person may also be the person constructing the narrative—that is, the narrator and witness are one—since it is possible to be an authentic witness to oneself.
that the Holocaust produced no witnesses during its historical occurrence,\textsuperscript{119} not simply because the event was denied by outsiders, but because the victims could not describe what had occurred to themselves they came to doubt the reality of what they had experienced. Without a historical narrative of the self one's sense of oneself as a person with an identity is gone. Those who survived the Holocaust were only able to do so, Laub contends, by creating and maintaining an inner witness, an internalised other, who substituted "for the lack of witnessing in real life" (1992, 87). Because the denial of a witness by dominant forces removes the possibility of being recognised as a person, the act of witnessing to the "experience of objectification ... can help restore self-respect and a sense of one's self as an agent or a self" (Oliver 2001, 98). I will return to the importance of self-respect for agency in the next section and to the importance of witnessing to one's own experience in later chapters when I discuss the role played by the moral accounts given by members of subjugated groups in resisting oppression.

Self-constituting narratives are not only important in establishing a sense of self and identity, they are important for another reason: according to Nelson, narratives that are identity-constituting are also indicative of moral competency. Nelson, following Margaret Urban Walker, suggests that stories of strong moral self-definition are in themselves a "kind of moral competence" (Nelson 2001a, 15),\textsuperscript{120} in that it is "the ability of morally developed persons to install and observe precedents for themselves which are both distinctive of them and binding upon them morally" (Walker 2003, 5).\textsuperscript{121} For example, someone may choose to become a vegetarian

\textsuperscript{119} Laub defines a witness as "a witness to the truth of what happens during an event" (1992, 80).
\textsuperscript{120} In contrast, stories of weak moral self-definition are those that construct the individual as morally competent and therefore as a functioning member of the moral community.
because they believe factory farming practices are wrong. The precepts the person chooses to follow, in which harm and cruelty to animals is wrong and should be avoided, are directly correlated to their self-narrative as an ethical vegetarian, in contrast to someone who chooses to be a vegetarian for financial reasons, as I once did. Identity-constituting narratives which are stories of strong moral self-definition may, therefore, be revealing of moral competency.

It is evident, then, that moral agency not only requires that a person possess competencies requiring critical self-reflection thus allowing them to act in accordance with moral precedents, they must also possess the capacity to construct a coherent narrative in which their choices and actions make sense in light of their narrative self. Because competencies in narrative self-constitution and autonomy are relational they can be problematic for some persons, particularly as they first have to possess feelings of self-worth and self-respect in order to develop the necessary competencies of self-discovery, self-direction and self-definition. I will examine this aspect of moral agency in the oppressed in the next section.

**Self-worth and self-respect (in relation)**

In order to be considered, and consider themselves, equal members of the moral community, persons have to feel that they are valued as equals by others. Feelings of self-worth and self-respect are vital to self-development and therefore to the capacity to develop autonomy competencies and moral agency. Where relationships are inequitable and distorted, the effect can be detrimental both to one's sense of self-esteem and, correspondingly, to one's moral agency. Persons whose identities, relationships and practices are devalued on account of their group memberships, often as a result of arrogant perception—or the valuation of others
based on only the valuer's ideals—may feel that their moral qualities as persons are overlooked, ignored, or undermined, making it difficult to develop feelings of self-respect. Card argues that "when our primary relationships lack reciprocity in valuing, we risk losing (or failing to develop) self-esteem" (1990, 205), suggesting a mutuality between feeling valued and the development of self-worth and self-respect.

Respect can be thought of as the way in which we respond to the worth of others, and, consequently, different kinds of respect are warranted by different kinds of valuing. Because different sorts of worth are associated with different kinds of respect, gaining the self-respect necessary for the development of autonomy and moral agency is dependent on being valued in particular ways by others. How persons are valued is therefore integral to their development of self-respect.

Robyn Dillon (1992; 2004) suggests there are two ways in which we are valued by others, and, therefore, potentially two different kinds of self-respect arising from these. The first is the value accorded to other persons on the basis of our shared humanity, that is, the kind of worth "that each of us has simply by virtue of being a person rather than a rock or a tree" (Dillon 1992, 54). Persons have value because they are irreplaceable in a way nothing else is (Gaita 1991, 155). However, recognising that a person has intrinsic worth as a result of being human does not always translate into respectful treatment that fosters self-esteem and moral agency. This first kind of valuation forms the basis of what Dillon (2004, 50) calls "recognition self-respect", which is self-respect arising from someone recognising that certain norms entail the worth they have as persons and valuing themselves appropriately by living in accord with those norms. This kind of self-respect is based on the recognition by others that because someone is a person they have an "intrinsic moral worth" and the "status of a full and equal member of the moral community"
and deserve to be treated "as the bearer of certain moral rights" (Dillon 1992, 54).

A second kind of worth identified by Dillon is the kind earned or merited "through what we do and become" (1992, 54), and which we possess in varying degrees. This kind of worth is cumulative and for every meritorious act our worth increases correspondingly. As a result, some persons might accrue little or no evaluative worth because they have done nothing to merit it. One problem with this kind of valuing is that it is sometimes accorded to persons who possess certain qualities which we value in ourselves so that the value we accord others, and whether we see them as having equal moral standing to ourselves, depends upon similarities of practices, relationships and actions, between them and us. Another way of describing this is that we value others, not on the basis of how meritorious their actions are, but on how well they meet our expectations (Frye 1983, 67–69); this attitude has more in common with arrogant perception than an evaluation of someone's virtues. Since we also judge others on the basis of values we hold we are more likely to understand the motives and respect the actions of those with whom we share certain qualities, something I will return to in Chapter Five.

The kind of self-respect arising from this second kind of valuing, which Dillon calls "evaluative self-respect", is characterised as involving "an attitude of positive appraisal of oneself" and one's merits, and the belief that one is measuring up to "some standards of excellence" (1992, 54) and, therefore, evaluative self-respect is something we can acquire more or less of, or lose entirely. This kind of self-respect is sometimes identified as self-esteem and dismissed as morally unimportant, according to Dillon (2004, 49). This kind of worth depends on "the extent to which a person's character and conduct accord with and honor" (Dillon 2004, 50) the kind of person they are.
However, while it is important to understand that different kinds of valuing lead to different kinds of self-respect, describing what one feels as either recognition self-respect or evaluative self-respect overlooks the way in which the two are interconnected. As Dillon puts it, "the person with evaluative self-respect regards herself as having worth because she lives in accord with the norms for recognition self-respect" (2004, 50). Similarly, the two kinds of worth discussed by Dillon seem to me to be in a reciprocal, complementary relationship, since before persons can merit evaluative self-respect they need to act in praiseworthy ways; however, without recognition of their status as full and equal members of the moral community their actions may be unintelligible and misunderstood.

Dillon (1992, 55) questions the accessibility of both kinds of self-respect to women, and I would extend this doubt to all social groups whose members are objectified and/or marginalised by oppression. In order to gain evaluative self-respect, persons have to be able to form practical goals, develop a worthwhile life plan, and act towards it, and be valued for what good they can do; in other words, they have to be accepted as functional members of the moral community. Before this can occur they need to be seen as moral equals, which means they need first to be accorded recognition respect. However, if recognition respect is not forthcoming, persons may need to act in ways which demand evaluative self-respect in order to gain the recognition that they are worthy members of the moral community and entitled to recognition as such. For members of some social groups it may be necessary to act as if one has already been given worth as a human being by making choices which are indicative that one is self-respecting, even if one is not valued as

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122 Dillon argues that not only does oppression work to impede the development of self-esteem, or evaluative self-respect, but the conceptualisation of self-esteem is itself inimical to the development of self-esteem in women.
such by the wider community. The character of Sethe in *Beloved* is a good example of someone who recognises herself as having intrinsic worth and acts accordingly, although it is questionable whether her actions gain evaluative worth from the community.

One's self-esteem may be impacted negatively by the social and economic circumstances one finds oneself in, but my main concern here is with the way self-esteem is impacted negatively by the internalisation of negative attitudes and behaviours, in particular those that result from objectification and stereotyping of the visible identities, and hence the bodies, of members of some social groups. Devaluation of the self can lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth which result in reduced capacity to develop competencies essential to subjectivity and agency, such as autonomy. Sarah Hoagland (1988, 213) argues that oppression and comparative powerlessness work to reduce both one's sense of self-worth and one's capacity for critical self-reflection and action. Only by developing feelings of self-esteem can persons recognise their own desires as reflective of their true selves rather than the result of internalised oppression and demoralisation. If choice is important to exercising moral agency then being coerced or manipulated by others in how one chooses, especially by those with more power, can undermine moral agency and lead to demoralisation. However, in recognising the authenticity of their desires as the basis of their choices, Meyers suggests that self-respecting persons are self-limiting in their choices and do not act impulsively on those desires, adhering instead to moral and personal standards and recognising the importance of "choosing well" (1995, 222).

In summary, in order to act as moral agents persons need to develop feelings of self-worth and self-respect, and to do this the oppressed may need to transcend
others' unfair expectations of them which function to limit their self-development. If, before being seen to be worthy the oppressed must see themselves as worthy, then this may only occur through the presence of the internalised other and the development of the skills in self-knowledge, self-direction and self-definition, which Meyers argues are essential to autonomy competency. However, oppression also operates to limit the development of competencies in autonomy and agency by restricting both physical body movements and the social spaces where the oppressed are allowed to act, and it is this added burden to the development of autonomy competencies in the oppressed that I will address in the next section.

**The embodied agent and socially prescribed spaces**

A number of feminist theorists, notably Bartky (1990) and Young (2005), have argued that understanding the psychological impact of oppression requires an analysis of the embodied consciousness of the self. Persons experience themselves as not only inhabiting a body through which they negotiate the world but also as living as embodied beings in social spaces. Our bodies and the social spaces they inhabit, or are allowed to inhabit, impact in significant ways on the development of autonomy and agency. In this section I will argue that objectification of the oppressed on the grounds of their embodiment not only impacts on them by psychologically undermining their sense of themselves as effective moral agents, but also by limiting and deforming what they can know about themselves and the world, and hence how they can understand themselves and what they can convey to others about who they are and why they act as they do.

The notion that how one is embodied impacts on how one experiences the world has implications for autonomy and moral agency. In the previous chapter, I
suggested that how we are embodied, in particular our visual physical characteristics, play a significant role in the development of individual moral agency. Generally speaking, our knowledge of the world is dependent on our embodiment. Not only are our bodies the place where we interact with others and with the world and where we discover knowledge of ourselves through physical connections with others, for example, through sexual intimacy or pregnancy, but everything we know we know in part because we interact with the world through our bodily senses. Even where the imagination is at the forefront of how we experience the world, such as when an artist creates a work of art or an author writes a book, our ability to communicate imaginative ideas is through the medium of our senses, and hence the meanings we impart to ourselves and our practices are, to varying degrees, at least partially the result of embodiment.

If we find meaning through what we learn from the way our bodies interact with the world, then unjust social institutions and normative expectations can impose restrictions on our interactions with others, and hence on what we can know and how we can know what we know. Experiencing the world through the perspective of the dominant can result in the oppressed being unable to see themselves as having any value or their identities and actions as being meaningful, leading to feelings of alienation or disjunction, or a sense of dislocation, from both their bodies and themselves. If the world is understood and made meaningful by interactions mediated by the body, then feeling detached from one's body may mean one cannot make sense of the world, and this may be the case for some persons affected by oppression. Feeling estranged from one's body is an emotional response, but feeling that what one thinks one knows about the world is wrong because it does not make sense from one's own situated standpoint, is a moral judgement. For women
becoming aware of themselves through bodies that inhabit biased social and economic spaces, their embodiment affects both what they know of the world and what they find meaningful.

A number of theorists, including Meyers (2000; 2004) discussed earlier, have argued for the importance of self-knowledge for the expression of moral agency in members of oppressed social groups. Placing constraints upon how persons experience themselves as embodied beings limits and deforms what persons know or think they know about themselves, which, in turn, can impact significantly on their development of autonomy and agency. For example, normative expectations about how women should look, dress and behave have resulted in restrictive bodily movements, in "women's cramped postures and attenuated strides" (Frye 1983, 14). Young (2005, 32–34) details the ways in which men's and women's comportment and body movements differ and concludes that for women this difference is characterised "by a failure to make full use of the body's spatial and lateral potentialities" (2005, 32). Learning to mediate one's knowledge of the world through a body that is unnaturally constricted results in distorted perceptions of both oneself and others (Bartky 1990, 67–69). Carrying oneself in an unnaturally constricted way not only reduces one's ability to act, since one is unable to utilise a full range of movements, it also diminishes one's sense of being a self capable of acting in some ways because these do not accord with the way one sees oneself as a result of the internalisation of these constraints. That the body is experienced as

123 For example, Hoagland says, "before I am really able to respond to you, I need to be clear on at least some things about my self" (1988, 113). See also Mullett (1987) and Nelson (2001b).
124 For discussion on other ways in which normative expectations act upon the female body, which I do not have the space to take up here, see, for example, Bartky (1990), Bordo (1993), and Young (2005).
125 Rich (1986, 214–15) suggests that the body itself is where the subjugation of women is acted out, and that, consequently, the body should be thought of as a location for oppression and resistance.
constrained even when there are no physical restraints to action affects how one
experiences the world and hence what one can know about oneself. Internalised
constraints as a result of one's embodiment suggest embodiment sets limits on, and
may even distort, what persons can know about themselves and the world, and,
therefore, may not only affect the exercise of moral agency but also make actions and
choices unintelligible, an issue I will discuss in the following chapters.

Because one's embodiment impacts on one's sense of self in many ways, both
through events initiated in the body, such as puberty and ageing, or through bodily
trauma as a result of events which may involve others or be initiated by others, such
as accident, surgery, rape or torture, one's sense of self is almost constantly being
assaulted or affirmed by changes in the body. For the oppressed, these feelings of
being an embodied self are complicated by other ways one perceives the body, such
as internalised hatred or the perception of oneself as being lessor as a result of
devaluation by others. The body has an ambiguous role to play with regard to
autonomy and agency, at once a reminder of ourselves as separate from and
interdependent with others.

In addition, I suggested in Chapter One that the spaces we inhabit are
productive of our sense of self, and that for members of subjugated social groups this
means their understanding of themselves is constructed via marginalisation and
exclusion. As I mentioned in Chapter One, marginalisation is considered by Young
(1988) to be one of five ways in which oppression is experienced. To be marginalised
is to be "expelled from useful participation in social life", potentially "subject to
severe material deprivation" (Young 1988, 281). Providing for material needs does
not end marginalisation as members of these groups may lack self-respect, feeling
themselves peripheral to the productive society around them. Welfare provision
itself, while essential for survival, can also be an additional source of injustice where the material dependency of the recipient means they are subject to demeaning, patronising, often arbitrary bureaucratic policies (Young 1988, 281).

The social space in which interactions with others occur also impacts on how we feel and, hence, on our sense of self. For example, as a patient in hospital after an operation, I experienced myself in relation to the doctors, nurses, friends and family in different ways, depending on the social context and the discursive spaces we shared. My interactions with the surgeon and anaesthetist were at the level of my body and the organs affected so that I knew myself in relation to these medical professionals solely as an illness or disease to be treated, not as a person. Marlene Benjamin describes a similar experience when a radiologist is discussing her uterus with a colleague, "paying no attention to the fact that the sheet had fallen off [her] belly and a real person is there" (2007, 110). This sense of the body in a social space—as, for example, a patient or a worker or a sex object—existing separately to the person, changes not only the way we feel about ourselves and therefore our sense of agency, but also how we interpret the experience and what meaning it acquires for us. The kind of relationships we have are significant, not only because we need others to affirm our sense of ourselves as persons with the capacity to develop narrative and autonomy competencies, but also because they sustain our belief in the meaningfulness of our actions and our lives. Relationships that objectify and stereotype on the basis of our bodies undermine our sense of being persons with moral agency. Our relationships with others, whether deep and enduring or trivial and transient, affect and modify who we think we are, by changing what we think we know of ourselves and others, and as a consequence impact on our ability to function
effectively as moral agents.\textsuperscript{126}

A person's sense of self not only reflects their embodiment and the spaces they inhabit in the world, it also attests to their relationship to other bodies in social spaces. It may appear then, that for persons whose ability to develop moral competencies and express moral agency is impaired by oppressive environments, the solution is to create social and discursive spaces of their own which allow them to feel valued as equal members of the moral community. I will consider this idea in more detail later in this chapter but, as I shall argue, it is a problematic strategy for a number of reasons. Before doing so, however, I will consider another possibility, that persons may be able to develop a sense of self which is authentic by separating themselves from the negative aspects of being embodied.

\textbf{Separation from and reconstruction of the self, and the lessons of trauma survivors}

A metaphysical conception of the true or authentic self underlies much of the difficulty members of oppressed groups have with acting as embodied beings. There are conflicting notions as to what constitutes a true self, which I do not have the space to go into here, but in Western philosophy conceptualising the authentic self as an integrated whole is in conflict with the notion of the self as plural. The notion of the true self as existing somehow separately to the body has a long history in Western thought but is deeply engrained across cultures, perhaps as a result of religious

\textsuperscript{126} Sometimes these experiences give one new knowledge, as when the nurse who was with my uncle when he died described the experience for me, reassuring me that he had not been alone; and sometimes they colour the attitudes and opinions we hold, as when a man of middle-eastern appearance performed a kind deed for me. In either case, our understanding of someone we are in relation to is affected and may undergo a change. Of course, if we learn something to someone's discredit our thoughts may undergo a negative rather than a positive change.
beliefs in a soul or mind enduring after death.\(^{127}\) I am not going to pursue a particular theory of matter here; rather, I am going to argue that there may be potential benefits to considering the true self as separate to the body. This notion might appear at odds with a thesis in which the development of moral agency is linked to the privileging or exclusion of persons on the basis of their embodiment, but any separation of self from body is envisioned as a temporary strategy to enable disengagement from a particular situation where one's embodiment is seen as setting a limit on one's moral agency because of perceived moral deficiencies arising from one's embodiment.

Before I consider the philosophical implications for agency, I want to point to at least one precedent for the separation of body and self in attitudes towards illness in the West, where the body is seen as a space occupied by the self and the site of the disease to be treated rather than the true self. For example, the removal of organs such as the uterus, ovaries, and prostate, replacement of kidneys, heart, and lungs, and use of radiation or chemotherapy for cancer, are not generally presumed to affect one's sense of self, and the mind waking up from anaesthesia after surgery is assumed to be the same as the one that existed beforehand.\(^{128}\) Another way of expressing this is that the space the body occupies is merely the space in which the self is expressed, and bodily changes such as these are not deemed to affect the true self.\(^{129}\)

How can separating one's sense of self from one's embodiment assist one to

\(^{127}\) This belief is frequently repeated in popular culture, for example, in Western culture body swap stories, such as the 1988 film *Vice Versa* (1988). However, it is also found and expressed in more philosophical considerations of the nature of the self, such as in the Japanese anime *Ghost in the Shell* (1995). In this film, the character of Major Motoko Kusangi has a cyborg body allowing her to change physical bodies at one stage in the narrative without changing her essential nature.

\(^{128}\) According to Dr. Sandra S. Vermeulen, in a conversation in July 2007, radiation oncologists treating brain tumours with whole brain radiation are most commonly asked, 'will this change who I am?', by which the patient means: will this change my personality, my essential self.

\(^{129}\) Other examples of bodily change that are presumed not to affect the true self are natural physical changes, such as puberty and menopause.
act? Susan Brison (2002) has suggested that the perception that change happening to
the body does not affect the true self can be vital to maintaining a sense of self or to
healing the self after trauma. An inability to dissociate from one's body can make
victims of trauma feel tied to the body and the traumatic event and be unable to move
past it, whereas being able to separate from the body may allow the survivor of
trauma to feel as though "an essential part of themselves was untouched" (Brison
2002, 48), allowing them to move on. The sense that a distinct self emerged during a
traumatic experience, or that an essential part of themselves was untouched by a
traumatic bodily experience, allows persons afflicted in this way to continue to
maintain a positive awareness of themselves in the aftermath of the traumatic
event—although Brison cautions that such responses are only ever partially
successful and the "survivor's bodily sense of self is permanently altered" (2002, 49).

Similarly, an awareness of oneself as possessing multiple selves, some of
whose values are endorsed independently of the forces of domination might be
beneficial to maintaining subjectivity, even when one's sense of a self inhabiting
particular social identities is devalued or undermined by stereotyping or
discrimination. Of course, dissociating from the body during trauma is not identical
to the alienation and fragmentation of the self experienced by members of oppressed
social groups as a result of stereotyping and objectification, and it could be argued
that I cannot draw an analogy between them. However, my claim is that both are
concerned with the self that has been harmed (by trauma, by domination) and both
point to the possibility of the existence of a self separate from the self harmed by
domination or trauma. Conceptualising the self as necessarily multiple rather than
fragmented addresses the difficulty for the notion of the integrated self and hence
autonomy, and points to possibilities for resistance.
Traumatic events provide an example of when it might be psychologically beneficial to separate from one's embodiment but they are also important for suggesting that the self has the ability to change, to be destroyed and recreated. Later in this chapter I will consider the idea that persons can define how they are seen by themselves and others through re-imagining the nature of the self, and I suggest here that the possibility for this re-conceptualisation of the self can be found in the way a changed perception of the self facilitates survival in trauma victims. As Brison (2002, 44–49) describes, persons who experience trauma, whether as the result of an accident or illness or interpersonal violence or torture, undergo a change in how they perceive themselves. Victims of trauma frequently separate themselves from the self who existed before or during the traumatic event insofar as there appears to be an end to the old self who underwent trauma. One possible outcome of surviving traumatic events then, assuming the person is able to recover from the trauma and create new meaning, is the creation of a new post-traumatic self. The psychological process that results in this changed perception of the self may be beneficial to transforming the self in those persons who have internalised oppression and compromised agency.

One effect of trauma is losing one's trust in the world or no longer feeling at home in the world, as Jean Amery (1995, 136) describes this, and I argue later in this chapter that the oppressed may also experience themselves as not being at home in the world. Trust is belief in the fundamental goodness and non-maleficence of others; without trust in others one cannot feel safe, and, as I shall argue in the next section, the oppressed frequently experience being in the world as being unsafe. Although the analogy here is weaker, since survivors of trauma often experience themselves in a fundamentally different way from their experience of themselves before the
traumatic event(s), there may still be some benefit to be gained in terms of understanding the resilience of the self. Of course some trauma survivors are not resilient, and some experience themselves as having died as a result of trauma, once again interpreting a dualism between their own true self (which is dead) and the body which is alive. However, an alternative outcome seems to be a revaluation of what is meaningful, since actions such as torture or arbitrary life and death judgements make a mockery of human morality and make choices and actions seem meaningless. What seems to occur, going by accounts of some Holocaust survivors, such as Elie Wiesel (1981), is that one's moral centre has changed, since the value system which gave meaning to events prior to trauma is perceived as irretrievably damaged by the traumatic event. I will be arguing later that an important part of resisting oppression involves critically interrogating the values one has followed unthinkingly as a means of allowing oneself to be open to new interpretations and values of relationships and behaviours. Trauma survivors have no choice but to embrace new meanings and values if they are to continue to survive in a world in which the old values have been made meaningless; I would contend that persons overcoming oppression also need to subject the accepted values and meanings of social identities and practices to critical examination and actively seek out new meaning and value.

Since we gain meaning from telling a story about the events that happen to us, another way of looking at the loss of meaning is to say that trauma disrupts the narrative self-conception that allows us to make sense of the world and how we see ourselves in relation to others in the world. These aspects of trauma—the disruption to the narrative of who and what one is that gives a particular meaning to the world, and the loss of previously held values and moral ideals and practices—suggest

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130 See for example, the 1985 memoirs of Charlotte Delbo (quoted in Brison 2002, 47–48).
possibilities for those who experience oppression. Being able to re-invent the self, to reconstruct one's moral view and to begin a new narrative of meaning are important skills for resisting the negative constructions of social identities that are oppressed. What is evident from the example of trauma survivors is that changes to one's moral view of oneself and the world are possible. Assuming a narrative construction of the self, as discussed earlier in this chapter, then it may be possible to reconstruct the self, or to repair the damaged self and reclaim moral agency as Nelson (2001a; 2001b) suggests, by means of narrative.

In the last two sections I suggested that embodiment affects not only how persons are seen by others, it also affects how they are able to act in the world and consequently is central to agency, and therefore to moral agency. I have argued that, using the example of trauma survivors, it may be possible, however, for persons to separate their sense of self from their embodiment, at least partially, in order to regain effective agency. I have further argued that the perception of trauma survivors of having died, although their bodies survive, points to the psychological possibility for reinventing the self which I will discuss later in this chapter. Before doing this, however, I will argue that for persons to reclaim social identities and a sense of self requires them to, at the least, discover spaces where it is possible to examine themselves and their positioning in the world critically, and that to do so may require leaving behind their sense of being at home, that is, the unexamined assumptions that make privilege possible.

\[1\]Cathy Winkler, in her 1991 article "Rape as Social Murder", suggests that feeling themselves to be "defined out of existence" (quoted in Brison 2002, 45) as a result of trauma, survivors may redefine who they are by giving themselves new names (Brison 2002, 47). I will return to the idea of renaming as part of recreating the self in Chapter Six.
Reappraising social spaces and the nature of 'home'

In Chapter Two I described how the forces of domination organise members of oppressed groups in two important ways that contribute to their subjugation. The first, the categorisation of out-groups as homogeneous groups of people, so that the multiplicity of social identities held by group members is simplified or reconceptualised as fragmented and incoherent. The second kind of organisation is through institutions and social practices that function to exclude members of oppressed groups from the mainstream, marginalising them both physically and from the moral community. These two dynamics of group organisation commonly result not only in discrimination against the oppressed but also in their demoralisation, in part because the oppressed internalise constructions of their social identities as flawed or fragmented, and partly because any expressions of moral agency may be interpreted as madness or immorality by others since they do not always conform to normative expectations. However, these two means of organising the oppression of individuals on the basis of social identities and group memberships may also provide opportunities for the oppressed to respond; in the previous chapter I described how this may be possible by re-categorising social groups. Here, I will suggest that by self-defining on the basis of self-evaluation and re-evaluating the spaces in which action is curtailed by oppression, members of oppressed groups may gain a sense of self-respect and develop the capacity to make moral judgements and act on these as moral agents. The key to doing so is found in the re-conceptualisation of spaces of exclusion and marginalisation as spaces of critical self-reflection and knowledge. In this section, I consider some aspects of space and how reclaiming social and discursive spaces may be important to resisting the construction of negative social identities by forces of domination.
I have suggested that moral agency is compromised for persons whose embodied selves are located in oppressive socio-political spaces, and here I will argue that developing a sense of self and exercising moral agency for such persons entails claiming social and discursive spaces. Speaking may be easier somewhere where one feels safe, such as in a feminist space, but speaking to an audience which is in agreement with one's expectations and unchallenged by one's values differs to claiming a space in which to be heard where those listening do not identify with one's group identity and have no sympathy for one's values. As Parmar has said: "The appropriation and use of space are political acts" (quoted in hooks 1991, 152), and may therefore present a challenge for persons whose social identities cause them to be unseen, or objectified or made invisible. However, Maria Pia Lara (1998, 1) argues that the act of reclaiming social spaces, by asserting social identities and ways of knowing in the public sphere which are not typically represented, may itself be morally significant. For example, Lara suggests that autobiographical narratives by women intersect the aesthetic and moral spheres, and by contesting notions of "'values', 'beliefs', 'self-images', 'boundaries' and 'frontiers'" (1998, 7), function as examples of agency and transformation.

I suggested earlier in this chapter that the social spaces in which relationships play out may impact upon a person's sense of self-esteem and therefore on their capacity for self-direction. Public spaces, more often than not, are ambiguous in their effect upon the development of autonomy capacities and the exercise of agency from the perspective of the subordinate. Although I suggest here that appropriating social spaces may be an act of resistance, it is important to remember that in inequitable societies there are no spaces that are only inclusive and empowering since they are also sites of oppression or are created by oppressive contexts. It follows that even
those spaces of inclusion, such as separate women's spaces, black or lesbian spaces, have the potential to be exclusionary. For example, the segregated housing of some ethnic and race groups in Western societies may provide an inclusive empowering space away from oppression, but these spaces are created and ghettoised by oppressive forces. Similarly, separate lesbian spaces may be empowering of lesbian relationships by being free of heteronormative values but may also be affected by racism or domestic violence.

Oppressed social groups create a sense of identity by finding their place, and locating this place at the centre; to put oneself at the centre is to privilege one's own experience (Miller 2007, 176). The idea of moving from the margins to the centre is echoed in the writing of bell hooks, who develops the notion of homeplace as a place that black experience is privileged, somewhere African Americans can create a sense of themselves as persons and resist white racism. Finding a home in the world may also be part of recovering a sense of self as a person for members of oppressed groups, since feeling alienated from mainstream society and culture is an aspect of oppression. However, the notion of home as a place of safety and nurture is a contested one, since home is not always, or only, a place of resistance; it can also be the locus of oppressive practices, particularly for women. In experiencing home as the site of sexist or heterosexist oppression, women may develop perspectives on it that contradict the notion of home as a place of security or safe haven. The ambiguous nature of home, as both a place of safety and refuge and as a place of rejection and harm, makes it difficult to interrogate the values and practices learnt, or to completely escape these values, since they are carried within us. In this section I will consider some feminist approaches to notions of place and home and safety, before suggesting that in order for change to occur it may be necessary to give up the
idea of being at home in the world, of moving to the centre, and instead use the knowledge gained from inhabiting the margins to resist oppression.

The resistance value of home is well exemplified in the writing of hooks (1991, 47), who argues that among African Americans homeplace has a subversive value because it is the one place where African Americans have been free of the objectifying effects of white racist aggression. The importance of homeplace lies in its being the only space in a racist culture in which African Americans can affirm their value and develop feelings of self-worth and self-respect (hooks 1991, 42). Historically, the construction of homeplace involved the literal construction of a black space, a piece of real estate from which white racism is shut out, but homeplace signifies more than this; it is also a location for the creation of a sense of oneself as other than a product of racism, allowing for the possibility of resistance (hooks 1991, 42). hooks argues that as well as being a physical, mental and emotional space in which African Americans can experience themselves as people away from the violence of ever-present white racism, homeplace is also a theoretical space, one in which the self damaged by racism can be re-constructed. It is, therefore, a space in which African Americans can resist forces which seek to objectify them, and by affirming their sense of self, homeplace allows African Americans to actively resist the destructive forces of racist oppression.

hooks's description of homeplace suggests that, although it can have a physical existence, it is not primarily an actual space; rather, it is the affirmation of oneself as a person gained from relationships that reinforce one's sense of self-worth and self-respect. Consequently, homeplace does not always have four walls and a door in a single location; it can be more transient and ephemeral, as hooks makes clear in her example of Frederick Douglass's mother, a slave who travelled long
distances to spend nights with her son (1991, 44). Since in the era of black slavery in the US the children of slaves were considered property, neither they nor their mothers were believed to have emotional bonds equivalent to those of white mothers and their children. hooks (1991, 42) argues that black women in the post-slavery era in the US have continued to negotiate the difficult task of creating a space in which their own children could develop feelings of self-worth while putting most of their energy into working as domestics in white households and nurturing white children during the day. This task was made more difficult by their subjection to racism at work and on their way to work since segregated housing usually meant they were, literally, travelling between black communities and white neighbourhoods. If homeplace is a relational space, then although it is one which in the main black women have struggled to create, it is potentially available to everyone. However, the idea of homeplace suggests that in order to have a space in which to resist racism it may also be necessary to work against political policies and social practices designed to prevent members of subjugated groups from gaining a place of their own, either by restricting or preventing them from working or by preventing them from owning real estate.

The yearning for a safe space reflects a very real psychological need, since we all desire to feel safe and free from harms. However, many people feel unsafe in their own homes or walking on the street in the daytime, a feeling that stems from an awareness of our vulnerability to harms and our expectations about how other

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132 According to hooks, Douglass himself seems unaware in his narrative of the sacrifices his mother made to spend time with him.

133 "An effective means of white subjugation of black people globally has been the perpetual construction of economic and social structures that deprive many folks of the means to make homeplace" (hooks 1991, 46). For example, in the US after the National Housing Act of 1934, the practice of redlining, or the designation of black neighbourhoods as areas of high risk by banks and other lenders, made it more difficult for African Americans to obtain a mortgage. One result of this was the de facto racial segregation in US cities according to where lending risk boundaries were drawn (Woods 2012).
persons may behave based on their social identities. Even in places we may think we are safe from violence and aggression women may be vulnerable, as Brison's (2002, 2) description of her assault in the peaceful French countryside in the daytime reminds us. Although hooks develops the notion of homeplace as a place of freedom from particular oppressions, such as white racism, she is aware that it is also a conflicted space, particularly for black women, and never suggests that it is a place that is itself without discrimination, conflict or struggle. In Collins’s (1990, 186) opinion one reason for this is because African Americans are in danger of equating emancipation from racism with the espousal of white patriarchal values that discriminate against and devalue black women. hooks's conception of homeplace is one that has to negotiate a difficult course through these two objectives: to combat white racism, which objectifies both black men and black women, and at the same time to counter sexism and heterosexism.\textsuperscript{134}

The difficulty with hooks's notion of homeplace, is that, for women in particular, domestic violence and child abuse undermine the notion of home as a place of safety. The experience many women have of home is of a sometimes dangerous but always conflicted place, which may be the location of the same struggles and contradictory positions as the outside world, and therefore it is ambiguous as a place of resistance. The concept of home as a refuge needs to be challenged, since mothering and nurturing are not the only activities that occur in homes and the idealisation of motherhood as pacific is itself open to dispute. Instead, as Bonnie Honig (1996, 269) argues, the way in which home is conceptualised must be changed and home must be re-signified so that it is seen not only as a place of nurturing but also as a site of conflict and struggle.

\textsuperscript{134} For example, see hooks (1989, 120–6) and Collins (1990, 192–6) for more on homophobia in black communities.
I would suggest that one of the difficulties in considering the nature of home is the tendency for members of oppressed groups to seek a place in which they feel empowered. For women, because their power is frequently associated with home and the relationships forged there, home may be seen as the place from which they can draw strength. While this may sometimes be the case, seeing home only in this way ignores the complexity of power relationships between persons. Traditionally, too, the home has been seen as separate from relationships and practices negotiated in the wider moral community, and what occurs there has been largely unobserved and undisclosed, making it a dubious place from which to base practices of resistance.

When we think of home as a safe place it becomes difficult to recognise the potential for harm; we may also feel that victims of violence in a domestic environment should have been safe and that they must have somehow been responsible for any harm they suffered. Acknowledging that the home is frequently an unsafe place because inequitable power relationships can be distorted there may be a necessary step to recognising some behaviours and social practices as harmful. Therefore, although the home may be considered women’s space it is not necessarily one in which they are significantly empowered or able to exert much control.

This problem is complicated for persons who belong to colonised peoples or oppressed minorities, and who may find themselves in an ambiguous position fighting against violence within their community while defending their culture from oppression from without. According to hooks, self-censorship within many oppressed communities means those seeking to resist overt oppression from outside may first have to "struggle and resist" within their own culture (1991, 148). Although hooks is not explicit about why this is, it may be that self-censorship helps to keep together a community which is under siege from external forces. Because colonised
cultures are under siege from external forces such criticism from within brings with it the risk of being seen as a traitor to one’s own kind. Colonisation, war and exile can result in displacement and dispersal away from one's original home, so that the experience of home is significantly altered for some persons. Home may be found in more than one place, or it may be synonymous with fragmentation of oneself across the globe. For people oppressed from outside or whose home has been disrupted, there may be an imperative to affirm the value of their own culture (Narayan 1989, 259), so that any criticism, for instance, of sexist or heteronormative aspects of that culture, is seen as risking that sense of having a place in the world. To be a member of an oppressed group and to be able to examine critically both one’s native culture and that of the oppressor can lead to insights about both cultures, but it may also come with the price that one feels as if one belongs to neither (Narayan 1989, 266). In describing this dislocation Anzaldua (2007, 44), however, suggests it entails positive possibilities—the opportunity to create both physical space and culture for oneself out of one’s own body and mind.

When the oppressed seek a home in the world they are usually seeking two things: safety from the continuous threat of violence, and a sense of being known and understood for whom they are without having to make continual explanations. Notwithstanding this struggle, there is another kind of home, of safety, that most of us carry with us regardless of whether we still feel accepted in our natal home, and this is the sense of belonging to a group that frequently pits us against others. As I described in Chapter One, this involves identifying differences between members of our own group and members of other groups and characterising those who do not belong to our group in stereotypical ways, so that creating a sense of belonging

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135 I will discuss this problem, which is identified by Babbitt (2001), in more detail in Chapter Five.
commonly involves making a distinction between us and them, our family and theirs, our religion and theirs, our culture and theirs. Since home is where values are taught, it may be the place where we have learnt toleration of particular injustices and prejudices, and we may cling to the idea of home because it is the place in which we feel comfortable that our biases and fears are shared and understood. In considering Pratt's narrative and how home and place inform her sense of identity, Martin and Mohanty (1986, 196) argue that Pratt comes to understand the illusory nature of home as a place of safety when it is constructed on the subjugation of others. In considering the social and physical spaces of a privileged upbringing, persons have to recognise that the familiar structures representing stability and safety conceal histories of struggle against repression that made that privilege possible. For the privileged, being morally responsible may involve acknowledging that their sense of safety and stability and feeling of being at home in the world, has only been made possible because of the displacement and suffering of others.

Consequently, in inequitable societies, notions of the self and space must be considered with regard to the implications for power and privilege. In seeking to overcome their complicity with oppression, persons may have to risk losing this sense of feeling at home in the world in order to acknowledge that feeling comfortable and secure requires them to treat some people as objects not persons. In order to interrogate the privilege that accrues to a particular social identity, it may be necessary to leave behind the values learnt in the home; and for those who have undertaken this work of self-reflection there may be no going back. It may also be necessary to leave home to find out who we can be away from the expectations of the culture we were raised in (Anzaldua 2007, 43), or to confront the ways in which our own family or community have been damaged by the burden of oppressive violence.
and fear. We may have to leave the place of physical, emotional, linguistic and epistemological safety that home represents (de Lauretis 1990, 138) in order to find a space in which resistance is possible. Later in this chapter I will argue that for persons to develop the critical perspective necessary for resistance requires them to re-position themselves, to inhabit threshold spaces which are undefined, and to do this it may be necessary for both privileged and subordinate persons to leave the safety of familiar places and values behind in order to resist social practices that are oppressive to some groups. In the next section I will explore the notion that resistance to oppression and complicity involves both "dis-placement and a self-displacement" (de Lauretis 1990, 138), and that for critical engagement to be possible a sense of dislocation may be inevitable.

**Place as Situation**

I have argued that the kinds of moral agency accessible within different social spaces is crucial in resisting oppression, but I have not yet considered a potential difficulty with thinking about space as location, particularly with regard to the idea that persons have multiple identities. According to Marjorie Miller (2007, 180), when we think of space as location, where one moves from one fixed point to another, then identity becomes something we have to define as being of a particular nature in a particular space, and this is obviously problematic when we consider the multiple nature of social identities and group affiliations. Thinking of space as location forces us to define *here*, as opposed to *there*, and the process of doing so results in a fragmentation Miller (2007, 180) does not explain, but which I understand to be similar to Lugones's conception, where fragmentation results from a failure to understand identity as multiple and oppression as intersectional.
Miller (2007, 176) argues that the goal of moving from the margins to the centre, which is seen by some theorists, including hooks, as important for resistance, is predicated on thinking about space, and hence about identity, in this way. But because not everyone can be located at the centre and because some identity groups are inevitably marginalised, it becomes a race in which the different identity categories—often in the same person—compete against one another (Miller 2007, 177–78). Instead of understanding movement as location, Miller (2007, 180) thus suggests we understand movement and space as situational with regard to identities, so that, as Lugones also argues, each interaction between persons depends upon who they are in that place. As Alcoff puts it: "Social identities ... are more properly understood as sites from which we perceive, act, and engage with others. [And] these sites are not simply social locations or positions, but also hermeneutic horizons comprised of experiences, basic beliefs, and communal values" (2006, 287; italics in original). And because it is possible to simultaneously find ourselves in more than one situation—while we cannot inhabit multiple locations—a situational understanding of identity and place can embrace the complexities of being multiple selves interacting with other multiples selves in different circumstances.

The idea of situated identities is similar to the notion of world-travelling, which I would contend, given Lugones's use of the terminology reality, reflects a more nuanced understanding of social spaces than simply as location. For Lugones (1990b, 504), the liberatory potential of world-travelling lies in having the ability to remember how one is in another reality, in particular whether persons remember their intentions from one reality to another. This is a difficult undertaking for many people, particularly the privileged, since there are many reasons for not remembering oneself in other realities. For example, Lugones suggests that people may not want to
remember who they are and how they behave in front of domestic servants, because they lack moral integrity in the eyes of their servants. Another reason persons may have difficulty remembering is that doing so may involve confronting some uncomfortable assumptions about entitlement and exclusion, and involve breaking faith across class or race lines—of being a class or race traitor. For example, when Pratt faces the exclusions and discriminations that make her own privileged childhood home possible she breaks ranks with those members of her own class, race and/or faith who are still holding on to privilege.

Although world-travelling, as an exchange of realities or situations, seems to argue for a different approach to the critical position that is the outsider within, I would suggest that they are similar insofar as they both possess liberatory potential because persons retain knowledge gained as marginalised identities when they move into other worlds or situations. The epistemic advantage gained by critically positioning oneself as a world-traveller or outsider within is that of being able to see outside the explanatory framework of domination to other ways of understanding. However, like Miller, I think there are more profoundly transformative possibilities to be found in a situational approach to place and identity than simply changing the frame of reference, and in the next section I will consider what happens when we unsettle the boundaries of the self.

**The "space of radical openness"**136

I suggested earlier that members of oppressed groups may experience themselves being in the world as disrupted and disjunctive, either because the home to which they belong is irretrievably lost, or transitional, or because home exists non-

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136 Partial chapter title in hooks's *Yearning* (1991, 145); the full title is "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness."
continuously from place to place, or because it is not a place they can return to.
Being in the world in this way means being excluded from mainstream experiences
and mainstream life; it means experiencing the world and oneself in the world only at
the margins. While it may seem to follow from this that the goal of the oppressed
should be to move to the centre, as discussed above, there are problems attached to
this movement. I therefore argue instead that we may need to continue to inhabit the
margins to engage critically with what we know and what we think we know in order
to become open to others' ways of knowing. In addition, for those who are privileged
and those who are unsafe in their own homes or cultures, moving away from the
centre may be essential to interrogating the values of home, which privilege some by
excluding others.

Lugones and Collins both argue that ways of knowing in marginal situations
challenge what is thought to be known by privileged knowers, and hooks suggests
there is a space of radical openness where the oppressed can not only hear other
voices but also articulate their own knowing.\textsuperscript{137} The way in which inhabitants of
marginal spaces experience themselves as persons affects the way they can know
things. Experiencing themselves as being multiple selves in multiple worlds, or as
existing at the boundaries between different realities, identities or ways of knowing,
creates a momentary freedom from oppressive reality, which allows the subject to
imagine themselves otherwise.\textsuperscript{138} Epistemologies of oppression provide alternative
perspectives that work to undermine the status quo of power hierarchies by
questioning the logic of privileged ascriptions of identity, and in doing so open up a
closed system of meaning to other interpretations.

\textsuperscript{137} For example, black women working in white households may realise that white privilege does not
reflect superior intellect or ability but exists merely to retain specific advantages (Collins 1991,
40).

\textsuperscript{138} Paraphrased from chapter title by Mackenzie in Mackenzie and Stoljar (2000, 124).
Lugones, Collins and hooks all suggest that resistance involves taking what is known in one reality and articulating it, or making it intelligible, in another reality. Part of this struggle involves finding one’s voice and finding a space in which to speak, since in inequitable societies privileged and oppressed identities do not have the same authority to speak, or may be authorised to speak about different subjects in different social situations. The struggle to articulate one's experience and to have one's experiences witnessed includes the use of what hooks (1991, 150) calls a "counter-language", which she defines as ways of speaking which may originate in the coloniser’s tongue but which are irrevocably changed by the experience of oppression.

Because marginalisation contrives to exclude and silence marginalised persons while privileging the speech of some, as mentioned in Chapter One, dominant voices may pervade discourse making it more difficult to hear other voices and creating expectations about who will speak and be heard in different contexts. These discursive practices are normalised in inequitable societies so that it may seem natural that some persons are effectively silenced, excluding them from being full members of the moral community. For example, Williams (1991, 92–93) regards impersonal and objective writing as being an exclusive form of discourse which is empowering to oneself at the expense of the other and she instead aims to maintain a dialogic relationship with the other. Dominant discourses retain discursive authority by excluding, silencing, or erasing other voices (hooks 1991, 151), by making assumptions about what values are important and whose voice should be heard. The dominant expect the oppressed to move from the margins to the centre

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139 Mae Henderson (1992, 146) suggests that black women's writing is, in general, essentially a dialogic relationship, not only with the external other, but also with the internal other that, she suggests, exists within multiple selves and implies acceptance of difference and identification with the other.
and assume the values and concerns of the dominant, in other words to accept arrogant perception over their own experience.

Rather than moving in the direction dictated by the dominant, hooks proposes the oppressed inhabit a space of open-ended acting, which she describes as the "space of radical openness". The space that hooks refers to could be the limen described by Lugones as the place in between different realities, different worlds of sense, a space in which one can be aware of the plurality of different selves. It may also be the spaces "in the margins of hegemonic discourses" described by de Lauretis (1987, 20), social and dialogic spaces which are not only un-represented but un-representable in mainstream discourses. It may also accord with the liminal or threshold spaces between worlds described by Anzaldua, in-between or boundary spaces which are "unstable, unpredictable, precarious" and "always-in-transition" (2002a, 1), in which transformations may occur. Inhabiting this space involves recognising the ways in which one is pushed to the edges, both socio-economically and in mainstream discourses, and creating new meanings for oneself, one's relationships and one's social practices, meanings which are resistant to oppressive discourses and practices.

De Lauretis has suggested there are possibilities that can be found in spaces between gendered identities or notions of the self to question established meanings. In hooks's words, marginality is "much more than a site of deprivation ... it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance" (1991, 149). Both social and discursive, "real and imagined", "interrupted, appropriated, and transformed" (hooks 1991, 152), these are spaces in which social change can occur as well as spaces in the discourse where meaning is amorphous, unfixed, or fluid. The "counter-hegemonic" discourses of marginality are "not just found in words but in habits of being and the
way one lives" (hooks, 1991, 149).

However, as I mentioned earlier, although hooks uses the terminology of marginalisation, such spaces are probably best thought of as the transitional threshold spaces Anzaldua refers to, spaces that, as Parmar (1990, 101) notes, thwart oppositional discourses. For example, Monique Wittig's use of the term "lesbian society" refers to "a conceptual and experiential space carved out of the social field, a space of contradictions" (de Lauretis 1987, 144), where a lesbian "has to be something else, a not-woman, a not-man" (Wittig 1992, 13; italics in original) because, Wittig argues, lesbians do not belong to the natural kind that is 'woman'. These "social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparati" (de Lauretis 1987, 25) are where dominant understandings of social practice and language can be resisted, and where the meanings of social practices, such as lesbianism, can be challenged by alternative interpretations.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that spaces within the hegemony of hierarchical societies exist where the oppressed can challenge epistemologies of domination by developing the competencies needed for autonomy and moral agency. When the historical context which has resulted in some identity categories being oppressed is either hidden or denied, then being born poor or black, for example, rather than being a matter of moral luck, as I shall discuss in future chapters, becomes an apparent fact about the world. Critically positioning oneself, for example, as an outsider within or

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140 Wittig makes the argument that being lesbian involves the rejection of being a 'woman'—since in heterosexual reality women are naturally heterosexual—but that refusing to be a woman "does not mean that one has to become a man" (1992, 12).
world-traveller, allows persons to see through the explanatory framework of domination, and identify and acknowledge the exclusions and discriminations that permit the privileging of some social groups and the inequitable treatment of others. Re-conceptualising social identities as multiple permits persons to see themselves as they truly are and makes possible self-understanding and hence narrative self-constitution. This kind of critical positioning is attainable, I suggest, because there are social spaces and spaces in discourses where it is possible to challenge the meanings of identities, relationships and social practices.

I also argued in this chapter that relationality is central, not only to developing autonomy competencies and moral agency, but also to the construction of the narratively constituted self. Many of the social and relational identities assigned to us come with preconceived attributes, expectations and duties which complicate, and in some cases inhibit, the exercise of moral agency. In the next chapter I will consider the possibility that members of oppressed groups can overcome some of these barriers to moral agency and take responsibility for themselves by making their lives more intelligible to others.
4. Moral agents and responsibility

Introduction

Until now I have concentrated on what might be called the situational aspects of moral agency: what competencies are necessary in order to gain acknowledgement that agency is being exercised, why members of subordinate groups might be lacking in those competencies, and how persons whose agency is diminished can situate themselves in order to develop the necessary competencies. In this chapter I focus less on the idea of developing the capacity for moral agency and more on the possibilities available for members of subordinate groups to exercise moral agency, which I consider from the perspective of persons taking responsibility for their choices. If Walker (2007, 16–17) is correct in arguing that practices of responsibility are central to how we practise morality, then what is needed is a conception of responsibility that is appropriate to persons whose self-development has been negatively impacted by inequitable power relationships and who may, as a consequence, lack the capacity to develop the competencies necessary for the exercise of full moral agency. In my view members of subordinate social groups are not well served by recognised understandings of responsibility, particularly in the sense of being held and holding others accountable, and would benefit from an alternative approach, such as the care-taking sense of responsibility, which involves actively standing behind one's projects, identities and values. One way for persons whose moral development has been negatively impacted by systematic

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Having or lacking the capacities necessary to develop moral competencies to demonstrate full moral agency may make us less responsible, in the sense of being responsible or being worthy, but it does not necessarily impair our ability to take responsibility. In Babbitt's words: "We can take responsibility for actions or events that go beyond our capacities" (2001, 3).
discrimination to take responsibility in the care-taking sense is by making their choices intelligible to others. Intelligibility as it is understood here is a social activity whereby a person provides, not justification, but an explanation of their actions to others which is coherent in terms of the person's individual narrative of their beliefs, values and desires, and which is, therefore, meaningful with reference to their life story. The ability to give moral accounts, and hence make sense of one's choices to oneself and others, is also central to Walker's (2007, 114–121) conception of morality. Walker identifies three different kinds of moral accounts given—narratives of identity, relationship and value—which between them explain why someone chose to act as they did. In summary, persons who are diminished in their ability to exercise moral agency as a result of oppression may demonstrate moral competency by taking responsibility for their choices by giving moral accounts that make these intelligible to others.

The significance of intelligibility

Before moving on to talk about some different understandings of responsibility and why these might not be appropriate in situations of systematic discrimination, I want to briefly consider why intelligibility-as-responsibility might be a useful alternative strategy, even though there are obvious difficulties for members of subordinate groups—such as the presumption of moral incompetence, and the absence of epistemic credibility to be discussed in Chapter Six—which distinguish their attempts at intelligibility from those of others.

What does it mean to be intelligible to others? Schechtman (1996, 159) considers a person's actions to be intelligible when the actions taken stem from a person's "beliefs, values, desires, and experiences", and cohere with one another in the sense of being understandable with reference to the rest of a person's life story.
The capacity for moral agency is directly correlated with the ability to see oneself as "a persisting individual whose actions cohere with one's beliefs, values, and desires (which should also cohere with one another) and whose current actions have implications for the future" (Schechtman 1996, 159), that is, a person whose actions may be judged by others. Without an intelligible narrative connecting a person's internal psychological states with their actions they are "incapable of making the kinds of decisions necessary to agency" (Schechtman 1996, 159) and cannot properly be held responsible for their behaviour. Intelligibility, then, is the outward expression of an agent's moral competency.

While intelligibility requires an unbiased hearing from others it does not presume the unthinking acceptance of, and agreement with, the intelligible other's point of view. Indeed, Hoagland stresses that while one aspect of intelligibility is offering explanations for our own behaviour, a second aspect is understanding the choices made by others, "particularly choices we don't approve of" (1988, 223). However, since making oneself intelligible to others requires an attempt to convey why a particular course of action has been chosen, or why one is prepared to support a particular project or relationship, it may be more realisable within a community of like-minded individuals where values and social practices are held in common and others may be presumed to be sympathetic to, if not in agreement with, the choices made. It is not surprising, then, that making oneself intelligible to others in order to take responsibility for one's choices and actions was initially considered by theorists as an alternative to notions of responsibility-as-accountability and blame within marginalised communities.142 In fact, it could be argued that there are few incentives for members of privileged groups to make themselves intelligible to the subjugated,

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142 The earliest reference I can find is in Hoagland (1988) who acknowledges Frye (1986, unpub.) as the source.
especially as members of privileged groups are frequently those who demand explanations for behaviour rather than those being held accountable, a point I will return to below.

The concept of responsibility

Before considering the concept of intelligibility as it applies to responsibility in more detail I will review some of the different ways we think about responsibility, starting with some distinctions developed by Card (1996). It is possible to differentiate between taking responsibility in the sense of accepting praise or blame for our actions or being responsible in the sense of having some quality or virtue. In taking responsibility "we locate ourselves as morally relevant centers of agency" (Card 1996, 28), whereas being responsible for something is not necessarily morally relevant. This is apparent if we consider that we can be responsible for something in the same way, for example, a computer can be responsible in the sense of being the immediate cause for traffic lights not working or a dog can be responsible for chewing on a cushion; while both computer and dog can be responsible neither can take responsibility for their actions or choices in the way people can and do. It is also possible to distinguish between freely chosen responsibilities, which always require us to show initiative, and those assigned or inherited, those responsibilities we call obligations, which may be accepted or refused but require less initiative on our part. As long as the responsibility is accepted these all count as instances

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143 Especially Chapter Two.
144 In other words, causal responsibility does not necessarily translate into moral responsibility. Compare the computer being responsible for the traffic lights not working and the Director of the Department of Main Roads taking responsibility for the ensuing traffic gridlock.
145 Card (1996, 29) says we may accept or refuse responsibilities that we inherit or are assigned, for example, taking care of elderly parents. As Card points out, these assignments are governed by ethical norms, and I would argue that the normative pressure involved ensures the oppressed, in contrast to the privileged, are rarely able to refuse the responsibilities thrust upon them. In the case of caring for elderly parents, for instance, anecdotal evidence from friends whose parents are aging and observation within my own family suggests this responsibility falls more often upon female than male children, or at least, that they are less able to refuse the responsibility when it is...
where responsibility is taken, but an agent is more responsible when the responsibility taken requires initiative (Card 1996, 28–29). The insight that freely chosen responsibilities require initiative is useful in thinking of those times when there is no initiative, such as when our actions result from following orders.

Even after teasing apart these different notions of responsibility there still exist what Card (1996, 27) has called the ambiguities of responsibility. The concept of responsibility can refer both to capacities, as in the capacity for moral agency, and to virtues, such as the ability to follow through on something, thereby showing conscientiousness and integrity. Since it is possible to fail to follow through on a responsibility freely undertaken, the ambiguity then arises of being judged to have both fulfilled and failed to fulfil an undertaking (Card 1996, 28). However, as my focus here is on the expression of moral agency, I am concerned with a failure to follow through on our obligations insofar as it is an indication that a person's capacity to exercise moral agency has been compromised.

Card (1996, 28) differentiates four kinds of moral agency which suggest different senses of taking responsibility: deciding what should be done and how (the "administrative" sense), determining who is responsible for what and to whom ("accountability"), committing oneself to some project and making good on this ("the care-taking" sense), and (the "credit" sense), accepting praise or blame for what one has done or failed to do. I find these distinctions useful when thinking about members of subordinate social groups because looking for where the exercise of assigned to them. This observation is so obvious it may appear redundant; however, my claim is that where there is no consideration of oppression it may not be at all evident.

146 More commonly the notions of accountability and credit are conjoined, so that accountability is understood in a backwards-looking sense rather than in a forwards-looking sense, as Card understands it here. Usually persons are held accountable for something after the event and praised or blamed according to whether or not they met their obligations. In other words, 'being held accountable' refers to taking responsibility in the credit sense; since it would be confusing to discuss other theorists' work in terms of the credit sense I will distinguish these from Card's notion of accountability by referring to them as 'being held accountable' or 'responsibility-as-accountability'.

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moral agency is allowed, or conversely, where it is denied, can tell us whether there is a presumption of moral competence or incompetence. For example, Belinda Morrissey's (2003) study of women who kill—which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Five—found that the blame, and, therefore, the responsibility for killing, was repeatedly assigned to others, denying the women's own culpability and, consequently, denying them moral agency. However, before considering the problematic nature of responsibility in relation to the oppressed in more detail, I will look at practices of responsibility and how these arise.

**The social nature of responsibility**

According to Walker (2007, 16), morality consists in "complex practices of certain kinds", which correspond to practices of responsibility, and which "cannot be extricated from other social practices" (2007, 17). Practices of responsibility "implement commonly shared understandings about who gets to do what to whom and who is supposed to do what for whom" (Walker 2007, 16) within a given society. These practices may differ depending on the nature and history of particular relationships, for example, whether one is responding to a stranger or a friend or family member. They may also change over time given changes to relationships, as when a former teacher becomes a friend, or when there are changes to the way those relationships are understood, for example, when a child or grandchild takes on responsibility for elderly parents or grandparents. Practices of responsibility may also vary as the normative values of society adapt and change over time. For example, fulfilling one's obligations as an employer in the West now entails consideration of workplace safety, and an employer would usually be considered to have acted morally reprehensibly, as well as being legally at fault, if they failed to provide a safe working environment. Practices of responsibility specify not only who
is accountable to whom and for what, they also encapsulate the limits and scope of each individual’s agency, as well as revealing relationships between individuals. Because of the interconnectivity between relationships, social practices and practices of responsibility, obligations to respond to others can appear to arise naturally rather than being inherited as a result of the structure of social institutions.

According to John Searle, social institutions are a "system of collectively recognised rights, responsibilities, duties, obligations, and powers" (1995, 83) attached to a social entity, and come with rules and expectations that give authority to social practices and enable individuals to determine whether or not they are conforming with or deviating from the norm. Social institutions give authority to what Searle calls "institutional facts" (1995, 27), or those facts which are dependent on a social institution for their existence and meaning, in contrast to those facts which continue to exist independently of human institutions. Institutional facts continue to have an existence, in Searle's opinion, simply because "the individuals directly involved and a sufficient number of members of the relevant community ... continue to recognise and accept the existence of such facts" (1995, 117). For example, property rights exist for as long as they have the status of an institutional fact; as soon as they are rejected by the majority of community members property rights cease to exist within that society. Given that institutional facts depend upon what may be unspoken agreement for their existence they may appear to be naturally occurring facts about the world rather than social constructs.

Similarly, although practices of responsibility may appear innate rather than being reflective of morality, in reality they reflect social rules and expectations which in turn attest to the values of the institution generating them. For example, the

\[\text{147} \text{ I do not have the space here to investigate the reasons social institutions arise and why some social practices are given the status of social institutions and others are not, and the reader is referred to Searle (1995) for more discussion on this topic.}\]
institution of heterosexual marriage assigns men and women different responsibilities which reflect the values, expectations and rules attached to that institution. There is generally an expectation that women will be the nurturing partners in heterosexual marriages, creating and maintaining a home space and caring for any children produced by the relationship. These sorts of expectations, arising as they do from economic and historical traditions, may not be overtly articulated within a society, but they are nevertheless able to be articulated by all the members of the community to the extent that deviations from the norm may be identified. In contrast, where institutions lack clearly articulated values and expectations—and this is particularly the case for new institutions—when things go wrong, as Babbitt (2001, 73) suggests, the institution itself may be identified as wrong rather than a particular individual's behaviour.

**Responding to others**

When someone is held responsible for someone else it is expected that they will respond to the other’s needs in some socially determined way. Walker’s conception of how practices of responsibility fit into morality seems right because it is in accord with an intuition most of us have that moral practices are in essence ways of responding to others ethically which are dictated by our relationships with one another. If an accounting is demanded for some action or inaction the demand arises from expectations about behaviour which stem in turn from the relationships involved and how those relationships are played out in practices of responsibility. Similarly, when judging another’s actions as acceptable or unacceptable the judgement is made in response to expectations about appropriate responsiveness which are determined by the relationships involved.

Walker (2007, 113) suggests that an obligation to respond to another arises
because some individuals are vulnerable to specific others and this relational dependency creates the moral obligation. However, Walker rejects the idea that the obligation to respond corresponds to innate vulnerabilities, and that our responsibilities arise simply because some persons are vulnerable to other persons' actions and choices. Although vulnerabilities may appear to arise independently, Walker argues that in fact social practices underlie how vulnerabilities are conceived within any moral system. Instead, she suggests that social relationships are created and shaped in ways which produce specific vulnerabilities in some individuals to specific others, for example, children to their biological parents (Walker 2007, 95). It is our social arrangements, or social notions of responsibility, that create understandings of vulnerability which in turn create moral obligations, and hence in moral practice "our vulnerabilities take the forms they do as they are 'fitted' to the socially normed responsibilities of others" (2007, 96).

The social institution of motherhood, for example, conventionally assumes that mothers are responsible for the full time care of infants, and most mothers are presumably happy with this practice given this institutional fact still exists. Although it cannot be denied that infants are intrinsically vulnerable to others, vulnerability to their parents is a reflection of social relationships and social practices within a given society. This becomes clearer if we consider the many ways in which the construction of infant vulnerability has varied socially, for example, in the historical use of wet nurses and the present use of nannies to provide primary care to infants. However, even in Western societies, where paid child care professionals frequently care for infants for long periods of time, the ultimate responsibility for the child’s

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148 Walker is wary of applying a principle of vulnerability whereby we respond to others on the basis of the other’s vulnerability, arguing that this is an overly simplistic analysis. Instead, Walker (2007, 90) argues that there exists what she calls "dependency-in-fact", or dependency within a particular relationship, which creates an obligation to respond. These dependencies arise from societal arrangements.
wellbeing continues to reside with the parents, particularly the mother. In Western societies, where the mother finds the burden of this responsibility overwhelming, social institutions (for example, child care nurses, counsellors, child protective agencies) exist to assist her to be able to continue to care for the infant, reflecting the expectation that with help the mother will acquire the competencies necessary for being a primary care giver, and intervention to replace her with another carer only occurs when the parents are shown to fail catastrophically (Walker 2007, 96). The expectation that mothers are in every case the appropriate carer is rarely challenged, and there is no questioning of the allocation of responsibility at the level of social practice. Instead, when things do go wrong, the mother, or the failure of society to respond to her failure, is treated as the problem. This was illustrated in a 2009 Western Australian case, the court heard that the mother committed infanticide because she was unable to cope. The commentary on the case emphasised the social resources available to new mothers who struggle with the responsibility but did not mention that there were other persons, such as the father, who could have taken on responsibility for the child (Gibson 2009). It is not coincidental that the re-allocation of the responsibility of primary care for a child occurs only after the legal mother has failed to fulfil that responsibility. It can be seen from the foregoing that practices of responsibility, by holding persons accountable in situations in which they inherit responsibilities as a result of being assigned a particular identity, may place an unfair burden on some social identities, the implications of which I will consider in more detail in the remainder of the chapter.

If we accept that an obligation to respond arises not so much from the vulnerability and necessity of the other, although these are important, but from

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149 Walker (2007, 95) suggests that support given to primary care givers, in the form of state welfare, for example, not only underlies but also serves to propagate the norm that parental duties are exclusively the responsibility of the child's mother.
expectations that arise out of our social practices, we can begin to appreciate how problematic the notion of responsibility is for the oppressed. In societies where individuals are treated unequally or where social institutions are unfair or unjust then the responsibilities generated may themselves be unfair or unjustly onerous for members of certain social groups. The vulnerability of persons who experience systematically unjust practices and social institutions may be heightened as a result of distorted power relationships, making them even more at risk of burdensome responsibilities.

The notion that the practice of ethics should be one of responsiveness to others has both its supporters (for example, Gilligan 1982) and its detractors (for example, Grimshaw 1986; Houston 1987). Hoagland (1988, 221) is one of its strongest proponents, arguing that responsiveness to others and/or empowering the other to respond, where the aim is understanding the other rather than agreeing to their choices and actions, should be central to ethics within lesbian community. Hoagland (1988, 121–22) rejects the notion of responsibility as accountability because she believes it is (mis)interpreted in lesbian community to mean taking control. If being responsible means taking control over their choices and actions, then when individual lesbians fail to control the situation they become less responsive to others, which is detrimental to lesbian community as a whole. Hoagland (1988, 123) argues that lesbians understand power as control as the result

150 For example, a drowning child may or may not impose an immediate obligation to respond. From a classical utilitarian perspective there would be no doubt that a drowning child requires an immediate response from an able bystander. In Walker's (2007, 91) more nuanced analysis, which considers the context in which the event takes place, such as whether the drowning occurs in the middle of a war zone, or in a society in which children dying young due to disease or famine is a regular occurrence, the requirement to respond may be viewed quite differently.

151 This is not to say that its supporters do not see potential problems with an ethics of responsiveness; for example, Carol Gilligan differentiates responsibility from "self-sacrifice" in developing an "understanding of the causes of suffering" and an "ability to anticipate which actions are likely to hurt" (1982, 134).

152 Hoagland (1988) is talking specifically about ethical behaviour within lesbian community. For another view of ethics as primarily being about understanding the other, see Oliver (2001).
of living in a patriarchy, so they may assume that the exercise of power requires them to take control over another. Hoagland's description of lesbian responses in specific situations suggests that members of subordinate groups may evade questions of responsibility because they lack control over their ability to respond. However, if Walker's analysis is correct it suggests that those who try to control the situation they find themselves in not only misunderstand the nature of power in a social setting, but they also misconstrue how responsibilities arise. Perhaps the real issue here is the way in which the construction of rules and expectations hinders the ability of members of subordinate groups to act responsibly. To use Hoagland's example, perhaps one reason some lesbians struggle to take responsibility without taking control is because they apply the values and expectations of the institution of heteronormative patriarchy to lesbian community. For example, Card notes that "if lesbian love-making is then regarded as another kind of sexuality, there is the risk of importing the same values" (1996, 161), that is, the values of oppressive heteronormative sexual politics.

In the previous sections I considered the socially determined nature of practices of responsibility and how an obligation to respond to others may be connected to social constructions of identity and vulnerability. Since, if we accept Walker's analysis, it would appear that morality itself is imbued with the practices of responsibility, it may be inevitable that we retain a conception of responsibility within any ethical program. However, embracing an ethic of responsibility may require the oppressed to reject some commonly understood aspects of responsibility, particularly in the sense of being held accountable, where persons can be judged for their actions and praised or held to blame for acting, or failing to act, in accordance with normative expectations. I will consider this idea in more detail in the next section.
The problematic nature of responsibility for the oppressed

If we understand responsibility as it is understood in the accountable or credit sense, then moral competence involves understanding who is responsible for what and to whom in light of shared values; it does not entail reflection on these values or on the social practices that arise from them. Consequently, who is accountable for what and to whom is determined at the level of social practice rather than at the level of moral reflection. It follows that some people are less able than others to give moral accounts or demand them from others (Walker 2007, 18), placing an unfair burden on some members of the community. As a result some persons may find themselves faced with moral obligations that are impossible for them to meet. More troubling, in non-egalitarian societies it is possible to be morally virtuous, in the sense that one is compliant with social practices, while at the same time being complicit with injustices towards others (Calhoun 1989, 389), as Pratt discovered in uncovering the history of her own racial privilege.

The reasons responsibility-as-accountability is problematic for members of subordinate groups, both in terms of being held accountable by others and in demanding accounts from others, are complex. To help explicate these it is necessary to reiterate the distinction between those who are in "power-laden but distorted relationships", to use Harvey's (1999, 39) terminology, and those who, while they are subordinate in an inequitable relationship, do not necessarily suffer oppression, for example, some employees, medical patients, students. Those in subordinate roles do not always have the ability to determine what behaviour is acceptable, perhaps because they lack access to certain knowledges; for example, a patient may not be able to determine the appropriate level of medical intervention they will receive because they lack an understanding of the disease, human physiology, or the surgical and medical treatments available. Lack of knowledge may be experienced as
disempowering in certain circumstances; for example, the patient may feel unhappy about a treatment as a result of not understanding the alternatives, but this is not usually indicative of an oppressive relationship between themselves and the physician(s) involved. It may also be the case that some of those in subordinate positions, for example, children, people suffering dementia, and the mentally ill, lack competence in terms in moral reasoning and, therefore, are unable to determine the acceptable behaviour in a situation: in the self-constitution view, because they have not yet developed the capacity for, or are no longer capable of, constructing a self-narrative. In these cases it is appropriate, and not necessarily indicative of unjust coercion, for others to take responsibility for their choices.

In these kinds of relationships, although there is an inequality in power, there may be nothing especially onerous about the subordinate being held to account, for example, for a policewoman to demand an account of my actions following a traffic accident. The converse, however, is not true, as the subordinate, like the oppressed, are often in an inequitable position in demanding an account from those with more power, and it would be less easy for me to obtain an explanation of the policewoman’s actions following the traffic accident. The inequitable distribution of power in the kinds of relationships conceived here, parent/child, police/citizen, doctor/patient, is manifestly a factor in who can demand accounts of whom.

Therefore, it might seem unremarkable to claim that members of subordinate social groups likewise suffer from a lack of power in demanding an account from others or when others demand accounts from them, even when they are praised or blamed for

153 Although it can be. A friend who is a nurse described how an Australian Aboriginal woman from a remote area, transported to a hospital in the city by the Flying Doctor Service, repeatedly removed a plaster cast from her broken arm because she did not understand the reason for it. Rather than address her fears (the airplane flight, the big city, the large Western hospital, and the separation from her traditional lands), medical staff treated her as if she was acting irrationally.

154 I am thinking here of when the oppressed conform to a normative expectation, such as when women dress to please men. For example, a friend told me that she never purchased revealing clothes as her husband would not allow her to wear them.
actions over which they had limited control.\textsuperscript{155} It is less evident that members of subordinate groups may also suffer from the presumption of moral incompetence and/or the absence of epistemic credibility. For example, it may be assumed that they cannot possess certain knowledges, or, alternatively, that the knowledges they do possess are not relevant to moral reasoning.\textsuperscript{156}

While being held accountable for things over which one has no control may be onerous, it can be equally harmful to deny that someone has the ability to give an account of themselves. Sometimes members of subordinate groups, by reason of their subordination, are treated as though they lack moral competence and cannot claim responsibility or be held responsible for their actions. I have already mentioned that there are those who are not expected to take responsibility for their own actions, and hence are not held accountable by others. Children, persons suffering from dementia, and the mentally ill may be deemed by others either incapable of the moral reflection necessary for acting responsibility, and/or the ability to act successfully on their moral deliberations. When the moral competence of members of subordinate groups is questioned on the basis of their perceived inability to deliberate morally or to act in particular ways, then their moral accounts may likewise be considered comparable to those given by children, the senile or the insane. For example, historically when women failed to act in accordance with social norms they may have been deemed mad rather than acting in accordance with non-normative values because the values they espoused conflicted with the social expectations of the times.\textsuperscript{157}

In addition to the difficulties already mentioned, in a moral system which

\textsuperscript{155} The oppressed may be held accountable for the actions of others over which they have little or no control, such as when women are held responsible for rape because of the way they dress or behave, according to Elizabeth Boskey's 2010 UK study of attitudes towards rape (quoted in King 2011, 35).
\textsuperscript{156} See Fricker (2007) for examples of this.
\textsuperscript{157} For example, see Phyllis Chesler (2005) \textit{Women and Madness}. 
interprets responsibility as accountability, members of subordinate groups may be automatically disadvantaged because they may be considered less worthy members of the moral community. They may not be considered worthy of respect in the same way as other members of the community and this unequal playing field may make it problematic for them to be responsible in the sense of being held accountable, since neither they nor their concerns are taken seriously. Devaluation of a social group may also make it impossible for some persons to stand by their identities and relationships, particularly when these are depicted in mainstream discourse as normatively deviant. For example, the portrayal of gays and lesbians as morally defective may make it difficult for these individuals to stand behind these sexual identities, causing gays and lesbians to pass as heterosexual. Sometimes devaluation of a group is used as an excuse to deny members of that group some benefit, for example, historically, the depreciation of female intelligence was used as the justification for denying higher education to women. In addition, feelings of being devalued may be internalised by group members who may then consider themselves morally inferior or flawed, causing them to act in ways which are contrary to the rules and expectations of the broader community.

A more subtle impediment to exercising moral agency occurs when members of subordinate groups are expected to meet expectations arising out of values held by privileged groups which are inimical to the subordinate group’s own wellbeing or contrary to their value system. For example, indigenous people may be stereotyped as ignorant and stupid and impossible to educate, but the education provided may be in the language and cultural traditions of the coloniser. Indigenous people are often

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158 Although providing women with an advanced education was also considered a waste of resources as women were intended for tasks not seen as requiring formal education, such as child rearing. Educating those intended for menial tasks or those of lower social classes may also be seen as problematic, since a better informed sub-class may lead to revolt. In developing nations today girls often miss out on education due to a more subtle form of discrimination; when parents have the resources to educate one child they commonly choose to educate a son (UNICEF 2005).
expected to put aside the history of dislocation from language, culture and land, and
to conform to the values of the colonisers. Rarely are the colonisers' actions or the
history of interactions between colonisers and indigenous communities
acknowledged in considering who is held accountable and for what. Members of
subordinate social groups are commonly held accountable to the same standards as
the privileged while being deprived of the same advantages, a technique which keeps
them focused on their own individual shortcomings. Success or failure becomes a
matter of individual strengths or weaknesses, deterring the oppressed from joining in
common causes or questioning how the presumption of individual responsibility
benefits the privileged by maintaining the hierarchical status quo.

From the preceding discussion, it can be seen that notions of being held
accountable, praise and blame are highly problematic from the standpoint of
members of subordinate groups for a number of reasons.\textsuperscript{159} Inequitable social
practices may result in unjust or unfair assignment of responsibilities, making any
demand for an account unduly onerous. Members of subordinate groups may be
deemed morally incompetent or less competent and unable to reason and respond to
demands for accounts; therefore, they may not be offered the chance to account for
their actions, or their demands to be heard may be ignored. Devaluation of members
of subordinate groups and their knowledges may result in them being unable to offer
an explanation for their actions because they are considered unreliable or
unbelievable, or their accounts are not offered in the language of the privileged.
Finally, for the reasons given above, and because they are comparatively less
powerful, members of subordinate groups may not be able to demand an account
from others, particularly from the privileged, so that for members of some social

\textsuperscript{159} Compare Barbara Houston (1992), who argues against eschewing the concept of blame on the
grounds that doing so diminishes, rather than enhances, moral agency.
groups being held accountable is a one-way process.

**The care-taking sense of responsibility**

Considering the problems identified for members of subordinate groups, the concept of responsibility can be seen as setting up a conundrum of sorts, which feminists need to address: how to conceptualise responsibility within an ethics of resistance in a way that not only allows for agency and autonomy but does not contribute further to oppression? Although there have been arguments for dispensing with the concept of responsibility, particularly notions of responsibility-as-accountability and praise and blame, in regard to members of subordinate groups, there are also compelling reasons offered for retaining some aspects of responsibility within an ethical theory. Walker (2007) offers one such defence, which I discussed earlier in this chapter, in her description of how moral values and expectations are expressed in the assignment of moral responsibilities.

Card's (1996, 28) care-taking sense of responsibility—in which taking responsibility involves making a commitment to a project, value or relationship—suggests an alternative way of thinking about responsibility, and one that may be more acceptable to those who feel socially disempowered. To make a commitment does not merely indicate giving support to a project, it also requires making any necessary follow-through should one neglect or fail to fulfil a commitment. As Cheshire Calhoun explains, "standing for something is not just a matter of personal identification with certain values; it is also a matter of insisting on the endorsability of those values" (1995, 246; italics in original). If this is the case, then such a

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160 See, for example, Paul Benson (2004, 185) who suggests that since assigning responsibilities itself plays an oppressive role, we would be better served by moving beyond responsibility attribution and blame, and their associated dilemmas, into alternative modes of moral address; and Hoagland (1988) who argues that practices of accountability and blame are counter-productive in lesbian community, since they keep the focus on self rather than the relationship(s) involved.
commitment implies that we have reflected upon and decided for these values. It implies not only affirmation but also a willingness to recommend or ratify the values in some way, to take action in support of a commitment. Taking responsibility in this sense is not simply a matter of being resigned to the outcome of our actions. It is not enough to stand by one's decisions, if by that is meant being prepared to own the outcome of our actions. Neither is it simply a matter of having a belief in something. Taking responsibility is not simply something we think or feel, rather it is an active practice. It is not enough, for example, to say 'I stand by what I did'; we must be prepared to take action to ameliorate any harmful effects of that action.

Another way of thinking about this is to say that by standing behind our practices we are showing moral integrity of a kind described by Walker (2007, 113) as "reliable accountability". As Walker understands it, integrity is not so much a reflection of moral principles as it is an indicator of our dependable responsiveness to others. By this, Walker does not mean giving unlimited access to another, or even that we will always be responsive in the same way in the same relationship, since not only do relationships change over time but we may be "differently reliable" (2007, 124), depending not only on the relationship but on what is at stake. That our accountability in different situations varies is obvious if we consider how differently we behave in different relationships and how even within one relationship we may respond differently at different times and under different circumstances. Walker argues that although these differences in accountability sometimes reflect inconsistency, more frequently they attest to what is important to us at that moment with respect to that particular relationship.

Walker's understanding of integrity, like Card's care-taking conception of

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161 There is a whole argument here about the ethic of care and women's role as care-givers in patriarchal societies which I do not have space to discuss in detail. Readers are referred to Peta Bowden (2000) for an overview of the discussion.
taking responsibility, emphasises how we respond when things go wrong as well as what we can bring to a situation or relationship at the outset. Acting with integrity is sometimes thought of as showing morally exemplary behaviour, but few people (if any) manage to live their lives without letting someone down, somewhere, at some time. Moral integrity is as much about facing up to our moral inadequacies and making some attempt to make amends for our choices and actions as it is about trying to do the right thing in the first place. If we are differently reliable, as Walker claims, it may mean we are not responsive in the way we once were; consequently, we may need to respond to the damage that occurs as a result. For example, if changes to our circumstances, such as illness or a new relationship, make it difficult to be there for a friend in the way we were in the past then this needs addressing. Instances of integrity are often identified in specific, impressive performances, particularly when a person admits to involvement in choices or actions that were damaging to others, and if the admission could easily have been avoided, or if the person taking responsibility was not the one directly to blame (Walker 2007, 124–25). The reparative responses made when damage results from our choices are part of being reliably responsive to others.

The care-taking approach to taking responsibility suggests a solution of sorts to the many problems inequitable and oppressive power relationships create for the less powerful in terms of justification of their choices, but it also contains a conundrum of sorts, which is how to make those same choices understandable to others. If the care-taking approach requires persons to recommend or ratify their choices, which may be non-normative, then it requires them to be able to offer an explanation of their choices to others, in other words, to make themselves intelligible to others. I will consider what is required for intelligibility and the potential problems with this approach in the remainder of this chapter.
Intelligibility and the role of self-knowledge

The idea of making oneself understood as a means of taking responsibility for one's choices is not only implicit in Card's care-taking approach to responsibility, it is also explicitly argued for as an alternative to justification-based approaches by Hoagland (1988). Hoagland develops an idea suggested by Frye (in Hoagland 1988, 221), that, rather than appealing to notions of accountability or justification with regard to moral choices, members of subordinate groups should develop a concept of intelligibility. The concept of making oneself intelligible as a means of taking responsibility appeals to Hoagland because it avoids those potentially coercive situations in inequitable societies of some persons demanding accounts of others when those others may not be able to make similar demands.

The concept of intelligibility requires being able to offer explanations for one's choices, and hence it necessitates a degree of self-reflection and self-understanding (Hoagland 1988, 223); it also requires being "willing to situate ourselves in such a way that others who make choices different from ours can be intelligible to us" (Frye in Hoagland 1988, 226). There are two distinct aspects at play here: firstly, self-knowledge and self-understanding and the ability to convey an explanation for actions so that responsibility can be taken for them; and secondly, a way of positioning ourselves in order to hear and understand the actions and choices of others that may be different from those actions we might take and choices we might make. This kind of repositioning of the self is made possible if we

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162 I have already suggested in Chapter Three that there are limits to self-knowledge arising from one's embodiment and from one's social positioning, particularly in inequitable societies, and these epistemological limitations circumscribe the applicability of the concept.

163 Hoagland (1988) distinguishes three different aspects of intelligibility: being able to offer explanations for our own choices; understanding others' choices, in particular those we do not approve of; and being able to perceive what others perceive. I would argue that the second of these is subsumed by the third, since if we can see from the other's standpoint then we can begin to understand their choices, including those we do not agree with. For example, understanding the fear and isolation of being a battered wife may help us to understand why a woman remains with her partner.
understand identity as situational, as I suggested in Chapter Three. Because the concept of intelligibility contains these two aspects it implies a degree of mutuality, and may require persons to consider both their own social positioning as well as their perception of others' social positioning. I will consider the first of these aspects in this section and the second aspect in the next section when I look at the role played by ethical attending—or fully attending to one another in a non-judgemental way—in making oneself intelligible.

Because persons have to be able to convey reasons for their choices, appropriate self-knowledge would appear to be the minimum requirement for making those choices, and the persons making them, intelligible to others. If appropriate self-knowledge is the minimal requirement for making oneself intelligible to others, it elicits the question: what barriers might exist to the requisite self-awareness and self-understanding? For members of subordinate groups a significant impediment to self-knowledge is the distortion of their identities, emotions and experiences in mainstream discourses and social practices. In the previous chapter, I discussed how embodiment might limit what some persons can know about themselves, giving the person a distorted sense of self and view of the world, and resulting in interpretations and explanations of their behaviour which may be misleading. Another example is that members of subordinate groups may be denied the expression of certain feelings, such as anger, and consequently may have difficulty identifying and naming these emotions. Alternatively, members of subordinate groups may not be able to legitimately express their emotions or the moral attitudes that accompany them in

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164 Butler (2005, 85) casts doubt on whether we can have appropriate self-knowledge, or perhaps more accurately, she argues for a notion of responsibility which acknowledges the limits of self-knowledge, since the other is implicated in the formation of the self and we cannot claim to fully know the other.

165 See, for example, Frye (1983, 84–94); Lorde (1984, 145–75); Campbell (1994); and Spelman (1989, 264) Frye and Spelman both mention how women's anger is reinterpreted as hysteria, craziness or rage.
ways that are meaningful to others within certain contexts, such as when they are in the presence of members of privileged groups in the public domain. As a result, the only legitimate expression of the feelings of members of subordinate groups may occur in private, where it may be misdirected against other members of their own group or at members of other subordinate groups. If "social hierarchies are maintained by outlawing some emotional responses on the part of members of disesteemed groups" (Calhoun 1999b, 223) then, conversely, recognising the expression of those emotions, particularly anger, is to recognise that the person is "authorized to judge wrongdoing" (Calhoun 1999b, 224), and, hence, is a member of equal standing in the moral community.

Not only does intelligibility require persons to offer an explanation for their behaviour and choices, and thus take ownership of what they have done, it also requires an agreed normative framework within which those choices and actions make sense. This mutually understood "scheme of social interaction" (Calhoun 1999a, 83) allows persons to measure themselves against community standards and justify their choices and behaviour because there is agreement about what behaviour is considered praiseworthy or blameworthy. These schemata of social behaviour are integral to the structuring of societies: they not only set standards of behaviour but they also dictate what virtues are considered essential for members of different social groups to live morally exemplary lives, something I will return to in Chapter Five.

Where there is no such mutual agreement as to what constitutes normative

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166 On a train journey in Perth, Western Australia, I once witnessed the near paralysis of response from a predominantly white audience to an Aboriginal man's vocal anger against whites. As a white member of his audience I was silenced both by the legitimacy of his anger and by my own feelings of indignation at being confronted in a 'safe', that is, predominantly white, place. I will return to the importance of place for resisting oppression, which I discussed in Chapter Three, in the final chapter.

167 Lorde talks about how anger at racist attitudes among whites can be suppressed by white women because they are afraid of expressing it to other whites; the unexpressed anger is then redirected "at the first woman of Color who talks about racism" (1984, 127).
behaviour, it is difficult for individuals to stand behind a social institution or to make their choices intelligible to others. For example, resistance to the idea of gay marriage reflects normative expectations arising from shared understandings, in terms of behaviour and values, of what constitutes the institution of marriage. The idea of gay marriage not only challenges the social institution of (heterosexual) marriage, it also challenges those underlying, sometimes unstated, agreements of moral rightness, which in this case inform a particular moral view in which heterosexuality is morally acceptable behaviour. Standing behind a choice of gay marriage is often difficult because there are no socially agreed values as to what constitutes gay marriage, and this is in part because there is as yet no social institution with rules against which people can compare their own behaviour and determine if they are going right or wrong (Babbitt 2001, 73). However, if we recall, from the earlier section on the institutional nature of responsibility, that institutions are manifest in institutional facts which continue to have an existence only because they are recognised and accepted, then the potential always exists for these facts to be rejected and new facts come into existence. Therefore, although there may be barriers within existing institutions for the acceptance of certain behaviours because they are non-normative, the acceptance or rejection of behaviours within societies is dependent upon institutions which are themselves open to changing or even ceasing to be.

It is possible for a person to have appropriate self-knowledge to be able to convey the reasons for their actions without others being able to comprehend why they act as they do. That this is the case is often, but not always, indicative of inequitable power relationships. For example, the manager of a company may be unable to understand or may be dismissive of the reasons given by their employees for going on strike, either because these reasons contradict their own beliefs about
appropriate work conditions or because the employees' claims lack credibility in their eyes, perhaps because the claims are made by subordinates who the manager feels lack epistemological authority. While an employer/employee relationship in Western countries is normally free of violent coercion, in situations of oppression this inequity in power between the respective positions is significant because, while the powerful command attention and audience by the authority of their position, the subordinate may struggle to be heard at all, much less understood. Where a person is attempting to explain the motivation for their choices or actions that deviate from standard social practices there is a danger that the explanation given may be distorted by normative expectations. Standing behind normatively transgressive practices involves the risk of being misunderstood and the possibility of moral failure. I will discuss this in more detail in my discussion later in this chapter on giving moral accounts.

This problem of (un)intelligibility is described by Fricker as hermeneutical injustice, or the injustice that arises "when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences" (2007, 1). As a result, who and what we are and the choices we make may not fit the explanatory frameworks available to us. For example, in Beloved, Sethe is unable to offer an explanation for killing her children that makes sense within the norms of a slave-owning society, both because killing children is at odds with normative understandings of a mother's love, and, conversely, because a slave and her children are property, and if her loving them is understood to be the same as a mother loving her children it challenges the notion that she and her children are

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168 I will return to the question of epistemological credibility later in this chapter.
169 Rebecca Mason disputes this analysis, arguing that "marginalised groups can be silenced relative to dominant discourses without being prevented from understanding or expressing their own social experiences" (2011, 301); however, I agree with Fricker insofar as having certain ways of knowing denied by mainstream discourses creates uncertainty about the validity of these experiences even when they are affirmed by other members of one's own group.
merely property (Babbitt 1994, 10–11). Sethe's claims (to personhood, to being morally responsible for her children) are frightening to others because they represent a challenge to the social status quo (Babbitt 2001, 144), which denies subjectivity and agency to slaves. Consequently, to take responsibility by making oneself intelligible to others may involve an epistemological challenge,\(^{170}\) a task which involves envisioning a reality different from this one (Babbitt 2001),\(^{171}\) one in which one's actions are open to an alternative interpretation. The point here is not simply that dominant discourses effectively silence some experiences or knowledges, for example, the way women are often invisible and unheard in boardrooms or seminars. Instead, the argument is that the socio-political reality may deprive some individuals of explanatory power because there is no shared framework within which those individuals' experiences make sense to others. Therefore, for those individuals to take responsibility for their practices, including those they reject, may require them to re-examine practices "at the level of meaning and definition" (Card 1996, 148). I will discuss the problem of unintelligibility arising from standing behind normatively transgressive practices and its implications for taking responsibility by making oneself intelligible in more detail in Chapter Five.

Perhaps rather than requiring a shared explanatory framework, the concept of mutual intelligibility minimally presupposes a community sympathetic to the notion that we are all capable of reflecting upon and rejecting or adopting particular values and making choices in accordance with those values.\(^{172}\) This would suggest that

\(^{170}\) This is a separate claim to the argument that marginal identities are epistemically privileged.

\(^{171}\) In Babbitt's terminology it requires an act of imagination. I find Babbitt's arguments for how imagination transforms moral understandings compelling, but see Mavis Biss (2013) for a detailed critique of Babbitt's position.

\(^{172}\) With a few exemptions, for example, children, the insane or the senile. Interestingly, diseases such as Alzheimer's disease and dementia progress by destroying memory, both of oneself and one's history, and of one's knowledge of the world and how one's body interacts with the world, making it impossible for the sufferer to hold onto any notion of self and past, and, consequently, impossible to support a project or relationship; those afflicted frequently disavow the relationships that previously sustained their life choices (Dosa 2010).
Intelligibility minimally requires all of us being open to, and willing to engage with, others in a way that is both attentive to, and respectful of, difference. While we may neither agree with another's values and motivations, nor be sympathetic to those values, neither of these conditions is essential for the reasons for another's choices and actions to be made clear. It follows that if we do not necessarily have to agree with the choices others make then trying to understand another's reasons does not prevent us from making judgements about their choices and actions. However, we do this with a greater understanding and knowledge of both who the person is and why they act as they do. Another way of describing this is that intelligibility does not imply the uncritical acceptance or rejection of the other's point of view; rather, it suggests a mutual working-through of difference, particularly difference(s) that we may find threatening (Oliver 2001, 10) because we have internalised stereotypes of social identities. Rather than casting a 'veil of ignorance' over one another, intelligibility requires that we see the other in all their particularity, and discriminate without prejudice.

In this section I have considered the first aspect of intelligibility, that of gaining and conveying self-awareness and self-knowledge in order to make oneself and one's choices understandable to others. The second aspect I referred to involves positioning oneself in such a way that the choices and actions of others make sense. In the next section I will consider the circumstances necessary for this to occur, including the potential drawbacks to ethically attending that result from power imbalances in relationships.

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173 Oliver (2001, 10) argues that the Freudian notion of working-through is required by any theory of social transformation.

174 This can be seen in the example discussed later in this chapter, where a man does something criminally wrong because of his commitment to a transgendered partner. Without working-through the (possibly threatening) difference of this relationship, there may be no mutual understanding.
Power imbalances and attention-giving

In the previous section I suggested that the difficulties involved in obtaining appropriate self-knowledge may impair intelligibility. In this section I will address what I see as the main difficulty faced by those with subordinate social identities in wanting to make themselves intelligible to others, which is that power imbalances between subordinate and privileged social identities in inequitable societies produce a corresponding imbalance in attention-giving toward the privileged. Where inequalities of attention giving and receiving are constitutive of social institutions because of inequalities of power, it may be difficult to uncover these without questioning the very nature of the institution itself. One of the difficulties in considering these imbalances of power and the consequential imbalance in attention-giving is that, as I explored in more detail in Chapter One, they are not necessarily indicative of unjustly coercive or oppressive relationships. For example, relationships of attention-giving in which the majority of power rests with one party, such as students giving attention to a teacher, patients attending to doctors, citizens attending to police, may be neither coercive nor oppressive. The difference seems to be that although someone is in a subordinate position in each of these relationships they are not necessarily subordinate on account of a social identity arising from a non-voluntary group membership. This becomes clearer if we elaborate on one of these examples and ask what the doctor's duty is if they are a white practitioner in a remote Australian Aboriginal community. In these kinds of situations, where the relationship between the one attending and the one attended is complicated by histories of discrimination and injustice, the subsequent imbalance in who is attending to whom can lead to further injustices or harms, as was seen in the experience of the traditional Indigenous Australian woman in a Western hospital.
described earlier in this chapter.

In contrast to the inequalities in attention-giving that arise out of non-oppressive relationships, Frye has suggested that the non-reciprocal nature of attention-giving in oppressive relationships is a reflection upon who is considered a real person and who is considered merely an object. Frye (1983, 171) describes the invisibility and silencing of women in heteronormative patriarchal societies as arising from the way in which women are background to the lives of men, rather than being equal members of the moral community. In societies in which discrimination is present in many forms, persons with social identities that are discriminated against, such as women, people of colour, lesbians and gays, people with disabilities, and older people, may find themselves the backdrop against which the lives of ‘real’ people, those given agency, are played out. Lugones vividly describes this experience when she writes of the dominant: "they ignore us, ostracise us, render us invisible, stereotype us, leave us completely alone, interpret us as crazy. All of this while we are in their midst" (1987, 7). An example shows how deep-seated this foregrounding of some groups can be, where being asked to switch attention to another group requires explanation because it is not self-evident that members of subordinate groups should merit attention. In a television interview, Toni Morrison was asked by the interviewer when she would write a book that focussed on white people (Wendt 1998). The implication seems to have been that no-one, not even a black woman writer, could find the topic of black women's lives interesting enough to write about for their whole career; at some point they would have to address themselves to the

175 Often the injustice is compounded because of the systematic nature of discrimination. In cases of domestic violence in Australia victims can apply to the court for a Violence Restraining Order (VRO) to protect themselves from an abusive partner. However, for VROs to be effective they have to be enforced; the lack of enforcement points to institutionalised failure to take domestic violence within the police force (and society as a whole) seriously.

176 The frankly racist nature of the question was not recognised by the white interviewer until Morrison pointed this out for her.
lives of 'real' persons, that is, white people.

Being intelligible to others requires that persons are able to construct a narrative of identity, relationships and values (Walker 2007, 116–121) which makes it possible to identify their choices and actions as arising from authentic desires, but the notion also presupposes that someone is addressed, even if that someone is the internal addressable other. Given a relational understanding of the self the meaning of one's choices and relationships can only ensue with input from both self and the other. Consequently, Frye suggests that as well as making ourselves understandable to others, the concept of intelligibility requires that we situate ourselves in such a way that we can understand the different choices of others. The repositioning of the self required by the situational approach is similar to Lugones's notion of locating ourselves in another's world in order to better understand both their identities and their choices. By situating ourselves in a way which is both open and non-judgemental we can hear others without succumbing to discriminatory or prejudicial notions. Such a stance is an ethical response and requires a critical engagement with the other; it is not simply a matter of unthinking acceptance or agreement with the other. The person attending is responsible for the moral narrative at this point to the same extent that a midwife is responsible for the birth of a child, that is, not for the events that have led to the story being told but for facilitating the telling of the story in a way which is attentive and responsive to the process.

Ideally, attending ethically to empower the other involves a transformation on the part of the one attending, not in terms of who they are and the biases and prejudices they may unconsciously adopt from being members of a non-egalitarian society, but in terms of their awareness of these unexamined preconceptions. Therefore, attending to the other is self-reflective but it is also an act of love, and it is not possible to love the other while seeing the other arrogantly (Lugones 1987, 8).
Seeing the other arrogantly means seeing the other merely as a reflection of oneself, much as Toni Morrison's interviewer did, seeing not a black woman writer with stories stemming from the identity, relationships and values of a black woman but a woman who puzzlingly refused to grant white people's lives prominence. In contrast, the "loving eye" "is the eye of one who knows that to know the seen, one must consult something other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination" (Frye 1983, 75). It is reflexive in the sense of being aware of oneself but it is selfless or passive in the sense of abandoning one's preconceptions, not in the sense of losing one's particularity but of being able to actively suspend the biases that stem from being who one is in the relationships and with the values that one has. Or, perhaps a better way of putting it than 'suspend one's prejudices' is as the active 'letting go' of what one thinks one knows. It seems to me that this requires us to do something essentially contradictory: it requires being able to see difference where one could only see one's own reflection before, and at the same time see one's likeness to the other where the other's difference had previously clouded one's vision. To be able to see the other's essential humanity and see the other's difference all in the same gaze is to move beyond recognition in order for there to be a true acknowledgement of difference (Oliver 2001). For example, Hoagland appears to me to be arguing for intelligibility within lesbian communities on the basis that all lesbians share common values, but Hoagland's own examples—which include lesbians with disabilities, lesbians of colour and older lesbians—indicate that difference is inescapable even within like-minded communities. Acknowledging difference within social groups and across social identities is a prerequisite for an ethic of care-taking responsibility based upon a plurality of identities and selves.

Frye's description of the loving eye suggests that an awareness of one's situation is the basis of the kind of moral perception necessary for the attention-
giving required for ethical attending to work. The moral perception necessary in
order to live in terms of the principle of good was called by Iris Murdoch "loving
attention", by which she referred to "the idea of a just and loving gaze directed upon
individual reality" (1970, 34). Bridget Clarke (2003, 126) identifies Murdoch's
description of perception of individual realities with Frye's description of a kind of
perception in which the perceiver is able to discern patterns in their lives because
they share common experiences with others. According to Clarke, this kind of
situational pattern-perception is implicit in Murdoch's account of the perception of
individual realities, whose agent must be sensitive to social patterns if they are
"going to appear capable of clearsightedness" (2003, 123). Another way of thinking
about this is that loving attention is a kind of critical positioning in which persons
have an awareness of themselves and others as plural selves, each with their own
particularity and embedded in a particular social reality, in which some of those
selves may be privileged and some oppressed. Developing an awareness of one's
multiple self is, therefore, not only the first step towards moral competency, as I
argued in Chapter Three; it may also be a necessary stage in displaying moral agency
through making oneself intelligible to oneself and others.

In the last two sections I have considered the two main aspects which affect
intelligibility: having appropriate self-knowledge and being able to convey this to
others, and situating oneself in such a way that one can hear accounts given by
others. I have also considered a number of potential barriers to ethically attending
arising from inequitable power relationships and the impact this can have on persons
making themselves intelligible to others. In the final part of this chapter I will use the
example of the actions taken by the character Sonny in the film *Dog Day Afternoon*
(1975), which is based on a true story, to look in more detail at the kind of moral
accounts given by members of subordinate groups and how these accounts relate to
taking responsibility by making oneself intelligible to others.

**Giving moral accounts**

Taking responsibility for oneself and one's choices by making oneself intelligible to others entails giving moral accounts. The kind of accounts persons give will vary depending on the situation, particularly on the relationships involved between the person giving the account and those who are attending to the account. Moral narratives reveal the values that are important to us, those we are most committed to, because they are present in the relationships and things we have chosen to support. No-one can be infinitely responsive to others' needs; instead we are all selective about what relationships and causes we choose to support, and these choices are reflected in the narratives we construct about who we are and how we have come to be this person, and what is important to us.

The kind of moral accounts given by members of oppressed groups, none of which claims to be the definitive account of being, for example, gay, black and female, or female and Jewish and middle-class, makes it possible to challenge hegemonic discourses because accounts of marginalised identities, relationships and values are antagonistic to totalising discourses.

I mentioned in Chapter Three that people make sense of events and experience and are affirmed in their humanity by gaining acknowledgement of these experiences from the addressable other who is normally another person but who may be internalised. Since, as I explained in Chapter Three, in cases of extreme oppression the addressable other is denied, then telling these kinds of stories to one another is central to being considered an equal in the moral community. Moral accounts play a significant role in the exercise of moral agency because not only are they the basic form of representation for moral problems (Walker 2007, 116), but we
cannot conceive of situations responsibly without knowing the before and after, how the individuals involved got there, including what values and obligations propelled them into their choices and actions.

In suggesting that giving moral accounts is central to moral agency, I am not endorsing the accountable approach to responsibility. Instead, I would argue that the care-taking kind of responsibility, which involves persons actively supporting the identities, relationships and projects they invest with value, lends itself naturally to the concept of making oneself intelligible through moral narratives. How choices are presented to ourselves and others is important in making them intelligible, and this usually results from a story we tell about our motivations and desires. In other words, conveying the reasons for following a particular course of action reveals the practices and values the person is standing behind, and this makes their behaviour more intelligible. For example, if someone robs a bank and offers no explanation we would be inclined to proffer reasons for their action, perhaps condemning the act as criminal and wrong, and the person as immoral and greedy. However, in the movie *Dog Day Afternoon* the knowledge that Sonny is robbing a bank in order to raise the money to pay for a sex change operation for his partner may make us moderate our response, since while we may neither condone his actions nor fully comprehend his reasons for acting in this manner we can at least acknowledge that his actions stem from values that are important to him even if they are not values we share. If Sonny's behaviour is to count as taking responsibility for his actions in the care-taking sense, he must be able to show a commitment to particular relationships, practices and values, which make his action in robbing the bank apprehensible—if not commendable—to others. In other words, his actions have to show integrity in terms of the values he espouses. If what he considers most important is that he is, in Walker's phrase, reliably dependable in terms of his actions with regard to his closest
relationships, it may be more comprehensible that he feels obliged to do everything within his power to support his partner, even if this requires him forsaking some of his other values.

I stated earlier that we cannot conceive of situations responsibly without having the full picture of what has gone before and what will occur later, and we can only arrive at this knowledge through ethically attending to the other. For example, an ethical viewer would need to bring an awareness of their biases to their response to the unconventional relationship between Sonny and his transgendered partner in *Dog Day Afternoon* in order to maintain a critical stance in relation to Sonny's actions which is unencumbered by identity prejudice. Sonny makes the decision to rob a bank because he feels obliged to take responsibility for his partner's need to have a sex change operation; his actions grow out of responsibility for someone he cares about and are implicated in a relationship in which the other person's embodiment is at odds with their sense of self. Although it may be easier to understand the motivations of those with whom we share values, this does not mean that we cannot relate to those whose values differ from our own, as long as we can agree that those values are sufficient motivation for the agent to act. Even if the viewer does not share either Sonny's, or his transgendered partner's, values—insofar as the viewer may not see value in a relationship with a transgendered person or they may not see the desire to have a sex change operation as an authentic desire because they cannot comprehend someone not feeling at home in their body—they may still relate to his story because they can understand the notion that relationships bring specific obligations which persons invested in the relationship have a duty to respond to. By ethically attending to the other we may be able to understand the obligations that compel them to act as they do, even if we disagree about the action to be taken to fulfil those obligations.
It may appear from the example of Sonny that, for the care-taking sense of responsibility, morals are relative to the individual, that there are no overarching values that we should all ascribe to, and someone acts for the good if they act according to their most important values. It may also appear that Sonny has simply selected between two types of moral reasoning: the rightness or wrongness of stealing from banks versus the importance of taking responsibility for a relationship, the so-called justice versus care styles of reasoning. It is my contention that the actual process of moral reasoning is more complicated than it may appear from the example given. Each of us, in every moment, makes choices which potentially curtail other possibilities.\footnote{Peter Howitt's (1998) film \textit{Sliding Doors} gives a dramatic example of how one choice can cut off other possibilities.} In addition, since no-one can be responsive to all the demands made upon them, we each need to be selective between competing values in order to respond to anyone at all. In every decision we make we prioritise one value over another, according to what we see as most important in that situation, a decision that reflects on who we are and how we see ourselves. What makes the account of Sonny's actions credible is that we can imagine an alternative scenario where he is unable to break the law to obtain the money, not because the relationship with his partner is less important but because he values himself as someone who abides by the laws of his society and this value is integral to his sense of self.

I have suggested that Sonny may not see himself as someone who breaks the law and steals money, and he may regret having to do so, but he may find it easier to reconcile his actions and his beliefs if he holds in higher regard another value which is only achievable by robbing a bank. There is a counter argument here that there are alternative ways of standing by his relationship than robbing a bank to raise the money for his partner's sex change operation. It could also be argued, as is done by
the girl, Amy, in response to the Heinz dilemma, that breaking the law may have a detrimental effect on Sonny's most important relationship, the one he is most concerned to support. In response to these criticisms I am going to suggest that Sonny acts as he does because he stands behind a relationship which was not acknowledged as legitimate either morally or legally at the time, and that because their practices are normatively transgressive the oppressed may not be able to openly own the values, identities and relationships which are most important to them. Sonny may either not be able to see alternatives, or the alternatives available to others may not be available to him, and the choice may indeed be an oppositional one between robbing or not robbing a bank. Because Sonny is in a normatively transgressive relationship it may not be possible for him to go to his family or a financial institution and request a loan for the operation since to do so would require him to own the relationship publicly. Consequently, in considering what action to take to make his partner happy, Sonny may not see many options available to obtain the money required, either because he could not see them, or because they were not available to him because he did not conform to normative expectations.

In response to the Heinz dilemma, Amy questions whether Heinz should steal, not just because it is wrong to break the law, but because if he is caught and jailed he would be no longer be able to care for his wife (Gilligan 1982, 28). Similarly, one could also question whether Sonny is right not only in putting his own freedom at risk but also in potentially depriving his partner of his support. One

178 The classic moral problem, the Heinz dilemma, involves a man needing expensive medication for his dying wife. He is faced with the decision whether or not to steal the medication when he cannot raise the money to purchase it. See Gilligan (1982, 25–26).
179 Victims of domestic violence who kill sleeping partners give accounts that suggest they feel as if they had no other option than kill or be killed, although those around them believe they could have sought help from friends or authorities, or that they could have left the violent relationship. Because the threat is not "imminent", whether their actions are considered "excessive self-defence" or "killing for preservation" varies depending on the jurisdiction (Sheehy, Stubbs, and Tolmie, 2012), suggesting that this is as much a legal grey area as it is a moral grey zone.
180 Gilligan says of Amy that she sees in the dilemma "not a math problem with humans but a narrative of relationships that extends over time" (1982, 28).
response to these arguments is that sometimes it is simply the case that a relationship is valued so much that the other person's health and happiness outweigh any negative consequences of the action to the agent. It is clear, however, that, as with Sethe's decision to kill her child, the explanatory framework available does not allow Sonny to make his actions intelligible, since the values he holds are at odds with the expectations of a heteronormative society. To make himself understood means uncovering the prejudices of heterosexuality as an institution, just as any explanation Sethe makes requires her to unpack the institutionalised inhumanity of slavery.

The potential moral accounts given by Sonny in *Dog Day Afternoon* point to the problem of normative difference as a possible drawback to the notion of making our choices and ourselves intelligible to others as a way of taking responsibility. In the previous section I suggested another possible drawback to this approach to taking responsibility for members of subordinate groups is that the power imbalance between privileged and subordinate aspects of social identities makes it difficult for the subordinate to be heard by others. I also suggested that there may be limitations on self-knowledge as a result of inequitable power structures which restrict what the person can know about themselves, and hence what can be conveyed to others. Although failure to develop self-awareness is a major stumbling block to moral competency and the exercise of moral agency, as I argued in Chapter Three, failure to convey self-knowledge to others presents its own problems, especially for the oppressed, as it may make one's actions appear unintelligible. It is the problem of unintelligibility and the role played by moral luck that I will consider in Chapter Five.
Conclusion

Since taking responsibility—in the sense of being held or holding others accountable—is problematic for members of subordinate groups responsibility is conceived here in the care-taking sense, which involves actively standing behind one's identities, relationships and practices. I argue that standing behind one's projects and values can be achieved by making oneself and one's choices intelligible to others. The idea of giving moral accounts, which are effectively stories we tell each other, is suggested as a means of offering explanations for one's choices and actions. However, since the notion of intelligibility involves both the idea of self-knowledge and understanding as well as the ability to convey this to others, and the ability to situate oneself in such a way that one can hear others' accounts, given the disadvantages confronting the oppressed, being heard is itself not uncomplicated.

The complexity involved in the process of making oneself intelligible through moral accounts which I described in this chapter hints at the difficulties in utilising this approach to exercising moral agency, particularly for the oppressed. In the next chapter I will consider further what is involved in making oneself intelligible to others, including the consequences when a person is unsuccessful, whether this constitutes a moral failure—particularly when the behaviour is non-normative—and what the implications are for exercising moral agency.
5. Intelligibility and moral luck

Introduction

In the last chapter I suggested that members of subordinate groups can exercise moral agency and take responsibility by making themselves intelligible to others. I also mentioned some of the impediments to doing so, in particular, distortions and limits on self-knowledge which impact on one's self-understanding and one's ability to convey one's choices to others. In my discussion on the necessary conditions for intelligibility in Chapter Four, I touched briefly on the key associated concepts of social uptake, the meaningfulness of social practices and identities, personal integrity, what is involved in living a morally good life, and the possible consequences of being unintelligible, and I will take up these ideas in more detail in this chapter. I will discuss the idea, introduced by Card, that there is a degree of moral luck—that is, luck that is implicated in our moral choices and our ability to develop a moral character—involved in whether our actions, relationships and identities receive social uptake, and, consequently, in whether we are able to take responsibility by standing behind those practices and projects we find meaningful. Throughout the chapter I will consider some arguments related to intelligibility for the oppressed, first presented by Babbitt (1994; 2001), including her suggestion that for some persons standing behind one's projects may involve taking a moral risk, that is, the risk that if the meanings one stands behind are not socially validated then one may not see oneself as possessing self-worth, and, as a consequence, may lack the expectations appropriate to a person who sees themselves as having value (Babbitt 2001, 4). Calhoun (1999a, 83–84) has argued that, "given sufficient bad luck", moral lives can fail either because they are frequently unintelligible to others or because the
choices made are unable to be defended "in terms that others find meaningful", suggesting that unintelligibility will necessarily produce moral failure. In response, Babbitt (2001, 82) argues that unintelligibility is sometimes unavoidable when pursuing a certain kind of moral agenda, especially one which may be in conflict with normative values and social expectations; in these cases, the possibility of moral failure is a moral risk worth taking as a necessary step toward resistance. I will also consider a potential criticism to the notion of intelligibility suggested in Babbitt (2001, 6–7), which is that in inequitable situations the act of explanation is already an unduly onerous one for some persons, so that the requirement to be intelligible may add to the burden for these persons.181 Finally, I will use this chapter to present the idea, first suggested by Babbitt, that a certain kind of unintelligibility ensues when a person's response to a situation demonstrates an epistemic awareness of a situation which is not accessible to others because social expectations generate narratives of a kind that do not cohere with how the person understands themselves. It will be my contention that the potential benefit of being able to live a life that is authentic outweighs any of the negative aspects associated with the goal of making oneself intelligible.

**Moral luck and moral failure**

Before discussing the conditions essential to being intelligible to others, I want briefly to consider the probability that the meanings one assigns to one's identity, relationships or practices will not gain social uptake, since this is key to the problem members of subordinate groups face in making themselves intelligible to others. To do this I will examine the role played by moral luck in social uptake and

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181 A similar idea, although not articulated in the same way, is also found in the writing of Williams (1991).
making persons intelligible, and whether, as Calhoun (1999a, 83) asserts, unintelligibility constitutes moral failure. Although one can fail morally because one has failed to live up to the ideal of what morally exemplary behaviour should entail this is best described as a failure to follow through on a commitment rather than failure to agree on what actions are morally right in the first place. The latter is the kind of moral failure I am concerned with here.

Like Calhoun (1999a, 83–84) and Card (1996), my claim is that there is moral luck involved in our ability to make ourselves intelligible, either because we have limited control over the social identities we are assigned or the power relationships and social institutions within which these identities acquire meaning. Consequently, there is luck involved in whether persons are considered moral failures. It is a matter of luck that one is born a particular person at a particular time and place, and therefore subject to particular events as a particular social identity, for example, being born Jewish in Germany in the 1930s. What "makes luck moral", according to Card, is "its involvement with our choices (or failures to choose) to do what is morally right or wrong or with our having a moral character" (1996, 22; italics in original).\footnote{According to Calhoun (1999a, 83; italics in original) Card's understanding of moral luck differs from that of Thomas Nagel, because Nagel emphasises the luck "that enters into our being held responsible, blamed, or praised" whereas Card emphasises the luck involved in our ability to "take responsibility for ourselves".} Hence, moral luck is not only implicated in whether persons are held responsible, as, for example, Germans who lived through the Nazi era being held accountable for having participated in what happened to the Jewish people,\footnote{The example is from Calhoun (1999a, 82).} according to Card (1996, 27), it is also central to our capacity to take responsibility in the first place.

For one's moral life to be intelligible to others, Calhoun (1999a, 83) argues that both parties need to share a mutually understood scheme of social interaction
within which their actions and behaviour make sense to others. According to Calhoun (1999a, 83), "among the ideals of what human moral life should be is the ideal of living a moral life" where "one's moral understandings are shared by others", making it possible for persons to defend their choices and actions in a way others find meaningful. Without a shared scheme of social cooperation, persons run the risk that the projects, relationships and identities they choose to stand behind are misapprehended or appear meaningless to others; in either case, such behaviour risks unintelligibility. In addition, in my view such behaviours may be unintelligible not only because they are unrepresented, but because they may be unrepresentable in mainstream discourses, a point I will return to later. If there is no social uptake, no social recognition that the identity, relationship or practice has value and therefore is meaningful, then persons risk moral failure, understood by Calhoun (1999a, 83–84) as the failure to make oneself understood as part of a moral community. Being unintelligible therefore represents a failure of social uptake of what one finds meaningful.

Calhoun (1999a, 94) argues that there are two ideals for moral lives, the ideal of doing what is right, or living according to moral principles which can be justified to others, and the ideal of living within a shared scheme of social co-operation. On the basis of this understanding of what is involved in living a morally good life, moral failure is the result of one's commitment to a moral principle which is unintelligible to others. Calhoun (1999a, 89) suggests that moral resisters, that is, those persons who try to do what is right in situations of systematic discrimination, may act in ways and produce results that are perceived as wrongdoing rather than acting for the good; furthermore, that "resistantly trying to do the right thing might produce moral failure" (1999a, 88; italics in original). Calhoun gives, by way of example, the refusal to take "custody of one's children upon divorce" as appearing
"coldly unloving rather than a resistance to compulsory motherhood" (1999a, 89). Therefore, doing what one believes is right but which violates normative social practice becomes a matter of moral failure because there is no shared understanding that the action undertaken constitutes the right thing to do in the circumstances.

It could be argued that living according to generally agreed upon moral principles, for example, following the categorical imperative, cannot result in moral failure; instead, it represents a social failure if a person's actions are at odds with normative expectations. Calhoun (1999a, 91) considers this argument—that what is happening represents a failure to live up to social mores rather than moral failure, one which sees moral resisters as morally correct social failures—to rest upon mistaken assumptions about how we determine what constitutes morally exemplary behaviour. Given that "morality is a scheme of social cooperation", contrasting "social norms with genuine morality is misleading" (Calhoun 1999a, 91). I agree with Calhoun to the extent that I would argue it is difficult to judge the appropriateness of moral responses separately from non-compliance with normative social practices, since normative social practices determine practices of responsibility and therefore social norms underlie morality. It follows that, although we may invoke moral ideals of what constitutes a morally excellent life, there is no separate morality which is independent of socially determined norms. As I suggested in my discussion on giving moral accounts in Chapter Four, for persons whose choices conflict with mainstream community expectations arising from social norms, the difficulty lies in justifying the moral correctness of those choices given conflicting social expectations.

The problem I find with Calhoun's analysis is that it makes moral failures of the lives of moral resisters, which is at odds with our perception of the lives of people who stand up to injustices. Babbitt (2001, 81–82) addresses this issue by
suggesting that rather than representing a kind of moral failure as Calhoun believes, unintelligibility may be a necessary step to resisting because, for some persons, social expectations about the way in which they should behave may result in skewed moral meanings. I will return to the problem of persons acting on a moral principle when social expectations deny them the capacity for this ability in the second half of this chapter, after first considering the conditions under which intelligibility is made possible.

Meaningfulness and social uptake

As I discussed in Chapter Four, to be intelligible, a person's actions have to stem from their beliefs, values and desires, and these have to cohere with one another in a way that makes narrative sense in view of the rest of their life story. A person's capacity to make narrative sense of their own story has implications for moral agency insofar as any action taken must be comprehensible with respect to the person's beliefs, values, desires and experiences in order for the person to be seen to have agency in respect of that action (Schechtman 1996, 159). Unintelligibility may arise because of moral incapacities that impair a person's ability to construct a coherent life story, and this inability might have serious consequences for the person's ability to exercise moral agency but it is not necessarily an outcome of inequitable and unfair power relations. For example, someone who is seriously ill may be unable to make sense of the world or construct a coherent narrative of events; some drugs make the recipient paranoid and/or delusional and the person may interpret events around them incorrectly as a result, as a friend of mine did when she was convinced her hospital admission had been shown on the television news. However, unintelligibility may also arise because members of some social groups lack epistemic credibility because their lives are not valued in the same way and are
not accorded equivalence to the lives of persons who are accepted as members of the moral community. It is not surprising that persons who are deemed to lack intrinsic moral worth as human beings are also seen to lack the skills necessary for moral competency, and their perceived deficiency is made manifest in their inability to articulate the story of their choices in a way which is comprehensible to others. Sometimes persons in this situation internalise the way others see them and come to believe that they do not have the capacity either to exercise moral agency or to offer an explanation for their own actions.

The issue of unintelligibility arises because for actions, choices and identities to acquire meaning there has to be social uptake, and social uptake requires social awareness and appreciation of the meaningfulness of one's relationships, choices and practices, on the basis of agreed moral values and shared social institutions. The presence of established social institutions with settled expectations facilitates social uptake, since the acceptance of certain identities, relationships and practices is predicated on expectations that arise out of particular ways of being. In other words, for meaningfulness to emerge, one's practices must accord with the range of social expectations which only arise in the presence of established social institutions. For example, heterosexual marriage is understood by many people as meaningful because of the existence of conventions and rules associated with it as a social institution. Without institutional support, that is, where social institutions do not exist, perhaps because the social practice is novel, individuals lack agreed codes and practices of behaviour against which their own actions and choices can be judged and their practices may appear to some as random or meaningless or immoral. In short, for social uptake to occur, actions and choices must be meaningful to others, and for meaningfulness to emerge there must be proper institutional support (Babbitt 2001, 101).
Social uptake can, therefore, be thought of as the attribution of appropriate meaning to one's actions and choices as a result of agreement about what behaviours are acceptable within a particular social institution. Social institutions possess both explicitly stated rules and practices, as well as constraints on ways of being which are not overt but are nevertheless understood and followed by the majority, and which allow for the inherent flexibility within all social institutions. However, this flexibility only extends so far, beyond which the meanings that are being individually asserted may be rejected as false by the wider community. For example, although there are no explicit injunctions against women having facial hair, women are discouraged from doing so because a bearded woman creates gender confusion in a heterosexual normative society. Because not all behaviours are codified explicitly, this is one reason why, for example, when some behaviours disappear other less obvious forms take their place, such as the social expectation that women wear physically constrictive clothing, which I mentioned in Chapter Three, which meant historically women have worn corsets, bustles and crinolines but may result in them wearing high heels today.

An analogy can be seen in the institution that is scientific endeavour: new theories are acceptable in a particular scientific discipline only insofar as they mesh with the established way of viewing the natural world in that discipline (what Thomas Kuhn called the scientific paradigm); theories which postulate notions inimical to the accepted rules and practices of the paradigm are rejected (Kuhn 1962). Challenging moral understandings differs from proposing new scientific theories, however, because it involves how an agent sees herself and her place in the world, not simply the way the world, social or natural, is constructed. Proposing alternative meanings associated with social identities, behaviours and relationships involves questioning the underlying, mostly implicit, values associated with the
practices and rules of social institutions. The arguments about gay and lesbian marriage, for example, raise issues not only about marriage between men and women but also about the presumed naturalness of heterosexual relationships. Change to social institutions frequently only occurs after the underlying assumptions supporting certain behaviours are made explicit, for example, the racism underlying the presumption of lower intelligence of members of non-white racial groups, exemplified by the use of intelligence tests aimed at white subjects (Gould 1981). Divergent meanings can receive social uptake as long as they do not directly contradict these underlying values and expectations associated with a social institution.

In Chapter Three I talked about some of the ways in which persons gain value or feelings of self-worth, and I briefly referred to the notion of individual worth arising from our sense of other human beings as irreplaceable in a way nothing else is. In order to understand the potential implications of making oneself intelligible it is useful to consider what it means to treat human beings as replaceable rather than as unique individuals. When persons are treated as replaceable, Raymond Gaita suggests, it is because "their desires and projects are denied a certain content—the content that conditions our sense that persons are irreplaceable" (1991, 155); this is revealed in the meanings ascribed to their actions and practices in contrast to those ascribed to persons who are seen as irreplaceable. For example, Gaita describes the different feelings a slave owner has in response to the suicide of a slave and the suicide of a friend, which he suggests "bring with them different conceptions of human individuality" (1991, 155). The different responses arising from the same event are not only because one man is his friend but because of the different ways the two lives are thought to have meaning. By characterising the suicide of a slave using language which we would use to describe the euthanasia of an animal, rather than the
death of another human, the slave owner denies that the slave's life has the same content as that of his friend. When we do not see the lives of others as having meaning equivalent to that of our own lives then we have denied them the value we accord to other human beings on the basis of their uniqueness. In order to give credence to the projects and desires of others, we have to take those others seriously, something we can only do in the human context when we consider those persons to be irreplaceable. Where social institutions are unjust, for example, in the presence of systematic discrimination, or where no recognisable social institutions supportive of a person's choices exist, it may be difficult for members of some social groups to stand behind their choices if others are unable to see appropriate value and meaning in their identities, relationships and practices because they are not considered unique, irreplaceable human beings.

Taking responsibility for oneself in the care-taking sense I described in Chapter Four means standing behind the meaning of one's choices, relationships and identity. Standing behind something or standing for something requires the person to actively support the meanings attached to the relevant identity or practice; it is not enough to merely affirm one's commitment to a project. Actively supporting the meanings attached to social practices does not normally present a difficulty for members of privileged groups because social expectations support their shared understanding of the correct behaviour in any situation. Having social agreement about what actions constitute ethical behaviour normalises certain behaviours and social practices, so that persons may not have to provide any explanation for their actions because the meaningfulness is inferred from the fit between the action taken and what action is considered appropriate in the circumstances, according to the agreed social framework. For the privileged, doing what is right may not present a challenge precisely because their own inclinations mesh with social expectations,
which, in turn, facilitates their exercise of moral agency. In contrast, those who are
assigned to less privileged social groups may find that their projects, desires and
selves are taken less seriously by others, and that mainstream social expectations
about group members are detrimental to their exercise of moral agency. Where
institutions are unfair or unjust this may result in the misunderstanding or rejection
of identities, relationships and practices claimed by less privileged members of the
community. If social uptake is dependent upon one's behaviours and practices
matching expected responses in particular situations, it poses a particular problem for
those moral resisters whose behaviour is non-normative by making their attempts to
respond authentically unintelligible to others. I will consider this aspect of taking
responsibility by standing behind the meanings one ascribes to particular practices in
the next section.

**Morally right, socially wrong?**

Arguing that moral meaningfulness, and hence intelligibility, is contingent on
one's situation and community, in effect, one's moral luck, suggests that doing what
is right involves adherence to a particular moral code associated with a particular
way of being. Accordingly, making choices that are intelligible involves making
moral judgements based on settled expectations about what kinds of behaviours are
permissible to whom and in what situations. In other words, what is right is largely
contextual rather than resulting from some externally applied morality, such as
adherence to Kant's categorical imperative. In addition, because there has to be social
uptake for behaviour to be meaningful, for the 'right thing' to emerge from a
sequence of options available to the agent, the choice has to be meaningful in a larger
context than simply what appears to the agent to be the morally correct response; it
also has to be understandable in terms of socially normative behaviour. Difficulties
emerge because persons experiencing systematic discrimination may find that acting in accordance with settled expectations is contrary to their wellbeing, suggesting that conformity to normative expectations alone does not constitute a morally feasible position for them.

If doing what is right places persons in a morally indefensible position insofar as they can either act in accordance with expectations arising from inequitable social institutions, which are inimical to their own wellbeing, or they can act in accordance with their own moral convictions, which may not be supported by social uptake, then this creates a moral problem.\(^{184}\) Either they can act in ways that are morally right for them and socially wrong, or they can act in ways that are socially right but potentially complicit with their own oppression, which would be morally wrong; either course would leave the person in an untenable position. This suggests that the question has not been approached in the appropriate way. Is the problem one of failure of social uptake (meaningfulness), or failure to reach agreement with all members of the moral community as to what constitutes living a moral life?

The general moral problem of what is involved in acting well and living a moral life constitutes a complex philosophical question in itself, one about which there is considerable disagreement, and which I do not have the space to consider here in depth. The problem of 'doing the right thing' also brings with it a number of other conceptual issues, such as what is involved in living a good life. In addition, how we ask the question often implies assumptions about how it should be answered,\(^{184}\)

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\(^{184}\) As well as being inauthentic, conformity to social practices that are contrary to one's own wellbeing cannot be morally defensible if one does not subscribe to the normative meanings attached to those behaviours. I am thinking here of behaviours such as passing and not examples such as the subversion of the normative meanings attached to social identities or practices as the mothers of the disappeared did in Argentina, for example. Passing is inauthentic because it involves pretending to be something one is not and subscribing to meanings that may be contrary to thriving as a person, for example, if an Aboriginal person passes as white and embraces racist attitudes towards Indigenous Australians. In contrast, in drawing upon "the constraining societal norms of gender roles and motherhood" (McLaren 2004, 223), the mothers of the disappeared changed those gender norms, particularly the meaning of motherhood.
for example, by asking if the 'right thing' involves acting in accordance with settled expectations of what constitutes the good. However, Calhoun's (1999a, 84) suggestion of four principles that form the basis to living a morally exemplary life seem uncontroversial: affirming one's self-respect by claiming a place in the moral community, acting in accordance with mutually agreed rules, acting in accordance with a conception of the good, and cultivating a virtuous character. Calhoun (1999a, 84–85) describes these principles as the moral commitments an agent must bring to their actions; however, as moral lives are lived in the actual world where agreed-upon social practices and moral frameworks already exist, being virtuous may be regarded by others as conformity to the standards and concepts arising from existing social institutions and structures rather than, for example, acting in a way that is true to one's authentic desires. If doing good or doing what is right involves conformity to the moral practices of a community in which some members are treated unequally then this creates a conundrum for those members of the community and for anyone else who recognises their treatment as unjust. For some persons doing what is right in terms of living a life true to their own beliefs, values and desires might involve defiance of existing social institutions and resistance to normative values and social practices (Babbitt 1994, 13–14; Calhoun 1999a, 85–86). However, where social expectations conflict with the actions needed for persons to live a good life they may find it difficult to convince others that their choices have value and meaning.

Another issue in considering the intelligibility and moral defensibility of actions is whether or not it is always the outcomes that matter—whether we should be judging particular acts on their consequences rather than the attributes and attitudes brought to the situation by the agent. Purely consequentialist or instrumental accounts which consider the value of actions based solely on their instrumental outcomes miss something of the complexity of practices of responsibility (Walker
For example, one problem with judging actions based on their consequences or intended consequences is that quite often we have no intention of performing those acts before doing so, or we may intend quite different outcomes from those that occur, which is why Anthony Giddens (1984, 9–11) argues that, in terms of agency, the intentions people have matter less than their capacity to act. Babbitt's (1994, 13) analysis suggests that the context determines which outcomes matter and why, so the significance of the consequences may have more to do with social expectations than particular outcomes. Babbitt (1994, 13) illustrates her analysis with the example of Sethe in *Beloved*, whom we may judge to act rightly because we understand her actions within the context that it is a reasonable aspiration for African Americans to resist slavery, although such an understanding involves standards and concepts that differ from the time and place, specifically the belief that racism and slavery are wrong.

These complexities influence how we judge the appropriateness of one another's actions and have implications for the possibility of unintelligibility and moral failure. How complicated such judgements can be and how difficult it may be to judge whether or not some action is the right thing to do from the consequences alone can be seen from Sethe's example. Simplifying Sethe's actions into specific consequences, such as the death of her daughter, makes them not only less defensible but also less comprehensible. To consider her actions purely on the basis of their outcomes misses the point that Sethe acts on the basis of values that are incommensurate with those qualities and attribute assigned her by the institution of slavery. Judging others on whether or not they can defend the outcomes of their choices also makes any moral failure (in the sense of unintelligibility) a matter of individual responsibility rather than socially predetermined by their conformity or nonconformity to socially agreed standards. Card argues, on the contrary, that "taking
responsibility requires me only to try, not to succeed, because I can embrace the values I find in my relationships whether others recognise them or not" (1996, 150).

It is not clear if having social agreement about what constitutes an appropriate choice or behaviour in specific circumstances prevents the uptake of other meanings persons might want to attach to particular identities, relationships and practices. However, for persons attempting to inscribe new meanings onto identities, relationships and choices, the social consequences of standing behind what are often non-normative practices can be profoundly negative as the new meanings are resisted. Card has argued that "the need for social uptake in changing meanings suggests a certain moral problem in a society in which the existing meanings of (a social identity) are deeply negative" (1996, 149–50). In the context of systematic oppression doing the right thing may involve imposing meanings on relationships and practices which may not be recognised as meaningful by others; or it may involve laying claim to identities which have negative meanings associated with them. Rejecting new meanings, however, is not the same as disagreeing about the right response in a situation and it may be possible to have new meanings taken up, especially if they accord, to some extent, with social practices, while the proper response is still being debated. An example of this is the acceptance by the wider community that gay and lesbian relationships are meaningful in some undetermined way, while the debate continues about what kind of meanings should accrue to them and whether they should be considered meaningful in the same way as heterosexual relationships. This lack of uptake of meaningfulness is another indication of the problem mentioned in the previous section, that the content of some persons' lives is not taken as seriously as the content of others.

Another problem in justifying choices for members of less privileged social groups arises because members of some social groups are prevented from exercising
full moral agency, so that acts that stem from deeply held beliefs and values may seem to both the agent and others to be counter to their wellbeing if the behaviour is contrary to social expectations, particularly when the action or choice is at odds with what is considered paradigmatic behaviour for someone possessing that social identity at that time and place. Following one's authentic desires in these situations may result in actions which appear confused or self-contradictory to others, for example, Sethe's love for her children in *Beloved* expressed as a desire to see them dead rather than enslaved. The dilemma for persons in this situation lies in the fact that because moral norms may be detrimental to wellbeing, doing what is right may involve behaving in ways considered non-virtuous, and acts of rebellion against social conventions may appear to others to be immoral, or trivial if not taken seriously, rather than instances of standing behind a project.

Where social institutions do not support their wellbeing, for some persons doing what is right for them may appear instead as instances of acting wrongly, not only in terms of social norms, but also in terms of self-interest. This is the case whether the social group(s) involved reflect privilege or not, since such actions unsettle social expectations. In these situations, actions which arise directly from the characteristics of the individual and reflect the person's beliefs, values and desires, may appear to others as contrary to self-interest. For example, a slave owner who feels it is wrong to own slaves, or a white person opposed to segregation during the Apartheid era in South Africa, may be viewed as traitors to their social group rather than persons acting on conscience. As mentioned in Chapter Four, rebellion against restrictive or unjust social conventions can appear to be an act of socially and

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185 A slave escaping from slavery seems criminal or immoral to those for whom slavery is normative. The fact that we do not find anything strange about a slave's doing so today reflects our current understanding of the paradigm of slavery, one in which the institution of slavery is considered evil and wrong, and any action taken to alleviate the slave's condition is morally sanctioned.
psychologically damaging behaviour, and regarded as "deviant, outlaw, perverse, crazy, extremist" (Calhoun 1999a, 91) rather than morally commendable behaviour.

For persons in the situations described above, that is where systematic discrimination exists, doing what is right may involve taking a moral risk—as well perhaps as a political risk. It is a moral risk because such an action has to do with how a person understands themselves, and, therefore, how they can act and be understood (Babbitt 2001, 4). Actions and choices are measured against normative expectations of what constitutes good behaviour or the right approach and are considered good or bad depending on how well they measure up to established social practices; behaviours are, to some extent, codified and judged accordingly. If one has the bad moral luck to claim an identity or choose a relationship which attracts negative meanings, or to act in ways not in accordance with recognised moral norms, then it may be difficult to demonstrate to others that one is living a morally exemplary life, because the meanings one attaches to these identities, relationships and practices are not taken up by others. In claiming one is doing what is right when it appears one is acting contrary to normative values, one has to be able to justify identities, relationships and behaviours that conflict with social expectations about the kinds of identities, relationships and practices that are meaningful.

When what is considered normative behaviour contributes to systematic injustices, persons in these communities have to decide what is right by differentiating between social practices which are unjust and those which reflect truly virtuous behaviour. This is complicated for persons with multiple social identities, because what is right for members of one group may be construed as contrary to the interests and wellbeing of another social group. For example, rejecting attitudes and behaviour prevalent within one group, such as heterosexist attitudes among Hispanics or racism among lesbians (Lugones 1990a, 142), may be interpreted as an
attack upon the group and be met with opposition on this account. In standing behind multiple social identities, persons need to attain a critical positioning which achieves a balance between awareness of injustices perpetrated within each social group and discriminatory attitudes and behaviour directed at their group from outside. Attempting to do what is right may result in marginalisation within groups, but, as I suggested in Chapter Three, marginalisation may have a positive aspect if persons use it to attain a critical position on their multiple selves.

For those persons finding themselves members of less privileged groups there may be significant difficulty in rejecting practices that are inimical to their wellbeing. Incurring psychological damage from the internalisation of negative attitudes towards members of their group may prevent some persons from being able to see value in their own lives and relationships. Rejecting external devaluation of a social identity is not simply a matter of exchanging positive values for the negative values attached to the identity by others; if they are not to be demoralised by negative evaluations of their social identities, individuals have to begin to see themselves differently and to instantiate this difference by acting in ways that reject negative constructions of their identities. For example, Sethe needs to reject the devaluation of herself as a slave and see herself as a human being, but to do this she needs to act in ways which are commensurate with having full moral agency; in other words, she needs to develop the autonomy skills to be able to act as a moral agent before she can see herself as a subject not an object.

Because the right thing to do in any situation is socially and normatively framed, doing what is right may prove to be a complicated undertaking, and one that may result in negative outcomes for persons who have the moral luck to belong to a subordinate social group or to have multiple social group affiliations.
Integrity and moral agency

As mentioned in Chapter Four, being intelligible to others requires that a person's choices make sense in terms of their espoused values, beliefs and desires. For an action or choice to be meaningful, the person has to be choosing or acting in a way that is consistent with their authentic desires, rather than acting as they think they should or as others would have them act; in other words, they have to show integrity in their choices. Although there are a number of ways of thinking about integrity, the kind I am referring to here is the notion that persons show integrity when they act in a way which is consistent with their core values and principles. This is similar to Lynne McFall's (1987, 9) conception, but she suggests integrity is only shown where persons continue to uphold these commitments and principles in the face of challenges, and that they do so for the right reasons. It is tempting to think of this kind of integrity as acting in a way that is faithful to one's true self, whereas in actuality this notion of integrity does not require the notion of a 'true self', merely that there is coherence between one's actions and one's desires, attributes and values. Further, the notion of a true self is misleading, since it suggests a singular unchanging entity, whereas I have argued throughout this thesis for a conception of the self as multiple and changeable. Walker argues that given "multiple and sometimes competitive" responsibilities, "the self to which one would be true is not just given" but is "constructed and affirmed in intertwined histories of identity, relationship, and value" (2007, 125).

If actions are meaningful insofar as they arise out of a person's authentic desires what does this actually mean? If a person claims to believe in monogamy but has countless extra-marital affairs while married, then there is an obvious conflict between the person's asserted beliefs and values, and their actions, undermining the integrity of their beliefs. Alternatively, if someone asserts they are anti-racist and
stands up to racist bullying or teasing of others, they display integrity between their beliefs and their actions. In other words, for someone to show integrity there must be internal coherence between their choices, acts and practices, and their professed beliefs and values.\textsuperscript{186} A difficulty emerges in demonstrating integrity when someone's judgement of what is the right response in a situation is at odds with normative expectations of the good. For example, if there is a social practice that male relatives control a woman's reproductive capacity, a doctor who consents to assist a woman with contraception may have difficulty explaining her actions as the right thing to do given accepted ideas about how women and doctors should behave. Showing integrity by following one's own judgement when it is contrary to normative expectations may leave persons vulnerable to being judged as acting in ways which are either immoral or criminally wrong.

However, for a person to demonstrate integrity, the values they espouse must be both morally significant and reflective of a life in which their actions are meaningful. According to Walker, persons cannot show integrity or find meaning in a life committed to immoral or criminal pursuits, or in an unreflective life lived in accordance with a set routine, as an account of such a life would show no "intelligible moral personality" (2007, 111; italics in original). Similarly, a life of deliberate violence or one devoted solely to a person's own pleasure (McFall 1987, 9) is not a life of self-worth or moral significance.\textsuperscript{187} Other behaviours we sometimes think of as indicative of moral integrity may also be lacking, such as a life spent following social principles without subscribing to them, or a life in which a person is

\textsuperscript{186} McFall (1987, 7–8) describes several kinds of coherence that contribute to integrity: 1) consistency "within one's set of principle or commitments", 2) coherence between principle and action, insofar as they must correspond at some level of description, and 3) constraints between principle and how one is motivated to act.

\textsuperscript{187} A life of deliberate violence differs from the case of a moral agent whose life involves violence but as result of a commitment to a greater ideal, such as freedom from domination, and in McFall's opinion a life devoted to pleasure does not involve integrity because "there is no possibility of conflict—between pleasure and principle—in which integrity could be lost" (1987, 9).
responsive in terms of their moral duties without having any particular emotional
investment in them (McFall 1987, 16). To show integrity one must be able to
demonstrate a commitment to a life which has meaningful values; one must not only
be honest about what values one subscribes to, one's actions must be consistent with
regard to those values.

McFall (1987, 17) distinguishes between the set of moral principles and
commitments held by an individual that are partial to particular others and the set of
moral principles adhered to within a community that are characteristically impartial.
I am understanding moral integrity here as both local (Walker 2007, 125) and partial
and, above all, as a sign of one's reliability (2007, 122); on this understanding,
integrity is neither universal nor impartial, nor is it a matter of living in accordance
with abstract moral principles. In the previous chapter, I discussed Walker's notion of
one's dependability in terms of one's responsiveness to others and one's preparedness
in giving an account of one's response or failure to respond as indicative of moral
integrity. However, one's connections to others, the relationships one values, may
influence how reliable one is in terms of one's responsiveness. For example, Sethe
puts her relationship with her children above that of others and she is consistently
accountable in terms of how she acts towards her children, if we accept the premise
that a mother who loves her children would prefer to see them dead than enslaved.

This approach agrees with Calhoun's view of integrity as both a social and a
personal virtue which is premised on a view of the self as relational. Because
integrity has a social as well as a personal aspect, as well as making reference to our
own judgement we are obligated to give due consideration to what others judge the
right thing to do and to take others' doubts and contrary opinions seriously (Calhoun
1995, 260). Therefore, we need to give due consideration to the values endorsed by
the community before dissenting from those values, and consequently we may be
ambivalent about endorsing our own judgement over the judgement of others. For example, some religions have conservative factions whose rules about dress and behaviour are quite restrictive, and an adherent may reject these practices as outdated while still maintaining a belief in many of the values espoused by the religion. To have integrity means to understand that one's own viewpoint matters to others within a community of co-deliberators (Calhoun 1995, 258). However, adherence to one's own convictions when these conflict with social principles more commonly leads to others believing that one is acting without judgement, without due consideration for others, immorally, or criminally. One's co-deliberators may find it difficult to perceive one's actions and choices as arising from deeply held moral convictions when they conflict with community values. When social principles conflict with personally held commitments, moral integrity may consist in standing behind choices which others misconstrue or find incomprehensible.

I have argued in this section that for social uptake of meaning to occur a given community must agree to a moral framework which reflects which ways of being are allowed and, in turn, creates particular expectations about which social practices are acceptable. Other kinds of moral choices are not necessarily meaningful to others because they involve different expectations about what constitutes living a morally good life from those expectations originating in normative values. In some situations, however, we may have to acknowledge that we lack the understanding necessary to allow us to judge whether someone has shown integrity in acting in a particular way. For example, it may be difficult to reconcile our notion of the practices and values of motherhood with killing one's child. However, if, instead, we acknowledge that Sethe has access to experiences that are denied to us, which make her actions and behaviours meaningful, such as the knowledge of what it is like to be denied subjectivity and to live life as an object or piece of property, we may be able
to give credence to her actions as morally deliberated choices and practices that are nonetheless unintelligible to us. Judging whether someone has acted for the good might require us to acknowledge the limits of our own comprehension and that there may exist other ways of understanding. In summary, behaviours or social practices which do not conform to normative expectations may be (mis)interpreted as being contrary, rebellious, or even immoral rather than an expression of genuinely held values. The agent then runs the risk that others do not recognise their actions as meaningful, making it difficult for them to make themselves intelligible to others. If moral resisters are more likely than other members of the moral community to have their actions misunderstood or misinterpreted, then the attempt to make themselves intelligible may involve moral risk taking.

**Moral risk taking**

In the rest of the chapter I address the problem that moral risk taking creates for the possibility of making oneself understood by examining in more detail what constitutes a moral risk, what taking a moral risk involves, and why moral risk taking is important for those suffering systematic oppression. Firstly, moral risk taking is not political risk taking, although it can involve actions which involve political risk. Political risk refers to actions which can result in political, economic and even physical harms, such as the loss of employment, imprisonment, torture, or loss of life. For example, taking part in a political protest about the treatment of members of one's group can entail verbal and physical violence and result in arrest or assault by authorities. Although political risk taking can accompany moral risk taking, it is not necessary to be at political risk to be vulnerable to moral risk taking.

As I said in the introduction to this chapter, moral risk taking relates to the risk that if the meanings one stands behind are not socially validated, then one may
not see oneself as possessing self-worth, and, as a consequence, lack the expectations appropriate to a person who sees themselves as having value (Babbitt 2001, 4). Although choices involving a moral risk may also involve a political risk, Babbitt argues that they differ because moral risk taking is about how an agent sees themselves, how they understand who they are and make sense of their own behaviour, and how they are understood by others. Moral risk occurs when someone stands behind a relationship or a behaviour that is capable of being misunderstood due to its nonconformity with the normative values of the person's society, so that they run the risk that their actions will not be understood or accepted by others.

An individual is potentially placed at moral risk in one of two different situations. The first situation occurs when the ethical nature of a person's actions and choices is considered questionable, because they have attached non-normative meanings to an identity, relationship or social practice. Although, in theory, this can occur in response to anyone's choices, in practice it is mainly members of less privileged groups who challenge normative values. In the second situation, members of some groups are denied certain kinds of moral agency, since they are believed to lack the capacity to exercise it. As we have already seen, this commonly occurs in hierarchical societies where expectations generated by social norms function as a means of constraining or disempowering certain individuals from certain choices and actions. When individuals appear to demonstrate these kinds of diminished agency their choices and practices are re-interpreted to satisfy expectations about their moral capacities. Although I will be discussing these ways of interpreting moral risk taking separately—beginning with the difficulties arising for the oppressed with regard to standard meanings attached to social identities, relationships and practices—in practice they are interrelated. Social institutions generate both standard meanings and social expectations based on normative values, and in a hierarchical society both may
be detrimental to members of out-groups demonstrating moral agency and standing behind what is important to them.

Normalisation of certain social practices

To make sense of one's actions, the relationships and practices one chooses to stand behind must have meanings which are morally defensible. If one's actions only acquire meaning(fulness) through being defended against criticism by others, then it follows that one's actions and choices and identity only acquire meaning when they are made intelligible to others, so that "even the most private parts of our lives require a public justification, where this means shared intelligibility" (Walker 2007, 121). This is not a particularly contentious claim, since there is no human activity which is not dependent on social uptake for meaning. Just as artistic activities or artefacts assume an audience which will negotiate meaning with the artist, all human activities require an(other) to engage with for meaning to emerge. Moral risk taking sets the agent up to be vulnerable, not only to rejection by others but to confusion as to whether his or her own choices are ethical and meaningful.

Social institutions normalise certain relationships, and are productive of standards and practices which are then taken for granted and do not usually require additional explanations to be comprehensible to others. For example, in most cultures if a person says they are getting married this suggests to others the practices attached to the activity and, because the meanings are standard, the person does not have to unpack the meanings attached to the institution of marriage in that society. The standard meanings attached to normative practices can be distinguished from the alternative meanings attached to social identities and practices that members of out-groups choose to stand behind because, unlike alternative meanings, they do not require further explanation. In addition, because standard meanings are reflective of
social institutions, where these are hierarchical such alternative meanings may be negative or critical, particularly with regard to the social identities and practices of members of out-groups.

If meaningful actions and choices consist of morally defensible social practices, what makes behaviour lose meaning for others? Two kinds of behaviours are associated with moral risk in terms of the meanings being (mis)understood by others: firstly, behaviours which are novel and therefore lack appropriate social institutions to support them, and secondly, behaviours whose meanings apparently deviate from normative values. Where social institutions either do not exist or have not developed enough to provide guidelines on what behaviours are acceptable, then it is difficult to justify one's choices because there is no standard of comparison. This is especially true of novel social behaviours or activities, such as the use of modern reproductive technologies which have produced new forms of reproductive behaviour without corresponding institutional support in the form of accepted social practice, for example, sperm donors, surrogate pregnancies, and in vitro fertilization. The second kind of behaviours that risk unintelligibility because the meanings that come with them may be unclear to others are those that are non-normative.

Normative meanings that accrue to social practices, for example, a heterosexual couple having a child, do not need to be explained to others, as these come packaged, part and parcel with the social institution, in this case the institution of heterosexual marriage or cohabitation. In contrast, a single woman who makes the same decision may have her capacity to be a parent questioned and it may be assumed that a single woman having her own child is both morally irresponsible and

188 Typically, a heterosexual couple that chooses to have children does not have to defend their choice, but a heterosexual couple in which both suffer disabilities, for instance, may find they do have to explain their decision to others. Parenthood as a social institution is invested with complex meanings, which are difficult for the non-normative family to negotiate. There may exist an expectation that parents who do not fit the social institution of the heterosexual, nuclear family will fail to succeed as parents and the children of such parents are at risk of harm.

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reprehensible, since social expectations attached to being a single mother include sexual promiscuity and welfare dependency, where such dependency is seen as a kind of welfare cheating. Where social behaviours are novel or non-normative, it may be difficult to defend choices because there is no social institution with acceptable practices to corroborate that the behaviour is appropriate.

As well as a potential political risk, claiming alternative meanings for non-normative or novel practices, identities and relationships therefore poses a considerable moral risk, the risk that the choices made will be rejected as not meaningful or not morally defensible. In addition, the negative meanings assigned to the identities, relationships and choices of members of out-groups by dominant discourses may prove difficult for those members to challenge because these meanings are supported by the normative values and powerful social institutions of the in-group. Whether individuals are able to stand behind their choices is to a large extent dependent upon moral luck, which I have referred to above and will now consider in more detail.

The role of moral luck

Card argues that there is a degree of moral luck involved not only in whether we find ourselves being held responsible, that is, in the situations in which we find ourselves, but also in our ability to take responsibility for ourselves and our actions, that is, in our capacity to respond. As Card puts it:

There is luck involved in the validation requisite to successfully creating meanings. Insofar as taking responsibility for ourselves and our character involves imposing meanings on our lives that we can stand behind, that luck becomes a kind of moral luck (1996, 150–51).

What makes it moral good luck and not simply good luck is that a moral ideal exists,
in this case the ideal of what human moral lives should be, what a good life is and what is involved in living a morally exemplary life. Since living one's life well and doing the right thing as a moral resister involves making choices that may appear bad or wrong in the light of normative expectations one has to be able to provide a moral context in which the choices are understandable. As Card demonstrates, and I have already discussed, having the freedom to act on meanings that one can stand behind relies, to some extent, on social uptake, and without the necessity for social uptake there would be no moral risk. However, this does not mean that individuals should wait for optimum social conditions before embracing identities and choices that are meaningful, as the example of Sethe demonstrates.

If moral luck is involved in taking responsibility for one's choices then members of oppressed groups have the bad moral luck to be born into social groups that cannot lay claim to category privilege. Membership of less privileged social group(s) does not necessarily mean that the meanings one chooses to stand behind are not recognised by others, but in many cases the meanings associated with the identities and actions of the oppressed are negative; taking responsibility for them thus involves both resisting dominant understandings and imposing new meanings on relationships and practices that the oppressed are able to stand behind. Card's example of taking responsibility for oneself, one's relationships and one's choices as a lesbian shows how difficult it is for members of subordinate groups to claim particular social identities as their own and to inscribe their own meanings on identities and practices that have already been tagged negatively, often in stereotypical ways, in hierarchical societies. There is a profound difference for persons in these circumstances between claiming positive attributes for a social identity within a group of similarly identified individuals and claiming the same identity in the wider community.
Although moral luck is not synonymous with being in a privileged group, privilege ensures a certain amount of good luck, since one may be able to stand behind non-normative values without social penalty.¹⁸⁹ A man with the good luck to be born white and middle-class may find it easier to claim a gay identity and relationship, and to retain the advantages of sex, race and class than if he were working-class or black. However, retaining race and class privilege does not guarantee that the meanings he seeks to impose on his identity and his relationships are taken up by others. For example, his partner may not be invited to social events by his employer. It could be said that privilege is a kind of moral luck, since there is luck in being born into the group that benefits from what is considered normative. Simply put, having the good moral luck to be born into a privileged group makes it easier to live a life which accords with social expectations about one's behaviour since there are fewer restrictions on one's behaviour in the first place. One meaning of privilege is exemption from the law so that having privilege means one has immunity from specific constraints (Tirrell 1993, 17). For example, Tirrell points out that in most Western countries boys and men are exempt from the general prohibition against nudity, being able, in certain situations, to appear in public without upper-body covering.

Where a social norm has changed over time, the meanings attached to the behaviour it controls undergo a corresponding change; an example of this is changing attitudes toward violence against women. Where violence towards women was once considered normative and morally defensible, it is now considered socially aberrant and unethical behaviour, and has lost its meaning as a permissible part of

¹⁸⁹ Conversely, sometimes the aspirations of the oppressed can appear to be facilitated by belonging to a social group that is discriminated against; for Indigenous Australians aspiring to be an elite sportsperson is an attainable goal and channelling their ambitions into sport will be treated as appropriate by white and black alike. However, I would argue that this is not good luck but, perversely, a positive outcome of having the bad moral luck to be born an Indigenous Australian in the twenty-first century.
marriage, for example. It is probably more accurate to describe the meaning attached
to the behaviour as changing rather than being lost since what was once normative
and defensible on these grounds is now considered unethical, as well as criminal.
What changed to make the meaning of the practice change were the values that were
associated with the practice. Therefore, in some cases, the values we ascribe to might
need to change before meanings can change.

Sonny in *Dog Day Afternoon* is a good example of someone who has the
moral bad luck to try to make meaningful his choicess, his relationship and his
identity in light of a value system which either makes his choices meaningless or
ascribes negative meanings to them. Given the non-normativity of his choices,
insofar as he is in a relationship with a transgendered person, he takes a moral risk
that the meanings he attaches to his practices will not be taken up others. If the
meanings he attaches to the relationship are not taken up, Sonny runs the risk that he
will not see himself as someone with self-worth and, as Babbitt suggests, he may
lack the kind of expectations possessed by someone with appropriate self-esteem.
One explanation for Sonny's behaviour is that he has internalised the normative view
of his relationship as socially transgressive and, lacking appropriate self-worth, is
prevented from developing his own positive meanings. His behaviour suggests he
doubts whether he is doing the right thing, and this goes some way towards
explaining his inability to stand behind the relationship and his own actions in a
manner that is convincing, since it is not possible to convey a practice or relationship
as meaningful if one does not see appropriate value in it.

In the absence of appropriate social institutions and structures to provide
rules which make sense of his actions, Sonny may be unable to make moral choices
that are meaningful, because it is not clear what the right thing to do is in the
situation. As I mentioned in Chapter Four in discussing the Heinz dilemma, in some
situations doing what is right may depend upon one's responsiveness to others and concern for the relationship rather than following institutional rules, such as the one that says stealing is wrong. I suggest the film *Dog Day Afternoon* does not attempt to address the main difficulty for Sonny, which is how he can convey the motivations that lie behind his actions. His apparent dilemma involves robbing a bank, but his real problem lies in explaining why he acts as he does when his choices are all but incomprehensible to others in a society in which there is no social uptake of his relationship with his transgendered partner.

The example of Sonny suggests that standing behind relationships and practices that do not have established social structures and rules risks moral failure because the moral accounts given are potentially unintelligible to others. In order to take responsibility for choices, the oppressed may have to attach new meanings to identities, relationships and practices that may not be taken up by others, thereby potentially placing them in situations of moral risk. Attempting to make oneself intelligible in these circumstances may, therefore, involve an inherent moral risk that one's actions and choices will be meaningless to others, thereby undermining one's own sense of oneself as having moral worth.

**Standard social expectations make certain kinds of agency improbable**

Both Card (1996) and Calhoun (1999a) discuss the kind of moral risk I have explained above, but Babbitt identifies a further way in which moral risk can arise, that is, where the expectations generated by social rules render the agency of the individual dubious with regard to some specific action. The first kind of moral risk, standing behind relationships or behaviours for which there are no socially established and approved institutions, makes an individual vulnerable to being misunderstood. Sonny in *Dog Day Afternoon* has difficulty explaining his
commitment to a relationship with a transgendered man, since both the transgender identity and being in a relationship with a transgendered person are normatively transgressive at the time the movie was made. The second kind of moral risk is different, in that the social expectations generated by norms in hierarchical societies are frequently a means of constraining or disempowering certain individuals from certain actions.

In inequitable or unjust societies, members of some groups, or more specifically, individuals with some social identities, are not expected to demonstrate certain kinds of moral agency because they are believed to be incapable of doing so. An example of this can be seen in Morrissey's (2003) research on women who kill. Morrissey discovered that legal and media narratives of the murders and court cases placed the blame for the women's actions with anyone but the women themselves. It seems that the normative expectations that women nurture and care for others made it difficult, if not impossible, to accept that women are capable of reasoning and acting in a manner to bring about another's death intentionally. Even where individual women admitted to planning and carrying out their actions, the police, legal representatives and media insisted on following narratives which constructed the women's stories in ways that denied them agency. Rather than acting violently of their own choice—whether it was as self-defence in response to provocation, as Aileen Wuornos claimed, or as willing accomplices or instigators of violence—the women were portrayed as either mad, as victims, as under the control of men, or, where there was an element of sexual abuse, as "fulfilling the needs of their men" (Morrissey 2003, 154). It seems that crediting women with the moral agency

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190 Aileen Wuornos killed seven men in Florida from 1989–1990 during the time she worked as a prostitute. Although she did not deny the killings, she claimed they were done in self-defence when the men raped or attempted to rape her (Muraskin 2004, vii). See Shipley and Arrigo (2004, Chapter 8) for a more detailed biography.
involved in reasoning through the choice and then killing another human being conflicted too radically with established expectations about female behaviour, and hence someone else had to be credited or blamed.

So ingrained is the connection between group identity and social expectations and moral agency that when the actions of a member of a group do not accord with normative expectations, these actions will be interpreted in ways that do not conflict with normative expectations. Certain social identities, it becomes clear, are associated with normative expectations that, when flouted, result not in a reconsideration of those expectations but a re-evaluation of the person's social identity. If the social identity, that is, 'woman', is perceived as nurturing and non-violent, then individuals who exhibit violent behaviour are either acting in accordance with someone else's will or else they are no longer women but, like Aileen Wuornos, monsters. This suggests that an important barrier to women being seen as full persons is that women are frequently denied credit for the ability to reason morally or to take any action on their own that does not coincide with what is considered normative, a denial that is maintained even in the face of individual women demonstrating these capacities.

Sethe in *Beloved* is suggested by Babbitt as another example of the way normative expectations can make certain kinds of moral agency implausible. Sethe shows love for her children in the only way she can, by killing them so that they do not have to suffer a life of slavery. As both she and her children are considered property not people, objects not subjects, she is not supposed to have maternal feelings for her children. Not only are such feelings undesirable from the point of view of the slave owners, they are also a possible source of pain for Sethe herself. As a piece of property she is not expected to show any agency at all, much less to determine a way for herself and her children to escape slavery. As a slave there are
no expectations that Sethe will act for herself, much less see herself as a person. Any action as a subject, as a person, is in Sethe's case at odds with social expectations. Her actions are unintelligible to anyone who cannot understand why she feels impelled to act in accordance with her own moral conviction that she and her children are entitled to live as subjects.

The expectation that persons will not perform any acts of their own volition or that persons will not perform certain acts because of who they are makes it morally risky (in addition to any other risk the agent incurs) to perform these acts. Action which is at odds with social expectations of the kind of agency persons are supposed to show may make the action incomprehensible to others because it conflicts with \textit{a priori} assumptions held by others. The person's actions will either be misunderstood (as in Sethe's case), or considered evidence of insanity, or the impetus to act will be credited to others (as in the case of some women killers); in any case, any attempt at explanation will encounter difficulties because such actions confound social expectations. This occurs even within oppressed groups. For example, when Sethe explains that she killed her children to save them from slavery because she loved them and wanted to protect them, her explanation is rejected by her own community because she does not accept slavery's presumption that she is not a person and therefore should reduce her own expectations, as her friend Paul D has done.\footnote{I take the distinction between their expectations from Babbitt (1994, 5; 2001, xi). Sethe says to her friend Paul D., “I did it. I got us all out ... Up till then it was the only thing I ever did on my own”; in contrast Paul D. has learnt as a slave that "you protected yourself and loved small. Picked the tiniest stars out of the sky to own" (Morrison 2006, 188–89).}

\textbf{Explanations and the explanatory burden}

I mentioned above that social expectations might be such that group members
occupy particularly rigid stereotypes of identity and social role, or some roles and identities might have excessively negative attributes and characterisations, making it difficult for the oppressed to see themselves as having the necessary capacities to live full moral lives. I have also described how social expectations might also exist such that some members are unable to achieve any significant social goal. As a result, claiming anything other than stereotypical roles and identities requires these group members to make explanations about their identities and choices, which for others are unnecessary. It could be said that a conflict exists between the way some group members construct themselves to resist stereotypical identities and roles, and the expectations held about them by others. If no conflict existed between community expectations and the roles and identities assumed by some group members then there would be no demand for explanation. Where a conflict exists it generates the expectation that there will be some explanation, for example, as mentioned earlier, when a woman intentionally kills another human being it is expected there will be some reason for her behaviour that is not dependent on the woman's own agency.

Where a story produces surprise as a result of expectations held about particular group members then it creates what Babbitt (2001, 6–8) calls an "explanatory burden" on the individual involved. The burden is generated, Babbitt suggests, because not only does the individual have to explain their own actions; in addition, they have to explain why they have not met the expectations of others. Babbitt (2001, 7) gives the example of a fellow female graduate student whose professor was surprised by the quality of her work; the surprise he felt arose out of his expectations for her. The significance, Babbitt suggests, lies in the burden placed on the graduate student by the professor's expectations. To answer his surprise the

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192 This does not mean that one dispenses altogether with the need for explanations, just that we would no longer need these kinds of explanations.
student would have to explain to him that his surprise at her work arose from his low expectations of black students. Notice that although the professor is the one whose covert racist sensibilities have resulted in his low expectations and subsequent surprise, it is up to the student herself to counter his surprise.

The demand for explanation is created in these situations because social expectations are such that a particular expression of agency is deemed implausible (Babbitt 2001). The woman who kills, the slave who claims subjectivity, the black female student who excels academically, all three act in ways surprising to others because they are not considered to have the capacities to undertake these actions, and, consequently, the choices they have made may not be understood by others. Normative values drive social expectations about individual subjectivity, moral capability and agency, and to act in a way contrary to these expectations creates an anomalous situation which requires explanation. In these circumstances neither giving an explanation nor refusing to do so is sufficient to lift the burden of explanation from the individual, because only the transformation of social expectations, making that particular expression of agency more plausible, would lift the burden of explanation.

Epistemological issues

Another facet of the explanatory burden helps reveal the way in which the unintelligibility of others is built in to explanatory frameworks facilitating the intelligibility of the privileged. In previous chapters I discussed the way in which privilege constructs itself by deliberate omissions and exclusions (of the lives of and injustices towards others). Consequently, in order for the meaning of their actions to become clear, it falls on those who belong to less privileged group(s) to uncover the interpretative context within which both the explanation (and the requirement for the
explanation) becomes intelligible, for example, to reveal the presence of racism. This kind of burden arises because the person is denied both a certain content to their kind of moral agency, and, when the established explanatory frameworks available do not allow a person to make sense of their actions, because they hold values that are at odds with the normative expectations of the society. The explanatory burden arises here because to make sense of what an agent does requires access to ways of viewing the world which may be inaccessible to others due to the explanatory framework.\footnote{Remembering that the slave's actions to escape slavery, which appeared inexplicable to someone of that time who agreed with slavery, now appear reasonable and require no explanation because racism and slavery are currently considered morally wrong.}

To clarify this, consider the example Babbitt (2001, 6–8) gives from Miriam Tlali's novel, *Between Two Worlds*, of a black woman called Muriel working in an otherwise all-white office in Apartheid South Africa. In South Africa at this time Muriel could be considered fortunate in having employment and being treated well by her employer; however, because this is occurring during the Apartheid years Muriel is constantly reminded that her black skin sets her apart from her co-workers, from the separate washroom for her use, to the special mug set aside for her so it will not be accidentally used by any of the white employees. Part of Muriel's role is to make the morning coffee, but on one occasion one of her white co-workers makes the coffee for her and brings it to her at her desk. A white woman bringing a black woman coffee, that is, performing a menial task, is unusual enough that it would seem to warrant Muriel's extraordinary gratitude. But this expectation, that Muriel should show extraordinary gratitude to her white co-worker for a courtesy that would be unremarkable if it was directed towards any of her white colleagues, is itself onerous. In order to understand why this is so requires Muriel to unpack the context for her co-workers; Muriel has to uncover the racism inherent in the expectation that
she should be grateful for the white woman's kindness, and this places a burden of explanation on Muriel. If she does not express excessive gratitude, she has to explain why she does not: that the simple courtesy of bringing coffee is something people do for one another that should not merit additional thanks but requires additional thanks in this context because it is a white woman doing it for a black woman in a racist society. Muriel is burdened by the expectation of gratitude and burdened by having to explain why this is so; the onus is on Muriel to uncover the context of racism just as it was on Toni Morrison to uncover the context in the interview mentioned in the previous chapter. To make the onus rest on those less privileged to uncover contexts of discrimination is to leave them doubly mistreated.

**Moral resisters and unintelligibility that is not moral failure**

Babbitt has argued against the notion that unintelligibility automatically represents an instance of moral failure, particularly in the case of moral resisters. Earlier in the chapter I suggested that a certain kind of unintelligibility ensues when a person's response to a situation demonstrates the capacity for a certain kind of moral understanding, an epistemic awareness of a situation which is not accessible to others because social expectations generate different kinds of narratives which do not cohere with how that person understands themselves. For example, there is no socially sanctioned narrative of motherhood that understands killing one's children as an act of love, so that Sethe's claim to having the capacity for moral deliberation and the ability to choose what is best for her children is impenetrable to those who read her behaviour in the light of a cultural, historical narrative of how motherly love should be demonstrated. In fact there is no mainstream narrative of a black slave possessing the capacity for moral deliberation let alone exhibiting motherly love, so Sethe's actions and explanation also conflict with cultural narratives of how slaves...
should act. It could be said that Sethe cannot tell her story because the norms and values relied upon to make sense of the story are those Sethe is most concerned to resist (Babbitt 2001, 137). In order to understand Sethe's story in a different way, the conceptual framework within which the story is given meaning has to undergo change. In order to understand Sethe's story as one of motherhood and love, others have to see Sethe as a person not an object, and moreover a person who has a certain moral capacity and whose actions have meaning commensurate with being the actions of a moral equal (Babbitt 1994, 13).

It follows that what Sethe and others are doing in making claims to knowledge that conflict with accepted expectations is making claims to a kind of power. Making oneself intelligible to others constitutes an act of resistance not simply because to be heard one must have power—the power to ensure one's credibility—but also because for the oppressed to express access to non-privileged knowledges is to reject the norms and values which systematically devalue them as human beings and to lay claim to a personhood equal to that of the privileged. Established norms and values do not just determine expectations about what we can do; they also dictate how much credibility is given by others to the stories we tell. The result is that some persons' accounts are less likely to be heard and considered meaningful in the way the person giving the account intended. As the examples of Sethe and Aileen Wuornos suggest, actual outcomes for persons may be highly negative when the behaviour cannot be accommodated within the normative interpretive framework. Being unintelligible within the moral explanatory framework may result in ostracism, prison or death.

However, it appears that we sometimes recognise behaviour in others as principled and praiseworthy even when the behaviour is at odds with normative values and social expectations, and therefore would normally constitute moral failure.
in its unintelligibility. When persons act to instantiate a view of themselves that they
do not yet see acknowledged by others, they make claims to qualities not normally
associated with members of that social group. In some cases, like Sethe, where
persons strive to act in ways that they are not seen as capable of, it suggests these
persons have developed evaluative self-respect sufficient to see themselves as
competent moral agents even without external acknowledgement of their moral
agency. While it is difficult to say whether it is the claims they make or their right to
make such claims that is accepted, by acting in ways which defy expectations for
members of their social group they generate expectations for themselves and other
members of their group about what kinds of behaviour are possible. It is these kinds
of situations, where agents exercise certain kinds of moral agency that are not seen as
accessible to them, or demonstrate an awareness of themselves as being equal
members of the moral community in defiance of the devaluation of their social
identities, that any unintelligibility generated by their stories is countered by an
understanding that these lives are morally significant. Indeed, unintelligibility arising
in these situations may reveal that the accounts given are morally significant. What is
important about the kind of moral accounts given is that those attending recognise
the integrity and authenticity of the person providing an account of themselves, even
if those attending cannot fully understand the reasons given nor are able to explain
why the person has shown integrity in their behaviour and choices. Consequently,
being a moral resister may entail a certain amount of unintelligibility, since the
person's actions are contrary to normative practices and social expectations.

Conclusion

Given the conditions necessary for a person to act in a way that is meaningful
to others, it is unsurprising that where comprehension is not facilitated by
membership of privileged social group(s) persons may struggle to make themselves, their choices and actions, intelligible to others. To be intelligible to others one must be able to justify one's actions within a shared moral framework, but social institutions which are exclusionary and unjust do not produce moral communities in which everyone can have a say. The social expectations generated by normative values create both a major barrier to the exercise of moral agency as well as an impediment to understanding, and if taking responsibility for one's identity and actions involves making oneself intelligible to others, then members of oppressed social group(s) may be significantly disadvantaged by living lives frequently at odds with settled expectations. If the social expectations and norms of the community function to exclude some group members and deny them full moral agency, then making themselves intelligible becomes a difficult task. When the given community only allows for some voices to be heard, it is difficult to see how those who are excluded can see themselves as persons whose viewpoint matters. Acting in ways that are non-standard and engaging in non-normative practices may make it impossible to convey the meaning of one's actions to others successfully, but this does not make these actions meaningless; choosing to act in ways that challenge social norms or values is meaningful in itself, independent of social uptake. Acting in accordance with non-normative values defies others to be open to alternative understandings, rather than simply dismissing one's behaviour as meaningless, immoral, or crazy. These kinds of moral choices still demonstrate integrity since they represent authentically held desires, but they may be difficult to explain to others without a shared explanatory framework. In the final chapter I will look at some examples of these kinds of moral choices by examining a number of moral accounts in which the protagonist is portrayed as a moral resister and explain why I believe these demonstrate steps towards the goal of being intelligible to others. In doing so I
will revisit Babbitt's argument that failure to be understood does not necessarily indicate moral failure, since it is sometimes necessary to first act in ways appropriate to the kind of person one wants to be in order to become that person, and hence partial intelligibility may be all that is achievable.
6. Transformations

Introduction

In previous chapters, I suggested that both the categorisation and description of membership of social groups may be implicated in undermining a person's ability to develop competencies necessary for moral agency and, consequently, in their reduced capacity for acting. Further, I argued that there are resistance possibilities involved in persons taking responsibility for their identities, relationships and practices by making these intelligible to others, particularly where the person's actions are subject to stereotyping by mainstream understandings. In this chapter, I will suggest that insisting on the meaningfulness of non-normative social identities and practices can be understood as a means of resistance, particularly when this involves reinventing stereotypical depictions of non-normative social identities. A major difficulty in societies that treat some members unfairly is for those persons to explain themselves in the absence of an explanatory framework within which their actions are meaningful and intelligible to others. The reason this is so, I have suggested, is because these persons value identities, relationships and practices that are often contrary to what is considered normative. Insisting on the significance of non-normative behaviours and values requires taking a moral risk and investing them with a meaningfulness that may not always be recognised by others, hence the potential for unintelligibility. However, before persons can challenge constraining normative behaviour and social identities, they have to be seen as equal members of the moral community. If they are not respected as equals they may suffer from epistemic prejudice in the credibility economy as a result of their social identities, as Fricker (2007) contends.
If some persons lack credibility in the eyes of others because the content of their lives is not meaningful in the same way as the content of other persons' lives, as Gaita (1991) suggests, then what is needed is a space in which the content of their lives, even if it is not fully understood, is recognised by others as meaningful. To resist the demoralising expectations of others, including other group members, persons belonging to subordinated groups need to develop feelings of self-worth, and they can only do this when their moral lives are accorded the same respect as those of members of privileged social groups. I argue that this self-valuing is only possible when they cross over the boundaries between the fixed social categories of oppression and inhabit the spaces in-between. I suggest that such an activity, undertaken by the individual at the level of self-transformation by re-imagining themselves as other than what they currently are, is only effective if it seeks to change negative and stereotypical social identities.

**Meaningfulness and explanatory frameworks**

We derive meaning from events around us by interpreting those events in the light of particular values, and what is considered salient is a matter of perspective insofar as it depends upon "how the world appears from, to the narrator now, in the light of her, his, or its own particular interests, needs, desires, and capacities" (Scheman 2011, 196). In this way we make connections between events and personages to bring sense to what is represented (Nelson 2001a, 14), and the connections we make and the events and personages we consider salient reflect our explanatory frameworks. This does not mean that whatever meaning we individually impart to an identity, event or experience will be understood or accepted by others, since discourse and meaning are subject to the same entrenched power relationships as our other social interactions and institutions. Indeed, Naomi Scheman (2011, 196)
contends that the subordinated and marginalised have to bring their perspective into line with the privileged view from nowhere in order for their accounts to be taken seriously.

That the meaning we instantiate is dependent on the paradigm through which we interpret the world is evident in an example given by Laub (1992, 59–60) of the testimony of a prisoner from a concentration camp where the inmates resisted and blew up a crematorium. According to historical sources only one chimney was blown up, but the female survivor testified to seeing four chimneys in flames. From the viewpoint of the prevailing historical paradigm the woman's account seems either exaggerated, false or, at best, inaccurate; however, it may be possible to reinterpret the woman's account by challenging the validity of the interpretive framework of Nazi omnipotence and indestructibility. As Laub points out (1992, 60) if, instead, we consider the woman's testimony as accurate then we can understand that by testifying to armed revolt in Auschwitz she is testifying to the "breakage of a framework", one in which the Nazi's are unassailable and the camp inmates are without agency or choice. In Oliver's words, "she bears witness to something that in itself cannot be seen, the conditions of possibility of Jewish resistance and survival" (2001, 16).

One way in which the credibility of the prevailing explanatory framework may be challenged is to re-tell the narrative of the events in such a way as to make visible the morally relevant details master narratives have suppressed, a process Nelson terms telling a counterstory. A counterstory, as Nelson defines it, is one that "resists an oppressive identity and attempts to replace it with one that commands respect" (2001b, 50), where identity refers to the interaction between "a person's self-conception" and how others conceive them (2001a, 6). As already discussed in Chapter Two, in inequitable societies, the social identities created by identity power

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194 This example is used by Oliver (2001, 1).
tend to be constrictive and one-dimensional, and counterstories seek to replace these stereotypical depictions by uncovering the prejudiced and misleading assumptions in which they are grounded. It will be seen that counterstories necessarily involve "counter-language", as defined by hooks (1991, 150), and which I mentioned in Chapter Three, since they involve ways of speaking that may originate in the oppressor's tongue but that are changed by the experience of oppression.

Pratt's (1984) autobiographical story, by uncovering the oppression of African Americans which made her own white middle-class privilege possible, can be thought of as a literal counterstory to the (master) narrative of family history told her by her father. Pratt's story operates on several levels, since it is also sensitive to the kind of subjective complexity described by the notion of the multiple self and to the ways in which the construction of social institutions and practices privilege some social identities at the expense of others. Pratt's account reflects her changing sense of self over the course of her life and how her different selves experience the world in terms of both privilege and/or oppression. As a woman, a lesbian and an adherent of the Jewish faith she is formed by experiences of oppression, whereas as a middle-class white woman she is constructed by class and race privilege. However, this description of her various selves as separate unities simplifies the way in which multiple identities function, as well as presenting an overly simplistic description of the interplay between oppressed and privileged identities. For example, it seems wrong to say she is oppressed as a Jewish lesbian when she experiences class and race privilege. However, the privileging and oppression of some identities does not cancel out others: it is not a zero sum game; the interaction of social identities is, rather, a complex relationship that depends upon both the time and place in which those identities are manifested. It is the process of identifying these intersections of privilege and oppression at different times and places that makes Pratt's
autobiographical story more than simply one woman's story.

The complex interplay between the various privileged and oppressed social identities that Pratt possesses brings depth and texture to her analysis of how exclusions are not only productive of privilege; they also contribute to defining her as a person. Scheman (2011, 196) has described this ability to "recognise, articulate and effectively communicate how the world appears from one's particular location" as a kind of "perceptual autonomy", and she argues that having the capacity to give one's own situated point of view is part of developing autonomy skills as well as being central to autonomous narration. Consequently, the ability to make their situated standpoint intelligible to others through the moral accounts they give becomes a way for members of subjugated groups to demonstrate their competency as moral agents, and hence may be useful in establishing their moral equivalence with persons belonging to privileged groups.¹⁹⁵

As de Lauretis has argued, and as I discussed in Chapter Three, there are social and discursive spaces that are empirical and metaphysical borderlands, where normative and non-normative are potentially juxtaposed and where contiguous and dominant paradigms can be challenged and, therefore, where new meaning may emerge. These spaces exist between self and other, and between the subject and the addressable other. In these places it may be possible to question underlying expectations and assumptions about identity, relationships, actions and values that accompany inequitable power distributions, as Pratt is able to do, and, therefore, it may be possible to declare the significance of non-normative choices, such as Pratt coming out as a lesbian. It may also be possible to make claims about the moral standing of members of subjugated groups so that the choices and practices

¹⁹⁵ I discussed situated standpoints in more detail in Chapter Two.
associated with them can acquire the meaningfulness of those practices associated with persons considered equals in the moral community.

Interpretations of social identities that do not support the allocations of privilege and authority determined by the forces of domination reveal another way of seeing the world, one that may be antagonistic to assumptions about power and truth contained in master narratives. These kinds of reinterpretations, like the testimony of the witness to revolt in Auschwitz, present a challenge to normative understandings by rejecting the totalising power of the dominant interpretative framework. Whether these new understandings are completely intelligible to others is less important than the recognition that there are other kinds of understanding than standard interpretations.

Re-envisioning social identities

Laying claim to affirmative social identities is perhaps the most difficult aspect of resistance, given that discrimination often functions by targeting members of particular social groups precisely for being members of those groups. How can one create a positive image that resists repressive conditioning if one's social identity is inexorably linked to negative and/or stereotypical conceptualisations? More fundamentally, how do the oppressed conceive of positive imagery for social identities tarnished by the stereotyping imposed by dominant groups, given that the oppressed may have internalised these stereotypes of attribute and behaviour and social forces such as identity power may operate to reinforce these negative images? It is not enough to claim that controlling images are stereotypes or deceptive as the persistence of these perceptions demonstrates they can withstand a lot more than mere contradiction; rather, the complexity of these identities needs to be made explicit in order for the stereotyping to be revealed. I suggest later in this section that
one way in which alternative representations can achieve this is to depict the multiple selves that are obscured by dominant categorisations of social identities.

In redefining their identities, members of subjugated groups are faced with the difficulties associated with either re-imagining existing identities or creating new identities: if identities are re-imagined then such depictions have to interrogate existing stereotypes perpetuated in master narratives, and if new identities are created they face the problem of intelligibility, which I described in Chapter Five. In addition, where new identities are created by individual group members they must allow for difference within the group or risk duplicating the categorising effects of oppression, and this is particularly the case where persons with multiple identities are discriminated against within oppressed communities. Finally, since oppression tends to either simplify or efface the complexity of multiple identities experienced by the oppressed, some identities may need to be critically examined and either dismantled or re-conceptualised. Consequently, redefinition of social identities by members of oppressed groups has the difficult task of both counteracting the negative images attached by dominant forms of categorisation as well as depicting persons who belong to subjugated group(s) as unique individuals with multiple identities, in addition to being members of a particular social group.

Such recreations of social identities by members of subordinate groups need to be realistic, being honest about negative attributes and behaviours, and the reason for their existence, while at the same time not portraying group members in the stereotypical manner of mainstream depictions. Since morally reprehensible behaviour, such as drug and alcohol abuse and accompanying violence and criminal activities, may come out of lives lived under oppression and is frequently used by the dominant as a reason to justify oppressive acts, the revelation of these behaviours needs to be accompanied with insight into the power relationships that form the
political and economic framework in which these behaviours are present. Redefinitions of subordinate identities are complicated by the fact that negative oppressive depictions may be internalised by group members, and even if these aspects have been identified and recognised as alien by members of the group—as artefacts of oppression—and, therefore, not necessarily inherent, they may be difficult to differentiate from other characteristics. This is more likely to be the case when individual group members have not positioned themselves critically with regard to the social identities they are assigned by dominant categorisation schemes. For example, a gay man who practices promiscuous behaviour and does not position himself critically in regard to his social identity as a gay man, may be unable to separate his own authentic desires from the stereotype of gay promiscuity.

A major problem for members of subjugated groups in re-imagining their social identities is that other members of the social group may dispute the way in which they are depicted, particularly where such descriptions ignore underlying complex power relationships. For example, bell hooks has contested the liberating potential of films such as Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It*, which "claim to tell women's stories while privileging male narratives" (hooks 1989, 137).196 There is a temptation on the part of group members to regard any depiction of their subjugated identities as empowering because of its rarity.197 However, for these depictions of subjugated social identities to be transformative rather than simply descriptive they have to demonstrate an awareness of the power relationships involved and to challenge destructive mainstream values. This kind of awareness is exemplified by Toni Morrison in *The Bluest Eye* where she shows how the aesthetic value accorded

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197 I saw a production of a play by Aboriginal playwright Jack Davis in Geraldton in Western Australia in the 1980s which gave discounted or free access to Aboriginal people; in spite of the confronting subject matter the predominately Aboriginal audience was both enthralled and invested in the story.
to white skin negatively impacts black lives.  

Transforming the self by reinventing social identities

In order to re-envision social identities, and hence transform the oppressed self, persons must possess what Kim Atkins (2008, 136–37) calls narrative competency, the ability to construct a coherent integrated story of identity reflecting self-understanding and self-evaluation. We can only become persons we can regard as worthwhile when we can utilise self-understanding and agential continuity to adequately "articulate relations of mutual implication and explanation between our constitutive attributes, relationships, actions, and sufferings, over time" (Atkins 2008, 137). Narrative competency requires the same kind of skill in communication, interpretation and evaluation as autonomous agency, and, as discussed in Chapter Three, thus presupposes the development of competencies in self-discovery, self-definition and self-direction as identified by Meyers (Atkins 2008, 136–37). Likewise, Scheman (2011, 96–97) argues that the capacity to give moral accounts from a situated viewpoint is vital to autonomous narration as well as being necessary for the development of autonomy competencies. The link between autonomy and narrative competencies is revealed in the way social oppression operates through master narratives, which may undermine autonomy by immobilising or diminishing the members of subjugated groups.

Personal transformation is theorised by Atkins (2008, 119–20) and Mackenzie (2008, 126–7) to occur through empathetically imagining oneself as another, which one does by assuming another's first-personal perspective—which Mackenzie also calls the "external perspective" (2008, 126)—as one's own. Such imaginings, although partial, since there are limits to our empathetic capabilities (Mackenzie

198 Alcoff (2006, 279) mentions this example.
2008, 126), are empowering when they stem from a sense of the self as potentially worthy. I argue that this is a kind of world-travelling, in which another's viewpoint becomes our own, not as a means of understanding the other as Lugones (1987) has suggested, but as a means of understanding the position of our future self. This is similar to what happens when we make a decision and think something along the lines of: ‘can I live with this?’ The person who lives with the decision is a different person, a person who has been changed or had their circumstances changed by the choice made. However, this changed first-person has to be able to look back upon the choice made and be able to connect to the first-person who was before the change; in other words, once a change has been made the person has to be able to own it. For something to be owned by a person in this sense it has to be something of importance, not in an abstract or ideal way such as the desire for freedom, but as something which their authentic self earnestly desires. Self-transformation can only come about as a result of an affective force, which impels persons to conceive of themselves and others in different ways from how they are currently existent. In Morrison's telling, the difference between Sethe and Paul D. in Beloved, for example, seems to be that for Paul D. such re-imaginings of the self are abstract and potentially unrealisable whereas for Sethe they are accompanied by major changes to her life and conception of herself.

The idea of alternatives of oneself is articulated in the work of Jan Bransen who describes an alternative self as "a continuation of the person one is, such that 1) this person is wholeheartedly moved to make one of the available choices, and 2) this alternative succeeds in reconciling from her perspective the reasons for this one choice with the crucial characteristics of one's own motivational profile" (2006, 19). Mackenzie (2008, 123) further suggests that the role of imaginatively projecting oneself is inherently ambivalent and to be useful in terms of narrative self-conception
it must be constrained by four factors: one's physical embodiment, one's biographical history, one's cultural context and social interactions, and one's practical identity. In other words, there are limits on one's ability to creatively imagine oneself otherwise, such as the external constraints provided by other people. However, we have to be wary of applying these constraints without reference to a person's own unique situation since, as Mackenzie (2008, 134) herself points out, there is a problem with external constraints on a person who is being victimised or discriminated against and whom external constraints could potentially disempower. Another difficulty, also highlighted by Mackenzie (2008, 138), is that the information we have about ourselves necessarily limits the imaginative project so that to some extent we need to be open to what is outside us to open up our capacity for imagining ourselves otherwise. Hence, the external constraints should work to limit the project but not to constrain it from the outset, as they would if we were limited by normative expectations. Although these constraints are not insignificant, in my view they are not the determining factor in personal self-transformation; rather what principally limits one's capacity to transform oneself is the impossibility of either seeing oneself as one truly is right now or fully embracing a potential future self.

As I stated earlier, imagining another's first-person perspective is necessarily partial (Atkins 2008, 119; Mackenzie 2008, 126); however, I believe it is the partial nature of such imaginings which gives them power. As Mackenzie (2008, 122) points out, if our imaginings are limited to what we know about ourselves and the world, then they are necessarily limiting in terms of their transformative power. Such imaginings, while not falling into "self-deception, self-indulgence, wishful thinking, and other failures of agency" (Mackenzie 2008, 123), have to be able to entertain novel and unfamiliar experiences in conceiving alternatives to the self. However, given that the self one envisages has to be capable of looking back and recognising
the self one is now there is an element of uncertainty in this process. Lives that are open to many possibilities and provide those who are heedful with hope for change are not those with a definitive end point. Lives that deal with ambiguities and crossroads suggest potentialities that specific imaginings of other lives do not, especially where the life imagined is one that transgresses normative values. An example of this difference might occur if a heterosexual woman were to imagine what it would be like to commit to a relationship with a man versus what it would be like to imagine herself in a relationship with a woman. She has a certain amount of information about what the experience of a heterosexual relationship would entail and can glean more from her cultural context. Conversely, her ability to imagine her life in a lesbian relationship is simultaneously constrained and enriched by the dearth of cultural context; she may not be able to imagine most, or all, of what it is to be in a lesbian relationship, but this may make her more, not less, open to the experience. Note that her ability to imagine being in a lesbian relationship is limited by the four factors Mackenzie suggests: being a woman, her remembered past as a heterosexual, how transgressive being a lesbian is in her culture and whether she knows any lesbians, and whether she can see a lesbian relationship as meaningful; however, such imaginings are not limited by her ability to imagine being a lesbian according to standard meanings. That is, if she can see being a lesbian as desirable for herself even without knowing exactly what the experience involves, the partiality of this imagining does not prevent her from embracing this alternative self and connecting back with the heterosexual self that made this valuation.

It seems to me that what happens in personal transformation is closer to Babbitt's (2001) understanding of such change than that theorised by Mackenzie (2008). Mackenzie's understanding seems to suggest there is no difficulty in imagining or articulating a future self; in contrast, Babbitt's approach suggests that
although one may be able to imagine oneself other than what one is now what this entails may be difficult to articulate to oneself, much less to others. Consider the case when I am trying to decide whether or not to have a child; although I can read literature, watch films and ask women who have given birth about the experience, I am still limited in what I can imagine about what childbirth and motherhood involves. In some ways what I can find out from the world limits my view of what such an experience entails, and I might choose not to have a child based on the negative reports of others, rather than making the decision with openness to all the possible outcomes.

This may be an appropriate place to suggest a caveat on the use of the imagination to effect self-transformation, and that is that such usage does not come without a cost to the person. Babbitt (2001, 127) investigates this issue in detail and concludes that sometimes this cost involves being less responsive in certain ways in one's relationships in order to give precedence to moral and theoretical priorities. While the cost may vary, the examples given in this chapter suggest that as well as being transformative, reconceptualising the self as an imaginative exercise has the potential to be damaging to whoever is involved and to those around them. For example, when Pratt (1984, 26–27) came out as a lesbian her husband "threatened and did violence, threatened ugly court proceedings" and not only took custody of their children but moved them hundreds of miles away to restrict contact. Therefore, standing behind non-normative social identities by re-envisioning them in ways that are empowering may not only require members of subordinate groups to rehabilitate these identities from the stereotypical imagery and negative expectations generated by dominant characterisations, it may also entail considerable personal sacrifice.

An example of an affirmative life narrative which utilises transformative imagery of social group identities is the self-styled "biomythography", Zami: A New
Spelling of My Name (1982), by Audre Lorde, a semi-autobiographical story, which also draws on myth and poetic re-imaginings. Anzaldúa calls this kind of fictionalised memoir "autohistoria", and she defines it as "the genre of writing about one's personal and collective history using fictive elements" (2002b, 578). Anzaldúa (2002b, 560) argues that creating a personal narrative involves co-creating the group/cultural story and requires the person to re-examine the dominant knowledge systems constructing reality. Anzaldúa describes the bridge or boundary between one world and another as both "a barrier and a point of transformation" and suggests that before crossing it is important to do the work of facing up to the part of you "holding your failures and inadequacies, the negativities you've internalized, and those aspects of gender and class you want to disown" (2002, 557). In other words, before it is possible to transform themselves by boundary crossing between their social identities persons must undertake a critical self-examination to uncover those internalised forces that may be impeding change.

One interpretation of Zami is that it is an attempt by Lorde to uncover the social forces that have acted upon her, and to recognise and document the strength that has allowed her to survive the various oppressions she was subjected to by inventing a new, mythic self, one able to cross over the boundaries between multiple social identities and intersectional oppressions. By imagining herself as a "Black woman warrior poet" Lorde can take responsibility for who she is by standing behind her multiple identities as an African American lesbian. As someone possessing multiple identities Lorde inhabits what AnaLouise Keating calls a "threshold position", since thresholds "mark crisis points, spaces where conflicting values, ideas, and beliefs converge, unsettling fixed categories of meaning" (1996, 2). By intentionally locating herself in this manner, Lorde challenges the negative normative meanings attached to her African American and lesbian identities by dominant
interpretive frameworks. By claiming multiple re-imagined subjugated social identities, Lorde’s project of self-definition also confronts those who view themselves as possessing unitary identities "to re-examine the exclusionary terms used to define their own personal and social locations" (Keating 1996, 2). However, given the distorting effect oppression has on non-normative identities, such a strategy is not without cost, as I mentioned above and as I discussed in Chapter Five. Persons standing behind non-normative identities, relationships, and practices take the moral risk that they will be misunderstood by others in the moral community. For persons seeking to reinvent stereotypical social identities and imbue them with positive meanings for themselves, the possible negative outcomes and moral risk have to be weighed against the ongoing harm inflicted by multiple intersecting oppressions on their moral capacities.199

While Lorde did not suffer the same economic disadvantage as many other African Americans, she was subject to white racism both in "the world outside—that world that defined us as doubly nothing because we were Black and because we were Woman" (1982, 225), as well as within the lesbian community. Lorde (1982, 68–71) describes a family visit to Washington D.C. in 1947 in which the practices of racism, from the whites-only dining car on the train to the ice-cream parlour that will serve them but not allow them to eat on the premises, constantly assail them. However, because her parents attempted to protect their children from racism without ever naming or explaining it,200 Lorde does not recognise the systemic nature of racism, believing instead that she is somehow responsible for outcomes over which she has no control, and the anger that she experiences has no target unless it is herself.

199 Lorde says of the damage caused by intersecting oppressions, "many of us wound up dead or demented, and many of us were distorted by the many fronts we had to fight upon" (1982, 225).
200 For example, her mother took food for the train trip, describing the dining car as too expensive and unhygienic, and was thus able to disregard the fact that African Americans were not allowed in the dining car in 1947.
Keating (1996, 148) argues that by denying the existence of racism her parents make it impossible for Lorde either to name the force working against her, to respond appropriately to it, or to define herself as an African American. In order to be able to take responsibility for her identity, relationships, and practices, and to exercise moral agency, Lorde has first to recognise and remove the barriers oppressive forces produce in her and in the world which prevent her from developing and expressing herself. These barriers operate both socially and psychologically to undermine her sense of self as a person having the kinds of moral capacities that allow her to exercise full moral agency in each of her social identities. Therefore, part of her journey to self-definition involves standing behind aspects of herself, such as her African American identity, that may invite negative expectations from others, and, most importantly, re-envisioning these identities in ways which are empowering to her. Reinventions of the self by reinventing social identities in this way are not confined to the individual, but influence—and are, of course, influenced by—the way these social identities are viewed by others.

By examining the way external and internal forces have distorted her sense of self, Lorde's autohistoria, contrary to its self-proclaimed mythic status, becomes a literal story of narrative self-constitution as strongly morally defining. Narrative self-constitution, as I outlined in Chapter Three, entails persons being capable of making sense of themselves by ensuring that their actions cohere with the narrative of their beliefs, values and desires. Who we are at any point in time is dependent on the way the different narrative strands come together. As we have seen, it is possible,

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201 Lorde describes the way racism and sexism work against her as forces forming "a barrier to the realization of my own powers ... which I had to examine and dismantle, piece by painful piece, in order to use my energies fully and creatively" (1984, 147).

202 Both the article "Poetry is not a luxury" and her discussion with Adrienne Rich in *Sister/Outsider* (1984) suggest Lorde considers her identity as a poet to have the same moral and political dimensions as her other identities. For someone less concerned with injustice her career as a poet might be categorised by Nelson (2001a, 15) as a story of non-moral self-definition.
though, for persons to imagine themselves as other than who they are, and such
creative re-imaginings of oneself are not necessarily problematic even if they are
inaccurate.\textsuperscript{203} Indeed Mackenzie and Jacqui Poltera (2010, 47) challenge
Schechtman's (1996, 120) notion of the reality constraint as being too inflexible,
arguing that a certain amount of incoherence and self-contradiction within self-
constituting narratives is permissible, since to assume otherwise is to assume an
overly unified view of the self which does not reflect complexities such as internal
conflict and self-estrangement. Crucially, how significant such imaginative self-
narratives are depends upon their ability to persuade persons to commit to a
particular action, identity or relationship.

Like some other forms of self-transformation, re-imagining the self may also
involve a process of renaming, and in Lorde's case this renaming actively engages
with the reinvention of some of her multiple social identities, revealing how
entwined social identities are with a person's sense of self, so that actively seeking to
change one necessarily impacts on the other.\textsuperscript{204} I touched briefly on the connection
between recreating the self and renaming in my discussion on trauma survivors in
Chapter Three, and would argue that, when renaming involves the rejection of false
or demeaning labels, this activity is important to the development of moral capacities
which have been constrained by oppression. Self-definition, or renaming, is the
ability of the protagonist "to translate this experience into words she can share with
others, thus making possible collective transformations" (Keating 1996, 162), and
when undertaken by a member of a subjugated group it potentially challenges the

\textsuperscript{203} Whether inaccurate self-narratives are problematic may depend upon whether they are delusional fantasies and therefore cannot be identity-constituting, as Schechtman (1996, 119–120) suggests, or whether they are damaging to the person's self-actualisation and therefore represent a retrograde step, as Mackenzie (2008) suggests.

\textsuperscript{204} Since slavery involves an effective de-naming, insofar as African American slaves were literally deprived of their African names as well as their cultural identities, renaming for African Americans also involves re-claiming this lost African identity (Keating 1996, 162).
status quo. Keating also argues that Lorde's self-transformation "occurs only in the context of others" implying an "intersubjective construction of personal identity and an interactional self-naming process" (1996, 146). In this way Keating's analysis of Lorde's journey to self-understanding and potential transformation suggests that self-definition requires a relational understanding of autonomy and agency, which I argued was the case in Chapter Three.

Although there is a fantastical element to Lorde's re-imagining of herself, it is consistent with Mackenzie's criteria in being constrained by Lorde's physical embodiment, biographical history, cultural context and social interactions, and any fantastical elements can be attributed to her practical identity as a poet. The transformation Lorde undergoes involves recognition and naming of herself as a black woman, but she does this by interrogating and destabilising traditional identity categories and re-imagining them as empowering for herself. By situating herself on the borderlands of social categories Lorde is able to tell her story with an awareness of the social relationships and institutional forces that have acted upon the person she has become without being wholly determined by them. However, Lorde acknowledges that the identities she claims might be distorted by stereotypes and misunderstandings for others, so that standing behind the identities, relationships and practices she finds meaningful also exposes her to the risk of unintelligibility and moral failure.

**Responsiveness to others**

By acting in ways that are denied by oppressive expectations, individuals not only re-envision their own identities they also redefine their relationships and their responsiveness to those persons who are significant in their lives. For example, in the
film *Samson and Delilah* (2009),\(^{205}\) film-maker Warwick Thornton shows the protagonists taking care of each other as a means of asserting moral competency. We can read Samson and Delilah as embodying the addressable other to one another and being reliant on one another for feelings of personhood and agency. Because they value each other they affirm one another's sense of self and moral worth, and it is this affirmation that allows them to be responsive to one another and act to rescue one another at different moments in the story. For example, when Samson rescues Delilah from the violence she suffers in the Aboriginal community as punishment for her grandmother's death—effectively challenging the traditional view of Delilah's responsibility and the expectations generated for her within the community—and when Delilah, with his brother's help, rescues Samson from his dependency on petrol-sniffing. In choosing to take responsibility for one another, they also take responsibility, through the relationship, for themselves and their own choices.

However, these choices, like the choices made by Sethe for her children, and Sonny for his transgendered partner, are also morally questionable. For instance, from the point of view of her community Delilah shares the responsibility for her grandmother's death, and it could be argued that as a member of that community she should stay and make amends for failing her duty of care. Additionally, because Samson steals his brother's truck to take Delilah away from the community this causes his brother harm. It could be said that Samson puts his responsibility to Delilah over that of his brother and she puts her responsibility to Samson over that of

\(^{205}\) *Samson and Delilah* (Thornton 2009) is a film written and directed by Aboriginal film-maker Warwick Thornton, which portrays a young Aboriginal couple who leave their community in a stolen truck after the death of Delilah's grandmother—whom Delilah helped make traditional paintings—and Delilah is held responsible and beaten by the other women. They live under a bridge on the outskirts of Alice Springs with an older Aboriginal man and where Samson continues to sniff petrol as he did in the Aboriginal community. Delilah attempts to sell her own paintings but is rejected by both a white art gallery and white tourists; she is later abducted and raped by white youths, resorting to petrol sniffing herself until she is hit by a car and hospitalised. The film ends with Samson's brother coming to town to take them back to the Aboriginal community and from there Delilah takes Samson to her own country to break him of his dependency on petrol sniffing.
her community.

I described in Chapter Four how social arrangements create vulnerabilities that, in turn, create moral obligations, and in this context taking care of her grandmother is Delilah's socially-normed responsibility. In choosing to take care of Samson, Delilah demonstrates what relationship is important to her, and this choice differentiates and defines her as a moral person with a particular set of moral obligations that do not accord with her community's expectations. In doing so she shows moral integrity of the kind described by Walker (2007, 113) as reliable accountability, and discussed in Chapters Four and Five, where integrity is not so much a reflection of moral principles as it is an indicator of a person's dependable responsiveness to others. It will be remembered that Walker suggested that we are differently reliable, depending upon what relationships are important to us at a particular time. Such responsiveness to others is a form of moral responsibility in the care-taking sense proposed by Card (1996, 28), and which I discussed in Chapter Four. In this sense, taking responsibility involves making a commitment to a project, value or relationship, where taking responsibility is an active practice in which an agent is prepared to stand behind certain practices, values or relationships, often those that challenge the norms of the community. Accounts of commitments to a particular relationship that may be denied or devalued in mainstream discourse, such as Sonny's relationship with a transgendered person discussed in Chapter Four, allow the oppressed to reinvent these relationships and practices, and the social identities of the persons involved in terms of what the oppressed value or find meaningful in their moral lives. However, in order to do so, they have to actively inhabit the marginalised social and discursive space in which they are able to exercise some moral agency by standing behind the practices, identities and relationships they value.
Social and discursive spaces in which to act

The history of rejections experienced by Lorde and Sethe, as well as by Samson and Delilah, point to the difficulties persons have in discovering and inhabiting a social space in which their practices, identities and relationships have meaning. Finding space in which to act, to make claims to the value and meaningfulness of marginalised identities and practices, is not easy and involves actively seeking out spaces in the margins where such behaviour is possible. However, realistically speaking, many of these attempts will be unsuccessful due to the strength of opposing forces and historical differences in the interaction of these forces in different times and places. For example, in spite of the many dislocations caused by the white colonisation of Australia, Samson and Delilah are in their own country and traditionally Australian Aboriginal persons link their sense of self with an idea of place, or 'country'. As a result the experience of contemporary Aboriginal Australians in traditional communities is one of potential empowerment and transformation which is nevertheless simultaneously constrained and distorted by external white racism and internal negative forces.

In Chapter Three I suggested that social spaces which are apparently safe and empowering to a subordinate group are neither totally free from external influences nor from internal struggle for recognition by some group members. Consequently, although members of oppressed groups may feel safer in their own communities this is not always the case, and they may need to leave the apparent safety of their own group and move into boundary or threshold spaces. For example, in Samson and Delilah, the negative events that occur in town may appear at first to be the result of moving from a safe Aboriginal space into a racist white space, one in which they are literally marginalised, but it is clear from the scenes of substance abuse and physical violence that, as well as being partially constructed by colonialism and white racism,
the Aboriginal community is anything but safe.

Re-imaginings of the self frequently involve travelling between places, and recognising the differences between the self in one place and in another, much as Lugones describes world-travelling, which I discussed in Chapter Two. For example, in *Samson and Delilah*, how the two protagonists are situated in the world affects both their sense of self, as well as playing a major role in determining when and how they choose to act, particularly in terms of taking responsibility for one another. Although the idea of country as it is understood by Indigenous Australians refers to a physical space, the final scenes of the film where Delilah takes Samson back to her country to care for him seem to be allegorical rather than real, so that the idea of country may also represent another space in the film, perhaps a borderlands of sorts between the two social spaces which undermine their moral agency, an imagined space in which Delilah is empowered to act. In these scenes, which reveal both her moral agency and her sense of moral responsibility towards Samson and their shared relationship, Delilah is depicted as capable of rescuing Samson from both the white racism that paralyses him in town and the powerlessness he experiences as an Aboriginal man even when he is in Aboriginal community. The implication is that Samson's relationship with Delilah is potentially empowering, in part because she is empowered by finding, or perhaps imagining, her own space. Whether or not this is an actual social space, the film hints at the possibility that there is somewhere they can live free of harm. In earlier chapters I argued that space is productive of a person's sense of self, and Delilah finds her capacity for moral agency in a space that is neither white nor Aboriginal, somewhere neither real nor imaginary, but on the boundary in-between. For Samson to be able to realise a positive sense of self rather than experience himself objectified by racism he needs to move away from both the apparent safety of the Aboriginal community, a space which I explained earlier is
partially constructed by oppressive forces, as well as from the white spaces (the town and the marginalised 'black' space under the bridge).

From the point of view of developing agency competencies, the scenes of Delilah 'saving' Samson by taking him away from the powerlessness he experiences in the black community are comparable to those in which Sethe 'saves' her children by physically taking them away from Sweet Home, a place for ex-slaves. The idea that the space represented by Delilah's country is a separate space, somewhere apart from both white and black communities in the rest of the film, in which both imaginative transformation and moral agency are possible, is also hinted at in the creative space of her artworks which straddle both Aboriginal and white social spaces. One way of interpreting the film is that Delilah's place of country is also a physical representation of the space previously only hinted at in the artworks, the space of self-transformation. In reality it is not clear to what extent self-transformation is possible for Samson and Delilah, perhaps one reason Thornton, the writer and director, chooses to be ambiguous about the reality of the final scenes. In situating themselves between Aboriginal and white communities Samson and Delilah also take the moral risk of being unintelligible to both groups, so that their world-travelling positions them as other wherever they are. However, the final scenes of the film, allegorical or not, elicit hope rather than despair, suggesting, as Babbitt (2001, 82) argues and I discussed in Chapter Five, that the possibility of moral failure is a moral risk worth taking when pursuing a certain kind of moral agenda.

**Limitations on re-imagining the self**

Earlier I suggested that one way of creating new meaning is to interrogate the assumptions and expectations contained in dominant explanatory frameworks, since frequently persons who are oppressed have no model within the dominant paradigm
of what constitutes the exercise of moral agency for someone with their social identities. For example, earlier in this chapter I discussed a woman who challenged the dominant paradigm of Nazi power as unassailable by testifying to armed revolt in Auschwitz. In order to challenge the totalising effect of the dominant paradigm and to resist the expectations of others, persons have to be able creatively to imagine the world and themselves as other than what it is presently; a slave has to act in ways which are not wholly determined by external, conventional conceptions of how a slave should act. As Babbitt (1994, 10–11) suggests, in order for persons to see themselves as someone with moral worth they may first have to make choices commensurate with this self-evaluation; in other words, persons may have to act first and become the person they hope to be through the choices they make. However, as I have already discussed, such a choice involves the person taking a moral risk, since where their choices conflict with normative expectations there is always the possibility that they will be misunderstood, as Babbitt's example of Sethe in Beloved reveals.

Sethe is someone who has been objectified by slavery and racism but whose consciousness of how these forces have constrained her choices and threaten those of her children are indicative, not only of her own sense of herself as a person who has been treated unjustly but also of a strongly developed moral self. For Sethe to feel that she and her children are treated unjustly she must believe that she and her children have more worth than that of mere chattels; she must see herself first and foremost as a person, not a slave. Being able to imagine oneself as other than what one is involves not only imagining what other possibilities might exist, but also involves questioning expectations and assumptions held about members of one’s social group. In telling her story, Morrison has Sethe make claims about what is important, which differ from the expectations of what a slave or ex-slave should
value. Babbitt describes this as having a "certain sort of self-concept" where "it is sometimes the case that one pursues an identity and community in order to make appropriate judgments of importance, rather than taking specific ways of being to be important because of one's community" (2001, 86). Hence, the value that Sethe accords her daughter and her relationship with her daughter is based on a self-concept which is aspirational rather than one Sethe has achieved. For example, Sethe acts in ways that suggest she has become someone other than who she was, someone other than an ex-slave, in fact someone who sees herself as having a value commensurate with being an equal member of the moral community. Because she acts in accordance with this self-concept, as if it was the case that she is an equal member of the moral community, her actions are the actions of someone who values herself as an equal to others, and this makes them largely unintelligible to others who do not see her this way. In order to see her actions as she intends them, others would have to see Sethe as she sees herself, and this is a problem for both whites and for other ex-slaves.

Calhoun (1999a, 90) describes this as having a commitment to a moral principle that is not intelligible to others. When a person's actions are unintelligible for the reason that they do not have meaning within the explanatory framework available, then the person will be unable to adequately explain to others why they have made the choices they have. However, others may recognise such persons as possessing the qualities necessary for equal membership of the moral community and accord them evaluative worth, even if the content of their moral accounts is not fully understood. This recognition may occur if others see persons who transform themselves through redefining social identities and asserting non-normative values, identities, relationships and practices as living meaningful lives, irrespective of whether such lives are fully intelligible to others. Such transformations challenge the
standard expectations held by others about persons with these social identities, since they involve persons acting upon their own beliefs that they are morally competent and capable of making decisions that are worthwhile regardless of dominant understandings of their moral capabilities. For persons in these situations their choices and actions have value because they become the person they aspire to be through acting as they imagine this person would act, defying normative expectations.

These points suggest that acting in accordance with a self-concept that is not fully articulated, and/or in defiance of normative expectations, involves taking a moral risk and leaves persons vulnerable to being misinterpreted or misunderstood. There are also some other problems with the project of re-imagining the self which may not be easily overcome, particularly by individuals on their own, as they arise from the way power relationships work to enforce particular paradigms by denying the validity of alternative voices. Fricker's analysis of prejudice in the credibility economy suggests that persons may deny some persons' claims or testimony on the basis of the latter's social identity. What is accepted as knowledge or factual is not based on facts in the real world but on how those facts are interpreted in ways which support entrenched power relationships and the social institutions. In other words, the 'truth' often functions to maintain the status quo, so that counter claims, to the positive value of subjugated social identities, for example, are seen as questionable. For example, in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee 2006), Tom Robinson lives at a time and in a place in which African Americans lack moral equivalence and are not expected to be capable of self-reflection and moral competency. Therefore,

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206 Where stereotypical notions about a social group are used to justify unfair treatment of some persons, members of privileged groups may act as if what they believe to be true corresponds with facts about the world and therefore that their beliefs are true, making such beliefs and the facts they enforce difficult to contest. Babbitt says where "the truth of a proposition is not expected ... further understanding of such a proposition depends upon ... examining its implications for background beliefs and practices, as well as for interpretation of other events" (2001, 168).
Tom's explanation for his behaviour in regard to Mayella Ewell is incomprehensible to his white audience, since a black man should not feel sorry for a white woman because to do so is to suggest an equality, or perhaps even superiority of moral behaviour, which the white racist paradigm denies. As hooks suggests, prejudice in the credibility economy also exists within subjugated social groups. Although it would appear more likely that members of a person's own social group would affirm that person's experiences and claims, as Paul D.'s rejection of Sethe's claims suggests, it may instead be the case that other members of a person's group have internalised their subjugation and are unable to imagine any other way of living, or they believe that it is impossible to act in ways other than in accord with normative expectations. It is also possible that members of oppressed groups feel fearful when one of their number claims a different experience, perhaps fearing retribution by members of the dominant group. Frequently, fear of what might happen to themselves encourages members of oppressed groups to enforce the subjugation of other group members. Persons may be denied validation by others for all these reasons; yet without validation, Laub (1992, 80) says, persons may not be an authentic witness to themselves, undermining their sense of self. Mackenzie (2008, 133) suggests that one way we can check the plausibility of our narratives (about a putative future self) is to seek advice from others; however, since it is possible to imagine how this external other might respond then we can also regard ourselves as this other imagined respondent, much as the internal other provides an addressable other to validate our sense of self. This would seem to confirm Babbitt's analysis that in some circumstances exercising moral agency requires persons to act in accordance with a self-concept which may not be accepted by others.

There are indications, given that the viability of social practices and the institutions they instantiate rely on collective agreement about what counts as a fact
(Searle 1995, 117), and acceptance of what is a fact changes over time as institutions change, that perhaps imaginative re-conceptualisation plays some role, albeit indirectly, in the way social institutions evolve. However, it would be overly optimistic to assume that such collective re-imaginings are always necessarily positive for persons resisting oppressive forces. Given that identity power, which creates understandings of social identities as a result of shared imaginative conceptions, operates in conjunction with other kinds of social power, it may, in practice, in inequitable societies, work to enforce stereotypical depictions and unfair expectations of these group members.

In addition to the possibility of negative interpretations, there are also the external and internal constraints on the project of self-reinvention, which I discussed earlier in this chapter. The nature of self-knowledge is such that there are always aspects of the self that are unknown and unknowable. As a result, such re-imaginings of social identities are necessarily partial since they depend upon factors beyond the control of the individual for social uptake to occur. Consequently, there is a sense in which the work of re-conceptualisation of identities is ongoing rather than something which can be readily achieved, and it would be simplistic to suggest that simply re-imagining one's identity is sufficient for a person to resist oppressive forces. Rather, I suggest that the project of self-definition plays an important, albeit small, part in developing the autonomy competencies essential for moral agency, and that positive ascriptions of characteristics give persons a sense of being persons whose moral qualities engender the respect of others.

**Conclusion**

If, as I suggested in Chapter One, oppression is connected to a person's social identities, both in the way persons are categorised and in the problematic dynamics
of these identities, such as stereotyping, devaluing and objectification, then re-imagining or reclaiming those identities may be an important initial step towards resisting oppression. I have suggested that resisting stereotypes and other negative depictions of social identities involves actively resisting the kinds of assumptions and expectations attached to them in dominant discourses. Consequently, seeing themselves in ways which reject dominant expectations may be important for members of subordinate groups to live authentic lives. Such imaginings are necessarily partial, as we have seen, since there are significant limitations on a project of self-reinvention: internal constraints imposed by the distortion of identities by oppressive forces and restrictions on narrative self-construction, and external constraints, including normative expectations, difficulties gaining epistemic credibility, and exclusion from social spaces. In addition, we have also seen that such a use of moral imagination may not be without a cost, and persons who attempt such a project may be seen as having unsuccessful and unintelligible moral lives. Given that the alternative may be to endure lives distorted by oppressive forces, however, persons who are members of subordinate groups may undertake the project of self-transformation through the reinvention of social identities because doing so positions them as persons who see themselves as worthy members of the broader moral community.
In this thesis I have suggested that persons whose moral competencies have been compromised by inequitable social power relationships are disadvantaged as moral agents because they have been unable to fully develop the skills necessary to function as equal members of the broader moral community. I have argued that the diminishing of effective moral agency is often closely connected to the categorisation of persons into social groups based on sex, race, class, sexuality, age and ability, and the characterisation of persons belonging to some of these groups as having reduced capacities of moral reflection, choice and action. Perceived differences in moral competency between the members of different social groups may justify the presumption that some persons are less able members of the moral community on the basis of their social identities. One outcome is that members of these subordinate social groups suffer from prejudice in the credibility economy (Fricker 2007), so that any claims to experience or knowledge are liable to be dismissed on the basis of their social identity. The perception that some persons are less able members of the moral community on the basis of their social identities is related to the presumption that some lives are not meaningful in the same way others are because the identities, relationships and values persons choose to stand behind are non-normative. I have indicated that self-defined group standpoints may counter these perceptions by allowing members of subordinate groups to make knowledge claims that are considered credible by others both inside and outside their groups. Such claims may also pose a challenge to established interpretive frameworks and undermine dominant classification schemes by asserting the importance of alternative social identities in the form of plural or multiple selves and the value of non-normative practices and relationships.
While the idea of self-definition of standpoint groups may be attractive to members of subordinate groups it may also be problematic because of the way that social categorisation functions as a form of control in hierarchical societies. In inequitable societies social identities operate to limit and control the moral agency of members of subordinate groups by derogating the moral capabilities of group members and marginalising them in regard to the broader moral community. It may also be self-defeating for oppressed persons to assert claims to social identities that have been constructed as a means of their marginalisation, since such attempts at self-definition may be co-opted and utilised to support the agenda of dominant social groups and institutions (Collins 2002, 208).

In addition, since ways of knowing, including understandings of identity, are mutual constructions which depend upon the affirmation of others, then claims to new identities which are made unilaterally may not be intelligible to others. This is especially the case where the framework for understanding has been displaced, since understanding and uptake of moral choices requires an explanatory framework arising from a shared moral system (Calhoun 1999a, 83). If persons also lack epistemic credibility on the basis of their social identities (Fricker 2007) because the content of their lives is not meaningful in the same way the content of other persons' lives is meaningful (Gaita 1991), then this increases the likelihood that their identities and choices will be incomprehensible to others. At a minimum, epistemic credibility requires that others acknowledge that a person's choices and actions are indicative of a self-reflective person, that is, a person capable of moral agency.

I have suggested that some social identities are treated as morally inferior because persons who belong to these social groups are not considered to be of equal standing in the moral community, and this lack of valuing by others may make it difficult for persons to have evaluative self-respect for themselves (Dillon 1995,
Consequently, in order to respond to these circumstances positively, I have contended that individuals may have to act as if they are persons whose moral qualities and self-worth entitle them to be treated with respect, and hence deserving of the respect of others, even if they are not accorded respect by those around them. For persons who are devalued by society, seeing themselves as persons of moral worth is a transformative process because it requires seeing both themselves and the world as other than how they are normatively perceived.

The implication of this, I have proposed, is that resistance to being treated as morally inferior may involve the transformation of the self through the reinvention of negative social identities into positive ones that persons can stand behind. Since categories of identity are rarely uncontested (Parmar 1990, 118), I have argued that by claiming multiple identities members of subordinate groups may avoid some of the problems associated with standard social categories. A pluralist approach also addresses the issue that social identities are not fixed; rather they are both fluid and complex, making assignment to a social group as a means of classification uncertain at best. Additionally, self-defining through claiming multiple group identities may redress the problem of the negative and stereotypical way aspects of the self appear in "dominant systems of representation" (Parmar 1990, 116) for persons whose social identities are considered 'other'.

Such a project means morally marginalised persons may have to imagine or invent a self which is not yet instantiated and act in accordance with this self-image (Babbitt 2001). I have contended that certain thoughts and actions represent resistance because they arise from morally marginalised persons' consciousness of the situation which leads to a re-imagining of their selves as situated identities. The resistance potential of these thoughts and actions stems from the re-imagining occurring within a conceptual space in which the person chooses to examine and
question the normative expectations attached to their social identities rather than be constrained or defined by them. This notion helps explain why acts of re-imagining or reinvention of the self through the creation of alternative social identities have resistance potential. I have suggested that, although non-normative identities, relationships and practices may not receive social uptake because they are not understood by members of the broader moral community, persons affirming these practices and values may be recognised as living meaningful lives and possessing the qualities necessary for equal membership of the moral community, and accorded corresponding evaluative worth, even if the content of their lives is unintelligible.

Pluralist conceptions of the self are not only useful in understanding the effect that multiple intersecting oppressions have on persons belonging to more than one subjugated social group, they also provide viewpoints that may otherwise be lost in systems that categorise persons in dualistic ways. The partial and critical nature of the situated knowledges that arise from a pluralist re-positioning of the self provides a counterpoint to the totalising viewpoint of dominant knowledge systems (Haraway1988, 584). And since social identities are fluid, such situated partial locations are also, necessarily, transitional. Thus, by constantly shifting the viewpoint that is privileged, the critical positioning of a pluralist identity promotes the interrogation of static interpretive frameworks. Such a project therefore unsettles the dichotomy of privileged versus oppressed and margin versus the centre which enables systematic forces of domination operating through processes of categorisation to enforce control.

I have indicated that transformative notions of identity and space require persons inhabiting the margins to adopt situated critical stances which reject dichotomising interpretive frameworks, such as asserting the primacy of multiple selves evident in plural social identities. What makes the idea of these acts of self-
assertion and self-creation significant in terms of resistance is when persons position themselves critically in regard to their social identities. This may involve inhabiting interstitial or transitional social spaces, such as in the margins of discourses, in the spaces between one identity and another, or on the threshold between realities, where the possibility for resistance and transformation exists. Situational approaches to resisting stereotypical identities therefore require persons to displace themselves and cross the boundaries between different social identities or social groups. Positioning themselves in social and discursive borderlands allows morally marginalised persons to see alternative viewpoints and ways of being rather than being wholly defined, and their choices and actions constrained, by dominant interpretive frameworks.

Normative expectations that accompany assignment of social identities can be harmful and incapacitating, and social and psychological barriers to action may reduce a person's ability to make claims to being of equal standing in the broader moral community, both of which impact upon a person's moral agency. However, just as no-one can be said to be wholly constrained by external forces, no-one can be said to be wholly defined by them, since where persons are wholly constrained there would be no resistance potential (Foucault 1983, 221). Therefore, although constraints on the actions of members of subordinate social groups arising from inequitable social practices and institutions may impede moral agency in these persons, they do not wholly preclude the possibility of moral agency. Given that autonomy is considered a necessary condition for moral agency, and self-definition is a skill required for autonomy competency (Meyers 2004, xvii), then acts of self-transformation through the reinvention of social identities reveal a person as a functional moral agent, and I have argued, are crucial for resistance.

Normative expectations attached to social identities used to categorise persons in terms of their sex, race, sexuality, age and ability are substantial
contributory factors in determining individual choice and the limits of moral agency. My principal interest in this thesis has been with the resistance possibilities available to persons whose sense of self-worth and capacity to respond as moral agents has been compromised by unfair social expectations in inequitable societies. I have suggested that, in these circumstances, resistance requires the reinvention of the self which depends upon a critical re-positioning obtained "through practices of political and personal displacement" (de Lauretis 1990, 145) across the boundaries between different social identities. The re-envisioning of the self as one that is constantly changing from one situation to the next is best exemplified in the idea of the multiple or plural self, an understanding that also unsettles fixed notions of social categorisation. In addition to developing feelings of self-worth and the capacity for self-reflection, the process of self-definition involves skills in both autonomy and narrative competency and may also provide a means for persons with diminished moral agency to act within the constraints imposed by inequitable social institutions and practices.

I envisage that the strategies for resistance I have proposed here may be taken up by persons who are struggling for positive recognition in Western societies, such as persons who are marginalised by their sex, race, sexuality, age or ability. Rather than directing self-defined group standpoints at members of their own group, such persons may benefit from taking up the "excessive critical position" (de Lauretis 1990, 145) discussed in Chapter Three, which is attained by displacement across the boundaries between social identities, and social and discursive spaces; such a position allows the interrogation of both dominant perspectives and those generated by other members of their subordinate group. For persons who are marginalised by their sex, race, sexuality, age or ability, this may involve questioning and challenging dominant assumptions and expectations about what it means to have moral worth and
live a morally exemplary life in contemporary Western societies, such as Australia.

This thesis is proffered as a contribution to feminist ethics in the area of identity politics, building on feminist epistemological projects in situated knowledges and epistemic injustices, and feminist perspectives on the self, particularly projects aimed at re-conceptualising the self as multiple. Many of the ideas expressed here would benefit from further research and thought, particularly the notion that a person's moral development and competency is closely connected to their ability to redefine negative social identities through attaining a critical positioning with regard to their own group standpoint. Given that moral accounts of non-normative identities, relationships and practices given by members of subordinate groups are often unintelligible, it would also be useful for future researchers to consider whether the insights gained from situational awareness can be made intelligible to others, as well as to what extent the moral accounts given by members of subordinate groups have the ability to change dominant perceptions of their credibility.
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