

SELF-RESPECT AND CHILDHOOD

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ABSTRACT

In his autobiography Martin Luther King, Jr. recounts how his mother, Alberta Williams King, confronted what he describes as “the age-old problem of the Negro parent in America: how to explain discrimination and segregation to a small child” (King 2001: 20). He writes “She taught me that I should feel a sense of “somebodiness” but that on the other hand I had to go out and face a system that stared me in the face every day saying you are “less than,” you are “not equal to”” (King 2001: 20). The challenge that Alberta Williams King speaks to raises many important issues. One of which concerns how a child should conceive of themselves from a moral point of view. Williams King is surely correct in wanting and teaching her son to conceive of himself well; to have a sense of himself as a “somebody”, as a person that matters, and matters equally among others. Moreover, this sense of self seems like one that *all* children should have as a matter of living well as children. But what does it mean more concretely for a child to have a sense of themselves in these terms? And why is such a self-conception of the kind that King describes so important? In order to answer these questions my primary aim in this dissertation is to offer a focused exploration and a robust account of how children ought to conceive of themselves in childhood. The account that I put forward is what I refer to as the ‘base form of self-respect.’ The base form draws from philosophical conceptions of Kantian ethical theory and contemporary cognitive developmental psychology to offer the first empirically informed philosophical account of self-respect that is fitting for the context of childhood.

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¹I would like it noted that my time as a graduate student at Georgetown University was made more difficult by the lack of support available for pregnant and postpartum students, and students that require childcare. As a student and graduate employee at Georgetown University there was no maternity leave income available, and no childcare options that were affordable on a student income. As an international student and a graduate employee there are also no living or healthcare protections when pregnant. When I applied for leave to have my children I was told by the Georgetown Office of Global Studies that I had two weeks to leave the country as my visa would expire, which would prevent me from staying in my home, and from seeking any medical care that my plan would cover. If Georgetown values the contributions of all its students—not just those who do not get pregnant or require childcare—more support is needed.

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Chapter 1: Children's Self-Conceptions and the Need for Self-Respect

In his autobiography Martin Luther King, Jr. recounts how his mother, Alberta Williams King, confronted what he describes as “the age-old problem of the Negro parent in America: how to explain discrimination and segregation to a small child” (King 2001: 20). He writes “She taught me that I should feel a sense of “somebodiness” but that on the other hand I had to go out and face a system that stared me in the face every day saying you are “less than,” you are “not equal to”” (King 2001: 20).

The challenge that Alberta Williams King speaks to raises many important issues. One of these concerns how a child should conceive of themselves from a moral point of view. Williams King is surely correct in wanting and teaching her son to conceive of himself well; to have a sense of himself as a “somebody”, as a person that matters, and matters equally among others. Moreover, this sense of self seems like one that *all* children should have as a matter of living well as children. But what does it mean more concretely for a child to have a sense of themselves in these terms? Why is such a self-conception of the kind that King describes so important? And how might a parent or caregiver aim for this end well when raising children?

Providing an answer to these questions is not a straightforward task. This is because while there is a vast philosophical literature on how to conceive of and regard children, there is relatively little regarding how children should conceive of or regard themselves. A significant portion of the philosophical literature focuses on questions like what freedoms and resources are owed to children, how ought we raise children to be flourishing adults, and what it means to be a ‘good parent.’ Answers to these questions rarely take into account a child’s own subjective experience. If, however, we are interested in raising children to live

well as children, and think that how a child conceives of themselves is an important part of that picture, then a robust account of how children ought to conceive of themselves is needed.

In addition to the question of how children ought to conceive of themselves, the Williams King conversation also highlights an important challenge that children face, and parents face when trying to raise their children to conceive of themselves well. This challenge—the kind that stares persons in the face everyday telling them that they are ‘less than,’ and ‘not equal to’ other members of the community—takes the form of systemic oppression. As Serene Khader explains, systemic oppression surround oppressed people with representations that their group is less, and it persistently threatens the development and maintenance of attitudes to the contrary (2021: 237). The systemic oppression of Jim Crow, of course, does not exist in the same way that it did when King was a child, but its legacy persists, as evidenced, among other things, by the presence of well documented systemic racism in the US healthcare, education, and penal system.²

A similar legacy persists in Australia, among many other nations. Currently in Australia, for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons routinely face significantly higher rates of discrimination than non-indigenous Australians (Faulkner *et. al.* 2021). With respect to indigenous youth, for example, during 2020-2021 their incarceration rate was 31 times higher than non-indigenous children (AIHW 2022). In 2019 attendance rates for Indigenous children enrolled in a preschool program in all regions (major cities, regional, remote, etc.) were lower than attendance rates for non-Indigenous children (AIHW 2021). In 2018 only 35% of Indigenous children were assessed as “developmentally on track”, compared to approximately 55% for non-Indigenous children (APC 2022). The reason for this discrepancy, of course, is not moral failure on the part of the indigenous community, but, like the ‘new Jim Crow,’ a result of historical and contemporary prejudice reflected in the very systems designed to ‘support’ the community.

The oppressive practises and systems that challenge children’s self-conceptions are also not only limited to systemic racism. The current gender wars playing out in childrens’ schools in the US, for

²See, for example, Newkirk 2016, and Alexander 2019.

example, deny transgender children equal access to community participation and resources to meet their basic needs. As a 2021 Human Rights Watch report states, as of July 2021 more than 110 bills were introduced to US state legislatures “attempting to roll back transgender rights, most of them targeting transgender youth” (Thoreson 2021). Of the bills introduced, 36 sought to deny transgender children transition-related health care, despite overwhelming evidence that access to such care has huge benefits for children who have access to it (Levin 2021). Other bills have sought to deny children access to basic facilities such as the use of washrooms and locker rooms that match their gender identity, “lawmakers in dozens of other states have [also] sought to bar transgender children from participating in sports with their peers, cutting them off from a crucial lifeline for physical and social development” (Thoreson 2021).

These practices, of course, are only a handful of examples of a much larger collection of practises that operate as a feature of systemic oppression. While such systems are widely recognized as being harmful, typically theorists here too do not consider how children should conceive of themselves, and so why such systems might be particularly harmful for children. In order to fully identify and address the potential harms and challenges these systems create we need the appropriate conceptual tools to do so—where this includes a robust conception of how children ought to conceive of themselves.

My primary aim in this dissertation is to offer a focused exploration and a robust account of how children ought to conceive of themselves in childhood, one that should provide a better framework for assessing and addressing some of the issues of oppression as articulated above.

For the remainder of chapter one, I will begin by demonstrating how some of the concepts that are available in the literature that may speak to children’s self-conceptions, namely self-esteem and future oriented perspectives, are unable to properly account for how children should conceive of themselves. As I will come to demonstrate in more detail shortly, self-esteem is insufficient because it is typically cast as a descriptive concept—it describes how a person feels about themselves—rather than a normative one—describing how a person *should* feel about themselves. If we are interested in accounting for how a child should conceive of themselves, I argue that a descriptive concept such as self-esteem will not be

sufficient. Future oriented perspectives—those perspectives that aim to constrain a child’s behaviour for the benefit of future goods—are also insufficient because they are only helpful insofar as some of the ways in which a child can conceive of themselves create barriers to the realization of future goals.

A better approach, I contend, for accounting for how children should conceive of themselves is to draw from existing accounts of self-respect. Unlike self-esteem, self-respect is typically cast as a moral concept that describes how a person *should* conceive of themselves subjectively as a matter of moral regard. As I will come to explain later in this chapter, however, many of the accounts of self-respect already established in the literature presuppose mature capabilities that render them inappropriate for the context of childhood. Nonetheless, I will argue, self-respect has many features that are useful to draw upon and reconceptualize for the context of childhood. My aim in this dissertation then, more precisely, is to offer an account of self-respect that is fitting for the context of childhood. In order to offer such an account, I will end this chapter stipulating the parameters I take a fitting account of self-respect to require. This will include the requirement that a fitting account be responsive to the developmental abilities of children.

In chapter two my aim is to consider what children can developmentally achieve with regards to self-respect. As I will come to explain in chapter two, the abilities of children are subject to significant variation across children, across tasks, and throughout a child’s development. As such, if an account of self-respect is to be fitting for childhood, a one size fits all approach will not be adequate. My aim in chapter two then is to focus on the capabilities of young children—approximately three to six years of age—given what the developmental literature suggests is typical of this age. Once I have discussed these capabilities for children of three to six years of age, I will then discuss these same capabilities for older children—children in middle adolescence, approximately 13 to 16 years old—to provide a sense of how children develop in these domains so as to then later discuss how the requirements of self-respect might evolve for older children.

In chapter three I build upon the insights of chapter two to propose a theoretical framework for

an account of self-respect in early childhood. This form of self-respect is what I refer to as the ‘base form of self-respect.’ The base form, as I will come to explain in more detail in chapter three, is a presuppositional interpretive framework that is constituted by a collection of dispositions that together shape how a child experiences themselves and others as objects of value. When these dispositions are oriented correctly—towards, that is, an appreciation for the child’s inherent moral value as a person and their basic moral rights—it is my view that a child has self-respect. I also consider how this model might evolve as children’s capacities for self-respect develop, as well as how the base form can be used to explicate some of the harms systems of oppression present for children’s self-conceptions.

In chapter four I end by exploring the question of how to cultivate self-respect in childhood. Having self-respect, as I come to explain, is not an innate ability, but something that requires nurturing and cultivation. In chapter four I consider how parents and primary caregivers might cultivate self-respect in their children. In particular, I propose a four-part model of educating young children for self-respect that calls for parents to engage in modelling self-respect for their children, to engage in communication and dialogue with their children, to cultivate respectful and caring relationships with their children, and to provide, to the best of their abilities and in line with the requirements of their own self-respect, opportunities for their children to exercise and practise the skills necessary for self-respect. I also discuss some of the barriers parents and caregivers face in cultivating self-respect in their children.

1 Self-Esteem in Childhood

One concept that may come to mind regarding how children should conceive of themselves is self-esteem. Self-esteem is a concept that is often discussed in relation to children within and outside academia. It is a central feature in children’s books, and television programs, for example, as well as parenting guides

on raising children well.³ It also features prominently in children’s developmental psychology.⁴

There are varying ways in which the term ‘self-esteem’ is used and has been used over time within these contexts. One of the most common articulations, however, sees self-esteem as a descriptive concept. As Roland and Foxx, explain “the public and psychological communities’ conception of self-esteem [has] become focused on the importance of “feeling good”” (2003: 266). Self-esteem, Roland and Foxx go on to explain, is commonly defined as a form of subjective self-evaluation based on things such as one’s performance on a given task, or the opinion of others. When one feels good about themselves, based on the criteria they see fit, they have positive self-esteem, and when they feel poorly about themselves they have low self-esteem.

This analysis is also compatible with some theories of self-esteem present within the philosophical literature. Gabriele Taylor, for example, describes the person who has self-esteem as someone who “takes a favourable view of himself, while he who lacks it will think of himself in unfavourable terms: he is not worth much” (1995: 158). David Sachs (1981) also describes having low self-esteem as regarding one’s self unfavourably.

A child who thinks of themselves as a ‘somebody,’ equal in value to other persons—in the way that Williams King is aiming for—undoubtedly thinks of themselves in favourable terms in this regard. And conversely, a child who thinks of themselves as ‘nobody,’ ‘less than, and not equal to’ undoubtedly thinks of themselves in unfavourable terms. So, perhaps an account of self-esteem like the one described is all that is required to account for how children should conceive of themselves.

Self-esteem, as I have described here, however, is a descriptive concept rather than a normative one.⁵

As such, it functions to describe how a person *does* feel about themselves rather than how a person *should*

³There are currently 410 listings with the terms ‘self-esteem,’ and ‘children’ present on the book depository. Whereas listings with the terms ‘self-respect,’ and ‘children’ only number 17.

⁴There are currently just under three million articles that feature the terms ‘self-esteem’ and ‘children’, and approximately one tenth of that mentioning ‘self-respect,’ and ‘children.’

⁵According to Roland and Fox (2003) the reason why this is the case is because the concept that I have described here originates in, and continues to bear the features of the psychological tradition; a tradition that employed and that largely continues to employ the term for the purposes of describing a person’s self-conception in the absence of normative considerations.

feel about themselves. I claimed earlier that it seems to be the case that the self-conception Williams King describes is one that all children should have; all children, that is, should have a sense of themselves as a ‘somebody’, as a person that matters, and as a person that matters equally among other persons. If this is correct, and we are interested in accounting for how a child should conceive of themselves, then a descriptive concept like self-esteem as I have described it here will not do.

One reason for appealing to self-esteem in the first place seems to be the assumption that having high self-esteem is good, and low self-esteem is bad, that they are state of affairs that ought to be promoted or avoided respectively. As Roland and Foxx explain, example, “many therapists... have accepted the notion that if “we could only enhance [children’s] self-esteem, then everything would be so much better”” (2006: 248). We might think then that while self-esteem does not provide normative guidance on its own, its presence or absence is nonetheless a good indicator that something is going well, or poorly from a moral point of view. Unfortunately, however, self-esteem cannot even function this way. This is because it is not the case that every instance of low self-esteem is necessarily problematic, nor every instance of high self-esteem unproblematic. A person, for example, may act carelessly causing harm, and so rightly feel bad for what they have done, and bad about themselves for doing so. Conversely, a person may think very well of themselves, but for reasons that do not justify that self-conception—favourable opinions based on racist beliefs, or a sense of undue entitlement, for example. Given that this is the case, not only can self-esteem not provide the normative tools required to account for how a child should conceive of themselves, but its presence or absence also cannot reliably indicate when a child’s self-conception is positive or is worrisome from a moral point of view.

2 Future Oriented Perspectives

Given that self-esteem is unsuitable to account for how children should conceive of themselves, another promising option is to consider future oriented perspectives of harm. John Stuart Mill, for example, argues

that parents have a duty to prepare children for freedom as citizens; citizens who are well positioned to vote, and make good decisions regarding their own lives (Mill 2003: 172). Perhaps children who lack a self-conception of worth such as the one I described above do not become persons who can choose well as future citizens, and this is why it is problematic.

In a similar vein to Mill, John Eckelaar, argues that parents and the state have a duty to protect the proper, or ‘natural’, development of children, and that resources should be allocated in such a way “so that an individual child does not suffer such deprivations that he is disadvantaged disproportionately, when compared to other children generally, on the outset of his or her adulthood” (1986: 172). As an alternative to Mill’s perspective (or in addition to), we might conceive of coming to have self-respect in adulthood, for example, as part of a child’s proper development, and that this requires a particular self-conception in childhood. If this is the case, as with Mill, how a child conceives of themselves will be important, but only in so far as it promotes other important ends in later life.⁶

Future consequences may indeed be part of the reason why children having a particular self-conception is important, but it cannot be the whole explanation. Consider the case in which a child with a self-conception of worthlessness comes to repair their self-conception in later life such that they can still achieve the end specified by Mill and Eckelaar. In this case, even with the positive long-term outcomes, it seems that it would still be a tragedy for that child to conceive of themselves in other terms—as worthless, as nothing, as below the requirement of consideration, for example. If this is correct, then a future oriented perspective, as well as concepts such as self-esteem are unable to properly account for how a child should conceive of themselves.

⁶Immanuel Kant appears to endorse a similar view. As Tamar Shapiro explains, on the Kantian picture, while children do not have the same moral status as adults, morality prohibits children from being treated in particular ways that would “hinder children’s development as deliberators”, as an inability to deliberate well is an obstacle to morality (1999: 721). If a self-conception of worthlessness hindered children’s development in this way, then actions that brought it about would presumably be prohibited.

3 Self-Respect in Childhood

Given the inadequacies of self-esteem, and the future oriented perspectives, it is my contention that a better approach to account for how children ought conceive of themselves in childhood is to draw from accounts of self-respect. Like self-esteem, self-respect concerns a child's own subjective self-conception. However, unlike self-esteem it is also a normative concept; to have self-respect is most fundamentally to have an appreciation for one's own inherent moral value as a person that is expressed in relational and non-relational terms, and to have "a standing favorable attitude" towards oneself predicated on that value (Meyers 1995: 221).

In this section, my aim is to first articulate more clearly an account of self-respect. There are many varying accounts of self-respect in the literature, too many to articulate here.⁷ The view that I will present here then is a collection of features that are commonly cited as being central to self-respect. I will then demonstrate how some of those features that are common to self-respect render these accounts inaccessible to children due to the presupposition of mature capabilities. I will argue that although these features are problematic for children, their presence does not make it the case that the concept of self-respect as a whole is unfitting for children. If self-respect is going to be fitting for childhood and helpful for present purposes, however, the concept must be reconceptualized to reflect what children can developmentally achieve.

3.1 Self-Respect in the Literature

Many accounts of self-respect are built upon the Kantian tradition of moral value according to which persons as such have an inherent moral value (a 'dignity') in virtue of their shared capacity for rationality.⁸

⁷See, for example, Rawls (1999), Kant (1999c), Darwall (2004), Dillon (1995, 2015, 2021), Hill (1991: 4–18), Middleton (2006), Massey (1995), Meyers (1995), Telfer (1968), Thomas (1995), Taylor (1995), Sachs (1995).

⁸See Darwall (2004), Dillon (1995, 2015, 2021), Hill (1991: 4–18), and Middleton (2006).

According to this tradition, as a shared capacity and the source of moral value, the capacity for rationality grants persons equal moral status among persons, as well as a collection of basic moral rights, and responsibilities. The basic moral rights persons have include the right to fair and equal treatment among persons, the right to have one's preferences and interests taken seriously and weighed appropriately in the deliberations of others, and the right to be understood as having the authority to make claims and issue demands for these basic rights (Darwall 1995). The basic moral duties persons have include the duty to respect the basic moral rights of persons, and the duty to respect those features of persons that are morally valuable, which includes a persons' capacity for rationality—their agency.

When a person has self-respect then, they have a standing favorable attitude towards themselves predicated on an appreciation of themselves as objects of inherent moral value. In addition to this attitude, self-respect also calls for persons to act in ways that show appreciation for their value in relational and non-relational terms. In relational terms self-respect requires persons to recognize and appreciate their own moral value in relation to others. Drawing from the Kantian perspective, this calls for a person to recognize and appreciate the basic moral rights and responsibilities they and others have as persons. One appreciates this value appropriately, among other ways, by taking one's rights and the rights of others seriously in one's deliberations, and by giving them appropriate weight—specifically, equal moral consideration—in those deliberations. Appreciation is also given by holding the right kind of reactive attitudes with respect to one's basic rights, and the rights of others. Reactive attitudes are responses that we give when we hold someone, including ourselves, morally accountable (Strawson 2008). In the context of self-respect, this might include exhibiting feelings such as indignation when someone does not respect one's basic rights, or the rights of others, or shame when one fails to respect the basic rights of others.

In non-relational terms, a person has self-respect in so far as they appreciate those features of themselves that are morally valuable; specifically, according to the Kantian perspective, their capacity for agency. What respect for agency amounts to is partly expressed relationally: it calls for a person to

recognize that among the basic rights they have as a person is the right to express, and not have others interfere with their capacity for agency, as well as the duty to protect that right.⁹

In non-relational terms, a number of views hold that respect for agency also calls for a person to exercise that agency well; you value yourself as an agent when you exercise your capacity well. For a number of views, exercising one's agency well calls for a person to be "autonomously self-defining" (Dillon 1992a: 130). To be autonomously self-defining is to exercise one's capacity for agency, and a person respects their agency, and so themselves, in so far as they exercise and protect that capacity. What it means to be autonomously self-defining varies among theorists, but for many accounts it includes a responsibility to cultivate and pursue things like one's own identity conferring commitments and life plans. Identity conferring commitments are commitments that a person makes to themselves, and that they see as defining the person that they are (Hill 1991: 12). Their cultivation and pursuit requires a person to critically reflect upon and evaluate their ideals, goals, commitments, and particulars in order to gain better self-understanding. To have a self-respecting life plan is to cultivate and strive to live by a conception of a worthwhile life—a life that is reflective of one's own ideals, and aspirations as the particular person that you are (Dillon 1992a). These life plans should be reflective of a person's identity conferring commitments, and they should also be compatible with their value as an agent, and as a moral equal of persons—the self-respecting person, should, for example, embrace those activities, goals, relationships, etc., that promote and protect their agency and moral equality, and shun those that do not (Dillon 1992a: 130).

In addition to cultivating life plans and commitments, some theorists hold that a person should also strive to act in ways that are reflective of and value their particularity as persons. According to Robin Dillon, for example, a person's moral value lies not only in the fact that they are agents, but that they are particular persons as well. Self-respecting persons, then, value themselves not only in their generic 'personhood,' and agency, but also in their particularity as well; that is, as a concrete, specific individual

⁹See for example, Dillon (1992b: 60, 1997) and Telfer (1995).

with their own individual quirks and idiosyncrasies, histories, concerns, projects, needs, abilities, desires, limitations, and so on (Dillon 1992b: 60). A person values their particularity appropriately when their life plans and identity conferring commitments reflect their particularity. They also value their particularity when they consider it appropriately in their deliberations, where this includes among other things, taking seriously and valuing their own preferences, ideals, tastes, and so on in their everyday decisions, as well as those decisions that furnish life plans and personal commitments (Dillon 1992b).

3.2 Self-Respect and Unfitting Requirements for Childhood

I claimed above a descriptive account of self-esteem cannot account for how children should conceive of themselves because a descriptive account describes how a person conceives of themselves, rather than how a person should conceive of themselves. I also claimed that future oriented perspectives were inappropriate because they can only speak to how a child should conceive of themselves in so far as a particular self-conception contributes to future ends.

Unlike these two approaches, self-respect in some ways appears to be well equipped to account for how children should conceive of themselves. Self-respect calls for a person to see themselves as objects of inherent value, to value their personal ends, and to have an appreciation for their relative value among persons. Self-respect is also incompatible with self-conceptions of worthlessness. If the intuitions regarding how children should conceive of themselves are correct, then a concept such as self-respect appears to be helpful here. Not only does it appear to capture the spirit of Williams King's aims—for a child to conceive of themselves as a 'somebody', as a person who matters, and as a person who matters equally among other persons—but it also provides guidance for what it means for a person to conceive of and value themselves in these terms. A person who sees themselves as a particular person, a somebody, for example, values and pursues their own ends, takes their particularity seriously, and respects their basic rights. And a person who sees themselves as mattering equally gives appropriate weight to their

own basic rights, interests and preferences, as well as to the basic rights, interests and preferences of others.

Importantly, however, accounts of self-respect standardly make no mention of applicability to children.¹⁰ There is also good reason for thinking that self-respect is unfitting for childhood. On Darwall's view, for example, a person's equal moral status—the appreciation of which is fundamental to self-respect—is grounded in a person's capacity to occupy the second person standpoint; this is what it means to be 'a person as such' in the relevant sense. To occupy the second person standpoint requires a person to be able to "recognize and act on second-personal reasons", with the authority to create second-personal reasons for others (Darwall 2004: 47). To recognize and act on second personal reasons, however, appears to require a level of conceptual understanding—of rights, entitlements, accountability, etc.—that enables one to "understand what is being said *and* act on this understanding" (2004: 47). While children may act in desirable ways when demands are issued, Darwall holds that young children lack the capacities needed for the appropriate level of conceptual comprehension, and so even when the demands themselves are made to children they do not take the same "form of moral address"; they are not, that is to say, second-personal forms of address (2004: 47). If a person's equal moral status is grounded in their ability to occupy the second person standpoint then, and self-respect is a recognition of that status, on Darwall's view this concept of self-respect is unfitting for childhood. It is for this reason too that children are not able to exhibit the requisite reactive attitudes; reactive attitudes are second personal forms of moral address that hold people accountable for their actions (Darwall 2004: 47).

There are a number of accounts of moral status that seek to ground an individuals' equal moral value in ways that do not require the ability to occupy the second person standpoint—a point I will return to later in this chapter. Children's inabilities in these regards then do not obviously undermine children

¹⁰One notable exception is Michele Moody-Adam (1995). On Moody-Adam's view children can meet what she describes as the "minimum content of self-respect", where this is to "hold the conviction that one best affirms one's own value by using one's abilities and talents to contribute to one's survival. One who fails to act on this account fails to affirm self-respect" (1995: 284). Moody-Adam's view departs in a number of ways from most views of self-respect, and so I have not focused on it here. Her view is also subject to the same challenges of comprehension that the other mature model presents for children, as I will describe below.

as being bearers of self-respect. Nonetheless, there remain other important issues regarding children's capabilities and self-respect. As I articulated above, it is a common feature of accounts of self-respect that a person must strive to live a life that is reflective of one's particularity as a person—of one's identity conferring commitments, ideals, points of no return, etc. This is how one values oneself as an agent and a particular person. In order to strive for these ends, however, a person first needs to know what those are; a person needs, that is to say, a sufficiently "established practical identity" (Oshana 2003). An established practical identity is a conception of the self that is coherent and sustained over time, and it is "typified most readily in what we consider to be ineliminable and intractable aspects of ourselves" (Oshana 2003: 80). Young children typically do not have established practical identities; they do not have well developed or stable views of who they are, including what they want to be, what their preferences are ("The child who loves skating today may hate it tomorrow; the child who will only wear purple today will tomorrow only wear pink"), and where they stand on a range of important issues (Brennan 2002: 61, Hannan 2018: 19). As a result children's aims, rather than being a reflection of their particularity, "often don't issue from an authoritative and settled pattern of projects and values", and so are "likely to be incoherent, conflict with one another, and change frequently" (Hannan 2018: 19). The reason why young children typically lack established practical identities is partly because established practical identities take time and experience to explore and cultivate. They also require sufficiently developed cognitive skills to engage in an ongoing process of introspection regarding one's values, aims, and commitment—skills that, as I will explain in chapter two—are beyond the capabilities of most young children.

The skills needed to cultivate identity conferring commitments, and to possess moral equality in the way Darwall describes—such as the higher order conceptual understanding to comprehend things such as rights, entitlements, duties etc, and reasoning and reflection capacities to reflect on one's commitments—are also, it seems, necessary to appreciate one's basic moral rights, and the rights of others. If value for one's moral equality is expressed by reasoning appropriately about and acting in accordance with one's basic moral rights, as many views hold, then it would seem that a person would need to comprehend

these complicated concepts and have the skills to reason well in situations with respect to them. If this is correct then this too is a requirement that young children will be unable to meet.

Given the unsuitability of many of the requirements of self-respect for children, one may be tempted to conclude that the concept of self-respect is unfitting for the context of childhood. This conclusion, however, I contend would be too hasty. While some of the particulars of the individual views are unfitting for children, there is still much to be gained for the context of childhood.

To have self-respect, as I have said, is most fundamentally to have an appreciation for one's own inherent moral value as a person that is expressed in relational and non-relational terms, and to have "a standing favorable attitude" towards oneself predicated on that value (Meyers 1995: 221). As I will come to explain in the next section, many theorists hold that children have equal moral value among persons, and are entitled to a collection of basic rights in virtue of that value. That children cannot occupy the second person standpoint, then, does not preclude children from having self-respect.

Moreover, while many theorists have proposed ways in which a person shows appreciation for their moral value, there is good reason, as I have said, to think that they do not have children in mind; they largely do not mention children, and the standards that they demand of persons appear to presuppose mature capacities. This does not mean, however, that how a person appreciates their value cannot be reconceptualized with young children's capacities in mind. And in fact, as I will come to show in chapter two, young children—children between the ages of three and six—typically have a range of skills that look to be relevant for thinking about how a child of this age might appreciate their value in developmentally appropriate ways. These skills include a developing capacity for agency and appreciation for their particularity as persons, as well as the ability to reason, reflect and act on simple ends, including those that involve interpersonal consideration and coordination. And they also typically have what might be referred to as a 'rudimentary moral awareness'; an appreciation that is, that some actions, such as causing physical harm to another person, is impermissible. If we assume that, like the mature accounts of self-respect, one appreciates their moral value in so far as they value their particularity and agency,

and basic rights then all of these skills are relevant for thinking about the shape self-respect should take when reconceptualized for childhood.

For the remainder of this chapter I have two aims. The first is to clarify the moral value and basic rights that I take children to have. This will provide the foundation of self-respect in childhood; the moral value that children with self-respect will recognize in developmentally appropriate ways. I will then make clear what I have in mind when I claim that standards of self-respect should be fitting for children.

4 Self-Respect and Moral Value in Childhood

For the reasons explained earlier, a child's moral status and rights cannot be grounded in the same features put forward by Darwall—in one's ability to occupy the second-personal standpoint. Nonetheless, there is broad agreement among a number of theorists that all persons, including children, share the same basic moral equality and moral rights as adults.¹¹ These rights typically include the right to fair and equal treatment among persons, the right to have one's preferences and interests taken seriously and weighed appropriately in the deliberations of others, and the right—in so far as it is possible either by oneself or by proxy—to be understood as having the authority to make claims and issue demands for these basic rights (Archard 2014: 64).

The features that ground a child's moral standing are subject to debate. Some accounts argue that a children's full moral status is grounded in their ability to develop sophisticated cognitive capacities (Marquis 1989). Others argue that it is grounded in children's rudimentary cognitive capacities (Regan 2004, Wood 1998), their membership of cognitively sophisticated species (Cohen 1986, Benn 1967, Dworkin 1993), their role in special interpersonal relationships (Nozick 1997, Kittay 2015), the presence of other salient capacities such as the capacity to care (Jaworska 2007), or simply due to the fact that children are persons (Brennan and Noggle 1997).

¹¹See Jaworska (2007: 460), Jaworska and Tannenbaum (2018), Brennan and Noggle (1997). Jaworska and Tannenbaum (2018) even go as far to say that this is the "commonsense view" regarding children's moral status and moral value.

Many theorists argue that children have other important moral rights, beyond their basic moral rights, in virtue of other morally salient features including the roles they occupy (such as being a child), promises made, abilities, etc. (Brennan and Noggle 1997: 6). On Brennan and Noggle's view, to accord someone the equal moral status that they have as a person is to: 1. respect the moral status, and the rights they have thereof, and 2. be willing to consider any other moral claims they might make due to other factors that affect their moral status (1997: 6). It is for this reason that adults are typically recognized to have a wider collection of moral rights than children; rights that might be referred to as 'full rights of discretion.' Regardless of children's desires to the contrary, for example, it is widely agreed that children must receive some formal education, that they must be prohibited from entering into binding contracts, pursuing sexual contact, or purchasing alcohol—domains in which rights of discretion are typically extended to adults. As Brennan and Noggle (1997) explain, however, these limitations are compatible with the view that children share the basic rights and moral value of persons. Children, they claim, "can have a total package of rights and duties that differs from that of an adult; yet this is compatible with children having the same moral status, and the same basic rights, as any other person" (1997: 7). The full collection of moral rights persons have, they explain, is derived from a combination of their basic moral rights plus other morally salient features. The reason why adults typically have the additional rights of discretion then is that there is some morally salient feature or collection of features that adults have—their established capacity for autonomy, for example—that ground those rights for adults but not for children due to the absence of those features.

It would be an impossible task to consider and delineate all the various additional rights a child might have as a child, and in virtue of the other roles, and states of affairs relevant, as well as all the features of a child that might be considered morally valuable. Following the view articulated above then, I will assume that children have the equal moral value of persons and the basic right to equal consideration that this status provides. Following Brennan and Noggle (1997), I will also assume that this status is shared by all persons equally in virtue of their personhood.

In addition to being persons children beyond infancy are also agents—to some degree—and particular persons. Following the mature models of self-respect then, I will also assume that agency and particularity are morally valuable features of persons—features that call for protection and promotion, and recognition as a matter of self-respect. Unlike the mature models, however, I will not assume it is one’s capacity for a mature form of agency that is the source of moral value. Following Samantha Brennan, I will assume that it is one’s ability “to choose for oneself” rather than just one’s capacities as a “fully-fledged autonomous chooser” that is a source of moral value for children (2002: 65).

To have self-respect, as I have said, is most fundamentally to have a sense of and appreciation for one’s own inherent moral value that is expressed in relational and non-relational terms. Based on these assumptions then, to have self-respect on my view, will require a child, to the extent that they are able, to recognize and appreciate their equal moral value as persons, developing agents, and particulars, as well as their basic rights this moral value grants.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that social practice very often does not match the theoretical view of children’s rights that I am endorsing here. As Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (2012) articulates, social practice routinely ignores children’s capacities in favor of almost full parental—or state in loco parentis—dominion of children, where this includes parental discretion over even the basic rights moral theorists endorse as fundamental. Like Young-Bruehl, I hold that such actions, while commonplace, are morally problematic, and fail to show due respect for children. I will also follow Young-Bruehl in assuming that children do have these moral rights, and I hold that such moral rights ought to be respected, and should feature as a foundation for children’s self-respect.

5 Self-Respect and Fitting Requirements for Children

I have argued that many of the accounts of self-respect put forward in the literature are inappropriate or unfitting for children because they require capabilities that are beyond the capacities of what most

young children can typically achieve.¹² This raises a potential worry as there is a real sense in which some children are unable to think of themselves as anything but worthless given the circumstances they have been raised in—circumstances of parental abuse, peer bullying, or depression, for example, may make such a self-conception unavoidable for a child.¹³ Moreover, infants, and indeed children before the ages of three and four, typically do not have the capacities to form a self-conception, or a conception of other persons as ‘selves.’¹⁴ If an account of self-respect is to be reconceptualized to reflect only those requirements a child can achieve in this sense, then the account would risk losing meaning. This is because while it would not place demands on children that are beyond their abilities, it would lack the conceptual tools to explain, for example, what is morally problematic about a self-conception of worthlessness in important cases, such as those of child abuse and bullying. Moreover, it may allow for the ascription of self-respect to infants—if the requirements were so low not to even require a self-conception, for example—and that would clearly be a mistake. Given that this is the case, it will be helpful to clarify now how I understand what it means for standards to be ‘fitting’ for children.

On my view standards are fitting for children in so far as they are appropriate for the kind of beings that children are, where this includes, among other things, their moral value and moral rights, as well as their cognitive capacities and level of development. What it does not include are limitations imposed on children due to circumstances such as abuse, confusion, misinformation, or lack of opportunity. A helpful way to cast the requirement of fittingness, then, might be like this:

There are moral facts about persons. Some of these facts—such as the moral equality of persons—are objective, and independent of ability for recognition. There are also appropriate forms of self-regard.

¹²This claim is based on the views express by Amy Mullin and Eva Kittay, among others. Mullin, for example, claims that of children we “can only legitimately expect what is developmentally possible” (Mullin 2010: 158). She says, for example, that “it is morally appropriate for caregivers to expect children who have the capacity to do so to attempt to show respect for them as individuals to value them as persons” (Mullin 2010: 163). In a similar vein, Eva Kittay holds that “when the charge is able to respond morally to the dependency worker, she too has an obligation” (Kittay 1999: 54).

¹³Indeed, this is true too for adults. In the case of adults, however, accounts of self-respect are well equipped to explain what is problematic about cases like these. A mature model would standardly determine that self-conceptions like these are at odds with a person’s self-respect. For children, however, there is no appropriate model that is fitting to explain why such a self-conception is problematic.

¹⁴As Baris Korkmaz explains, infants and very young children do not recognize that they, or other persons, have minds or mental states; that persons have “beliefs, desires, plans, hopes, information, and intentions that may differ from our own” (Korkmaz 2011: 101). Young children do not, that is to say, have a “working theory of mind (ToM)” (Korkmaz 2011: 101).

Appropriate forms of self-regard are responsive to the moral facts but are dependent on particular kinds of abilities for recognition, such as cognitive capacity and level of development.

When a child is unable to recognize the moral facts about persons because of, for example, developmental limitations the moral facts remain and their self-conception is inaccurate, but the form of self-regard is fitting for their level of development; it is a developmentally appropriate (or age-appropriate) self-conception.

When a child is unable to recognize the moral facts about persons because of abuse, misinformation, etc., the moral facts remain and their self-conception inaccurate, but the form of self-regard is not fitting. We would not say, for example, that the form of self-regard is appropriate or fitting for that circumstance, but rather that it is understandable and regrettable given the damage the child has suffered.

A self-conception of worthlessness is incompatible with the moral value of children. In the absence of abuse, misinformation, neurochemical malady, or depression, a child would not, presumably, come to think of themselves as worthless. In the case of a child who suffers abuse and comes to think of themselves in this way then, the child's self-conception is both inaccurate and unfitting; it is not appropriate or fitting for that circumstance, but rather understandable and regrettable given the circumstances.

Suppose, however, that a child fails to adequately consider the basic rights of persons in their deliberations—as the mature models of self-respect typically call for—but they do so because of developmental limitations, because they do not yet, for example, have the higher order processing functions to deliberate at this level. Here, the child acts in ways that reflect an inadequate appreciation of the moral facts of persons, and their self-conception may be inaccurate, but their self-regard is nonetheless fitting for their level of development.

To be clear then, it is my view that the moral facts of persons are always relevant in assessing a child's self-conception (e.g. appropriate or inaccurate etc.), but what determines whether an expectation is fitting for a child is also what that child can developmentally achieve. For an account of self-respect to be fitting for childhood then, it should be reconceptualized in a way that reflects what children can

developmentally achieve.

What then to say of the infant? If self-respect is going to be instrumental in accounting for children's appropriate self-conceptions, then the concept cannot merely be reduced to the capacities of children; some conceptual integrity needs to be maintained. I have claimed that to have self-respect is fundamentally to have a sense of one's own inherent moral value, and to act in ways that respect that value in relational, and non-relational terms. In order to have self-respect then a child minimally requires a conception of the self, and other persons as distinct from themselves to have self-respect. This rules out infants as potential bearers of self-respect—as it should—and others who are similarly limited.

6 Summary

In this chapter I have argued that a robust account of how children ought to conceive of themselves is needed. I argued that neither a descriptive concept, like self-esteem, nor a future oriented perspective, like those offered by Mill or Eckelaar, is up to the task. Instead, I argued that a better strategy is to draw from existing accounts of self-respect in order to offer a new reconceptualized account of self-respect that is fitting for the context of childhood. In the next chapter my aim is to consider what children can developmentally achieve with regards to self-respect. And then in chapter three I will build upon the insights to propose a new reconceptualized theoretical framework for an account of self-respect in early childhood. This form of self-respect is what I will refer to as the 'base form of self-respect.'

Chapter 2: Children’s Developmental Psychology and Self-Respect

In chapter one I claimed that in order for an account of self-respect to be fitting for the context of childhood it should, among other things, be responsive to the developmental capacities of children. Offering an account of what children can developmentally achieve in terms of self-respect, however, is not a straightforward task. In this chapter I will first outline a collection of challenges bringing together discussions of self-respect and developmental psychology faces. These challenges include gaps in the developmental literature, unrepresentative samples, variation among children, and terminological challenges. In order to overcome some of these challenges, I narrow in on the capabilities of young children, children of approximately three to six years old. I also narrow in on a collection of capabilities that, whilst not exhaustive, appear to be central for a child to have self-respect. These include a working theory of mind, skills of reflection and introspection, and what might be referred to as a ‘rudimentary moral awareness.’ Once I have discussed these capabilities for children of three to six years of age, I will then discuss these same capacities for older children—children in middle adolescence, approximately 13 to 16 years old—to provide a sense of how children develop in these domains to then later discuss how the requirements of self-respect might evolve for older children.

1 The Challenges of Developmental Psychology and Self-Respect in Childhood

1.1 Variation in Development

One of the reasons why offering an account of what children can developmentally achieve in terms of self-respect is not a straightforward task is because children’s capacities are subject to variation across children, and throughout the development of the same child. For a long time developmental psychology was highly influenced by Piaget’s (1964) stage theory of development. According to Gareth Matthews and Amy Mullin (2018) it is, in fact, “the work of Jean Piaget that has been most influential on the way psychologists, educators, and even philosophers have come to think about the cognitive development of children”.¹⁵ It was Piaget’s—and a number of other stage-theorists’—view that children follow the same linear trajectory of development, progressing through qualitatively distinct, broadly applicable stages of development. These stages of development were thought to be marked by the acquisition of distinct knowledge systems—systems of ordered rules, categories, and procedures, that eventually become unified operations over time. As a child progresses through these distinct stages, they were thought to gain more complex skills and knowledge systems: from rudimentary forms of reasoning shaped by sensory and motor abilities in the sensorimotor stage, to basic abstract thinking in the form of symbolic representation and multi-dimensional reasoning in the preoperational and concrete operational stage, to yet higher forms of abstract thought in the formal operational stage.¹⁶

In terms of formulating an account of self-respect in childhood, an account with clearly defined, distinct and universal stages—as Piaget proposed—would make the task of determining abilities for self-

¹⁵Piaget’s work in developmental psychology also provides the foundation for some contemporary philosophical discourse with respect to children. Robert Noggle (2002), for example, contends that Piaget’s theory of children’s moral development is widely agreed upon as the appropriate model, and uses this theory to justify limitations on children’s autonomy.

¹⁶Piaget considered the formal operations stage to be the pinnacle of stage progression, “greatly expanding one’s intellectual universe” (Siegler *et. al* 2014: 141). According to Piaget, the reasoning abilities made available at the level of formal operations make it possible to conceive of the world as being other than it is, opening the way for reasoning about justice and morality. It was Piaget’s view, however, that unlike the other stages of development which he took to be universal, not all adolescents, or even adults, would reach the formal operational stage—but that if they did, he contended, their lives would be richer for it. This view, however, is not supported by many other theoretical perspectives. See, for example, Judith Smetana’s (2013) description of cognitive social domain theory.

respect across development fairly straightforward; with clearly demarcated stages and capacities that apply universally across children, we would need only look to those stages to assess what children could do. However, while attempts at replication have shown that children typically do acquire knowledge systems in the sequence that Piaget describes, research has also shown that children’s development is typically both more varied and complex in the same child, and across children than Piaget contends (Miller 2010).

Information processing theories—a branch of Neo-Piagetian cognitive theories—for example, contend that while the stages of development in childhood broadly follow the same stages of conceptual development that Piaget defines, they are not acquired ‘all at once,’ nor are they applied to all content areas uniformly. According to information processing, a child progresses slowly through the stages of development with time and experience, “in small increments that occur at different times on different tasks” (Siegler *et. al* 2014: 146). A single task can simultaneously contribute to different knowledge-systems to different degrees, and so an individual child—and indeed different children—can be operating at different levels with respect to different domains relative to their experience.

One important source of development-shaping experience, and one that leads to variation among children, is the sociocultural context they are raised in. Socio-cultural theorist, Lev Vygotsky (1981), explains that a child’s performance with respect to a given task, their cognitive development, and the very shape of their cognition, is determined by the wider sociocultural setting the child has been raised in. On Vygotsky’s view cultural artifacts—psychological tools and signs, such as language and counting systems, ways of problem-solving, thinking, and memorizing (mnemonic techniques)—shape how we represent the world, how we communicate to ourselves and others, how we problem-solve, plan and evaluate, and the very degree of our cognitive organization (Meadows 1993: 243). The cultural artifacts we inherit are a product of the culture we are situated in, and so how well a child performs on a given task, and the shape of their overall development, is determined by the skills and tools made available (or unavailable) to the child in their sociocultural context.

Other important sources of development-shaping experience include a child’s personal history (beyond sociocultural setting), and their physical form (e.g. their capacity for visual and auditory perception, reach, gait, etc.). As dynamic systems theorists Esther Thelen and Lisa Smith (1994) explain, a child’s history and very embodiment shapes how she approaches and engages in tasks; how she reaches for objects, and thinks about the problem at hand. This in turn shapes the trajectory of development which, given the variation in personal history and embodiment, varies in important ways among children.¹⁷

As well as variation in development, there is also variation in how well a child will perform on a given task in the moment depending on how the task is presented to the child. As Patricia Miller explains, for example, children often perform at different cognitive levels on different tasks when tasks are simpler, or with subject matter that children are more familiar with (Miller 2010). In object permanence tests—tests used to determine capacities for mental representation—for example, infants typically performed better, outperforming their age-related stage, when the object hidden from sight was their mother rather than a different physical object (Miller 2010: 654).¹⁸

Lev Vygotsky (1981), also explains that when provided with scaffolding from more experienced persons, children typically perform better on a task than had they performed the task independently. The ‘Zone of Proximal Development’ (ZPD) is what Vygotsky refers to as the “distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky 1978: 68). Many studies that aim at determining a child’s abilities, such as those that support Piaget’s theory of development, consider what a child can achieve independently, but, as Vygotsky explains, that is a narrow picture of what a child can actually achieve as it does not take into

¹⁷Embodiment is only one important factor that Thelen and Smith cite as important for development. On their view, a child’s development and success at executing particular tasks are determined by a range of equally important factors including those described above, and ‘multi-causality’ is the term they use to refer to the convergence of these multiple forces to concrete behaviour, and shape development (Perone and Simmering 2017: 6).

¹⁸Due to this variation and other reasons, some theorists have questioned Piaget’s and others contention that cognition is best thought of as a coherent cognitive system, rather than a system of domain specific clusters; “a collection of different and unrelated mindlets” (Flavell 1992). As Miller explains, “it seemed more accurate to depict cognition as concepts and related clusters of concepts that pertained to a particular domain, such as math, space, or quantity, rather than as a series of general stages” (2010: 654).

account variation in a child's immediate social context.

So, while children generally acquire knowledge systems in the order that Piaget contends, their development is not shaped by qualitatively distinct, broadly applicable stages of development. Rather, if the other theories that I have considered are correct, children's development occurs slowly over time in small increments, varying across different tasks and different domains. And how a child in fact performs on a given task, rather than being constrained or determined by any age-related stage, is shaped by a number of factors including the complexity of the task, a child's familiarity with the task or elements of the task, and the surrounding support systems.

The challenge this presents then for formulating a theory of self-respect in childhood then is that a one size fits all approach to self-respect in childhood will not be sufficient. In order for an account to be properly fitting for children, it will need to be flexible with regard to age and individual variation.

1.2 Empirical and Theoretical Gaps in the Literature

The second reason offering an account of what children can developmentally achieve in terms of self-respect is challenging is because the concept of 'self-respect,' is noticeably absent from the literature in developmental psychology—reflecting on their own field of psychology, Constance Roland and Richard Foxx note, for example, that “the field of psychology has focused on self-esteem and paid little attention to self-respect” (2003: 247). Roland and Foxx claim that this focus has led to what many refer to as the “self-esteem fallacy,” which is the idea that issues of esteem are best fixed by its promotion rather than doing “the work that is necessary to build a solid foundation for meaningful personal change” that a focus on self-respect would provide (2003: 248). Like the theorists who focus on mature self-respect, Roland and Foxx focus on mature forms of self-respect as the answer—in particular to issues pertaining to children's self-conceptions. For the reasons I cited in chapter one, however, while such a focus may be helpful for mature adults, filling the gap in this way would not be instructive for children.

There is also the challenge of the mismatch of interdisciplinary terminology between developmental psychology and philosophy. For example, while there is a gap in the developmental psychology literature with respect to conceptions of self-respect, ‘moral awareness,’ ‘moral development,’ and ‘moral reasoning,’ are dimensions that have received a plethora of attention. Given that self-respect, as I have described it, is a moral concept, this literature would appear to have clear and direct application to the discussion at hand. There is, however, an important mismatch between how some developmental psychologists describe the moral sphere, and how philosophers who focus on ethics typically do. According to renowned psychologist and scholar Elliot Turiel (1983), for example, ‘moral knowledge’ as distinct from other types of knowledge is considered to be normatively binding, obligatory, and unalterable. Prescriptions are universally applicable and impersonal, and “determined by criteria other than agreement, consensus, or institutional criteria”, and the wrong making feature of an action is grounded in the harm to other persons’ rights or welfare (Smetana 2013: 835). The personal domain, on the other hand, is beyond the realm of moral consideration. As Judith Smetana articulates “morality has been distinguished from prudential issues, defined as non-social acts pertaining to safety, harm to the self, comfort, and health. . . moral and prudential rules regulate acts that have physical consequences to persons. Whereas morality pertains to interactions among people, prudence pertains to acts that have immediate, directly perceptible negative consequences to the self” (Smetana 2013: 835). Within the realm of prudential concern are control of one’s bodily autonomy and privacy, as well as personal preference and tastes for, for example, activities, friends, goals, etc.

These definitions set the parameters of psychologists’ research and so the findings produced; they set the parameters for what are considered, among other things, the prototypical cases for the purpose of studying children’s conceptual understanding and judgement. So, when a child responds in a particular way to a prompt that falls under the category’s parameters, the child’s response is marked as a ‘moral response’, or a ‘response to a moral case.’

Within the philosophical community, however, it is far from widely agreed that, for example, issues

concerning the self, such as bodily autonomy and privacy, are merely prudential considerations rather than important moral issues, or that the wrong making feature of an action is necessarily harm to another person. Given the discrepancies in the way terms are used, it is important, then, to be cautious with respect to the conclusions that can be drawn when applying developmental findings to philosophical frameworks.

Even when there is overlap and consistency in terminology, a further issue is present with respect to the methodology found in developmental psychology. It is widely recognized, for example, that a vast majority of the data that we have with respect to children’s developmental psychology falls into the ‘WEIRD’ category of research; studies “created under the architecture of Western understanding”, administered to White, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic” (“WEIRD”) participants, presented as the ‘norm’ (Choudhry and Farranti 2018: 39). As Henrich *et. al* (2010), and others have argued, however, this group is “frequently unusual and not representative of large-scale human populations” (Choudhry and Farranti 2018: 39). So, even when we are using the same terminology, what we can really know about the abilities of children of this age is limited due to the scope of the research that as been conducted thus far.

2 How to Proceed with the Empirical Data

Variation across children and throughout their development, an absence of a theory of self-respect with literature, discord in terminology, and limited sample kinds present unique challenges to determining when children have the developmental capacities for something like mature self-respect. Variation, as I have said, means that a one size fits all approach to self-respect in childhood will not be sufficient to be responsive to the varying developmental capacities of children. An absence of a theory of self-respect means that there is no direct literature to mine in determining when children, even generally speaking, have the capacities for its realization. A mismatch in terminology in means that even when there appears

to be relevant developmental literature—such as that discussing moral awareness and moral reasoning—we must proceed with caution when relying on this literature. And the presence of ‘WEIRD,’ methodology means that, even when we settle on areas of agreement among disciplines, what we can actually know about children’s capacities is limited.

With these challenges in mind, how then does one proceed meaningfully? My aim in what follows is to focus in on the capabilities of young children—children of approximately three to six years old. This focus reduces the issue of variation, but it does not eliminate it. As such, the research I present should be understood as a generalization of what we know children of that age can typically achieve—at the same time acknowledging that what we can know is limited in all the ways described above, and cannot apply to all children universally, even when they are the same age, given the variation among children’s capabilities. What this means for the account of self-respect that I come to put forward later based on this research is that it should be understood as a generalized, and limited account, that should be modified for the particularities of the individual child.

My second aim in what follows is also to focus on a small collection of skills that I take to be central to having self-respect. While there is an absence in the literature on children’s development focused directly on self-respect, there is a wealth of literature focused on the capacities for self-conceptions of particular kinds—when a child has the capacity to understand themselves as individuals as distinct from other persons, for example, or when children come to understand themselves in agentic, or characteristic terms.

As I explained in chapter one, children typically lack a sufficiently developed sense of self to be the author of their own actions—they do not have well developed or stable views of who they are, or what kind of person they want to be, what roles they occupy, or where they stand on a range of important issues, etc. Nonetheless, children of three to six years of age are typically not lacking any form of self-conception. As I will come to show shortly, children of this age group typically have a working theory of mind, a sense of themselves in characteristic terms—they, for example, describe personal traits, relations,

goals, etc.—a sense of themselves as agents, and a sense of themselves in, what we might loosely refer to as ‘moral terms.’ Each of these domains are important for self-respect as I have cast it, even if they are not sufficiently developed to meet the mature form of self-respect, and so they are instructive when thinking about how to cast the requirements of self-respect in childhood.

For any action a child can perform or state a child can be in—such as the kind of self-awareness described—there is a multitude of cognitive capacities that give rise to it. It would be an impossible task to discuss all of them here, and not necessary to determine when the action or state is developmentally possible for a child. In what follows then I will focus on three domains of development that are central to the kinds of self-conceptions I have discussed, as well as additional skills that appear to be necessary for self-respecting action more generally. They are a theory of mind, characteristic recognition and self-evaluation, and moral awareness.

Once I have discussed these capabilities for children of three to six years of age, I will then discuss these same capacities for older children—children in middle adolescence, approximately 13 to 16 years old—to provide a sense of how children develop in these domains to then later discuss how the requirements of self-respect might evolve for older children.

3 Theory of Mind in Childhood

In order to have any conception of self and other a child first needs to establish a working theory of mind. Within the cognitive development literature, ‘theory of mind’ (ToM) refers to a collection of cognitive abilities that give rise to the ability for a person to understand that they have a mind (or mental states), as do others, and that “others have beliefs, desires, plans, hopes, information, and intentions that may differ from our own” (Korkmaz 2011: 101).

In cognitive terms, ToM is described as “a composite function, which involves memory, joint attention, complex perceptual recognition (such as face and gaze processing), language, executive functions (such

as tracking of intentions and goals and moral reasoning), emotion processing-recognition, empathy, and imitation” (Korkmaz 2011: 101). Its development is dependent both on the maturation of a range of brain systems, and social forces including parental scaffolding, other interpersonal relations, and education.

In terms of development, research suggests that ToM systems begin to come online as early as the end of a child’s first year, with children beginning to “treat themselves and others as intentional agents and experiencers” (Wellman 2010: 259). By the age of two, assisted by the rapid language acquisition and development that takes place at this time, children report on personal wants and feelings, and understand that desires lead to actions. Children of this age, and younger, will also assist others when they perceive a desire or need in that person—for a toy they have, for example, or for comfort. As Siegler *et. al.* explains, there is a variety of evidence that children as young as one also often offer both physical comfort (hugs, kisses, pats) and comforting comments (“You be okay”) to unhappy playmates.

By the age of three to four children are attributed what might be referred to as a working ToM.¹⁹ It is at this age that children typically “understand that mental phenomena are states-with-contents as causes of behaviour...They understand why people feel a certain way and notice others’ motives and learn to induce some mental states. They realize that the same world can be experienced in different ways by different people and infer from gaze direction what a person is thinking or what a person might want. They explain events by attributing them to unobservable entities, such as beliefs or desires”, and by age four, children typically understand “that beliefs and desires are private and changeable and do not depend on the external state of reality changing” (Korkmaz 2011: 102).

Importantly, however, children’s ToM are far from fully developed, or without limitation at this age. While recognizing that other people have their own thoughts and beliefs, children of three and four are often poor at gauging what those beliefs are, often projecting their own perspective on to others (Harter 2012: 32-4). They also have difficulty recognizing the multi-dimensional nature of situations (that there

¹⁹Korkmaz (2011: 103) notes that while children of this age typically acquire ToM, there is significant differences across cultures, and across socioeconomic backgrounds, in terms of time of acquisition. Cultures and environments that promote language acquisition and value perspective-taking tend to have children that develop ToM earlier than children raised in other conditions.

are, for example, multiple interests at play), and the ability of persons to experience more than one affective response to different elements of the same event (Nucci and Powers 2014: 125). In situations of moral appraisal, for example, young children will often assess that a victim is ‘all sad’ and the perpetrator ‘all happy’, whereas an older child will typically more often consider whether the perpetrator also feels sadness and regret for causing harm (Smetana 2013: 847).

A child’s limitations in ToM are due in part to limitations in their executive functioning in areas including processing speed, voluntary response suppression, and working memory. These functions underpin ToM, as well as a person’s ability for effective agency as they are required for comprehension, problem-solving and reasoning abilities. Processing speed refers to the efficiency with which information is processed. Voluntary response suppression is one of the integrative executive functions that allows for the “filtering out [of] distractors” to focus on comprehension, assessment and goal-directed planning (Luna 2004: 1357). And working memory is “the ability to maintain and manipulate information online” and allows a person to hold information, consider and revise plans, information, and ideas, and then to select and implement a response (Luna 2004: 1357). Improvement in these functions allows for more rapid, efficient, and effective cognitive control of behaviour including goal oriented behaviour, as well as reasoning and assessment processes, and higher order abstract thinking (Luna 2004: 1357-8). Young children of three and four are still relatively limited in all three executive functions across domains relative to older children and adults. The result is that children are less well able to assess and respond to their mental states, and the mental states of others in the ways described above, and are also less well able to execute their goals with reasoning processes limited to simple cases of assessment.

As children develop they continually improve their other ToM abilities and agentic functions, applying them “in a more flexible way and in more complex situations” (Korkmaz 2011: 103). Moreover, they tend to gain a more sophisticated understanding of mental life. For example, as Henry Wellman explains, “While 3 - and 4 - year - olds know that thinking is an internal mental event (different from looking, talking, or touching) and that the contents of one’s thoughts (e.g., a thought about a dog) are not public

or tangible, they fail to recognize the constant flow of ideas and thoughts experienced in everyday life and involved in actively, consciously thinking” (2010: 261). Seven-year-olds, on the other hand, typically grasp that a person sitting quietly is likely still having some thoughts—a view not shared by children even as old as five. Older children yet can also contemplate the relation between mind and brain, the possibility of disembodiment, and superhuman capabilities (Wellmann 2010: 263).

3.1 Theory of Mind in Childhood: Implications for Self-Respect

The research above indicates that even with limitations, children of three and four—but no younger—have a rudimentary working theory of mind that is sufficient for an existential and agentic understanding of the self and other persons; among other things, children typically have the skills to understand that there are other minds or ‘selves’ that have separate and private states and motivations, and they understand and act on their own agentic motivations—even if success in their motivations and comprehension is limited.

That said, it is worth noting that while the limitations outlined above do not prevent young children from a sufficient existential and agentic understanding of the self, they do have implications for how we should conceive of self-respect in childhood. I claimed in chapter one that to have self-respect in mature terms requires persons to recognize that they and other persons have a collection of basic rights, that respecting those rights requires persons to take theirs and other persons’ interests and preferences seriously in their deliberations, and to respond to those deliberations in ways that show due appreciation. Children of three and four can only recognize the interests, preferences and emotional states of other persons in simple, ‘absolute’ terms (e.g. all happy, or all sad), and cannot perform multi-dimensional forms of assessment well. If recognition of rights is a feature of self-respect in childhood then, children of three and four can, and should only be expected to meet this requirement some of the time, in simple cases of assessment with simple emotional responses, as development allows. As children develop, increasing

their ToM and other abilities, more should be expected of them and more often. For this age, however, meeting the requirements of simple cases should be sufficient.

4 Characteristic Recognition and Self-Evaluation in Childhood

As well as providing evidence that children have an existential and agentic understanding of the self, ToM also suggest that children of three and four have a level of understanding of their own interests, beliefs, and desires, etc., which is suggestive of a characteristic understanding of the self. Focusing solely on ToM, however, does not provide much insight into the content of that understanding to be able to assess the depth of a young child's self-understanding.

One collection of sources that are particularly illuminating in this regard are children's own verbal self-evaluations.^{20,21} In a large body of research, Susan Harter (2012) compiled a collection of verbal self-evaluations that range from children in very early childhood, to late adolescence and early adulthood, and she found a collection of typicalities with respect to how children present and evaluate themselves. According to Harter, the following cameo is prototypical of children's self-representations for early childhood, between two and four years of age:

“I'm almost 3 years old and I live in a big house with my mother and father and my brother, Jason, and my sister, Lisa. I have blue eyes and a kitty that is orange and a television in my own room. I know all of my ABCs, listen: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, J, L, K, O, P, Q, R, X, Y, Z. I can run real fast. I like pizza and I have a nice teacher at preschool. I can count up to 100, want to hear me? I love my dog Skipper. I can climb to the top of the jungle gym, I'm not scared! I'm never scared! I'm always happy. I have brown hair and I go to preschool. I'm really strong. I can lift this chair, watch me!” (Harter 2007: 513).

²⁰That is, insofar as we can take child's verbal representations as reliable indicators of their self-conception.

²¹Harter's (2007, 2012) research does not extend to pre-verbal children, and there is evidence that children do engage in self-evaluation at the pre-verbal stage. However, access to the content of those evaluations is, of course, very limited, and insufficient to determine whether a child has the requisite sense of self.

One way in which the cameo is prototypical for children of this age pertains to the structure of the self-description, and the content deemed salient for the child. As Harter explains, at this age children's self-descriptions tend to be presented as separate, taxonomic attributes that focus on a number of concrete, observable characteristics including physical descriptors (e.g. "I have blue eyes"), abilities and activities ("I can run real fast, climb to the top"), possessions ("I have a kitty that is orange"), simple physiological states ("I am always happy"), personal preferences ("I like pizza"), and social relations ('I have a sister, Lisa') (Harter 2007: 513).

Another way in which the child's self-description is prototypical of this age is that the self-description lacks coherence and is disjoint. According to Harter, that the self-description is disjoint and lacks coherence is due to the fact that children of this age typically lack the ability for higher-order conceptual integration—the ability to reflect on and assess traits to produce higher order generalizations (Harter 2007: 514). As a result, children's self-descriptions often jump from one description to another and display an 'all or nothing' mindset ("I'm not scared! I'm never scared! I'm always happy") rather than presenting a considered, coherent self-portrait (Harter 2007: 514). Considered self-portraits of this kind, or 'global self-conceptions', are typically only available in later childhood. Harter explains that children of eight to ten, for example, can typically reflect on both positive and negative attributes at the same time to form a more integrated self-appraisal—e.g. "I now understand that I can be both smart and dumb, you aren't just one or the other. Even though I'm not doing well in certain subjects, I still like myself as a person" (Harter 2012: 61). Without the skills for higher-order integration, children of three and four cannot arrive at a global self-conception, holding only a piecemeal understanding of self that shifts depending on a child's focus.

A further dimension of the child's cameo that is prototypical is that it is unrealistically positive. One of the reasons that children's self-descriptions tend to be unrealistically positive is that young children often have difficulty distinguishing their ideal selves from their actual selves, conflating the ideal with the actual (e.g. 'I know all of my ABCs, listen: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, J, L, K, O, P, Q, R, X, Y, Z.'). They

also have difficulty identifying false-self behaviour—behaviour that they engage in to please others, or to produce a desired end that is not reflective of their true desires, interests, or abilities etc.—and they have, as I have said, poor perspective taking skills, often projecting their own perspective on others, and so reinforcing their own positive self-evaluations.²² Moreover, young children also typically do not yet engage in social comparisons for the purpose of self-evaluation that might temper unrealistic assessments. They do, however, engage in temporal comparisons (e.g. “Jason, age 3, boasts that “I can run real fast, faster than when I was 2!”) which are “particularly salient and gratifying given that skill levels change rapidly during this age period and thus improvement is quite noticeable” (Harter 2012: 32-4). Without social comparison to temper temporal comparisons, an inability to distinguish between ideal, actual and false selves, and limitations with respect to perspective taking, self-conceptions then are often unrealistically positive.

4.1 Characteristic Recognition and Self-Evaluation in Childhood: Implications for Self-Respect

Despite a child’s limitations illustrated by their verbal reports, Harter’s research suggests that children typically have the abilities that give rise to an understanding of self that includes an awareness of some of the characteristics (or particularities) of the self that include physical descriptors, abilities and activities, possessions, simple physiological states, personal preferences, and social relations. Moreover, Harter’s research also indicates that children appear to engage in a process of introspection, reflection, and self-evaluation that gives rise to this comprehension—in the cameo, for example, ‘Jason, age 3, boasts that “I can run real fast, faster than when I was 2!”’, indicating temporal comparison employed for the purpose of self-evaluation. This is important as self-respect in its base form, as I have said, requires that a child value their interests, preferences, and other particularities. Introspection and reflection allows a child to

²²Harter explains that it is typically not until adolescence that people can identify false-self behaviour. At later stages of development (typically around ages 12 or 13) people can recognize and conceal their true thoughts, and make claims that they do not really believe (Harter 2012: 85). Children at earlier stages can, of course, make false statements—especially when, for example, they believe that it is what parents or caregivers want to hear—but they are typically unable to identify such behaviour as false, or as a reflection of a false-self.

consider what their interest, preferences, and other particularities are, to then respond in ways that reflect value for them; pursuing ends, responding with self-directed kindness, etc. Harter's research indicates then that not only do young children have the requisite skills to understand themselves in existential and agentic terms, but also in terms of a characteristic understanding of self, as well as some skill for basic reflection and introspection.

As with limitations in a child's capacities for ToM though, a child's limitations in self-understanding also have implications for how we should conceive of self-respect in childhood. That a child, for example, typically has an unrealistically positive self-conception will make it more difficult for them to exercise their agentic aims—pursuing their interests, etc.—which can only be executed well insofar as a person has the relevant and reliable knowledge to do so. And while a child has some skills for introspection and reflection that give rise to their characteristic understanding, their skills remain far from advanced, allowing for only a relatively rudimentary characteristic self-conception. As Harter explains, while young children engage in some personal introspection, it is not until roughly middle adolescence (ages 14 to 16) that “the unreflective self-acceptance of earlier periods of development clearly vanishes” (Harter 2012: 97). Before this period a number of fundamental self-understandings or ‘self-truths’ remain unquestioned and unexamined—questions including ‘Who am I really (authentically)?’, ‘Which actions of mine are the most reflective of my fundamental person?’ ‘What principles do I stand for as a person?’.

Together, these limitations prevent young children from exercising their agentic skills at a high level, and from fully appreciating their specificity as persons. What this means for the purposes of self-respect then is that we can and should expect a self-respecting child to be disposed to take their interests and preferences seriously in their deliberations—insofar as this is what self-respect demands—and to have some knowledge about their specificity that they value, but we should not have the expectation that a child do so well all or even most of the time—that they, for example, will reason and execute plans upon deliberations well, and have a rich sense of a characteristic self.

5 Moral Awareness

As I have presented so far, children of three and four typically have the developmental abilities to support an existential, agentic, and characteristic sense of self—albeit with developmental limitations appropriate for their age. The final sense of self that I want to discuss now is a moral sense of self.

Self-respect is, as I have said, most fundamentally a moral point of view; to have it is to value oneself and other's in moral terms, to recognize moral restrictions and requirements on action, and to act well in that knowledge. Given that this is the case, and the wealth of developmental literature on this subject, it makes sense to inquire as to young children's capacity for moral awareness and moral action. As I claimed at the beginning, the use of the term 'moral,' within the literature in developmental psychology is not the same as that found within the philosophical literature, and so we should proceed with caution here. I will return to this point again later in this chapter when discussing some of the implications this literature has for our understanding of self-respect in childhood.

There are a number of theories of children's development with respect to moral awareness and agency. One theory that has had significant contemporary influence is social cognitive domain theory ('domain theory,' from now on). Domain theory was proposed in response to the eclipse of the highly influential stage theories of moral development presented by Jean Piaget (1964, 1965) and Lawrence Kohlberg (1969). Piaget and Kohlberg held that children's moral development followed a path of qualitatively distinct stages of development beginning with recognition of and adherence to social convention in early childhood, and later transforming into recognition of universal moral principles. It was their contention that the kind of moral thinking that called for conceptions of universality were beyond the capacities of most children, even well into middle childhood.

Contrary to Piaget and Kohlberg, domain theory maintains that even very young children recognize the distinction between moral, conventional, and personal domains, and that, rather than following a simple unified linear trajectory of development, each domain forms its own distinct conceptual framework

of social knowledge, developing simultaneously and following its own trajectory throughout childhood (Nucci and Powers 2014).

With respect to the moral domain, domain theorists contend that as early as two years of age children have an understanding of moral transgressions, and that these transgressions primarily pertain to physical harm to the self and others. Between the ages of three and four, children typically judge “moral events to be more independent of rules and authority, more generalizably wrong, and more serious than conventional transgressions” (Smetana 2013: 843). And by five to seven years of age, children generally recognize that they have basic obligations to others including duties of harm avoidance, assistance, and sharing. Children are, however, still limited in their ability to take the perspectives of others, integrate competing concerns, and take into account wider moral issues and competing claims, including fairness, into their assessments (Nucci and Powers 2014: 132).

In terms of recognizing distinctions among kinds of transgressions, domain theorists explain that, while typically rudimentary, children exhibit understanding through differences in kinds of emotional engagement, judgements of severity with respect to transgression, and understanding of the flexibility of rules. For example, domain theorists have observed that children even at the preverbal stage and beyond often reflect negative affective experiences in the case of perceived moral transgressions, whereas conventional and personal transgressions are experienced as affectively neutral (Smetana 2013: 847). This distinction is also reflected later in development in children’s verbal judgements of anticipated affective consequence of actions, and in their theoretical justifications; studies examining children’s verbal evaluations of prototypical moral and conventional cases, for example, show that children around three years old, and more consistently by four years old, distinguish moral (direct physical harm) and social convention (e.g. “not sitting in a circle during story time, wearing pajamas to daycare, not putting toys away in the appropriate place, or not saying “please””) using different theoretical criteria (Smetana 2013: 843).

With respect to perceptions of transgressions, studies have shown that children routinely judge moral

transgressions as worse than conventional transgressions, and this is the case even if sanctioned by an authority, and if the moral transgression is relatively minor compared to the conventional transgression; it would, for example, be worse to steal a person's eraser (perceived as a minor moral transgression) than to come to school in one's pyjamas on a regular school day (perceived as a major conventional transgression) (Smetana 2013: 850).²³

And with regards to flexibility other studies have shown that children are more willing to engage in negotiation on personal matters, seeing this domain as more flexible and open to negotiation than the other domains. Children for example, are typically willing to challenging their mothers to “gain more control and assert their perspectives on these issues”, protesting, for example, in favour of their right to choose for themselves in matters such as friendships, clothes, etc. (Smetana 2013: 846).

As well as being able to distinguish between domains, there is also evidence that children engage in ways that are suggestive of moral agency. Young children of two and three who observe distress in others will, for example, experience discomfort at that distress, and will typically attempt to intervene by sharing their possessions (toys) with others, and showing comfort and caregiving to others (e.g. hugging, patting, touching). They may also intervene by “giving physical assistance, or getting someone else to help”, as well as exhibit “guilt-like” and “shame-like” emotions of response when they do something wrong—whether this is to another person, their possessions, or in response to breaking a perceived rule—and “empathic anger on behalf of a victimized person” (Eisenberg *et. al* 2006: 654-5, 661).²⁴ According to Martin Hoffmann (1982, 2000), children at this age “are increasingly aware of other people's feelings and are capable of understanding that other people's perspectives and feelings may differ from their own” and so actions reflect a greater awareness of the other person's needs (Eisenberg *et. al* 2006: 655). Children can also “be more accurate in their empathic responses and help others in less egocentric ways” (Eisenberg *et. al* 2006: 655).

As I mentioned earlier, however, while children of three and four can differentiate between self and

²³Children judged that this was the case even though they thought other children were likely to do otherwise.

²⁴See also Siegler (2014: 567), and Turiel (2006: 800).

other, they still cannot do so well, and their empathic responses are typically “restricted to another’s immediate, or situation-specific, distress” (Eisenberg *et. al* 2006: 654-5). As Eisenberg *et. al* explain “as children develop more sophisticated perspective taking skills and the ability to think abstractly, the ability to experience empathic responses even when the other person is not physically present (e.g., if they hear or read about someone in distress) emerges. . . Moreover, by mid to late childhood, children can empathize with another person’s general condition or plight” (2006: 655). Children’s abilities to respond well then, both in their dispositional emotional response, and their ability to consider the interests and preferences of other persons remains limited at this stage, but improves with development.

5.1 Moral Awareness: Implications for Self-Respect

What these studies suggest for the purposes of self-respect is that even young children can engage in what might be referred to as—in a very loose sense—‘moral thinking’, and have a moral self-awareness. This is because it is evident that even young children can understand that there are rules that govern behaviour, and that some of these are universal in the sense that they apply to all persons, and transcend convention and social authority—such as the requirement not to cause physical harm. Moreover, in so far as children’s prosocial actions and responses are evidence of the “beginnings of moral self-awareness”, that children also appear to have some sense of themselves as moral agents—children act in ways to assist, and comfort others, consider their interests, and display moral-like emotions in response to their own actions, and the actions of others. Together, this is suggestive that young children could act in ways that show an appreciation for persons basic rights in a rudimentary sense.

I claimed earlier that the terminology found in the developmental literature and the philosophical literature with respect to the ‘moral’ domain is not consistent. Given the discrepancies in the way terms are used, it is important, as I have said, to be cautious with respect to the conclusions that can be drawn. What can be said confidently, however—despite the discrepancies—is that children make distinctions

across kinds of cases, as reflected by their affective responses and verbal judgements, irrespective of whether these domains are properly considered ‘moral,’ ‘prudential,’ or ‘conventional’ in philosophical terms. And children also tend to judge some forms of behaviour as unacceptable regardless of convention or authority, and they offer justifications that suggest universality; e.g. ‘harming persons is wrong.’ So, while this research is not unproblematic in philosophical terms, it does provide good evidence to suggest that young children typically have skills that are important for a form of moral regard relevant for self-respect.

Two further points need to be emphasized here too. First, it is important to note that it is particularly difficult to measure a child’s abilities with respect to moral self-awareness and moral agency. This is, in part, because it is difficult to determine what a child’s motives are, and while we can inquire verbally, a child may know more than they can say, or be motivated to give responses for non-moral reasons—to please their interlocutor, for example, especially in the case of authority figures. Emotions, and in particular ‘moral’ emotions such as shame, are also hard to measure “because the behavioral indicators are poorly discriminating” (Thompson 2020: 79). As Thompson emphasizes, in order to better elucidate the meaning of children’s actions and responses in such cases, as well as the intersecting influences on cognitive development—including inculcated parental practices, and the wider social systems that guide and support moral self-awareness—much more research is needed. What can be concluded then is only that given the research available now we know that children typically act in ways that are suggestive of moral self-awareness insofar as we take prosocial actions and responses to be indicators of moral action and thought.

It is also important to reiterate that the groups of children used as subjects for much of the data that supports the ‘typicalities’ in children’s development appear to be WEIRD children. A child’s socio-economic and cultural setting, however, has implications for how a child understands and responds to persons’ mental states, moral states of affairs, and their self-representations. With respect to self-representations, for example, Harter explains that in Western (individualistic) cultures the self is typically

“defined as *distinct*, pursuing its own personal goals. The self strives to be *unique*, to *stand out* from the crowd, hopefully by being superior. One also places such self-attributes on display. In communicating with others, one is open and direct with regard to thoughts, opinions, and emotions” (Harter 2012: 290). In cultures that emphasize interdependence over independence—such as cultures in China, Japan, and Korea, that place greater value on the collective—self-construals “are typified by representations of self in relation to significant others. In-group goals are pursued. The self strives to occupy proscribed and proper roles, to *fit in*, so as to achieve social harmony within the group. Connectedness to others is paramount. The interdependent self refrains from direct communication, because the open and uncensored expression of thoughts, opinions, and emotions may disrupt group harmony” (Harter 2012: 290). How the self is understood within different cultures influences both the content of a child’s self-description and the level of participation in providing it, inline with the values of that culture. The participants who provided cameos for Harter’s research appear to be middle-class American school children (Harter 2012: xxi). This is relevant then because it places limitations on the extent to which the children’s self-representations are prototypical of all children. The conclusions that can be drawn then with respect to this data—without further information demonstrating its wider applicability—is limited to this group.

6 Self-Respect and Self-Conception at Ages Three to Six: Summary

My aim in the dissertation, as I have said, is to provide an account of self-respect in early childhood that is responsive to the developmental capacities of young children. By focusing on kinds of self-awareness and reasoning capacities of children of this age, I have aimed to show that while such children typically do not have the full developmental capabilities that would make the mature models of self-respect fitting for them, they do have a range of capacities that are relevant when thinking about a reconceptualized form of self-respect. These include the presence of working theory of mind, the ability to recognize the interests, preferences and emotional states of other persons in simple, ‘absolute’ terms, and the abilities

that give rise to an understanding of self that includes an awareness of some of the characteristics (or particularities) of the self that include physical descriptors, abilities and activities, possessions, simple physiological states, personal preferences, and social relations. Moreover, it is evident that even young children can understand that there are some rules that govern behaviour, and that some of these are universal in the sense that they apply to all persons, and transcend convention and social authority—such as the requirement not to cause physical harm—suggestive of a rudimentary form of moral self-awareness.

7 The Evolution of Self-Respect in Childhood

My aim for the remainder of this chapter is to focus on children’s ability for self-respect in middle adolescence with the purpose of considering later how some of the expectations of self-respect might transform in childhood with advancements in development. Focusing on the same areas of development then—a theory of mind, characteristic recognition and self-evaluation in childhood, and moral awareness—I will now examine how these skills, and those related to them, change, and I will discuss what the implications of those changes are for the expectations we have of older children and their self-respect.

7.1 Advanced Theory of Mind: Middle Adolescence

Relative to younger children’s abilities, the literature on older children and adults with respect to ToM is limited. Dumontheil *et. al* (2010) suggests that the reason for this is because of a ceiling effect; young children (around 5 years of age) already surpass the various test that are designed for ToM, and so there has been little need seen to conduct research beyond this age. Nonetheless there has been some important research conducted in the area of *advanced* theory of mind (aToM). aToM refers to the ability “to recursively infer the mental states of others to explain their complex behavior in ambiguous social situations” (Bilecka-Pikul *et. al.* 2017: 145). This involves a person interpreting others’ second and

higher order beliefs and actions from “multiple perspectives within a communicative situation”, including interpreting other persons beliefs about other persons beliefs (Bilecka-Pikul *et. al.* 2017: 145). According to Dumontheil *et. al.* (2010) developments in aToM see two developmental peaks post early development, followed by two developmental plateaus. They typically occur in early to middle adolescence (around 13–16 years of age), and in early adulthood (19 years +). In middle adolescence children see increased capacity with respect to complex, multi-person analysis, allowing for complex recursive analysis. However, unlike their older counterparts, children in middle adolescence struggle to interpret persons’ affective cues (Bilecka-Pikul *et. al.* 2017: 146).

The peaks of post early development that occur roughly correspond to advancements in children’s executive functioning. As Luna *et. al.* explain “Adult-level mature performance began at approximately 15, 14, and 19 years of age for processing speed, response inhibition, and working memory, respectively” (2004: 357). With respect to processing speeds, Luna *et. al.* note that while manual reaction time diminished with age, synaptic pruning and increased myelination—“the selective elimination of unnecessary neuronal connections” and “the insulation of established axonal connections”—allows for “the faster responses and superior integration of widely distributed circuitry necessary for the top-down modulation of behavior” (2004: 1358). This means that children in adolescence have stronger skills in analysis and reflection, as well as regulation over personal agency than their younger counterparts.

As well as these developments, researchers have also noted evidence of a gender gap in aToM and executive functioning. Raffaelli *et. al.* for example, note that while children’s self-regulatory functions develop throughout childhood, girls “exhibited significantly higher levels of self-regulation” at all points in development (2005: 69). Bilecka-Pikul *et. al.* (2017) also note that girls are typically better with respect to aToM in both affective and cognitive assessment at all points in time than boys. The presence of this gap is postulated to be the product of differences in “neurological underpinnings”—specifically, a differential in cognitive maturation—and differences in socialization. Generally speaking, “females are expected to show greater ability to understand the emotions of others by displaying empathy and

compassion” which may have an impact on proficiency in areas of affective and cognitive assessment (Raffaelli *et. al* 2005: 69). However, Bilecka-Pikul *et. al.* emphasize that the extent to which this gap is the product of neurological underpinnings, or socialization is unknown due to the limited research available, and so they claim that results should be interpreted with caution (2017: 152).²⁵

Choudhry and Farranti (2018) also offer similar warnings with respect to interpreting neuroimaging and neuroscience in adolescence—a source of data that has been used within developmental psychology to “confirm” stereotypes of adolescent behaviour including high-risk behaviours, poor analysis and decision making, and psychological turbulence. Choudhry and Farranti explain that this ‘confirmation’ is often made on the basis of oversimplifying and overextending neuroimaging and neuroscience to explain behaviour when better explanations may be found in more complex analysis—those that do not employ ‘universal’ Western paradigms, for example—and take cultural determinants into appropriate consideration (Heine *et. al* 2010, Choudhry and Farranti 2018: 39). Oversimplification and overextension is particularly problematic here not only because it is not accurate, but because it “creates new ways of stigmatizing adolescents that reifies their lower societal status and essentializes long-standing societal tropes about teenagers” with the potential to “strip away teenagers’ subjective experiences, while simultaneously creating new spaces to exact social control” (2018: 37). Like the aTom research, Choudhry and Farranti (2018) claim that more research, and an appreciation of the complexity of the science, needs to be had before universality with respect to typical behaviour can be gained.

Given the lack of research, and oversimplification with respect to adolescent’s aToM and the causes of adolescent behaviour we should, as I claimed earlier, be cautious with the conclusions drawn with respect to what an adolescent can be expected to achieve—especially given the potential social risks for adolescent autonomy. Nonetheless, what the current research demonstrates is that there is some evidence to suggest that during middle adolescence children typically gain more advanced abilities with respect

²⁵It is also important to note that this study does not indicate whether the participants examined are properly described as ‘female’—where this refers to the child’s biology—or ‘girls,’ as socially recognized. This means that there is further ambiguity, and further reason to be cautious when drawing conclusions from such studies.

to aToM that allow children to interpret more complex interpersonal situations, with multiple parties and interests at play—although they still struggle interpreting some emotional cues relative to mature adults. There is also evidence to suggest that adolescent girls have more advanced aToM than adolescent boys, and that some adolescent children tend to be more inclined to risk taking, and poor reasoning than their adult counterparts.²⁶ The reason for these differences however, may be the product of (WEIRD) socialization rather than neurological or biological differences in children.

7.2 Advanced Theory of Mind in Middle Adolescence: Implications for Self-Respect

In so far as research in aToM is indicative of adolescent children’s abilities, it is evident that adolescent children continue to have an existential understanding of self and other, and also have increased capacities for agency and reflection. With respect to deliberations regarding one’s own and others’ interests, for example, adolescence can navigate those situations better than younger children—respecting their own, and others’ basic rights and interests with more consistency, more of the time. Our expectations of middle adolescents then should meet those abilities; we should expect children in middle adolescence to navigate those situations well more consistently and more often.

It is worth noting that a child’s abilities may be limited by tendencies to engage in high-risk behaviour, emotional turbulence, and gender differentials. However, the extent to which this should modify our expectations with regards to self-respect will depend on the social context, and developments in the relevant domains of scientific research.

²⁶I stipulate ‘some adolescent children’ here because there is evidence that the behavioural ‘tropes’ of adolescence, including risk taking and the “storm and stress” of that period, do not translate across all cultures (Choudhry and Farranti 2018: 39).

7.3 Characteristic Recognition and Self-Evaluation: Middle Adolescence

As well as developments in aToM, and executive functioning, research suggests that children in middle adolescence also typically see developments in their capacities that give rise to a more detailed characteristic understanding of the self.

According to Susan Harter (2012) during middle adolescence, around fourteen to sixteen years, as well as recognizing concrete observable characteristics of the self, early adolescent teens' self-representations tend to focus on social skills and attributes such as "attributes that influence interactions with others or one's social appeal" (Harter 2012: 74). Teen's verbal self-representations also reflect an understanding that they occupy different social roles (e.g. student, child, employee), that they display different traits within these roles (self-descriptions involve a "differentiation of attributes according to roles"), and that such roles come with differing normative expectations (Harter 2012: 74).

Harter explains that self-assessments at this stage are also typically more accurate than those of younger years. This is due to developments that help to limit overestimation including improvements in cognitive functions that give rise to better reasoning abilities, engagement in social comparisons among peers, and engagement in comparison of the self relative to one's character ideals (e.g. 'I'll never be like Beyoncé'). Middle adolescents are also typically better at identifying false-self behaviour than younger children ("Sometimes, I feel phony. Say I think some guy might be interested in asking me out. I try to act different..."), which allows for a more accurate self-conception (Harter 2012: 94-6).

Self-assessments at this age, however, still tend to display inaccuracies and instability. Unlike younger children, children in middle adolescence start to recognize and care about seemingly contradictory characteristics in their self-representations, and in particular, become concerned about which set of characteristics relative to a role reflect their "true self" (Harter 2012: 74). According to Harter, this can create confusion and anguish ("intrapsychic conflict") with respect to a sense of self and self-evaluation; "differing standards and opinions of others [with respect to different roles] represent conflicting self-guides",

and so children are neither certain of which traits are representative of their ‘true self,’ which normative guides to follow, and which standards to judge themselves by (Harter 2012: 74). To try and overcome the challenge this uncertainty and anguish presents, adolescents tend to become preoccupied with the opinions and expectations of others; “adolescents gaze intently into the social mirror for information about what standards and attributes to internalize, even though they would like to deny it” (Harter 2012: 103). The social mirror itself is prone to inaccuracies and instability, and can contribute to the instability in children’s self-perception.

Another source of inaccuracy that children in middle adolescence are prone to are what Harter describes as the two egocentric processes: the ‘imagined audience’ and the ‘personal myth.’ The imagined audience “reflects the assumption that others, particularly one’s peers, are as preoccupied with your behaviour and appearance as you are, and that peers are constantly submitting you to scrutiny and critical evaluation” (Harter 2012: 105). The personal myth involves an assumption of invulnerability (“I am incapable of being harmed”), an assumption of personal uniqueness (“My thoughts and feelings are unique experiences that others, particularly parents, simply cannot understand’), and an assumption of omnipotence (“I possess special attributes of influence and power”) (Harter 2012: 105). Both processes are different kinds of differentiation from other persons. The imagined audience under-differentiates in the assumption that others are similarly preoccupied with oneself; that there is a similarly shared mental state with ‘me’ at the centre. The personal myth over-differentiates in the assumption that one is uniquely special, and more complicated and less vulnerable than the average person. While these assumptions may not be entirely unfounded—with adolescents’ preoccupation with the social, for example, it may be the case that others, particularly other teens, are spending more time looking at and judging one another (Harter 2012: 107)—they are over generalizations that hinder accurate self-understanding, the understanding of other persons.²⁷

²⁷Note that these ‘egocentric processes’ map onto the stereotypes of adolescence mentioned above. It is worth emphasizing here that these processes should not be interpreted as necessarily neurological, but an interpretation based on behavioural observation and children’s verbal self-identification from a limited sample set.

According to Harter, by late adolescence, from sixteen onwards, the accuracy of adolescents' self-representations improves and is more balanced. With improved critical reflection skills children typically shed the egocentric processes that are characteristic of middle adolescence, and come to recognize and accept both positive and negative attributes as part of the same self. This allows for a more stable and integrated self-conception (a "global self-conception"). Harter claims that by late adolescence children's self-representations show that higher-order abstractions within and across roles have been meaningfully integrated into the child's sense of self, and the apparent inconsistencies resolved; adolescents, that is, now have the ability to recognize that one can occupy different roles, where different traits are valued, without it posing challenges to their 'authentic selves' because all are part of the self (Harter 2012: 74).

Stability of self-conception is also supported by children's departure from a reliance on social comparison. As Harter explains, children are less inclined to engage in social comparison with others, focusing more on "comparisons with one's own ideals" which are reflected in their self-representations; at this stage, self-representations now include "attributes reflecting personal beliefs, values, and moral standards" (Harter 2012: 74). Children in late adolescence also rely less on the normative standards of other persons as self-guides, and instead engage in the construction of their own self-standards that govern their personal choices (Harter 2012: 74).

7.4 Characteristic Recognition and Self-Evaluation: Middle Adolescence: Implications for Self-Respect

Despite the limitations and challenges, and insofar as a child's verbal accounts are accurate representations of their self-understanding, it is evident that children in middle adolescence see vast improvements in their characteristic understanding of self relative to younger children. Not only do children typically have an awareness of their physical descriptors, abilities and activities, possessions, simple physiological states, etc. of earlier stages, but they also have an understanding of what constitutes a desirable social trait, and which traits they possess. They have an understanding of self as occupying different social

roles. Moreover, it is evident that children of this age have both more advanced agentic capacities, and self-awareness as agents. Children can, for example, identify false-self behaviour for the purposes of achieving desired ends, and can reason and reflect on questions pertaining to their ‘true-selves.’

With regards to the expectations of self-respect at this age then, it is evident that here too we can and should typically expect more of adolescent children than their younger counterparts. For example, in so far as self-respect requires a person to value their characteristics (their ‘particularities’), we can and should expect a more detailed and accurate understanding and valuing of one’s specificity relative to younger children. We can and should also expect better reasoning and reflection on those particularities, and the particularities of others. Developments in aToM and executive functioning suggest that children have a better appreciation of their own minds (mental states, preferences etc.,) and the minds of others, and research on self-representation suggests that this is knowledge reasoned and reflected upon for the purposes of goal setting, and interpersonal interactions. It is evident that children in middle adolescence still do not always do this well due to limitations in interpreting other persons’ affective cues, the presence of the egocentric processes, and a lack of cohesion in self-representation, but advancements in development allow for better application than younger stages of development.

7.5 Moral Awareness: Middle Adolescence

The last capacity that I will discuss in this chapter to illustrate the evolution of children’s capacity for self-respect is the capacity for a moral self-conception and moral awareness.

As I claimed earlier, according to domain theory, in early childhood children’s understanding of moral transgressions primarily pertain to physical harm to self and others; young children typically regard physical harm to self and others as wrong. Children’s judgements tend to be limited to “directly accessible acts”, and lack subtlety in their evaluations (Nucci and Powers 2014: 125). Children also have a difficult time assessing situations if more than one person with a competing claim or desire is involved, and “most

pre-school age children have difficulty recognizing that individuals can have different interpretations of events or different beliefs” (Smetana 2013: 847).

By middle adolescence, however, children’s perceptions of moral reasoning move beyond direct physical harm, to include broader issues such as “exclusion, offensive behavior, or injustice” as well as harm and welfare within the realm of moral concern (Smetana 2013: 849). Children in middle adolescence’ have a concept of fairness that also becomes “more broadly comprehensive, universally applicable, and generalizable across situations” (Smetana 2013: 857). In particular, “concepts of fairness were found to shift in early adolescence from a focus on direct equality [e.g. tit-for-tat reciprocity] to a coordination of equality with equity and then a concern with equity, or an understanding that fair treatment entails a consideration of individual differences in needs and statuses” (Smetana 2013: 853). And children at this age are also typically more skilled at considering multiple aspects of moral situations—including actor’s intentions and rights, emotions, etc., across multiple parties—than their younger counterparts. The ‘happy victimizer effect’— where young children believe that victims of moral transgressions will feel unhappy, and will expect perpetrators to feel happy with their transgression given their perceived gains—for example, significantly declines, in part due to children’s increasing understanding of internal mental states perspective, which leads them to better understand and interpret different emotions, motives, and intentions in moral situations. Children shift from focusing on the gains achieved by victimization to the negative consequences (including sadness and guilt) of moral violations for victims”, and understand that an actor can hold the more complex emotional set simultaneously (Smetana 2013: 852).

Children in early to middle adolescence—those around twelve to fourteen years of age—still tend to struggle with ambiguous moral cases. As Smetana explains “research focusing on different topics, including rights, exclusion, peer relationships, and judgments of diverse social practices, indicates that adolescents struggle to coordinate divergent aspects of multifaceted and ambiguous situations” (Smetana 2013: 857). In particular, young adolescents were shown to conflate personal choice with rights, and demonstrated an over-application of personal rights claims in ambiguous situations. In one study, for

example, children were to determine whether it was permissible to take money that had fallen from a person's pocket. Young children claimed that the money should be returned. Young adolescents, however, around thirteen, typically said they would take the money for themselves. Researchers' contended that with a greater understanding of the social world, and the ambiguity involved (who holds a right to lost money, etc.), young adolescents would tend to capitalize on this ambiguity. Older children, around sixteen years, typically reverted to returning the money, resolving the ambiguity for themselves. According to Smetana (2013) and Nucci and Powers (2014), children of this age recognize the value in moral (or at least pro-social) action over individual personal gain, and so return the money. A similar pattern is seen in cases of indirect harm and assisting others, where direct personal gain is subverted for the greater social benefit. This has led researchers to describe moral development with respect to welfare as following a 'U-shape' trajectory, rather than a linear trajectory (Smetana 2013: 152, Nucci and Powers 2014: 132).

As well as growth in the 'moral' domain, it is also evident that perceptions of a distinction between moral, conventional and social domains remain, but that the nature of how these domains are conceived shifts. With respect to the personal domain there is evidence to suggest that by as early as five to seven years of age children hold physical aspects of the self—such as one's hair-do or clothing choices—to fall within the personal domain rather than the moral domain, and so is seen as a matter of personal discretion (Nucci and Powers 2014: 132). By around ten to eleven years old children typically understand the personal domain as including some decisions with regards to “behaviors, talents, and skills”, that they should decide, for example, which activities they should engage in as representations of who they are (Nucci and Powers 2014: 132). And by middle adolescence onwards, children come to hold that “beliefs, values, and thoughts” should fall within this domain, and by late adolescence this extends to include having the freedom of self-discovery (to coordinate “what is outside with what is inside the “true” self”) to fall within this domain (Nucci and Powers 2014: 132).

With respect to the conventional domain, from middle childhood onwards, there is evidence to suggest that children's development regarding conceptions of convention oscillates between periods of “affirming

the importance of convention and phases negating the basis of the affirmations of the prior phase” (Nucci and Powers 2013: 126). From eight to nine years old, for example, children begin to push back on some conventions “based on observed inconsistencies and exceptions to norms” (Nucci and Powers 2014: 132). From ten to eleven years, children come again to affirm some conventions as important for the maintenance of social order, and given authority by a social authority figure. Nucci and Powers explains that “a typical 10-year-old, with a concrete sense of social hierarchy, affirms convention as serving to maintain social order. For example, people in charge of schools make up rules to keep everyone from running in the hallways” (Nucci and Powers 2014: 126). At around twelve to fourteen years of age, children typically enter into another “negation phase in which the prior basis for affirming convention becomes viewed through the lens of the arbitrariness of the norms and their status as “simply” the dictates of authority” (Nucci and Powers 2014: 126). Later, in middle to late adolescence, around fifteen to seventeen, this is again replaced with affirmation following an understanding of how conventions fit within a larger social framework; “conventions are seen as normative and binding within a social system of fixed roles and obligations” (Nucci 2014: 126). Nucci and Powers attribute this oscillating pattern as being a product of children coming to terms with the nature and function of convention through a slow process of reflection and integration (Nucci 2014: 126).

Regardless of their stance on the role of convention, however, at all stages of development there is evidence to suggest that children continue to routinely judge moral transgressions as worse than conventional transgressions, and that negotiation—to “gain more control and assent their perspectives on these issues”—within the personal domain is more flexible than the moral or conventional domain (Smetana 2013: 846).

7.6 Moral Awareness in Middle Adolescence: Implications for Self-Respect

What this research suggests for the purposes of self-respect in middle adolescence is that children con-

tinue to engage in ‘moral thinking’, and have a level of ‘moral’ self-awareness that is more developed than younger children in terms of the complexity of understanding, and skills for reasoning about interpersonal cases.

Reasoning processes with respect to these domains, however, may be challenged by a child’s understanding of the complex relations between moral, conventional and personal norms. Taking into consideration the interest of oneself and others, for example, may be hampered by grappling with which domain the interests fall in (is the person’s interest a basic moral right, or is it simply a personal preference that falls beyond the basic moral domain? What should I do when something is in conflict with my interests? And what domain do my interests fall into? etc.). Of course this is a challenge that many mature adults face too, but not to the same degree as inexperienced adolescents.

What this means for our expectations of adolescence and their self-respect is that understanding should be given when children struggle to reconcile and integrate domains in their decision making. It also means that even in adolescence it is the case that children will not be able to act in self-respecting ways—e.g. taking persons’ rights and interests into appropriate consideration—all of the time or particularly well relative to their mature counterparts. As such, generally speaking children of this age can, and so should be expected to, act in ways that reflect their self-respect more often and more of the time than their younger counterparts, but not as often or as well as mature adults (where there are relevant limitations).

8 Summary

In this chapter I have aimed to explore some of the relevant developmental capacities that children have for self-respect. I have hoped to show that while children do not have the same capacities for self-respect as mature adults, they typically have a range of important skills in domains that are relevant for thinking about self-respect in childhood. I have also aimed to show that as children develop in these

domains, their capacities for self-respect typically improve, and so if we are interested in an account of self-respect that is responsive to the developmental capacities of children it is evident that we should expect more of older children than younger children, but still not as much as we expect of mature adults. In the next chapter my aim is to build upon the insights gained here to propose a new reconceptualized theoretical framework for an account of self-respect in early childhood. This form of self-respect is what I refer to as the 'base form of self-respect.'

Chapter 3: The Base Form of Self-Respect

To have self-respect, I have claimed, is most fundamentally to have an appreciation for one's own inherent moral value as a person that is expressed in relational and non-relational terms, and to have "a standing favorable attitude" towards oneself predicated on that value (Meyers 1995: 221). In chapter one, I stipulated that I would follow a number of theorists and assume that children have the unconditional and equal moral value of persons, and the basic right to equal consideration that this status provides. I also claimed that I would assume, like the mature models, that agency and particularity are morally valuable features of persons; features that call for protection and promotion, and recognition as a matter of self-respect.

On the mature models of self-respect recognition of this value often requires persons to, among other things, deliberate on and act well with respect to their basic rights and the rights of others, to recognize and value themselves as particular persons—a 'concrete, specific individual with their own individual quirks and idiosyncrasies, histories, concerns, projects, needs, abilities, desires, limitations, and so on—and set ends, including life goals, that reflect and value particularity (Dillon 1992b: 60). I argued in chapter one, however, that due to developmental limitations, children cannot act and conceive of themselves in the same way as mature adults. Children do not, for example, have the higher order reasoning functions to have a sufficiently developed understanding of the basic rights persons have, nor do they have the ability to deliberate about and act upon them appropriately. Children also do not typically have a sufficiently developed understanding of their particularity such that they could form and pursue identity conferring commitments. The task of this chapter, then, is to consider how a young child

should behave and consider themselves in ways that show appropriate appreciation for their moral value given what we understand young children to be developmentally capable of.

In order to attend to this task I will begin by articulating a form of self-respect that, I contend, is most adaptable to children’s abilities, and so helpful as a starting place for constructing a model of self-respect that is fitting for young children. This form is what Robin Dillon refers to as ‘basal self-respect.’ Basal self-respect, as I will come to explain in the next section, is an experiential understanding of value, that takes the form of an implicit and unqualified confidence in one’s value as a person. This confidence is constituted by a framework of dispositions that together shape how a person experience themselves, and others, as objects of value. Drawing from this framework, I will then propose a new form of self-respect that I contend is fitting for young children. This new model is what I will refer to as the ‘base form of self-respect’. As I will come to explain in section two, the base form is a presuppositional interpretive framework that is constituted by a collection of dispositions that together shape how a child experiences themselves and others as objects of value. It is my view that a young child has self-respect when these dispositions are oriented correctly. After I have presented this model, I will then consider how this form of self-respect might evolve as children’s capacities for self-respect develop. And in the final section I will consider how this model might be used to explicate some of the harms systems of oppression present for children’s self-conceptions.

1 Basal Self-Respect

To have self-respect, as I have claimed, is most fundamentally to have a sense of and appreciation for one’s own inherent moral value that is expressed in relational and non-relational terms, and to have “a standing favourable attitude” towards oneself predicated on that value (Meyers 1995: 221).

One concept that is helpful for thinking about how a young child might show appreciation for this value in developmentally appropriate ways is what Robin Dillon refers to as “basal self-respect” (1997:

242). According to Dillon, a basal self-understanding is an experiential understanding of self-value; it is an understanding that involves “experiencing something directly and feeling the truth of what is experienced”, rather than holding explicit beliefs regarding one’s worth (1997: 239). This understanding is built upon a “pre-reflective, unarticulated, emotionally laden presuppositional interpretive framework” that sets the foundation for one’s “explicit experiences of self and worth” (Dillon 1997: 241-2). When a person has positive basal self-respect, on Dillon’s view, they experience their value in the form of an implicit and unqualified confidence in their value as a person, independent of merit, performance, and character; they have, as Dillon puts it, an unquestionable assumption that “it is good that I am”, an, “implicit confidence” and “an abiding faith” in their value as a person, in the very “rightness of [their] being” (1997: 242).

An important aspect of this basal self-respect is that one’s confidence is largely experienced by way of the absence of particular explicit beliefs and experiences; specifically, those that conflict with a self-understanding of positive value. Persons do not, for example, suffer the “incessant whispering below the threshold of awareness” that “you’re not good enough, you’re nothing”; the kind of “self-condemnation [that] continually gnaws at one’s spirit”, and that is characteristic of a person with damaged or insecure basal valuing (1997: 242). Nor do they believe they are worthless, or below the dignity of persons.

The reason this model of self-respect looks like an attractive starting place for thinking about self-respect in childhood is that unlike the other more common forms of mature self-respect, basal self-respect speaks to the unconditional self-value that is fundamental to self-respect without carrying the prohibitive demands of intentionality or higher order reasoning; a person does not, for example, need to have a conception of themselves as holders of ‘inherent moral worth’ or ‘basic moral rights’ to have positive basal self-respect. It is conceivable on this model then that a child could appreciate their inherent moral value in experiential terms, without being prohibited by developmental limitations.

Like the other forms of self-respect, however, basal self-respect is also largely cast as a mature form of self-respect. Dillon explains, for example, that one’s basal self-understanding is fixed deeply in a

person's psyche by powerful emotion (1997: 241). Presumably, part of the reason a person's basal self-understanding is fixed so deeply is because of years of cultivation an adult has had to solidify its presence there, and because of the nature of mature cognition; by and large, mature cognition is more resistant to change than immature forms.²⁸

While basal self-respect is often described in mature terms basal *self-conceptions* are commonly examined and attributed to young children in developmental psychology. Theorist investigating the development of children's theory of mind and parental attachment, for example, have shown a correlation between warm parental engagement and willingness for independent exploration on the part of the child, as well as children self-reporting on positive self-esteem (Cahill et. al 2007). The hypothesis for this correlation is that the parental engagement contributes to a child's base emotional security, or basal security, which is an internalized, implicit, and often non-cognizant assumption of security and sense of worth.²⁹ If this is correct then this demonstrates that not only can children have basal self-conceptions, but they can act in ways—unintentionally, but responsive to—that understanding of self.

As I have explained in chapter one, typically on the mature models of self-respect persons have self-respect in so far as they conceive of themselves as objects of inherent moral value, and perform actions that show appreciation for that value in relational and non-relational terms. These actions include taking their interests and preferences seriously in their deliberations, setting ends such as life plans, pursuing ends that are reflective of their personal preferences, and, among other things, weighing their interests and preferences fairly among persons. If the research that I have examined here and in chapter two is correct, as well as having basal capabilities, children of three to six years of age also typically have a number of other developing capacities with respect to their theory of mind, characteristic recognition and self-evaluation, and moral awareness that speak to their ability to show a form of appreciation for themselves in these terms.

²⁸Thelen and Smith claim that cognitive systems are flexibly arranged—more so in children than adults—such that their components and their organization can change in the moment, and across situations “rather than being governed by rigid stages that are consistently applied across time and situations” (Siegler et. al 2014: 165).

²⁹For other examples see Grossmann et al. (2008), and Lieberman (2009).

As I explained in chapter two, for example, children of three to six can offer self-descriptions that include a number of concrete, observable characteristics including physical descriptors, abilities and activities, possessions, simple physiological states, personal preferences, and social relations (Harter 2007: 513). In terms of agentic capabilities, there is evidence that children can plan, act on and modify singular and joint aims—both prosocial and personal (Marvin and Britner 2008)—and, at three and four years of age, have sufficiently developed reasoning and observation skills for what might be referred to as ‘proto’ moral action. As Ross Thompson explains, children typically exhibit a sense of justice as fairness, and view other person’s welfare as personally relevant in their deliberations (2020: 72).

These capacities, as I have said are limited in a range of ways. They are also, however, suggestive that young children can perform actions that mirror those required for mature self-respect—albeit in a rudimentary way. For example, children can, like the mature model, recognize some of their preferences and particularities, and set simple ends based on that knowledge. Children can also assess situations and sometimes act in ways that take into account other persons interests, and reflect an appreciation of fairness in simple cases. In so far as considering oneself and acting in these ways are ways of valuing oneself, it stands to reason that if we are to conceive of self-respect in basal terms these actions and ways of considering oneself should feature in that framework. My aim in the next section is to consider what a child’s basal self-respecting framework might look like with these considerations in mind.

2 The Base Form of Self-Respect

According to Dillon, basal self-respect is, as I have said, a ‘feeling of self-worth.’ It is not, however, simply a feeling. As I explained above, it is also a “prereflective, unarticulated, emotionally laden presuppositional interpretive framework” that sets the foundation for one’s “explicit experiences of self and worth” (Dillon 1997: 241-2). With the developmental capacities of children described in mind, I propose that the base form of self-respect be thought of in terms of a similar presuppositional framework. In

particular, I will propose that a child's presuppositional framework, be constituted by a collection of dispositions that include an emotional or attitudinal steady-state, a basic mode of reasoning and response, and a disposition of emotional or attitudinal response. Together these dispositions will shape how a child experiences, and expresses themselves as an object of value. It is my view that when these dispositions are oriented correctly they will constitute a child's self-respect. What it means to be oriented correctly, on my view, is that those dispositions are reflective of, or at least compatible with, a child having a sense of themselves as an object of the inherent moral value that persons have as persons, agents and particulars.

2.1 The Dispositional Steady-State

The first feature of a child's self-respecting framework is an appropriate dispositional steady-state. A person's dispositional steady state on my view pertains to that person's general emotional or attitudinal disposition directed towards the self. According to Dillon's account of basal self-respect, a person's dispositional self-respecting steady state is characterized as an "implicit confidence" and "an abiding faith" in their value as a person, in the very "rightness of [their] being" (Dillon 1997: 242). A person experiences this faith largely by way of the absence of particular explicit beliefs and experiences; specifically, those that conflict with a self-understanding of positive value. Persons do not, for example, suffer the "incessant whispering below the threshold of awareness" that "you're not good enough, you're nothing"; the kind of "self-condemnation [that] continually gnaws at one's spirit", and that is characteristic of a person with damaged or insecure basal valuing (1997: 242). Persons also do not suffer explicit beliefs that feature the same content: 'I am nothing. I am not good enough. I am worthless.'

I take a young child's dispositional steady state to take a similar form as Dillon's. Like this account, a child should have a general confidence in the rightness of their being that they largely experience by way of an absence of beliefs to the contrary; a child, for example, should not believe that they are 'no good, worthless, nothing,' nor should they have a gnawing self-doubt or incessant whispering that is

characteristic of damaged basal self-respect. Such a requirement, as I explained earlier, is compatible with young children’s developmental abilities, and is also compatible with an appreciation for the child’s inherent moral value as persons.

The primary difference between Dillon’s model and the early childhood version will be the level of resilience required. An adult’s basal self-conception is described as deep-seated—a “primordial” self-understanding of value—and so is largely resilient to change (Dillon 1997: 242). Unlike adults, however, children have less well-developed skills of critical reflection, and typically less well-established knowledge systems. This means that children may be subject to greater influence from other persons, either because children are less well able to evaluate other person’s claims to reject them, or because they defer to those claims to fill gaps in their knowledge. So, for example, if another person—especially a person on whom the child is reliant—suggests to that child that they are worthless, that child may be more likely than an adult to internalize the suggestion.

To be self-respecting, however, I take it that a child need not have the same level of resilience as adults because it is beyond their capabilities and so unfitting as a requirement for children. A child, should, however, have some resilience compatible with what they can achieve. For example, when taunted by a playmate that threatens a child’s self-understanding of value (e.g. ‘you can’t play with us, you’re just a girl,’ ‘none of your ideas count,’ ‘you are the worst’), it seems fitting that a child with self-respect should not immediately fall into despair, accepting the taunts as accurate. They may feel despair because of the slight—perhaps they are upset about how mean their playmates are being, or because they feel excluded—but the taunts should not entirely upend their self-conception of value.³⁰ This is because to internalize the other children’s taunts would be incompatible with a child conceiving of themselves as an object of appropriate moral value—value that entitles them to, among other things, equal and fair consideration.

³⁰Determining what has happened in an interaction will not always be easy or immediate—i.e. has the child’s self-conception crumbled in that instant, or are they just feeling despair about the unpleasantness of it all? In situations such as these, however, what has transpired will become more evident by the presence or absence of the other dispositional requirements.

2.2 Basic Dispositional Mode of Reasoning and Response

The second dispositional requirement that I take to be part of a child's basal framework is a basic mode of reasoning and response. In basal terms, a person's basic mode of reasoning and response pertains to how a person considers themselves in their deliberations, and how they respond to those deliberations.

On the mature models of self-respect, as I have said, part of what it means to understand oneself as valuable as a person is to understand one's interests and preferences as having value.³¹ This is expressed by forming one's own interests, preferences, and ends, giving appropriate weight to those interests, preferences, and ends in one's deliberations, and, generally speaking, expecting other persons to do so as well. It also requires one to act on those deliberations; by pursuing those things one sets ends for based on those deliberations, for example.

Given the moral value children have, I propose that a young child expresses this value in a similar way; that is in so far as their basic mode of reasoning and response is structured in such a way that that child is disposed to take their particular interests and preferences seriously. And a child takes them seriously, on my view, either by explicitly considering what it is they are interested in or have preferences for ('what is it I want?'), or by operating with an implicit understanding that 'what I want matters', by pursuing ends, and expressing themselves in such a way that is illustrative of the importance they place on their interests. So, for example, when asked about what they want to do for the day, a child with self-respect may reflect and/or assert 'I would like to do x today!', or, if no inquiry is made, they may simply take it upon themselves to begin engaging in an activity that they enjoy.

While children of three to six typically have the capacities to know and express some of their interests and preferences—as Harter (2012) suggests—they do lack the ability to have a complex appreciation for those aspects of themselves. This is partly due to developmental limitations; children cannot, for

³¹See for example, Dillon's 'Personal Recognition Self-Respect' (1992a: 134).

example, typically reason about higher order or future oriented ends, or reason well about ends that might involved the coordination of multiple parties and multiple interests. It is also due to a lack of experience; it can be difficult, for example, to know what we might want before we know what there is to want. Moreover, even if children have an idea of what they want, they may be unable to express it well due to other developmental limitations in areas including theory of mind. As I discussed in chapter two, children will often assume that an interlocutor has the same knowledge as they do, and so will attempt to communicate based on that understanding, sometimes to the detriment of their communicative end.

Despite these limitations, what I take to be important for a young child's self-respect is not that a child have a clear sense of what their interests and preferences are, or even that they be able to express them well. What I take to be important is that a child be disposed to think that what they want and need matters, that they take time to think about what they want and need, and they expect other people to take what they want and care about as mattering too. So, if a parent, for example, is in the company of two children and addresses only one, the second self-respecting child may assert 'And me! I want that too!' or 'What about me?'³² Or if someone asks, 'what would you like to do today,' the child pauses to consider what it is they want, if they do not already know. Such actions, while simple, show an appreciation for one's interests and preferences, and so for oneself.

As with the mature models of self-respect, there are some limitations on how valuable a self-respecting person can be disposed to take their interests and preferences, and indeed how valuable they take themselves to be as a person. This is a point I will return to later in this chapter.

2.3 Disposition of Emotional or Attitudinal Response

The final feature that is central to a young child's self-respect is a value affirming disposition of

³²There may be circumstances where a child cannot express their preferences—due to fear, for example. For the child to have self-respect they need only view those preferences as important, and in fact choosing not to express their interests in situations of danger can be an act of self-respect in so far as it expresses value for their interests of avoiding that danger.

emotional or attitudinal response. By ‘emotional response’ what I have in mind is a collection of emotions or attitudes that a person gives (as in a public display of) or experiences in response to an event that may or may not be accompanied by intentional content. Examples of responses with intentional content include indignation, which may be experienced as a feeling of anger, irritation, a racing heart, etc., accompanied by the belief that someone has treated you wrongly. Or arrogance that may be experienced as a feeling of hostility, perhaps displayed with a sneer, and accompanied by a belief of one’s own superiority. Examples of emotional response without intentional content may include a non-specified anxiety, fear, or confusion, emotions that are experienced without a clear object, or a collection of thoughts to latch on to.

An important feature of the mature models of self-respect, as I have said, are reactive attitudes. As I explained in chapter one, a person, for example, may exhibit feelings such as indignation when someone does not respect their basic rights, or the rights of others, or shame when they fail to respect the basic rights of others. On Darwall’s (2004) view, in line with Strawson (2008), children cannot exhibit reactive attitudes because they lack the status and level of comprehension to adopt the appropriate form of moral address.

Nonetheless, I contend that when a young child has self-respect, as well as the other dispositions described, they are also disposed to give emotional and attitudinal responses that affirm their moral value. These responses need not be reactive attitudes in the Strawsonian or Darwallian sense, but they should be of the kind that affirms the child’s moral value. When taunted by other children, the self-respecting child will not, for example, be disposed to internalize feelings of worthlessness in response. Instead, the child may respond with anger or (proto-) indignation (‘My ideas DO count!’ ‘I am not the worst!’ ‘You are being mean!’ ‘I don’t want to play with you anymore.’), or they may feel sadness and confusion (‘This isn’t right,’ ‘I don’t know why they are being like this’). A child may also, when the wrong-doing is made right—an authority figure, for example, scolds the taunting children—feel validated (‘See! I told you that wasn’t ok!’).

As discussed earlier, there is reason to suggest that children typically engage in behaviour—such

as offering responses and assessments like these—that is indicative of a proto moral awareness. Even with these capacities though, children are more likely to miss the mark in their responses in terms of accurately reflecting an appreciation for their moral value. Children, and especially young children may respond inappropriately because they do not fully appreciate the consequences of their actions—e.g. ‘It’s not fair that I can’t run with scissors!’—or because they do not appreciate the multidimensional aspects of a discussion—that there are, for example, more persons’ interests at play than they can appreciate. Children may also respond disproportionately due to limitations in emotional regulation—a child may, for example, throw themselves on the floor in despair because a sibling took their toy. Disproportionate responses, and responses that reflect a lack of full appreciation for consequences, for example, are also features of adulthood. The presence of developmental limitations in childhood, however, makes these responses both more common, and more acceptable.

What I propose is important for the base form of self-respect, however, is not that a child be disposed to respond well to all matters that may bear on their self-worth—all instances, for example, that involve a disregard of their interests, or in which they have been treated unfairly—or that they always respond on target, and in a proportionate way. What I take to be important is only that a child have the disposition to respond well to simple cases that bear on their self-worth—when they are intentionally hit by another child, for example, or receive an unfair distribution among classmates—in a way that affirms their value (e.g. ‘Don’t hit me!’ ‘Hey! That’s not fair!’), even if it is not quite on target, or to the degree that is called for. Research indicates in simple cases, especially when a child is familiar with the context, children of three to six can typically respond in ways that affirm their value in the ways that I have described, and so such an expectation would be fitting for children.

2.4 Appropriate Perspective of Self in Relation to Others

I claimed earlier that to have self-respect is to have an appreciation of one’s moral value in relational

and non-relational terms. So, far I have focused primarily on non-relational forms of value. I now want to focus more squarely in on a child's relational value.

I have assumed, as I have said, that all persons have equal moral value; they share the basic moral rights of persons, are due equal moral consideration, and should be treated fairly among persons. In order to appreciate themselves in relational terms, I propose that a young child's basal framework—the framework that is constitutive of the base form of self-respect—in all three dispositional dimensions, should also be reflective of this value.

With regards to a child's basic mode of reasoning and response, the moral equality of persons should be reflected both in how a child deliberates, and the content of those deliberations. I claimed earlier that an important way in which a person values themselves is by taking their interests and preferences seriously in their deliberations. And I claimed that a child takes these things seriously either by explicitly considering what it is they are interested in or have preferences for ('what is it I want?'), or by operating with an implicit understanding that 'what I want matters', by pursuing ends, and expressing themselves in such a way that is illustrative of the importance they place on their interests. In so far as having one's interests and preferences taken seriously is a basic right persons have, to respect the moral equality of persons, a child should not only consider their interests and preferences as valuable, but also the interests and preferences of other persons as well—where this includes the interest in having one's basic moral rights respected.

To respect persons' moral equality, a child's deliberations need not be intentional in the conceptual sense (e.g. 'persons have rights, so I must...'), but, generally speaking, the content of the interests and preferences of people, including the basic rights should feature in a child's reasoning process. The self-respecting child may, for example, reason that they should not pull their friends hair because it will hurt their friend (and, perhaps, have the further thought that hurting people is wrong). As I have presented them here so far, these dispositional requirements would present a significant challenge for children of three to six years of age, and so qualification is needed, which I will offer shortly.

In addition to the moral equality of persons' shaping a child's basic mode of reasoning and response I take it that the moral equality of persons' should also be reflected in or compatible with a child's steady state, and disposition of emotional response. For example, while a child may feel positive and comfortable with respect to their own worth, this comfort should not be accompanied by an air of superiority, or a general disposition of smugness, and self-satisfaction, that is reflective of something like self-conceit—the view that one has superior moral status among persons (Darwall 2004: 52).³³ Conversely, a child's confidence should also not be accompanied by a steady emotional deference to others, where a child, for example, has a sense of themselves as valuable but not as valuable and so less entitled to consideration than others (Hill 1991: 5). In experiential terms, this may manifest by consistently deferring one's preferences to others, or not showing emotions like indignation when one's basic rights—such as the right not to be harmed—are ignored. A child, for example, may exhibit deference in this way at the hand of bullying—constantly being pushed around, having their things stolen, etc.—accepting that treatment rather than seeing it as unfair or unjust.

As well as limiting responses in these ways, a child should also be disposed to respond in ways that affirm value. Part of this affirmation requirement will be met when a child deliberates appropriately with respect to the basic rights of persons in the ways I will come to describe more clearly shortly. It will also be met, I propose, when a child exhibits emotions such as shame, guilt, pride and indignation when they are called for. These emotions can be thought of as experientially recognizing the moral claims in a rudimentary second person standpoint sense.

A full appreciation for the moral value and basic rights of persons, as well as the ability to deliberate about them well across states of affairs are, as I have argued, beyond the developmental capacities of children between the ages of three to six—this is, as I have argued, one of the primary reasons mature models of self-respect are unfitting for children. Exhibiting appropriate and consistent emotional responses that

³³I have stipulated 'something like self-conceit,' because self-conceit appears to require an advanced conceptual understanding of moral worth that has become confused—misunderstanding one's worth as greater than others, for example. While children may not be able to conceive of themselves in these terms, children can certainly look down upon others in ways that look a lot like self-conceit. Children, for example, who bully other children for racist, ableist, or gendered reasons.

reflect an appreciation for the moral value of persons will also be challenging for many children due not only to comprehension limitations, but also because of limitations in assessment capabilities—as Nucci and Powers (2014: 125) explain, children have difficulty recognizing the multi-dimensional nature of situations, and so are less well able to assess them correctly (2014: 125). Moreover, children’s abilities to regulate emotion are still relatively undeveloped leading to disproportionate—but developmentally appropriate—emotional responses (tantrums), and emotions that can hinder effective assessment and response (Denham et. al 2003).

What I take to be central to the base form of self-respect then, is not a mature model of comprehension. What I take to be central is only an experiential recognition of a simple collection of basic rights—where this might include the recognition of persons’ rights to fair treatment, rights not to be harmed, and perhaps basic bodily autonomy (you do not, for example, push your friends around to force them to go where you want)—in simple interpersonal interactions (involving, for example, two people and one basic claim), and that in such situations, children respond appropriately (respecting the rights at hand), at least some of the time. What this means is that children do not have to have explicit conceptual knowledge about moral rights or moral facts, but they should act in ways that are expressive of or compatible with them in simple cases.

Moreover, I take it to be central that when a child does fail to act appropriately, or witness others doing so, they embody, in simple cases and at least some of the time, something similar to Darwall’s description of moral accountability and responsibility. The self-respecting child who lashes out and hits another child, for example, may feel shame—as part of their disposition of emotional response—(crying, covering their face, running and hiding), and attempt to apologize (‘Sorry! Sorry! Sorry!’). Or, when witnessing another child hurting someone, the self-respecting child may intervene (‘Hey! Stop! That’s not nice!’).

I also take it to be central that when a child does fail to act appropriately—either by failing to respect the rights of people, or to demonstrate the right form of responsibility and accountability—that their

failure should not track a pattern of exclusion or prejudice. This would suggest that the child's failure is not due to developmental limitations (such as impulse control, and conceptual comprehension), but due to the embodiment of attitudes regarding moral inequality that are incompatible with the proper respect for persons, and so at odds with self-respect.

As I explained in chapter two and above, developmental research suggests that children of this age can and do assess simple interpersonal interactions along lines of justice and fairness—particularly focusing on harm to persons as impermissible—and will respond with emotions that are suggestive of a proto moral agency (e.g. shame, guilt, etc.). Moreover, children of this age also typically consider other persons' welfare as being relevant in their deliberations. Modest expectations such as those I have proposed then appear to be fitting for children of three to six years of age.

With respect to a child's steady state, and emotional responses, I contend too that to have the base form of self-respect a child need not exhibit and experience the appropriate emotions or attitudes all of the time, or particularly well. In line with their developmental abilities, it should be acceptable that children overreact, underreact, and get confused sometimes. It should also be acceptable that children give the wrong kinds of responses sometimes. What is central to the base form is that children get these responses right at least some of the time, in simple cases, in line with their cognitive developmental capacities to do so.

3 Self-Respect in Early Childhood: Summary

My aim in this chapter so far has been to consider how a young child should behave and consider themselves subjectively in ways that show appropriate appreciation for their moral value given what we understand young children to be developmentally capable of. As an answer I have proposed the base form of self-respect. The base form of self-respect, as I have articulated it here is a presuppositional interpretive framework that is constituted by a collection of dispositions that together shape how a child experiences

themselves and others as objects of value. These dispositions include an emotional or attitudinal steady state, a basic mode of reasoning and response, and a disposition of emotional or attitudinal response. It is my contention, as I have said, that a young child has self-respect when these dispositions are oriented correctly; that is, in a way that is reflective of or compatible with the inherent moral value that children have as persons.

I have two aims for the remainder of this chapter. The first is to consider how the base form of self-respect might evolve as children develop. Drawing from the base form of self-respect, my second aim is to show how the base form can be used to explicate some of the harms systems of oppression present for children's self-conceptions.

4 Self-Respect in Childhood: Evolving with Development

In chapter two I claimed that older children typically see significant development in abilities with respect to their theory of mind, characteristic recognition and self-evaluation, and moral awareness skills compared to younger children. Advances in these domains have bearing on older children's abilities to appreciate themselves as persons, agents and particulars. Older children can, as I have said, engage in higher order reasoning, and reasoning that involves multidimensional processing—considering, for example, multiple persons' perspectives at once and determining a course of action. They have a heightened awareness of their particularity, made possible by advances in executive functioning, and typically have a richer sense of their agency in both practical and moral terms—defining and setting goals within a richer understanding of practical and moral domains.

It is my view that to have self-respect children of this age should also have a positive self-directed emotional or attitudinal steady-state, a basic mode of reasoning and response, and a disposition of emotional or attitudinal response that is compatible with the principles of self-respect.³⁴ However, given

³⁴I think that this framework should also be a feature of the mature model of self-respect, in addition to the intentional features outlined by other theorists' views.

their advances in development, we should also expect more of older children. We should, for example, expect children to consider their own interests and preferences, and the interests and preferences of others in their deliberations, and to do so fairly well and in more complex cases than young children. Given their social experience, and stronger abilities in emotional regulation, we should also generally speaking expect older children to be disposed to give emotional or attitudinal responses that are more on target than younger children, as well as more sophisticated expression in those responses reflecting a more richer appreciation of the interpersonal and moral dynamics at play. It also seems reasonable, given their higher order reasoning abilities, for children of this age to explicitly reason about basic moral rights. A child of sixteen, for example, should—as developmental evidence suggest that they can—be able to assert claims with regards to basic entitlements such as bodily and personal autonomy, and to reason, respect and act responsibly with regards to other persons' basic rights.

As I explained in chapter two, children in middle adolescence are still developmentally limited in some ways compared to typical mature adults. Children of this age, as I have said, for example, often struggle to reconcile and integrate different domains—'moral,' 'conventional,' 'personal'—in their decision making. There is also some limited evidence that children of this age group, unlike mature adults, also tend to engage in higher risk taking behaviour, and experience emotional turbulence that can interfere with their ability to reason well. In addition, there is some evidence that children of this age group, unlike mature adults, typically experience egocentric processes that interfere with accurate self-representations, and an appreciation of the particularity and experience of others.

Given that this is the case, what we should expect of children of this age is perhaps a hybrid model of self-respect, one that brings together the base form of self-respect, with the more intentional requirements of the mature forms. With respect to the requirements of the base form of self-respect, given the advances in development, it appears that we should expect older children to reason and respond better with respect to their emotional or attitudinal steady-state, their basic mode of reasoning and response, and their disposition of emotional or attitudinal response, than younger children in line with their de-

velopmental capacities to do so. With respect to the mature elements, it appears that we should, for example, expect children of this age to reason intentionally about things such as basic rights, as well as engage more purposefully with their agentic pursuits—reflecting intentionally, for example, on their own particularity, and aims that they want to achieve. Children of this age, however, should not be held to the same standard of success as mature adults with respect to those dimensions due to their developmental limitations.³⁵

5 Self-Respect in Childhood: Some Practical Applications

In chapter one I claimed that one of the reasons an account of self-respect in childhood is needed is because without a robust account of how children ought conceive of themselves we are unable to fully account for the harms of oppressive social practises and institutions—harms that can degrade a child’s self-conception. Drawing from the base form of self-respect, my aim now is to show why oppressive practices and systems can be harmful for a child’s self-respect.

Looking back to Martin Luther King, Jr.’s conversation with his mother, Alberta Williams King, it is evident that she was concerned, among other things, about the effects oppressive systems were having and would have on her child’s self-conception; Williams King wanted her son to feel a sense of “somebodiness”, in the face of “a system that stared me in the face every day saying you are “less than,” you are “not equal to.”” (King 1998). I explained earlier that descriptive accounts of self-esteem can not explain why a child holding a self-conception other than what Williams King describes—conceiving of themselves as, for example, ‘nobodies’, as ‘less than and not equal to’—is problematic. This is because such accounts describe how a person does conceive of themselves, rather than how a person should conceive of themselves.

³⁵There should, of course, be limits to discretion with regards to basic rights. Taking someones wallet as an opportunistic grab would be a very different violation than being confused about someone’s physical autonomy—as in the case of assault. A confusion of the latter is far less excusable given the prevalence of understanding with respect to that basic right, and relative harm such an action would bring about.

The base form of self-respect, however, can explain why a child coming to hold such a self-conception is in fact deeply problematic. For a child to have self-respect in the base form is for that child, among other things, to experience themselves and others as objects of inherent moral value, where this inherent moral value is shared equally among persons. For a young child to have self-respect they need not have explicit beliefs regarding their inherent worth, but they should also not hold explicit beliefs to the contrary—that they are, for example, ‘less than or not equal to.’

Systems of oppression surround oppressed groups with ideology and treatment that encourages people to believe that they are of lesser value than the dominant group, and are deserving of fewer opportunities and material resources (2021: 237). Such social arrangements, as Serene Khader explains, “do not merely diminish the regard people in the dominant groups have for the oppressed. They also threaten to damage oppressed people’s self-regard” in ways that are add odds with a conception of moral equality (2021: 232). The base form of self-respect calls for children to have a sense of their moral equality as persons among persons. Systems of oppression then are problematic because they threaten children’s abilities to have a sense of themselves as moral equals by surrounding children with ideology, and treatment that confirms the contrary.

So consider again the example of indigenous youth in Australia. As I explained in chapter one during 2020-2021 the incarceration rate for Indigenous youth in Australia was 31 times higher than non-indigenous children (AIHW 2022b). In 2019 attendance rates for Indigenous children enrolled in a preschool program in all regions (major cities, regional, remote, etc.) were lower than attendance rates for non-Indigenous children (AIHW 2021). In 2018 only 35% of Indigenous children were assessed as “developmentally on track”, compared to approximately 55% for non-Indigenous children (APC 2022b). In addition, in 2019, the potentially avoidable mortality rate for Indigenous Australians was three times that non-Indigenous Australians (323 and 98 per 100,000 respectively) (AIHW 2022a). These conditions occur as part of, and as a back drop to, contemporary and historical systemic racism shaped by the ideology that indigenous Australians are ‘less than, and not equal to’ White Australians. Drawing from

the base form of self-respect we can say that such practises and systems are harmful to indigenous youth's self-conceptions because they pose a threat to those children having a sense of themselves as of equal value to the other members of the population—in particular, White Australians. That is to say, they pose a threat to Indigenous children's self-respect.

A similar claim can be made with respect to the discriminatory practises that transgender children face in schools, sport, and the medical sphere. As I explained in chapter one, as of July 2021 more than 110 bills were introduced to US state legislature “attempting to roll back transgender rights, most of them targeting transgender youth” (Thoreson 2021). Of the bills introduced, 36 sort to deny transgender children transition-related health care, despite overwhelming evidence that access to such care has huge benefits for children who have access to them (Levin 2021). Other bills have sought to deny children access to basic facilities such as the use of washrooms and locker rooms that match their gender identity, “lawmakers in dozens of other states have [also] sought to bar transgender children from participating in sports with their peers, cutting them off from a crucial lifeline for physical and social development” (Thoreson 2021).

Not only are these practises harmful to trans children because they violate the children's basic rights—such as the right to be treated fairly, and to have their preferences and interests taken seriously—but they are also damaging to their self-conceptions. Discrimination of this kind occurs as part of a wider oppressive system that discriminates against trans persons, communicating to those persons that their basic rights are less valuable than other non-trans persons, and what they need or care about is less valuable. It is also damaging to children's self-conceptions because such practises undermine children's agency and self-knowledge—features that are important for self-respect. When children seek gender affirming medical treatment with their parents, for example, children must be “consistent, insistent and persistent” about their gender identity to receive such treatment (Levin 2021). The denial of medical treatment then thwarts their agency, and denies or disregards their self-knowledge. This presents a challenge then to their self-respect, which is further compounded by the denial of access to resources needed to meet their

basic needs in other domains—such as the use of gender identity confirming bathrooms.

If raising children to have self-respect is an important moral value then, as I think it is, systems of oppression pose a serious threat to this end, and must be addressed.

6 Summary

In this chapter I have proposed a new form of self-respect that I contend is fitting for young children that I have referred to as ‘the base form of self-respect.’ I have considered how this form of self-respect is fitting for young children given what we know they can developmentally achieve. I have considered how the requirements of the base form might evolve with advancements in development, and I have considered why some oppressive practices and systems can be harmful for a child’s self-respect. In the next chapter my aim is to consider how to cultivate self-respect in childhood. Having self-respect, as I come to explain, is not an innate ability, but something that requires nurturing and cultivation. In chapter four I will consider how parents and primary caregivers, in particular, might cultivate self-respect in their children.

Chapter 4: Educating for Self-Respect

In chapter one I argued that an account of self-respect in childhood is needed. In chapter two, drawing from the literature in developmental psychology I aimed to demonstrate that while young children do not have the same capacities for self-respect as mature adults, they typically have a range of important skills in domains that are relevant for thinking about self-respect in childhood. In chapter three I aimed to build upon the insights gained from developmental psychology to propose a new reconceptualized theoretical framework for an account of self-respect in early childhood. This form of self-respect is what I refer to as the ‘base form of self-respect.’

The base form of self-respect, as I have cast it here, is not an innate ability. While the literature on children’s developmental psychology suggests that children may have what might be called an innate ‘pre-moral sensibility’—that is a “developing sensitivity to others’ feelings, intentions, desires, and goals; emotional understanding; and a dawning empathic capacity”—this sensibility is not sufficient for self-respect in childhood (Thompson 2020: 74-5). It does not, for example, teach children to balance interests and preferences fairly, or what basic rights they have, such as the right not to be hit, or physically harmed for example. It also does not teach children that the impulses the sensibility draws them to are those to be endorsed, just like human beings’ typical impulse to avoid pain does not teach a child which pains to avoid and which to endure. For the base form of self-respect a child need not, as I have said, balance the interests and preferences of persons particularly well, or have a robust conception of their basic rights. Children do, however, need to have a rudimentary ability to do so, an appreciation for some of their basic rights, and this requirement goes beyond a pre-moral sensibility.

An important question to address then is how we should cultivate self-respect in children. Given that different children have varying developmental capacities throughout childhood, and are situated in varying socio-cultural settings, the answer to this question—like the shape of self-respect itself—will not be singular. Moreover, the answer to this question will depend on who is asking, so to speak. Like many duties that must be fulfilled with respect to children, the duty to cultivate a child’s self-respect will be shared among persons and collectives—a child’s primary care givers, for example, their extended family, the wider community, and social institutions (governments, schools, etc.).

It is widely agreed that parents, in particular, have special moral duties to their children. The precise nature of those duties—what they are, what grounds them, and the limitations on them—is subject to debate. Nonetheless, most theorists hold that parental duties typically include the duty to “help facilitate healthy physical, psychological and moral development” of their children, to refrain from “harm and neglect,” and to prepare children for healthy social engagement and future wellbeing (MacLeod 2018: 173, Austin 2007: 111). Given the moral importance of self-respect for both personal and social wellbeing, and moral life there is good reason to think that the cultivation of self-respect falls squarely within the domain of parental duties.

Assuming this is correct, the question I want to address here then is how parents should go about cultivating self-respect in their children. I will begin by introducing what I refer to as the four pillars of moral education: modelling, communication and dialogue, practise, and relationship cultivation. I will then propose an approach to cultivating self-respect in young children based on these pillars with a focus on parental engagement. I will then consider the role privileges such as having self-respect oneself, and having access to the resources that support the cultivation of self-respect, have on who can educate children to be self-respecting.

1 An Approach to Moral Education

Self-respect in maturity and childhood, as I have said, is a moral concept; it speaks to how persons ought act and consider themselves given the moral value persons have, and share among other persons. In addressing how to cultivate self-respect in childhood it makes sense then to look to the contemporary literature on moral education.

Within this sphere, the primary focus is on how educators—such as school teachers and support staff—can teach their students to be moral actors. A number of the strategies that they endorse, however, do not rely on the formal teacher-pupil dynamic, and, as I will come to show shortly, can be easily translated to the parent-child dynamic for the purposes of educating for self-respect. There are many strategies proposed for the purpose of moral education. My aim here is to focus on what I will refer to as the ‘four pillars’ of moral education—strategies that are, for the most part, widely endorsed for the purposes of moral education. The four pillars are, as I have said, modelling, communication and dialogue, practise, and relationship cultivation. In what follows, I will begin by briefly describing these pillars, and then I will turn to consider the shape they might take as methods for cultivating self-respect.

1.1 Modelling Moral Character

Modelling is considered by a number of theorists to be the most important means of nurturing ethical behaviour in childhood. Thomas Lickona, for example, contends that the idea that teachers can only cultivate children’s character if they display it themselves is “the most important moral lesson in the character curriculum” (2004: 118). Nel Noddings (2010) places modelling as foundational to ethical theory on moral education, and Kristjan Kristjánsson claims that if a teacher is to be successful they must be an exemplary model “presenting excellences to which her students can attain” (1998: 11). To model behaviour is on these views, broadly speaking, to exemplify the moral characteristics one is aiming

to instil in one's students.

There are at least two kinds of educational strategies that employ modelling for the purposes of moral education, both of which might be thought of as Aristotelian forms of habituation in so far as they require “learning by doing various things frequently and consistently under the guidance and authority of a virtuous tutor” (Sanderse 2013: 35). The first I will refer to as the ‘behavioural model.’ According to this model, virtuous character traits are inculcated in the student as the educator connects “the child’s behaviour with different reinforcing and punishing stimuli” to those traits (Sanderse 2013: 35).³⁶ Here, the educator displays the admirable character traits, expects the child to follow suit, and then reinforces this behaviour in the ways desired. On this model, as Sanderse (2013) explains, a child’s behaviour is conditioned without the child necessarily knowing why the actions and traits are desirable or otherwise.

The second model, and the one most widely endorsed, is what I will refer to as the ‘cognitive model’. According to this view moral education requires more than behavioural mimicry—such is the product of a behavioural model. On this view, a child should ‘not only want to resemble the actions and emotional reactions of the model, but should also recognize the educator as representing a virtuous ideal, knowing what is virtuous about the educator’ (Sanderse 2013: 35). The aim of this model then is for the student to move from imitation—whether they mimic their educators’ actions—to emulation—where they act in the way modelled not to be like the educator, but to embody the traits that the educator exemplifies.

1.2 Communication and Dialogue

In order to achieve emulation rather than imitation, the educator needs to engage in *communication*. On Sanderse’s (2013) view, in order to achieve this an educator should explain their actions, goals and strategies as they approach moral problems for the student then to reflect on; to discern, that is, what is valuable about the traits modelled and how their own behaviour is closer or further away from this ideal.

³⁶This view is endorsed by Miller and Dollard (1941).

In addition to explanation, Noddings (2010) contends that an educator should also engage in *dialogue*. Noddings explains that while explanations are important, especially for critical thinking and analysis, they do not provide the student with an opportunity to engage in the inquiry and exploration that is needed for a child to develop their own adaptive moral framework. Dialogue provides this opportunity in so far as it is an open-ended discussion where both participants speak and listen on a topic for the purposes of inquiry rather than debate.

1.3 Relationship Cultivation

Across both models, theorists also contend that educators should cultivate caring, respectful relationships with their students, and provide their students with opportunities for practise. With respect to relationship cultivation, on Nodding's (2010) view, dialogue and all interaction with one's students should be conducted through a lens of care—a lens that is cultivated in caring relationships, and requires an educator to be attentive to the needs of the student. If engaging in dialogue with a child is overwhelming that child, for example, a good educator should either orient the discussion in a way that is manageable for the child, or should leave the discussion for another time when the child will be more receptive to it. In order to be attuned to these needs, respectful relationships need to be cultivated. In a similar vein, Sanderse explains that moral education is considered to work “particularly well if there is a mutual loving and trustful relationship between child and tutor” (2013: 35). And Kristjansson encourages an anti-perfectionism that is kind and forgiving towards ones students. Kristjansson explains that it is “already documented in the literature as well as being familiar to most experienced teachers” that teaching in a kind and forgiving way—that there is, for example, “nothing wrong with making mistakes and laughing about them afterwards”—is vital to education (2013: 11-2). The reason why these kinds of relationships are called for on Noddings' view is because, as I have said, they facilitate the appropriate lens of care one should take towards their students. One should take this lens, according to Noddings,

because it is respectful to the child—their abilities and limitations, etc.—and because it is an important kind of modelling in itself—engaging in respectful relationships just *is* a form of moral action. For Sanderse and Kristjansson the justification is not moral but motivational; students, the claim is, will not be motivated (or as motivated) to emulate their teachers if they do not have a caring relationship with them (Sanderse 2013).

1.4 Practise

In addition to modelling, communication, and relationship cultivation, moral education also requires practise. Across both models, theorists contend straightforwardly that moral education requires giving students the opportunities to practise acting well morally with the guidance of their educators. The justification is that students who practise acting well with guidance often come to act well on their own.

1.5 A Dual Approach

With respect to which model of moral education to follow most theorists, as I have said, endorse a cognitive model, agreeing that what we want to aim for in moral education is for students to engage in emulation rather than imitation, and for students to develop their own moral frameworks to be able to adapt to new scenarios.

Nonetheless, there are aspects of the behavioural model that have a place in moral education, and this is for two reasons. First, moral education typically starts even with preverbal children—children for whom the cognitive model of moral education would be inappropriate—and this form of education is often closer to the behavioural model than the cognitive one. Early childhood educators will, for example, attempt to model virtuous behaviour (kindness, fairness, etc.) for their students, even when students cannot grasp the reasons for that behaviour, as a method of setting the foundation for more cognitive

forms of learning. In so far as moral education should be fitting for the developmental capacities of those persons it is aimed at, modelling without explanation will have a place in early childhood education.

The second reason is a consideration of demandingness. Even when children can grasp reasons and engage in dialogue educators cannot always be expected to engage in such practises. The educator or student, for example, may not have the emotional resources or energy to engage in and focus on reasons and explanations. It might also not be safe to engage in such practises—if a child is running with scissors, for example, the best an educator may be expected to do is yell ‘Stop!’ rather than immediately engage the child in the reasons as to why they must stop. In so far as the demand of moral education should be responsive to the needs and abilities of all the participants—educator and student—modelling without explanation needs a place in moral education, not just in early childhood, but throughout development as well.

The age group that I am focused on here, as I have said, is children between the ages of three and six—children who have typically acquired verbal skills, and can engage in discussion of reasons. With the considerations outlined above in mind then, my aim in the next section is to consider what an approach to educating this age group for self-respect might look like in terms of a dual method of education, incorporating modelling, communication and dialogue (when appropriate), practise, and relationship cultivation.

2 Educating for Self-Respect

2.1 Modelling Self-Respect

To model moral behaviour according to the views articulated above is to exemplify the moral characteristics one is aiming to instil in one’s students. For the purposes of self-respect it would seem that a parent should exemplify those characteristics that are self-respecting. There is however, as I have emphasized throughout, a distinction between mature forms of self-respect, and the base form of self-respect.

An important question to ask then is which form of self-respect a parent should model?

One might be tempted to think that parents of young children need only model the base form since this is the only form of self-respect young children are typically capable of. According to the base form as I have articulated it, a child of three to six years of age should act in ways that show appreciation for their interests and preferences—communicating their desires for the day, for example—and respect some of the basic rights of persons—avoiding physical harm, for example—at least some of the time in line with the child’s developmental capacities to do so. To educate for these dispositions, one might think that a parent need only behave in these ways for the purposes of moral education.

Among the duties parents have to their children, however, is not only the task of cultivating their self-respect as the child that they are, but also cultivating their child’s capacities with an eye to their future, as the self-respecting adult that they will become.³⁷ While a child may not be able to realize mature forms of self-respect in childhood, modelling mature forms of self-respect will provide children with a guide or ideal to aim for; one that they will slowly approach throughout development, culminating (hopefully) in a self-respecting adult. This, of course, is not to say that the child will have the concept of mature self-respect as something to aim for, such a goal for a three to six year old is unrealistic both in terms of the interests children typically have, and their developmental limitations to set goals of this kind. The modelling of the mature forms of self-respect should, though, operate as a guide in the sense of functioning as a presence that the child becomes familiar with—similar to aspects of the behavioural model—and comes to understand and strive for over time as their developmental capacities and support allows.

The base form is, in some ways, a subset of the mature models; both kinds are, for example, founded on the principles of equal respect for persons, and particularity and agency as moral values. Respecting these principles will count then as modelling for both. The difference in the behaviour of the adult modelling mature self-respect as opposed to the base form will be, among other things, that the adult

³⁷See, for example, Mill (2003), Feinberg (2007), and Shapiro (1999).

will act on reasons and principles that they are more cognizant of, and they will be required to act well more consistently and in more complex cases with respect to their own moral value and rights, and the moral value and rights of others than children will be. It will not, that is to say, be sufficient for the adult to model self-respecting behaviour by simply refraining from causing others physical harm under the same conditions children would be expected to, for example. Moreover, given their higher level of development with respect to their agentic capacities, and self-realization—adults, recall, typically have established practical identities that allow them to be ‘authors of their own actions’—to model self-respect then the adult will need to not only respect the basic rights of persons, but engage in activities that are reflective of respect for their own agentic abilities and particularity, such as activities that cultivate, evaluate, and pursue their identity conferring commitments.

With this in mind, how then does one model self-respect in the base form and the mature form for one’s child? I suggest that parents should make an effort to act in ways that reflect the principles of self-respect not only in the larger, more complex decisions that they make (life plans and commitments, etc.), but also in the smaller everyday decisions, and that they model self-respect in those decisions in ways that are accessible to young children. For example, a parent may show that their preferences matter in scenarios that young children can understand (e.g. ‘I’m enjoying my coffee right now. When I have finished I will come and play blocks with you’). They may set physical boundaries with their children (‘please do not pull my hair’). They may also, and should also, model respect for all persons in front of their children in everyday scenarios. While children may not be able to comprehend the nuances of a parent’s behaviour, even very young children can recognize patterns of behaviour, and so parents can model behaviour for their children by modelling patterns of respect. In everyday situations, for example, a parent may make eye contact with all persons that they are interacting with, or use a tone in their voice for all persons that is respectful.³⁸

³⁸That is, if making eye contact is within their ability—for some neurodivergent parents, for example, this may not be possible—and is a respectful cultural custom.

2.2 Communication and Dialogue

Given the developmental limitations of children, and their lack of practice at identifying nuanced behaviour and motivation, children may find it especially difficult to identify self-respecting behaviour when observing parental modelling—even in the base form. It may be difficult, for example, for a child to assess when their parent is asserting their self-respect in times of interpersonal conflict rather than simply ‘mummy being mad.’ In order for a child to emulate self-respecting behaviour, rather than imitate it, communication and explanation will be necessary. Communication and explanation are necessary to emulate self-respect because a key component of self-respect in the mature form and the base form is that persons recognize the appropriate reasons for action. In the base form, for example, seeing that one’s actions will harm another person as a reason not to do it is important for a child’s self-respect; it shows a rudimentary appreciation of the basic rights of persons. In the mature form adults seeing as legitimate other persons’ claims with respect to their basic rights and having those claims provide reason for action is important for the adult’s self-respect. Communication and explanation then, in addition to modelling, provides children with the insight required to learn those reasons.

How then should a parent go about communicating with their child? To engage in communication and dialogue is, as I have said, to offer explanations for one’s actions, and to articulate one’s goals and strategies. It is also to engage in open ended discussion where each party speaks and listens, and the discussion can explore different aspects of the topic. If we adopt this model then parents should aim at engaging in dialogue with their children, and their dialogue should be aimed at articulating the underpinning principles of self-respect, such as explaining how they play into one’s actions in a way that is suitable and attentive to the abilities and needs of the child. It should also allow open ended discussion for the child to engage in a process of inquiry. So, for example, a parent may ask their young child if they want a cuddle. A right to bodily autonomy—where this includes decisions about receiving affection—is,

arguably, a basic right persons have.³⁹ The child may say ‘no,’ presenting an opportunity for dialogue. In this circumstance a parent might say ‘no worries. It is your body, and you always get to decide when you want to be cuddled.’ Here too a parent might follow up by asking ‘suppose that you want to hug someone. What do you think you need to do before you hug someone?’, and then the parent might go on by asking their child about their response, e.g. ‘and why do we ask someone before hugging?’.

Importantly, at this stage of early development, a parent does not need to talk explicitly about rights and moral principles—these are concepts, as explained earlier, that are too complex for young children to properly comprehend— but this should change as the child develops, approaching something closer to the mature model. A young teenager, for example, should have a clear sense of what their basic rights are as they get closer to transitioning into the world of adulthood where comprehension of rights is important—to lay claim, make demands, etc. At this stage too, open dialogue will be important, in addition to conceptual explanations. Also, for the reasons discussed above, a parent need not *always* engage in dialogue with their child. Given the importance of understanding reasons for self-respect, however, engaging in dialogue when parties can—when a child is receptive, with the parent has the requisite energy, etc.—will be important.

2.3 Methods of Practise

In terms of offering children opportunities for practise, the skills needed for self-respect are many, and so there are many ways in which a child may practise and develop self-respect. Moreover, what is suitable for one child at a particular age, may not be suitable for the same child later in development, or for different children. The key then to good practise, like dialogue and modelling, will be for parents to remain attentive to their child, and pursue methods of practise that are suitable for that child. Here then, I’d like to focus on three general suggestions for facilitating the practise of skills necessary for self-respect

³⁹This is not to say that young children have full bodily autonomy as a basic right; despite their wishes it is still, for example, within parental rights to insist their children go to school, or go to doctors, etc.

keeping in mind qualification for variation. They are engaging in play, personal projects and decision making, and what I will refer to as ‘community inquiry.’

Play is widely recognized as being valuable for children in childhood, and an important method in assisting children’s development into adulthood.⁴⁰ And some of the ways it assists development pertains to children’s self-respect.

First, play provides children with opportunities to pursue their preferences on their own terms. Play, and especially unstructured and imaginative play, allows children to pursue the games and stories they are interested in, to set the terms as they wish (preferably within safe boundaries), including how the game will be played, what will occur, and who and what can join in. In so far as self-respect requires a person to value their own preferences, play provides children with the opportunity to practise doing so.

Play also encourages children to engage in creative thinking, and considerations of possibilities; how the world could be, and how one could be within it. As Schapiro explains, “children more or less deliberately “try on” selves to be and worlds to be in... to feel what it must be like to speak in their own voices and to inhabit their own worlds” when they play (1999: 732). On Schapiro’s view, this kind of thinking is central to the development of agency as a ‘self’ or author of one’s actions—features that are central to the mature form of self-respect—because it provides children with the opportunity to rehearse or experiment with what it would be like to have mature agency.

In addition to play being an important way to express preferences and develop agency, play is also valuable for interpersonal reasons. Imagining what it is like to be other persons not only assists in agency and expressions of preferences, but it also provides a platform for children to imagine what it is like to be in another person’s shoes, which is central to taking the preferences and interests of other persons seriously. Moreover, play often requires coordinating with others, and practice taking other persons’ preferences into consideration when acting—a skill that is central to both forms of self-respect.

Given the value play has for self-respect, parents may facilitate play as a means of educating for

⁴⁰See, for example, Brennan (2014), Betzler (2015), Schapiro (1999), and Lone (2019).

self-respect by, for example, ensuring that a child has enough free time to engage in free play (e.g. not over burdening them with extra curricular activities). They may also initiate or join in free-play experiences. A parent, for example, may assume a persona as directed by the child, or ask questions about the experience to encourage creativity. Importantly, however, in order for the play to have all the benefits for the child's self-respect, the play should be an expression of that child's interests, preferences, and agency, and so not be dominated by the parent's involvement.

Another way of facilitating practise of skills necessary for self-respect is by providing opportunities for the pursuit of personal projects. According to Monika Betzler, personal projects provide children with "opportunities to enact their valuing over time and in recurring ways" (2015: 76). These opportunities are needed for children to come to "understand themselves as having an evaluative perspective and help them acquire a normative identity" (2015: 76). On Betzler's view projects are complex and normatively governed goals that "give rise to and are constituted by both interconnected recurring action types and forward-and backward-looking emotions with regard to the project, how it fares in changing circumstances, and how it affects the person pursuing it", and express an identity conferring commitment (2015: 76). On Betzler's view, engaging in a hobby such as playing soccer is a kind of personal project; it is governed by rules (when practises/games are, the rules of the game, personal conduct, etc.), it provides opportunities for backward and forward looking reflection and emotional engagement (e.g. pride/shame and the outcome of a game or personal performance), and it provides a child with a sense of identity (e.g. part of a team).

The personal projects that Betzler has in mind will very likely be too advanced for children capable of only the base form of self-respect; children of three and four, for example, are unlikely to identify in any deep or emotional way as 'a member of a team' as constitutive of their identity, for example.⁴¹

Nonetheless, it seems that providing children with the opportunities for projects like these is valuable

⁴¹This may depend too on parental involvement. Some parents who show identity commitments to a team (spectators who claim team wins as personal victories, for example), for example, may instill a similar sense of commitment in their child.

under certain conditions—conditions where the child chooses the project that they would like to be involved in, are engaged as part of the planning process, and are given opportunities for reflection, as well as exit. For example, if a young child wants to play soccer, parents might work on a weekly plan together, discuss goals, and talk about how the child is faring during the game and season (including checking in on whether the child is finding the project valuable, and enjoyable). Offering exits too, is important. If the aim is to give children practise at pursuing their own interests—as the base form calls for—and cultivating their own identity conferring commitments—as the mature model calls for—giving a child opportunities to withdraw from an activity or project communicates that what is most important is not the project itself, but the child’s interests, preferences, and evolving values.

In addition to having personal projects, it also seems pertinent to allow children to practise making their own life and day to day decisions with parental assistance in line with their ability to do so. Children, for example, should be given the opportunity to choose which school subjects to take, which extra curricular activities to engage in, which friends to engage with, and what they want to eat.⁴² When they are able, children should be given full discretion on these matters, and when they are not—as most probably is the case for young children—children’s preferences should be consulted on the matter and taken seriously.⁴³ With parental assistance, allowing children discretion in these areas will allow them opportunities to express their self-respect by valuing their interests and preferences, and set the foundation of the mature form by helping children plan for larger, defining ends.

One final way a parent might provide a child opportunities to practise self-respect is by providing opportunities for children to engage in communities of inquiry. Kristjansson suggests, in line with Matthew Lipman (1991), that in order to have self-respect children need to engage in “communities of inquiry” (Kristjansson 1998: 12). A community of inquiry is a space in which children “listen to one another with respect, build on one another’s ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported

⁴²Where those activities are reasonably safe for the child to engage in, and with regards to food choice, discretion should be given where possible given economic constraints, and within possible nutritional options.

⁴³Scharpio refers to areas that children are able to decide for themselves as ‘domains of discretion’ (1999: 733).

opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions" (Lipman 1991: 15). According to Lipman and Kristjansson such communities help develop children's critical thinking skills, and give them an enlarged vision of possible choices by which they want to live, which are necessary for self-respect. The inquiry, however, must be led by a kind and thoughtful educator. If this is the case then one way a parent could provide opportunities for their children to practise and exercise their self-respect is by seeking out or providing spaces of inquiry.

With respect to fostering *young* children's self-respect it is evident that engaging in communities of inquiry of this kind would be too demanding, and so not a fruitful method of practise for children of this age. This is because such engagement requires patience, sustained concentration and sufficiently developed skills for critical thinking and communication already to engage in this level of discussion. Nonetheless, there is something important to the idea of community of inquiry. Even for young children, being exposed to different ways of living, different values, traditions, and ideas is important for their self-respect. This is not only because doing so shows children different ways of living, and valuing that they can choose from, but it also fosters a better understanding of how to value oneself in relation to others. When considering the interests and preferences of persons, for example, it will not be respectful to simply project one's interests and preferences on to others. A child needs to consider their interests, and the actual interests of others in their deliberations to have self-respect as a child, and as they develop into maturity. Of course, a child cannot be expected to do this particularly well given their developmental limitations, but providing them with spaces to practise and to better understand and engage with other members of the community should help to facilitate practise and growth.

A parent may provide such spaces of practise by encouraging playdates with children of different genders, races, abilities, and socio-economic statuses. A parent could offer their children the opportunity to engage in activities that are not typically socially designated for them—little boys taking ballet classes, for example, or studying a language or engaging in a cultural enquiry that is not reflective of their home

life—and exposing them to and celebrating diverse forms of literature and art, etc.⁴⁴

Providing a child with opportunities for practise—whether it is through play, personal projects, or community engagement—requires privileges, including time, opportunity, knowledge, and often money. This is also true for the ability to engage in communication, dialogue and modelling. For those who are time and other resource poor, providing these opportunities will be especially challenging—after a long shift, for example, it may be hard for a parent to have the energy to explain why some behaviours are self-respecting and others are not. If educating for self-respect truly requires all of these things, one might rightly worry that self-respect will be a good relegated to positions of privilege. This is a point I will return to discuss in more detail in section three.

2.4 Relationship Cultivation

The final pillar of moral education that I want to discuss is the requirement that parents cultivate caring, respectful relationships with their children. As I explained earlier, a number of theorists hold that caring relationships are key to moral education. This is because such relationships are respectful to the child—their abilities as a child, etc.—because they are an important method of modelling, and because they are helpful in facilitating motivation. As Saunderson explains, for moral education to work, and in particular for modelling moral character to be effective, the child has to want to be like the person modelling the behaviour they are trying to instill.⁴⁵

If this is correct then educating for self-respect also seems to require cultivating caring and respectful relationships. Part of how such relationships will be achieved will be through modelling, and facilitating dialogue and practise. These activities are relationship building, and, when done correctly, should be the

⁴⁴What ‘exposure’ will amount to for children will, of course, depend on the context. For white Western children, for example, their communities continue to be dominated by white culture, and so exposure will require engaging in culture other than their own. For children from oppressed groups exposure may mean engaging more with and celebrating their own socio-cultural heritage.

⁴⁵Ideally, the child will move from wanting to be like the educator in imitation, to emulating that behaviour not because they desire to be like the educator themselves, but in so far as they recognize the educators traits as virtuous.

kinds of activities that help to cultivate respectful, caring relationships.

If we follow Noddings' suggestion, part of cultivating relationships correctly will involve being kind and attentive to the needs of the child; when parents engage in dialogue, model behaviour, and offers opportunities for practise, they are considerate of their child, and kind in their interactions.

Laurence Thomas (1995) also offers another reason for thinking that caring relationships are key to the cultivation of self-respect. On Thomas's view parental love is the "precursor to self-respect" (1995: 253). Unlike praise, he says, which is still important and motivational, parental love "has precious little to do with a person's performance", it is "unconditional, not because one may never cease to love an individual, but because there is nothing which a person can do that constitutes a conceptual bar to loving [them]" (1995: 252). Thomas explains that the significance of this kind of unconditional love is that "it allays, if not precludes entirely, the child's fear of parental rejection [and]... minimizes the child's fear of engaging in exploratory behaviour" (1995: 253). It also teaches the child to "have a sense of worth that does not turn upon either [their] abilities or [their] behaviour" as they experience themselves as objects of worth in these terms (1995: 253).

If Thomas is correct, then caring—and more specifically, *loving*—relationships will also be central to cultivating self-respect in children. In part, this will be for the development of a sense of unconditional worth that is central to both the mature and base form of self-respect. But this will also be central to self-respect in so far as it gives children the opportunity for the safe, self-exploration needed to develop and express their agency, and discover their preferences and interests as children and in later life.

Other theorists have argued too that good parenting requires love, not for self-respect explicitly, but for other important dimensions of parenting. Matthew Liao (2015) for example claims that parents have a moral duty to love their children. Liao claims that "being loved is a fundamental condition for children to pursue a good life, because children need to be loved in order to trust others, have positive conceptions of themselves, learn how to love others, and be motivated to obey commands" (Liao 2015: 99). As parents are, typically, uniquely positioned to best love their children, the claim is that parents have a moral duty

to do so. Mhairi Cowden (2012) argues, however, that if love is an emotion, and emotions cannot be the subject of command or duty, parents cannot have a duty to love their children.

Even if Cowden is correct—which seems reasonable—we might still think however, that given how important love appears to be for children’s self-respect (among other things), that parents would do well to cultivate the kinds of caring and respectful relationships that help to facilitate love. How love is cultivated between parent and child will vary among persons but it will surely involve an attentiveness on the part of the parent to the needs and interests of the child, and an attempt to bond over those things. If a child enjoys reading, for example, a parent might instigate reading time together. If a child enjoys physical affection, a parent might try and show this affection more often.

In addition to cultivating caring relationships, given the goal of parents as educators, another part of cultivating relationships correctly will also involve ensuring that the relationship is cultivated in a way that is guided by the principles of self-respect. What this means, among other things, is that the parent should respect their child and themselves, as objects of equal moral worth, and respect the rights that come with that status. Doing so will help to cultivate the right kind of relationship, and will also be another opportunity for parents to model self-respecting behaviour for their children. In more concrete terms this means that there should be limitations on how a parent interacts with their child, and how a child should be expected to interact with their parent. A parent, for example, should allow children opportunities to express and explore their capacities for agency, not only because it allows a child to exercise and practise the skills necessary for self-respect, but also because this is what is required for the parent to engage respectfully with that child. A child should also be expected, to the extent that they are able, to respect the basic rights of their parents. Moreover, a parent’s own self-respect should also place limitations on how they interact with their child. I claimed that one of the pillars of moral education is dialogue, and I recommended that parents articulate the underpinning principles of self-respect to their children, explaining how those principles play into their actions in a way that is suitable and attentive to the abilities and needs of the child. And I also recommended that parents provide opportunities for open

ended discussion for the child to engage in a process of inquiry. It is not difficult to imagine, however, how such a requirement could come to compromise a parent's own self-respect if, for example, for every action parents were required to take the time to offer reasons to the child, including under times of immediate stress, or pertaining to topics parents are not yet comfortable discussing. A child, for example, demanding to know why they cannot enter the washroom while a parent is using it cannot be entitled to an explanation then and there. As a matter of self-respect, and as an important tool for creating respectful relationships, parents must give weight to their own interests—including having a peaceful washroom experience (a basic right to privacy)—over the child immediately understanding why this is the case. It may, of course, be helpful to later explain to one's child about basic rights pertaining to privacy, and the importance of taking others' preferences seriously, but doing so should not overrun a parent's self-respect.

3 Self-Respect and the Demands on Parents

In the section above I discussed how the model for moral education might be used for cultivating self-respect in childhood, with a focus on methods of parental modelling, practise, communication and dialogue, and relationship cultivation. I have also touched on some of the demands cultivating self-respect in one's children may place on parents including the demand to love one's children, the demands of parental self-respect, and the demands of time and other resources needed for communication and dialogue, practise, and exposure.

In this section I will consider two potential worries for the view I have put forward. The first is that if parents themselves must have self-respect in order to cultivate self-respect in their children then the demands of this model seem too high. Due to a range of factors, including the kinds of systemic pressures that I identified in chapter one, many parents have damaged self-respect, and as such a model like the one I have proposed would seem to be inaccessible to them, among others.

The second worry one might have—and one that I have already touched on—pertains to other kinds

of resource privilege. The methods that I have proposed, as I have said, require providing a child with opportunities for practise—whether it is through play, personal projects, or community engagement and inquiry—and communication and dialogue which requires privileges such as time, opportunity, knowledge, and often money. If educating for self-respect necessarily requires all of these things, one might further worry that self-respect will be a good unfairly relegated to those who are in positions of privilege where such resources are available.

These worries are, of course related. Systemic pressures that communicate to persons that they are ‘less than,’ and ‘not equal to,’ typically track a range of privileges including economic privilege. My task now then is to first consider the extent to which privileges of the kinds that I have identified are actually required to educate for self-respect. And if they are required, what kind of social changes might need to occur to combat challenges to them.

3.1 Parental Self-Respect as a Requirement for Cultivation

According to a number of theorists, as I have claimed, a key pillar of moral education is modelling, for an educator to demonstrate the moral characteristics they are aiming to instil in their students. Kristjansson quoting Nietzsche, for example, says that “the teacher must be a moral exemplar, presenting excellences to which her students can attain” (1998: 11). And Saunderson says that “if teachers want students to emulate them [to become virtuous], they will have to explain to students how their actions and emotional reactions are related to an ideal of the virtuous life”—where the suggestion is that teachers’ behaviour can actually model that ideal (2013: 38).

In addition to holding that modelling moral behaviour is central to moral education, however, theorists also recognize that educators are imperfect actors, and sometimes even very poor ones. Moreover, for those teachers who do act well—even if imperfectly—it is recognized that they “often lack the knowledge and skills needed to make their own teaching explicit...They know that they should ‘teach as they

preach' and 'walk their talk,' but they do not connect their moral ideals to their actual behaviour in the classroom" (Saunders 2013: 38).

From what these theorists suggest, it is not impossible for imperfect educators to teach children moral values, only that "to be good, effective models, teachers should become 'reflective in their own work, working at the meta-cognitive level in their own teaching by explaining their actions in words in relation to why and how they teach as they do'" (Saunders 2013: 38).

Parents too are, like all persons, imperfect actors, and even sometimes very poor parents and people. And like teachers, it seems here too that in order to educate well, it would be ideal for parents to have self-respect. Having self-respect makes modelling self-respecting behaviour possible, and explaining one's motives, goals, and principles that much easier. However, it also seems possible for a parent to lack self-respect, and still assist in educating their children to be self-respecting in at least three ways:

First, even if a parent acts poorly in terms of self-respect, they may nonetheless be able to explain to their child how they went wrong, and what they should have done instead. This would require a parent to have a level of self-awareness, and moral knowledge, as well as an ability to articulate in a way that is accessible for a child—requirements that can be, themselves, challenging, but do not necessitate parental self-respect.

Second, a parent may act poorly, but have other skills that are helpful for their child to gain self-respect, and develop to have mature self-respect in the future. A parent, for example, might have good critical thinking skills (that are not directed well in terms of self-respect), or good interpersonal understanding (but that is not manifest in equal respect). These skills are necessary for self-respect, and so are ways a parent can assist in educating for self-respect, even if they do not themselves possess it. Of course, while educating for these skills, a parent who lacks self-respect may also create additional barriers to their children's respect by modelling poor behaviour—behaviour that is, given the close relationships parents often have with their children, likely replicated by their children.

The third way a parent who lacks self-respect may assist their child to be self-respecting is by rec-

ognizing their own imperfection, and seeking out others to assist them. A relative, for example, or a close friend; someone they recognize as a self-respecting person that can model self-respecting behaviour for their children, and engage in dialogue and recommend avenues for practise. A parent who lacks self-respect may lack it for the same reasons that prevent them from recognizing that they lack it, and so this avenue may not be open to some parents. Nonetheless, it is evident that it is at least conceivable for a parent who lacks self-respect, although significantly more challenging, to assist their children in coming to have self-respect themselves.

With regards to the model that I have proposed for educating children to be self-respecting then, it is important to note three things: First, the methods that I have proposed are only suggestions for raising children to be self-respecting, and not themselves normative requirements. My suggestions do call for parents to be self-respecting—to model self-respecting behaviour—and so the suggestions are largely limited to those parents who have self-respect. For suggestions about how to raise children in non-ideal conditions—where parents, for example, lack self-respect—beyond those I have briefly made above, more work needs to be done. What appears to be the case, however, is that raising one’s children to have self-respect without having self-respect yourself would be a significantly more challenging task than doing so with self-respect. This has some important social implications that I will come to discuss later in this chapter.

The second thing to note is that raising children to be self-respecting is a social task, and not one just limited to parental competence. As Kristjansson (1998) rightly claims, self-respect is constructed through mutual social recognition and interaction, and as such the method of one person setting a good or bad ‘self-respecting’ example will not suffice to determine whether a child will be self-respecting. With respect to the account that I have offered then, it will only be part of a fuller picture of educating for self-respect.

3.2 Resource Requirements for Cultivating Self-Respect

The second issue that I want to discuss now is the demand for other parental resources including time, opportunity, knowledge, and money. If educating for self-respect requires all of these things—putting considerations of a parent’s own self-respect to one side—one might worry, as I have said, that self-respect will be a good relegated to those in positions of privilege.

Like any form of education, and parenting generally, all other things being equal persons with more time and greater resources are at an advantage in providing for their children than those that are not. This is not unique to self-respect, but a wide spread disadvantage that comes from an unequal distribution of goods. That said, it is important to note two things. First, educating for self-respect does not require grand gestures of modelling, or opportunities for practise. Children do not, for example, need to engage in club sports, or expensive cultural activities to cultivate things like interpersonal awareness, or appreciation for projects. Nor do children need to see their parents engaging in such grand pursuits. Personal projects may be modest—collecting and reading books from the library that interests a child, learning new spelling words at school—and appreciation for others can be cultivated in ordinary life settings without too many resources being spent—for example, encouraging sharing, communication, and thoughtfulness.

Moreover, if theorists such as Noddings and Thomas are correct, what is *most* important when raising self-respecting children is not tangible resources but caring, respectful relationships between parents and their children. This, on Thomas’s view, is what sets the foundation for a child’s self-respect, and gives them the confidence to pursue that which matters most to them. Loving, caring relationships—like the modest suggestions above—will still take time, skills and opportunity, and this will make educating especially challenging for some parents who do not have access to, or have less access to these resources.

The second point to note is that opportunities for dialogue and practise assist in moral education only when they are steered appropriately—in the case of self-respect, towards the recognition of the inherent moral value of persons, agency and particularity. Economic and other social privileges do not provide

this moral framework. They may give people opportunity for education that provides it—studying moral theory at university, for example—but they do not alone provide the appropriate framework for guidance. Moreover, an unequal distribution coupled with, for example, a history of supremacist ideology and false meritocracy—such is a feature of Western society—works to promote the idea to privileged (white) groups that they are entitled to those privileges, and that those privileges are natural. This belief is compatible with self-esteem but deeply at odds with self-respect. For parents then, who are situated within and the beneficiaries of this system—whether they endorse the ideology or not—privilege of this kind presents a unique challenge for their own self-respect, and their ability to educate for self-respect in their children.

4 Social Implications

If what I have argued for here is correct having financial resources, resources of time, and other privileges—including having self-respect oneself—neither ensures nor are necessary to educate a child to be self-respecting. These resources however, do make educating for self-respect easier for parents in many ways. This means that having self-respect and being able to educate for it will likely track patterns of privilege—for the current generation and intergenerationally—because having such resources are often the result of privilege. Resources such as time and wealth, for example, are often accumulated intergenerationally; those who are already privileged with respect to time and money will often transfer those privileges to their children—either materially or via opportunity. And so children who come from such privileges are more likely to have self-respect, are more likely to have the resources to cultivate self-respect in the future, and are more likely to pass those privileges down to the next generations. Also simply not being subject to systems of oppression—systems that stare you in the face every day saying you are ‘less than, and not equal to’—is an important privilege that has bearing on self-respect and one’s ability to educate for it. As I explained in chapter one, systems of oppression surround oppressed people with representations that their group is less, communicating that message, and persistently threatening

the development and maintenance of attitudes to the contrary (Khader 2021: 237). Systems of oppression also have real material implications for those oppressed groups in terms of acquiring the resources to support self-respect. Being Black in the United States, for example, means that you are less likely to get employed for the same job than a White person—less likely, to even have your CV taken as seriously as a White candidate (Kang *et al.* 2016). This fact is both communicatively and functionally damaging for persons having self-respect and educating for it. This is because it contributes to the oppressive narrative that the oppressed group members are less deserving and less valuable than the dominant group, and it results in fewer opportunities for employment, and so fewer opportunities to gain the resources needed, among other things, to educate for self-respect.

Other forms of oppression function in similar ways. Women, for example, are less likely to be taken seriously in the work place than men, their opinions, and authority less valuable and less persuasive. This both has communicative implications with respect to their relative worth, and material implications—women have less opportunities to have and gather resources of the kind that would support self-respect (Sieghart 2021). This also has further downstream implications for self-respect. In Australia, for example, older women in Australia are the fastest growing members of the community to become homeless (ABS 2018). In part this is because their role within formal employment is seen as less valuable than men's, and partly because the labour they do in informal settings—such as the home—is unpaid, undervalued domestic and emotional labour. Only paid labour contributes to superannuation, and without sufficient superannuation many women—and particularly many mothers—end up homeless, unable to have their basic needs met. Communicatively, this treatment further contributes to the understanding that women are less deserving and less valuable than men. And functionally, it also results in even fewer opportunities to gain the resources needed, among other things, to educate for self-respect. The lack of opportunity and harmful message that is communicated is also, of course, compounded when forms of oppression intersect—Black women in the United States and Australia will likely be worse off because they are subject to both racist and sexist forms of oppression.

Persons in positions of privilege then, who are not subject to the same pressures will just find educating for and having self-respect themselves easier, and so are more likely to have it, and to raise children who do to.

I have argued that self-respect is an important moral good, and is a kind of self-conception that *all* children should have. If this is correct then the oppressive social barriers to self-respect must be addressed—in addition to the many other pressing reasons to dismantle such barriers, including the oppressive harms that adults presently face. Answering the question of how to go about addressing these issues is a big task, and must be the aim for future projects. However, one of the most important ways to address these issues from a parental standpoint is to—to the extent that one is able—educate one’s children to be self-respecting. To break patterns of prejudice persons need to recognize other persons as their moral equals. Teaching children to do this, as a matter of self-respect, requires this self-conception, and so will be one way to break down those barriers.

In order to reach this point, however, a further fundamental social issue needs to be addressed—one that I have not spent much time addressing here. I claimed in chapter one that social practice very often does not match the theoretical view of children’s rights that I am endorsing here. As Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (2012) articulates, social practice routinely ignores children’s capacities in favor of almost full parental—or state in loco parentis—dominion of children, where this includes parental discretion over even the basic rights moral theorists endorse as fundamental. If parents are to educate for self-respect, and to raise self-respecting children who will help to break down the social barriers to self-respect, then social practise needs to meet the theoretical understanding; social practise that is, needs to reflect the understanding that children in fact have the basic moral rights of persons. Without this shift, it would seem near impossible to educate children to respect their basic moral value, the moral value of others, and so to have self-respect. Addressing this issue is crucial, and determining how to do it too must be a project for another day.

5 Summary

In this chapter I have proposed a parent focused four-part model of educating young children to have self-respect in childhood, and to cultivate mature self-respect in the future. The four parts call for parents to engage in modelling self-respect for their children, to engage in communication and dialogue with their children—articulating and discussing their aims, motivation and justification for self-respect in a way that is accessible to young children—to cultivate respectful and caring relationships with their children, and to provide, to the best of their abilities and in line with the requirements for their own self-respect, opportunities for their children to exercise and practise the skills necessary for self-respect. I have also argued that while having financial resources, resources of time, and other privileges—including having self-respect oneself—neither ensures nor is necessary to educate a child to be self-respecting. These resources however, do make educating for self-respect easier for parents in some ways. Given that having self-respect, and access to such resources largely track privilege, if we want to promote self-respect in childhood for all children, I have argued that the oppressive systems that unfairly privilege some persons over others will need to be addressed. I have also argued that the social practises that do not recognize the basic rights of children too must be addressed.

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