

FLATLINING: WARRANTED VERSUS DESIRABLE MENTAL STATES AND OPPRESSION

Michaela M. McSweeney

DRAFT—Please ask before citing. Comments welcome.

There are certain technical words in the vocabulary of every academic discipline which tend to become cliches and stereotypes. Psychologists have a word which is probably used more frequently than any other word in modern psychology. It is the word “maladjusted.” This word is the ringing cry out of the new child psychology—“maladjusted.” Now in a sense all of us must live the well-adjusted life in order to avoid neurotic and schizophrenic personalities. But there are some things in our social system to which I’m proud to be maladjusted and to which I call upon you to be maladjusted. I never intend to adjust myself to the viciousness of mob rule. I never intend to adjust myself to the evils of segregation or the crippling effects of discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to an economic system that will take necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes. I never intend to adjust myself to the madness of militarism and the self-defeating effects of physical violence. And my friends, I call upon you to be maladjusted to all of these things, for you see, it may be that the salvation of the world lies in the hands of the maladjusted.

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

“The Christian Way of Life in Human Relations”

Looking on the bright side of things is a euphemism used for obscuring certain realities of life, the open consideration of which might prove threatening or dangerous to the status quo.

-Audre Lorde

The Cancer Journals

King’s and Lorde’s remarks both suggest that there is a kind of conflict between resisting oppression and achieving certain kinds of mental states, emotions, moods, and psychology that are thought of as positive. This paper is an attempt to flesh out that conflict.

I focus on two kinds of social norms that govern our directed emotional states (emotional states that are directed at some object, person(s), circumstances, etc.). The first, *pro-desirability* norms, push us towards being in desirable mental states, or mental states that seem to be good for us. They might initially be thought of as being about well-being. The second, *pro-warrant* norms, push us towards being in warranted mental states, or mental states that are properly responsive to reality.¹ I

¹ These might also be called ‘fittingness’ or ‘aptness’ norms, though I stick to warrant language in what follows.

first show that these two norms conflict in many cases; they systematically conflict in a way that has wide-reaching implications. I then examine exactly how that conflict intersects with structural oppression.

King and Lorde both worried that focusing on improving our own moods, happiness, or even mental health can prevent us from recognizing and resisting oppression. I argue that this is correct. In the dominant social milieu, pro-desirability norms swamp pro-warrant norms—we focus far too much on satisfying pro-desirability norms at the expense of warrant—and King’s and Lorde’s concerns apply perhaps even more than they might have anticipated to our social world today.

I argue that strengthening pro-desirability norms (because of the trade-off with pro-warrant norms) causes serious harm, both at an individual and social level. Pro-desirability norms, when kept unchecked by pro-warrant norms, reinforce structural oppression by obscuring our ability to recognize it as such, as well as by disincentivizing us from resisting it. If overemphasizing pro-desirability norms (and in turn underemphasizing pro-warrant norms) obscures and reinforces structural oppression, then doing so is bad for us, socially and politically speaking, even if it seems good for us, individually speaking.

However, this is not the whole story; in grossly non-ideal contexts—that is, in contexts in which people are severely oppressed—the tension between pro-warrant and pro-desirability norms actually serves to put the oppressed in a double bind. In more ideal circumstances our two norms are supposed to aim at the mental health and well-being of us as individuals in the world; the harm that they do is, so to speak, accidental. Thus, in more ideal contexts, we tend to implicitly recognize that emphasizing one norm requires de-emphasizing the other, since they are in conflict and can’t possibly both be satisfied.² I suggest that this is not the case in oppressive contexts. Instead, both norms are simultaneously wielded against the oppressed, holding them to a standard that is impossible to meet. If the oppressed fail to meet both norms—which are not simultaneously satisfiable—they are met with responses which serve to reinforce oppressive power structures. In

² I am open to the idea that such contexts do not actually obtain, but it is useful to consider them as a counterpoint to grossly oppressive contexts.

other words: pro-desirability and pro-warrant norms can sometimes jointly serve as tools of oppression, and in such cases, the tension between them is actually exploited rather than traded off.

I conclude by arguing that we cannot simply aim for better balance between our current norms, as this cannot overcome the way that the tension between the norms is exploited in oppressive contexts, as well as briefly suggesting a different solution.

1. THE INITIAL CONFLICT (AND SOME PRELIMINARIES)

My claims turn on a distinction between *warranted* and *desirable* mental states, made by Nomy Arpaly (2005).³ Arpaly defines an unwarranted mental state as one that misrepresents reality. (And hence, we can assume, a warranted one is one that accurately represents reality.) I depart from this way of understanding warranted mental states because I believe that there are mental states that do not *represent* anything at all, but still seem unwarranted in some way. Indeed, those mental states—directed emotional states, which are emotional states that are directed at some object—are the ones that I want to focus on here. (I don’t mean to suggest that emotions can’t be involved in representing reality.) The relevant mental states must be directed in some broad sense; it makes sense to evaluate for warrant the claims that I am sad because I saw Julia Le Duc’s (2019) photo of Oscar Alberto Martinez and his daughter Angie Valeria face down and dead in the Rio Grande, but perhaps not the claim that I am simply sad, or simply depressed. Because of this, I want to shift to talking about warranted mental states as states that are *properly responsive to reality*:

WARRANT (mental states): A *warranted* mental state is a mental state that is properly responsive to reality.⁴

³ Arpaly (2005) distinguishes between *warranted* and *desirable* mental states (I use the former term slightly differently than she does, but the latter term I use in basically the same way that she does). Arpaly points out that there is sometimes tension between warranted and desirable mental states, and so the first section of this paper is largely just an attempt to strengthen this claim. However, I depart much more from Arpaly in the rest of my argument. Moreover, nothing I say depends on accepting any of her view except that there is a distinction between warranted and desirable mental states, and (less crucial, but still important for, my own argument) that the mental healthcare community tends to think of mental illness as being about having undesirable mental states rather than unwarranted ones.

⁴ My adaptation of what warranted mental states are raises further questions about what it means to be “properly responsive to reality”. I want to set this question aside in this paper, though it is philosophically important in its own right. Instead I will assume that there are obvious cases in which emotional reactions to our circumstances and perceptions are unwarranted (like being amused by seeing someone dying on the street). All that is required for my point here is that there are such obvious cases. Hence, I will not attempt to spell out what “properly”, “responsive”, or “reality” mean here, and I won’t delve into metaphysical questions about the status of the norms themselves.

So not only things like hallucinations (which clearly misrepresent reality) count as unwarranted; so do states such as being amused by seeing someone starving to death on the street. Note that these are two distinct kinds of cases: the former involves a perceptual mistake, and the latter involves a psychological mistake. My focus here is on the psychological side of this divide; but I want to flag that I recognize that the divide is not a clean one. We might be unsure (either as outside observers or internally) whether the amusement is genuinely a response to seeing someone starving on the street, or whether perhaps it was the seeing that was the problem—that I didn't really *see* that someone was starving to death on the street, and so it was my immediate percept that was unwarranted. And indeed, depending on how cognitively penetrated perception is, there might not always be a fact of the matter about which side of the divide our mistake lies on.⁵ But for simplicity's sake, I'll assume we can focus in on the psychological side of things.

I'll also treat ignorance of a circumstance as blocking the possibility of our pro-warrant norms applying. Suppose that there is a houseless person starving to death on the sidewalk in front of the building I am in, but I am unaware that she is there, and I take the elevator to the garage and drive away without seeing her. I don't believe that we have a social norm that suggests that I need to have a warranted directed emotional state *about* her specifically, given that I don't even know that she is there. This contrasts with certain ways of thinking about related issues in both moral philosophy and epistemology. But remember, if you like those ways of thinking, that I am not endorsing the current status of either our pro-warrant or pro-desirability norms, but rather attempting to accurately describe them and suggest that there is tension between them. (Indeed, later, I will discuss this issue in more detail, and will suggest that the structure of our current norm is problematic because it rewards those who have the resources to avoid being confronted with circumstances that warrant negatively-valenced mental states.)⁶

⁵ See Siegel (2017).

⁶ One might think it is odd to speak of warrant when it comes to emotional states. I think it is not, and moreover is obviously not: the person who is amused by true suffering is in an unwarranted emotional state. One could claim that our judgment in such a case is only a moral, not epistemic one. (For example, we might be judging the person's character, or be concerned about the moral consequences of their amusement). This is wrong (though I agree that we are often also making a moral judgment). I assume in what follows that the notion of warrant that I put forward in §1 applies to emotional states; I won't defend this assumption here. Some Strawsonians (e.g. Wallace (1994), Shoemaker

Desirable mental states are those that, roughly speaking, we want to have. This might be cashed out in terms of thinking about what is *good for* us as individuals. But it is important to note that desirability does not necessarily track philosophers' notions of well-being. It roughly might correspond to a kind of hedonistic view of well-being, but does not track philosophical conceptions of well-being that require that (e.g.) our happiness be warranted in order to count as contributing to our well-being. This is because desirability is not a philosophical notion; it is an attempt to capture a kind of ordinary social norm that corresponds better to an ordinary concept of what serves our emotional interests as individuals. And, ordinarily, we aim at having positively-valenced directed emotional states. (To see this, just note that neither the self-help books on the market, nor, as I'll point out in the next section, the way psychology and psychiatry are typically practiced, aim at getting us in both warranted and desirable mental states. They aim at making us happy, or at least, minimizing our misery.)⁷

To expand, I want to distinguish two different types of desirable mental states:

INTRINSIC DESIRABILITY: The mental state is *immediately* and *intrinsically* desirable for the individual who has it.

INSTRUMENTAL DESIRABILITY: The mental state is *instrumentally* desirable for for the individual who has it.

Examples of conflicts between intrinsically and instrumentally desirable mental states abound.

Sometimes, these correspond to examples of purported differences between “first order” and

(2017)) might initially be hostile to my view here. If you think that X is the kind of thing that is blameworthy in virtue of the fact that human beings tend to blame for it, then it might seem to be hard to accept the background picture I am assuming here. (Whether this kind of view is the right way to interpret Strawson or not is a different question; (Redacted) argues that it is not.) While I don't personally like that version of the Strawsonian view, I suspect it can be reconciled with what I am saying here. It might be that the facts about e.g. whether anger is appropriate in a given situation hold in virtue of facts about e.g. what typical human beings do; but that my being in a warranted anger state hold in virtue of whether anger is appropriate in a given situation. This is too close to an explanatory circle for my own taste, but it's at least superficially non-circular.

⁷ Ruth Whippman (2017) gives a convincing account of the United States' “happiness industrial complex” and its relationship to the positive psychology movement, which may explain why happiness (and, in particular, happiness that we achieve ourselves—by making peace with any problematic circumstances we are in) is so central to Americans' ordinary conception of well-being.

“higher order” desires; e.g. feeling pleasure that one is getting a nicotine high is an intrinsically desirable mental state, but having a negative emotional reaction to your nicotine high is a instrumentally desirable mental state, since it will promote your happiness in the long run.

I claim that this conflict is systematic: pro-warrant norms conflict with both intrinsic and instrumental pro-desirability norms. (Later, I will attempt to show that this conflict serves to reinforce oppressive power structures.) Intrinsically desirable states are states that satisfy our desires (or maybe: contribute to our well-being, earlier caveat in place) in and of themselves. So, if only positively-valenced mental states are intrinsically desirable, then normative pressure to achieve intrinsically desirable states conflicts with normative pressure to achieve warranted states when any *negative* mental state is what is warranted—for example, feeling sad upon seeing someone starving to death on the street.

Instrumentally desirable states are instrumental to satisfying our desires. So any properly-responsive-to-reality mental state that is *not* instrumentally to doing so conflicts with instrumentally desirability. One obvious example here is in our estimation of our own talents and abilities. “Fake it ‘til you make it” works; if we can conceive of, believe that we are better at something than we are (say, projecting confidence while giving a talk), it helps us get better at that thing (within reason). But conceiving of or believing that we are good at projecting confidence when we are actually bad at projecting confidence is to get something wrong about the world; to be in a mental state that is not properly responsive to reality (instead, we are using our mental state to try to shape reality). And overconfidence in one’s abilities seems not just to be a belief state, but also involves a directed emotional state.

The conflict between pro-warrant norms and intrinsic pro-desirability norms is systematic. Not everything makes us feel good; the world is a terrible place. All sorts of things, from genocide to a stubbed toe, warrant negative directed emotional states. In the case of intrinsic desirability this is obvious. I’m confident that we don’t have intrinsic desirability reasons to have a negative emotional-mental state response to the stubbed toe (that is, emotional rather than physical pain), even if we have instrumental desirability reasons to do so (sometimes). There might be some people for whom having a negative mental state response to genocide is instrumentally desirable; if, for example, it

enables them to then engage in fighting genocide, which in turn increases their well-being by giving them purpose in life. But it's unclear how it could be intrinsically desirable to be in such a state.

(Note the self-centeredness of desirability; more on this in §5.)

It is perhaps less obvious that pro-warrant norms systematically conflict with instrumental pro-desirability norms. But they do. The problem is that what is in our individual interest (or at least, what we take to be in our individual interests) systematically conflicts with appropriately responding to the world. Consider my seeing a houseless person seemingly starving to death on the streets of Los Angeles (a daily occurrence). It seems true that sometimes having some kind of negative emotional response to this is instrumentally desirable for me. However, systematically having the strong negative emotional response that is warranted by the situation is certainly not instrumentally desirable for me, since it will clearly make me emotionally worse off. We have instrumental desirability reasons to negatively emotionally react to the world's horrors some of the time. But we do not have instrumentally desirability reasons to negatively emotionally react to those horrors with the frequency and degree that they warrant. None of this should be remotely controversial. For example, starvation and houselessness in one of the richest countries on earth is an atrocity that warrants an intense negative emotional response. Yet, we should all agree that it would be bad for us as individuals—at least, according to our ordinary concept of what is undesirable for us—to continually have such a reaction.

Both intrinsic and instrumental pro-desirability norms constantly conflict with pro-warrant norms. There is an important relationship here to the way we conceive of mental health and illness. We often take the mentally healthy person to be the one who has a moderate negative emotional response to severe horrors: she should react emotionally, but it shouldn't interfere with her ability to pursue her own goals, live a happy life, and so on, and she must swiftly recover and move on. This can be explained if both sets of norms (pro-warrant and pro-desirability) are important, but need to be balanced against each other. The person who swings too far in one direction either sacrifices too much of her own stability and ability to pursue and satisfy her own goals—perhaps, is too compassionate and empathetic at the expense of her sense of self its importance—or has walled herself off from the world by refusing to acknowledge the pain and suffering of others.

One reason that I focus here on social norms rather than philosophical notions of warrant and desirability is that there is a kind of feedback loop between the way we think about mental health and illness and the way that we think about pro-warrant and pro-desirability norms; each informs the other. And the normative considerations that bear on the way mental illness gets thought about are not typically those of the philosopher; rather, they are of the kind under discussion here—social norms that are constantly in play (but that can be hard to recognize). I share King’s concern about this feedback loop: our ideals of mental health and illness, as well as our general social norms, have shifted too far into the individualistic and self-indulgent direction of treating the walled-off person, who is only concerned with satisfying her own desires, as the mentally healthy one. Thus, we currently put too much weight on pro-desirability norms at the expense of pro-warrant norms.

In what follows, I argue that this imbalance harms people at the individual level. But, more importantly for my purposes, it causes serious problems at the social-political level. This is because pro-desirability norms serve to obscure, and thus make it harder to resist, structural oppression. All of this needs to be tempered, though, by thinking about how these norms play out in the most oppressive contexts. In §4, I will suggest that the tension between them is exploited in such contexts, and puts the oppressed into a double bind. Thus the “tradeoffs” and “swamping” that I talk about in the next two sections do not necessarily apply to those contexts.⁸

2. FLATLINING

We might think that pro-warrant norms are obviously intrinsically important: that it is important that we have warranted directed emotional states, regardless of any negative consequences of failing to do so. I won’t argue for this here, largely because I do not know how to; it seems to me a question that we simply decide based on our intuitions. (For example, intuitions about Nozick’s (1974)

⁸ The way I am dividing up pro-warrant and pro-desirability norms may be a bit artificial. A salient possibility is that our norms about desirability help shape our norms about warrant (and perhaps vice-versa, though as we will see, I am more skeptical of this claim), and thus, that our norms do not directly conflict as much as I claim. We should keep this possibility in mind, but I want to insist on the more independent characterizations of these norms in order to clear some territory.

experience machine case might roughly track the question of how important we think warrant is for both emotions and beliefs, though there are other issues at stake there.) Instead, I will argue that minimizing pro-warrant norms in order to maximize pro-desirability norms harms individuals, and, more importantly, is bad for our social-political world.

When pro-desirability norms swamp pro-warrant norms, emotional suffering is *flatlined*: emotional suffering is treated as on equal footing regardless of what it is responsive to or whether it is warranted. I will give just one example—an example that reconnects the discussion back to mental health care: an anecdotal case of a friend’s experience with a mental health care provider. I then suggest that there are other sources of support for the claim that pro-desirability norms have become too dominant over pro-warrant norms, for example, semantic drift of clinical terminology, as well as empirical studies about news avoidance. All this is bad for individuals who experience warranted emotional suffering. The central harm of flatlining, though, is a social and political harm, which I discuss in §3.

In 2009 a close friend, let’s call her Alice, was in therapy for complex PTSD; the trauma she experienced was very serious, seemed inescapable, and was extended over a long period of time, which is a standard criterion for c-PTSD diagnosis. She had roughly the following exchange with her therapist:

Alice: It is so unreasonable for me to have these psychological and physiological reactions to certain things. (In our framework, we can interpret this as Alice grasping at pro-warrant norms after being subjected, by many different mental health professionals, to a constant battery of pro-desirability norms.)

Therapist: No, it’s not unreasonable. Different people react to different kinds of things differently. And different people react to trauma differently, and also *experience* different things as trauma. For example, I have a client, Chip, who is suffering from PTSD because his (still massive) trust fund is down to 40% of what it once was.

Alice: So I am supposed to be comforted by the idea that people like Chip, who have no idea what real suffering is like, are experiencing similar mental health problems to me? This only makes me feel worse: not only is what I am experiencing unreasonable, but you are assimilating it to the experience of someone for whom their emotional state is *so* unreasonable it is laughable.

Alice came away from this conversation feeling angry and defeated. But I've long wondered what, exactly, was wrong with Therapist's side of the conversation. One salient problem is this: insofar as we think that people aren't responsible for their own mental disorders or illnesses, and insofar as we think that mental disorders and illnesses are sometimes exculpatory, and insofar as Chip is in the Brock Turner demographic, which already receives disproportionately good treatment from judges, juries, and the general public, Chip is precisely the kind of person who we should worry will have his (purported) disorder treated as exculpatory (either legally or morally).

In contrast, those who are most likely to suffer from PTSD and c-PTSD (a group that includes rape and domestic violence survivors, low-status members of the military, and those who grow up in and/or live in war-torn, high-crime, or gang-dominated communities) are least likely to have their disorders be treated as exculpatory. One person who has pointed this out repeatedly is the rapper Meek Mill. For example, commenting on the radically unjust treatment of Black people living in ghettos (research suggests an extremely high rate of PTSD in children and young adults who grow up in high-murder-rate, high-gang-violence communities), he says:

Philadelphia Murder rate has been in the 300 murders plus range since I can remember and kids are growing up in that first hand and they have no choice but to carry firearms after seeing all that blood spilled and that will distort your decision making process like PTSD (2019).

And: "You get locked up wit a gun you can't go to court and say you got PTSD from seeing too much murder" (2019). Meek Mill is highlighting the facts that diagnoses like PTSD are both unavailable (due to both a lack of mental health care resources and stigmatization of seeking mental health care) and also, even when available, not treated as exculpatory for poor black and brown people. This issue is crucial, and deserving of much more philosophical attention.

But I focus on a different moral issue, one that is somewhat removed from (though related to) the responsibility question. Flatlining harms those whose emotional pain *is* warranted. Consider Alice's directed emotional states when she was suffering from c-PTSD: while they were likely quite complicated, in retrospect it seems right to say that (a) certain kinds of states Alice was in were unwarranted—they weren't responsive to reality in the right way—but that (b) certain other kinds of

states (that are part and parcel of c-PTSD) that she was in were warranted, because they were completely reasonable responses to being subjected to long-term trauma—if you are stalked by someone who repeatedly tries to break in to your home and kill you, it is appropriately responsive to the world (your world) to experience intense fear every time your doorbell rings or someone knocks on your door. Similarly, if you grow up in the most violent square block of a large American city, it is appropriately responsive to the world to experience intense fear in everyday life.

In contrast, it seems that (assuming he was genuinely suffering from PTSD) Chip's PTSD-induced mental-emotional states were all of type (a); his own experience of going from having 20 million dollars to 10 million dollars (or whatever) didn't provide any (b)-type states.

So flatlining harms those whose emotional suffering is warranted. When two individuals experience similar levels of emotional pain, but one of those individuals' pain is warranted and the others is not, the individual who has the warranted emotional pain has their pain *flatlined*: it gets treated as no different than unwarranted pain. One clear explanation for why this occurs is that our pro-desirability norms have swamped our pro-warrant norms. The fact that individual a's pain is warranted by their circumstances and individual b's pain is not becomes irrelevant if we fully, or even mostly, shift our focus from warrant to desirability. When we focus only on pro-desirability norms, both individuals are on equal footing: they both are in an undesirable mental state (depending on the case, of intrinsically or instrumentally), and we want them to be in a mental state. So we treat their undesirable mental states similarly; we want both individuals to be happy and healthy and we focus on how to transform those undesirable mental states to desirable ones.

While happiness and health are important, without pro-warrant norms, we fail to recognize that there is something defective about the undesirable and unwarranted mental state that is not at all defective about the undesirable and warranted mental state. And this can cause real interpersonal harm at the individual level. In some cases (e.g. in Alice's case) this harm is quite minimal. In other cases it is extremely damaging. Consider Chanel Miller, who was raped and attacked by Brock Turner. In addition to having to deal with the trauma of being raped and left for dead, Miller additionally suffered serious psychological harm from having her resultant trauma thought of, treated, and addressed as equivalent to (or, in many cases, less real or severe than) the "trauma" of

her rapist who had to undergo a trial, go to jail for a few months, and miss some swim meets (see Miller (2019)). But there is also a deeper harm for members of systematically oppressed groups, as this is simply an example of a more general phenomenon that occurs constantly and forms part of the systematic psychological harm of oppression.

Most of us are familiar with instances of people (particularly younger people) saying things like “studying for this exam gave me PTSD”. This is an instance of what some psychologists refer to as ‘concept creep’⁹, and what some linguists (and philosophers) refer to as ‘semantic change’ or ‘semantic drift’¹⁰, in which (specifically in the psychological context) a word that was initially used to pick out a fairly narrow clinical diagnosis becomes used (sometimes initially jokingly, in a way that is clearly intended to be exaggeration, such as ‘the lack of chocolate chips in this cookie gave me PTSD’) to pick out anything from slight emotional disappointment over mundane everyday occurrences to dealing with studying for a difficult and important exam, which may well be deeply emotionally stressful but is not an instance of the kind of trauma that causes PTSD.

While some irresponsible use of language that is initially intended for clinical diagnoses can start out as a clear joke (e.g. the cookie case), other use (e.g. the exam case) contributes to semantic drift by expanding the notion of what eventually gets accurately captured by the term. The prevalence of people claiming to have PTSD because of a lack of chocolate in their cookie or a difficult exam they took is indicative that we live in world in which desirability matters more than warrant. The focus shifts to eradicating the mental state itself; to replacing it with a positive mental state. The result is that (to return to my example case) Chip’s pain and Alice’s pain get treated similarly in virtue of the fact that both are *bad for us* and should be eliminated; the fact that Alice is responding to something genuinely awful that happened to her, while Chip is not, drops out of the picture.

The broader point here is that this is just one case of a more general phenomenon: perhaps partly because of norms that have trickled down from the mental health care community—but I

⁹ See Haslam (2016). Note that this term seems to be used mostly in Haidt-sympathetic ways; it will be clear what differentiates me (quite a bit!) from Haidt in what follows.

¹⁰ E.g. See Cappelan (2018) and (Redacted) for discussions of semantic change in the context of the conceptual engineering debate. See Campbell (2013) for an introduction to this issue in linguistics.

suspect also because of broader factors on our social world—pro-desirability norms are swamping pro-warrant norms. It doesn't matter what the external cause or object of your negative emotions is, or whether they are warranted; it matters that they go away. It seems obvious to me that this swamping is happening, and I hope that both my anecdotal story about Alice and the semantic drift of terms meant to pick out clinical diagnoses support this claim, but I am also relying on my reader here to recognize what I take to be a fairly clear social phenomenon, and I don't take myself to have provided an exhaustive argument for it.

Thus far I have focused on clinical contexts and cases of trickle-down from these contexts (semantic drift). But the point of this section is much more general: there is a cultural phenomenon at play here, one which is much more general (but which, as I suggested before, and as King suggests, is involved in a feedback loop with mental healthcare).

One place where there seems to be empirical evidence for the claim that pro-desirability norms are swamping pro-warrant norms is in recent research about news avoidance. The evidence suggests that staggering numbers of Americans (and also, to a lesser extent, people world-wide) do not read, watch, or listen to news media, and that this is a relatively new development. Moreover, this seems to be *intentional* news avoidance, not simply not caring, or something like that. (41% of Americans report that they “often or sometimes avoid the news”.) And at least for “liberals” the main reason cited for this is that it is too depressing or upsetting and there is nothing we can do about it. 57% of those who report news avoidance cite resultant emotional distress as the main cause. In our framework, these people are avoiding consuming news because it forces them into warranted negative emotional states. And while there is some pressure (at least, on “liberals”) to expose themselves to reality (and, presumably, to have some of the warranted emotional responses to the badness of reality), it is considered both normal and acceptable to physically shield ourselves—e.g. by limiting our exposure—from the grave injustices and wrongs in the world.¹¹ Things are more complicated than this, in part because those whose lives involve grave injustice and wrongs cannot limit their exposure to such things. I will discuss such complications in §4, but for

¹¹ See Reuters Institute, Digital News Report, 2017 and 2019.

now, let's take on board the idea that we have swung too far in favor of desirability and away from warrant.

3. THE SOCIAL-POLITICAL HARMS OF SWAMPING & FLATLINING

Chip's pain being treated similarly to Alice's harmed Alice, but this harm was quite minor—it frustrated Alice and perhaps slowed down her recovery, but it was merely an annoying blip in her life, not some instance that psychologically damaged her extensively. And nor did it seem to harm anyone else, qua individual. I suspect that these kinds of facts are partly responsible for the idea that we ought to focus more on desirability than warrant in clinical contexts; if it is no real harm to anyone else to treat Chip's pain as equivalent to Alice's, then we ought to do it, since our goal is to help both Chip and Alice.

What is missing is that the Chip and Alice case is an instance of something that is a part of a broader system of social wrongs that are bound up in oppressive power structures. Treating their pain as equivalent is both obscures and propagates those wrongs.¹²

When pro-desirability norms swamp pro-warrant norms, we lose sight of the central importance of the external objects of our mental states—of what they are directed at and responsive to. If we treat Chip and Alice as people who need to improve their individual psychological well-being, with no relevant differences between them, then we have lost sight of the fact that Chip's emotional states are wholly not warranted by the world, whereas Alice's are at least partly warranted. One common cause of c-PTSD is being subjected to extensive domestic violence over a long period of time. This often happens to women who have warranted beliefs that they do not have other options or cannot escape their situation. In turn, those women may develop at least some emotional (and physiological) responses to certain stimuli that are warranted by what they know and what they can reasonably expect. Their background knowledge and expectations are different from those who have not had this experience. They have learned different things about what kinds of situations are dangerous for them. And their learning tracks reality! Insofar as our warranted emotional responses

¹² While I focus on these structural problems in this section, I don't mean to deny that in some cases, e.g. the Chanel Miller case, there is grave interpersonal harm as well.

can be warranted by inductive learning about our social and personal environments (just as our justified beliefs can be), these women are being properly responsive to the world when they feel that they are in danger, even if they have escaped the particular violence that they suffered. The social world and our position within it helps determine whether our directed emotional states are warranted.

Sarah Paul makes a related point—in a way that is instructive for us—in her (2019) account of *imposter syndrome*. Imposter syndrome is not a clinical diagnosis, but it is very familiar to academics. Because it is not a clinical diagnosis, Paul argues that we ought to give an ameliorative analysis of it (that is, an account that is useful to us—perhaps by highlighting systematic injustice—in making the world a better place). Paul argues that an ameliorative account of imposter syndrome must distinguish between belief states (and, I would add, emotional states) that are justified and unjustified; but typical discussion of imposter syndrome elides this distinction in favor of distinguishing between false or true beliefs. But focusing on justification allows us to give an analysis of when we need to change the social world vs. when we need to intervene (either on ourselves or others) to alleviate a problem that is internal to an agent.

For example, Paul points out that in academic environments, posturing and overconfidence are often systematically rewarded, and this can serve to justify our own beliefs in our inadequacy even if those beliefs are actually false:

If one's peers are accorded an inordinate amount of respect or credibility because of their confident presentation, or because they are members of a privileged class, this can help to justify the conclusion that you compare unfavourably. (2019, p. 240).

But the solution to this problem is not to intervene into the agent's psychology to help her 'fake it til she makes it'; it is to fix the credibility excess being awarded to her (typically more privileged in other ways as well) peers. The crucial point here is that we can't make this distinction without distinguishing between ways in which one's beliefs are justified by the (often unjust and oppressive) social world in which they are formed, and ways in which they are not.¹³

¹³ See Fricker (2007) and Medina (2013) for accounts of and discussion of the "credibility excess" phenomenon.

While Paul's is a case about belief states, not directed emotional states, the beliefs in question clearly come along with a host of emotional states; these emotional states can be bad for us even when—and sometimes especially when—they are justified by the social world we are a part of and our place within it. Something quite similar is true in the PTSD case. Alice has a host of directed emotional states that are warranted by the world she is (appropriately, at least some of the time) responding to; Chip might have similar directed emotional states, but they are not warranted by his circumstances or position in the social world. However, this is not to say that Alice should not receive mental health care, or that she should not seek to overcome, or at least live more harmoniously, her c-PTSD. This would be wrong for two reasons. First, some of her directed emotional states might not be warranted; c-PTSD can cause us to continue to be in directed emotional states that are both deeply harmful to us (and others) and are remnants of environments we are no longer stuck in. But second, even supposing all of her directed emotional states were warranted, to claim that she should not receive mental health care is to let pro-warrant norms swamp pro-desirability norms, which, while not what this paper is about, is (fairly clearly) just as bad for us as letting pro-desirability norms swamp pro-warrant norms is.

What is important for our purposes, though, is that an over-focus on simply fixing both Chip and Alice's directed emotional states—that is, making them more positively-valenced—obscures the fact that Alice's emotional states are at least partly warranted, and Chip's are not. And without recognizing this fact, we cannot recognize that (alongside providing people with the mental health care they deserve) we should work towards changing the social world, and that doing so is the kind of thing that will help people like Alice.

When pro-desirability norms swamp pro-warrant norms, negative emotional states are treated as only valuable (or important, or meaningful) insofar as they are instrumental to some individual's achieving some future positively-valenced mental state. Pro-warrant norms still exist, of course. But their power is radically lessened by the strengthening of pro-warrant norms. One of the effects of this swamping is that *what our mental states are responding to* drops out of the picture; we care about fixing the mental states instead of attending to the reasons that we are in them. Flatlining is one way in which this happens: everyone's emotional pain (for example) is treated as on par, so that

Brock Turner’s pain about having to serve a jail sentence for rape is on par with Chanel Miller’s pain at being raped and brutally assaulted. (There is something worse than flatlining going on in this case—I will discuss this in §4—but we can see that *at least* flatlining is occurring—perhaps Turner’s pain is treated as more serious and important than Miller’s pain.)

When pro-desirability norms swamp pro-warrant norms, we tend to stop focusing on the external cause of our mental states. The focus is on changing our emotions or beliefs about those external causes so that we can “recover” from them. But this means that we lose our focus on how our interpersonal relationships, the social milieu, our political institutions, and oppressive power hierarchies regularly warrant extremely negative mental states.

I take it that this is King’s point in the quote with which I began this paper. I see King as strongly resisting the way in which pro-desirability norms swamp pro-warrant norms: if I see that the world is full of injustice, the warranted response is the one that has been labeled ‘maladjustment’: it is not to make peace, psychologically speaking, with the world around us or the situation we are stuck in. But if we only focus on changing our mental states to make ourselves better adjusted, rather than focusing on whether those mental states are warranted by our world, and thus whether we might instead want to make a change in the world, then we lose our ability to resist oppression and other serious social harms.

Audre Lorde shows that certain kinds of “maladjusted” emotions are both (a) warranted by the world and (b) can serve to help us recognize and resist oppression. She also makes clear that insofar as we must change something, it must be the world and not our own mental states:

Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change. And when I speak of change, I do not mean a simple switch of positions or a temporary lessening of tensions, nor the ability to smile or feel good. I am speaking of a basic and radical alteration in those assumptions underlining our lives (1981).

Lorde, like King, suggests that adjusting (lessening tensions; smiling and feeling good) is not the right answer. But she additionally points out that anger is, at least when properly focused, an important motivator in enabling us to recognize and understand racism and oppression and other social and political harms, and in enabling us to actively resist them. We can’t lose sight of the fact

that the very kind of mental states that this paper focuses on—directed emotional states, that is, emotional states that have an object, like a state of affairs, event, person, government, or corporation—motivate us to act (and think, and reflect, and discuss, and so on). This is a familiar point, but it is a crucial one for our purposes. I will say more about it in a moment.

Lorde and King are an unusual pairing. But they can both be understood as showing that the tension between the two norms that I have highlighted in this paper make it difficult for us to resist oppression and other social and political wrongs in two ways. First, an over-focus on pro-desirability norms makes it hard to recognize oppression, because we are focused on our own mental states and changing them into more desirable ones, or on numbing ourselves to certain injustices. And second, as Lorde (and many others) have shown us, if our work is on eliminating our anger, or sadness, in the face of injustice, then we lose the crucial motivation (our anger and sadness about the state of the world) for resisting that injustice, even if we *can* recognize it.

Certain readings of King might seem incompatible with this. Indeed, some might find it strange that I am using King to motivate a view on which negatively-valenced emotions play a crucial role. But I am sympathetic to Myisha Cherry's (2018) argument that *agape*—and specifically King's account of *agape*—is both compatible with, and sometimes best expressed by, anger, and the passage I quote at the beginning of this paper helps bolster Cherry's argument. King clearly thought that negatively-valenced emotions play a crucial role in helping reveal oppression, as well as in helping us resist that oppression.

So: the central moral problem with allowing pro-desirability norms to swamp pro-warrant ones lies not in the fact that we will be interpersonally, individually harmed by doing so. Nor can it only be an epistemic mistake—though there is an epistemic mistake here. Instead, the central moral problem with this kind of swamping lies in the fact that it alienates us from both recognizing, and acting to resist, our own oppression.

There is a large literature on anger that is relevant here. Martha Nussbaum (2016, 2018) suggests that part of anger's conceptual role is that it involves a kind of desire for payback or revenge. If this is right, then it is unclear that anger is ever appropriate, and it is also much more complicated than I am making it out to be whether anger can play the purely positive motivational

role that I need it to for one part of my claim: the claim that anger (e.g.) can help us resist our own oppression.

But I don't think Nussbaum is right. I don't have the space to argue for this here. Instead, I ally myself with Lorde (1981) in thinking that anger is not aiming at revenge but rather at change; with Cherry (2018), who argues that anger is an important manifestation of *agape* love; with Frantz Fanon (1963), who argued that rage is the catalyst for the colonized to both recognize and fight to overcome their subjugation; with Sara Ahmed (2010, 2015), who shows not only that anger is motivational, but that it allows us to forge a unified social identity via solidarity; and especially with Amia Srinivasan (2019), who argues that much of the philosophical discussion of anger is mistaken in its focus on consequences rather than aptness (which is quite similar to warrant). My alliance with Srinivasan runs deep: if warrant is important, when it comes to directed emotional states, there are both moral and epistemic reasons for being angry when anger is warranted, independent of whether anger can play a motivational role in making change, and independently of whether anger might have bad consequences.¹⁴

Anger is not unique in playing a motivational role in change-making; and nor is anger special in its being warranted by unjust or horrible events, circumstances, or structures. Other negatively-valenced—and positively-valenced!—emotions are clearly warranted as well.¹⁵ For instance, while there isn't much literature within analytic philosophy about sadness and grief, elsewhere they too have been argued to be both apt and motivational. This is omnipresent Lorde's work (perhaps in particular in her (1982) autobiomythography more than in her essays, though also in her (1981)), and in Ahmed (2010). Claudia Rankine's (2015) says, of the Black Lives Matter movement, that it:

...Can be read as an attempt to keep mourning an open dynamic in our culture because Black lives exist in a state of precariousness. Mourning then bears both the vulnerability inherent in Black lives and the instability regarding a future for those lives. Unlike earlier Black-power movements that tried to fight or segregate for self-preservation, Black Lives Matter aligns with the dead, continues the mourning and refuses the forgetting in front of all of us. (Rankine 2015).

¹⁴ Callard (2017) is also sympathetic to this idea.

¹⁵ There is less relevant philosophical literature on other emotions, but we might look to e.g. Macalester Bell's work on contempt (2013), Cecelia Mun's (2019) work on shame and its relation to oppression and liberation, and Christopher Lebron's (2013) arguments that the right social response to the extraordinary racial inequality we are faced with is something like collective shame.

Rankine argues that the emotional states associated with mourning—not just anger but grief and sadness—can serve to both reveal oppression and motivate resistance. This supports the idea that all sorts of warranted negatively-valenced emotional states can serve in both of these roles. More importantly for our purposes, though, that these emotions are warranted by unjust or horrible events or structures is enough to make it the case that we ought to react to those things with negatively-valenced emotions. It is a secondary question whether those emotions can help motivate us to actively resist evil and oppression.

The central upshot of all this for us is this: once we understand the tension between our two norms, we can see that when pro-desirability norms swamp pro-warrant norms, systematic oppression and other social and political wrongs are obscured, and thus, we cannot resist them (as recognizing them is the first step to resisting them). Further, even if we can recognize injustice, we should worry that eliminating our sadness and anger also eliminates our motivation for resisting that injustice. This is deeply concerning. Oppression and injustice are harmful and ought to be resisted. And so, insofar as pro-desirability norms are meant to aim at our well-being, it will turn out that they actually end up undermining it. In §5, I will suggest that one way to address this problem is by trying to reshape our pro-desirability norms in a way that make them aim more at social or collective well-being than individualistic well-being. But first, I need to say something about the limitations of the claims I have made thus far.

4. OPPRESSION: DOUBLE BINDS AND NORMS AS WEAPONS

In many grossly non-ideal contexts—contexts in which people are very oppressed—it is not right to say that pro-desirability norms have swamped pro-warrant norms. In many such contexts, the conflict between these norms does not result in trading them off against one another. Instead, they are often mutually enforced despite the impossibility of satisfying both.

One way in which this can occur is in cases where “worse than flatlining” occurs: when one (powerful) person’s unwarranted pain is treated as important and real, while another (oppressed) person’s warranted pain is treated as unwarranted, imagined, unreal, etc. And, in particular, this can

occur when the former person has actually caused the latter person's pain. In such cases, the oppressed person is being held to extremely high standards along both warrant and desirability dimensions, despite the fact that they are not mutually satisfiable. In oppressive contexts, rather than these norms being used to support our flourishing, the conflict between them is exploited and used against us.

Consider again the excessively sympathetic public (and judicial) treatment of Chanel Miller's rapist, Brock Turner. Kate Manne's (2017) notion of *himpathy* might initially be seen as helping us to make sense of this—indeed she uses the example herself. Manne defines himpathy as “the inappropriate and disproportionate sympathy powerful men often enjoy in cases of sexual assault, intimate partner violence, homicide and other misogynistic behavior” (2018). However, what is at stake here is a much broader issue about power, and who has it, in general.

Focusing on himpathy risks us losing sight of the way in which Black men's emotional pain is, as a matter of structural racism, undervalued and ignored. Here I am worried that the notion of himpathy both completely excludes Black men, and also may contribute to Tommy Curry's charge that much feminist work simultaneously treats Black men as feminized victims and as aggressive, violent rapists. For himpathy cannot make sense of the horrific treatment of Black men in the United States. Consider Ava Duvarney's *When They See Us*, which powerfully displays the depths of just how little empathy—or sympathy—there is for young Black teenage boys falsely accuse of raping a wealthy white woman. The pain of the exonerated five was never taken seriously by the white press and the white public. *When They See Us* is necessary viewing for white Americans because the vast majority of them haven't considered this pain (and long-term suffering) as important or valuable or worth taking seriously, even after knowing that the five men were deeply wronged and later exonerated.

So instead of seeing this issue through the lens of gender (or any other axis of oppression), I will attempt to zoom out, even while recognizing that zooming out risks obscuring the distinctive ways in which oppression and power hierarchies manifest themselves.

First, as Meek Mill points out, those who grow up in and live in the most crime-ridden and gang-infested neighborhoods of urban America, the vast majority of whom are Black and Latinx, are

not thought of as having trauma-based disorders. Hence, if they commit crimes, they are not treated as e.g. having a mental illness or disorder that might be partly exculpatory of their actions, whereas Chip is, solely because of his class and race privilege. Chip can both access mental health care and have his pain taken seriously enough to get a diagnosis (not to mention how a jury will react to him, what lawyer he can hire, what kind of sentence he will receive even if he gets convicted, whether his diagnosis is believed, and how much it is treated as exculpatory). It is important to consider this issue because it complicates my claim that pro-warrant and pro-desirability norms are traded off against each other. But it also shows that what might look like an implicit commitment of mine, which is that there is some standard way in which these norms are applied to everyone, is false. Indeed, it is a particularly pernicious claim given the way that our norms play out in the mental health and illness context and, in particular, in judicial contexts.

Sometimes, these norms are—at least superficially—employed in order to aim at the benefit of individuals. But in oppressive contexts, that is rarely the case. First, in such contexts, these norms that are ideally employed in a way that aims at the benefit of individuals are instead weaponized (whether intentionally or unintentionally) against people, in order to maintain oppressive power structures. Second, the satisfaction of the norms is much higher-stakes for the very oppressed; but also it is even harder to simultaneously satisfy the norms for the very oppressed. Thus, our two norms put the oppressed in a “double bind”.

Let me say a little bit more about the first claim by way of two examples. The first example is problematic. It is in danger of reinforcing stereotypes about young Black and Latinx people from urban areas. But I use it because it is real, it was something I witnessed, and most importantly because, while I attempted to resist it, I lacked a clear theoretical understanding of what, exactly, was wrong with it—something I hope this paper will make a small step towards clarifying. I used to work in a small school for high school students who had dropped out or been expelled from the public school system; all of my students were Black and Latinx, and almost all of them were involved in or surrounded by gangs and gang violence. Almost all of the teachers at the school were white. A fair number of fights broke out among students in our school, and often many of the other students would surround the fight, cheering and laughing. The other teachers and administrators

would often talk about this behavior as though the students were (in a derogatory way) mentally ill, or much worse—referring to students as ‘callous’, ‘hardened’, ‘evil’, and, in one teacher’s case, repeatedly as ‘animals’.¹⁶

Cheering and laughing at a violent fight is just one way of achieving self-preservation in the face of constant violence; it thus might be thought of as a way of satisfying pro-desirability norms in a (very) non-ideal world. If one’s life is constant violence, then one can’t constantly react to that violence with a warranted emotional state such as sadness, fear, etc. An adaptive reaction to violence (e.g. humor or even joy) is simply one way of satisfying pro-desirability norms—at the expense of pro-warrant norms—in oppressive circumstances. (Though it is crucial to point out something that seemed troublingly lost on the white teachers in this case: that expressions of humor and joy do not necessarily correlate to feelings of humor and joy; there are other issues of self-preservation at stake when it comes to our expression of emotions.) The problem is that while pro-desirability norms can swamp pro-warrant norms for the relatively privileged, that is not how things work in deeply oppressive contexts: these norms that, when it comes to the relatively privileged, are deployed (at least superficially) in the service of helping individuals are instead deployed in the service of stereotyping, holding to an impossible standard, and even dehumanization, all of which serve to reinforce oppression.

Consider a contrast case in which someone physically protects themselves from exposure to the kind of circumstances which warrant negative emotional responses. Neither mental health professionals nor the white public bat an eye at the wealthy white people of Beverly Hills who use giant walls to protect their estates from exposure to houseless and poor people who they fear. No one calls them hardened, evil, or animals when they fight to ensure that there is no possible route on public transit from most of Los Angeles to Beverly Hills, or when they erect barricades on the sidewalks in front of their restaurants and stores so that they don’t have to step over dying people on the street to buy their \$10,000 purses. But the wealthy white citizens of Beverly Hills who do

¹⁶ Here we have what looks like the use of a pro-warrant norm to bolster the dehumanization of Black people. I suspect that this kind of case is not uncommon. See Livingstone Smith (2011) for discussion of how dehumanization works to reinforce oppression.

these things are erecting a *physical* barrier to their being put in a situation that, if they were in, would warrant a negative emotional reaction to the world.¹⁷

These examples show that the way we enforce pro-warrant and pro-desirability norms differs wildly depending on relative privilege and oppression. My earlier claim that we have swung too far towards pro-desirability norms thus needs to be tempered. While there is a sense in which the dominant cultural status quo is currently way off (with pro-desirability norms swamping pro-warrant norms), this isn't what happens in the most oppressive contexts. Instead, while both pro-warrant and pro-desirability norms are at least superficially appealed to in the service of the health and well-being of less oppressed people, they are weaponized against oppressed people: the tension between them is exploited to create a standard that is impossible to live up to.

One of the features of oppression is that it restricts options and interferes with agency, thus making the oppressed less agentially free than the privileged.¹⁸ Part of what I am claiming is that one under-appreciated way in which this plays out is that oppression restricts our ability to physically wall ourselves off from the very kinds of circumstances and event that warrant particularly negative emotional states as responses. And thus, insofar as we think that balancing warrant and individual well-being is both justified, and necessary for maintaining sanity, we should expect and accept that those who lack the privilege to physically remove themselves from the kind of circumstances that warrant deeply negative emotional states as reactions must compensate by sometimes psychologically treating those circumstances as instead warranting joy, amusement, or at least not severe sadness or anger.¹⁹

A wealthy white woman in Beverly Hills can maintain a lifestyle in which she has little physical exposure to anything that warrants deeply negative emotional states as a response. A Black teenager who grows up in a public housing project in Boston has very little control over what he is

¹⁷ Of course, things are more complicated than this. Most of these wealthy white citizens of Beverly Hills do not have warranted reactions to e.g. seeing a houseless person on the street, in the instances in which they cannot physically protect themselves from exposure. They either manage to see through this other human being, or react with anger, disgust, or fear, none of which are warranted emotional responses to witnessing houselessness. But it is clear that they also physically aim to protect themselves from witnessing houselessness, and I suspect, or at least hope, that this is in part because witnessing houselessness is actually emotionally painful for them in some way.

¹⁸ See e.g. Frye (1983).

¹⁹ See Shelby (2016) for related discussion of some of the moral issues important to the claims in this section.

exposed to; his whole life is filled with experiences that warrant deeply negative emotional responses. If our norms, and their enforcement, were just, then it would be him, and not her, whose unwarranted emotional responses (joy, humor, etc.) to those kinds of circumstances would be treated as simply mentally healthy: as a search for some kind of balance between his own well-being and what is warranted.

But neither our norms nor their enforcement are just. So physically sheltering oneself from the horrors of the world (by having both the material means and the privilege to actually physically avoid exposure to those horrors) is not seen as problematic. It violates neither of our norms. If we aren't exposed to horrors of the world, then negative emotional responses are not warranted. This obscures the fact that both individuals are using the means that they have to protect their own well-being from the world around them.²⁰ The wealthy white woman is both physically and psychologically doing so, using the resources that she has only because of her extreme privilege, whereas the Black teenager is only psychologically doing so, both because he lacks the privilege to do so, but also because to do so in his case would be to isolate himself from *his own* community (and perhaps family), a cost that the wealthy white woman does not face.

These pictures are both caricatures and are problematic. Wealthy white women can face harms that can be deeply personal and seemingly inescapable, as well as harms that are themselves a part of an oppressive power structure, like domestic abuse. Teenagers who grow up in notoriously violent housing projects can use their warranted negative emotional states that are responsive to that violence to motivate their own anti-violence work. The point here is not to essentialize how privilege and oppression intersect with our norms, nor what the possibilities for resistance are, but rather to just sketch a way in which both the application and enforcement of those norms and the norms themselves are unjust. The desires, interests, and life projects of the wealthy white woman are valued in a way in which the Black teenager's is clearly not, and this is reflected in the way in which our norms function differently for each of them.

²⁰ This is not to suggest that they are both equally justified in doing so—I happen to think that the wealthy white woman is at fault in a way that the Black teenager is not, but that is not what this paper is about. See Shelby (2016) for related discussion.

So, in at least some oppressive contexts, it's not correct to claim that we've swung too far in the direction of pro-desirability norms at the expense of pro-warrant norms. Instead, in such contexts, our two sets of norms both can be actively used to feed oppressive power structures, as in the school fight example. But also, independently of whether they are used this way, our norms put the oppressed into a double bind. Because the oppressed, poor, those who live in war zones, etc. are constantly faced with circumstances that warrant extreme negatively-valenced emotional responses, they can only satisfy pro-warrant norms at the extreme cost of failing to satisfy pro-desirability norms. At the same time, in at least some contexts, failing to satisfy pro-warrant norms (as in the school fight case) results in a range of negative responses from those in power, from simply issuing a negative judgment to dehumanization to police brutality.

When these norms are used as weapons rather than tools for measuring and aiding the health and well-being of individuals and communities, the idea of them being "traded off" or in tension with one another fails. It is a familiar point that there is no compassion or concern when it comes to making contradictory demands of the oppressed; this is precisely what a double bind is: you're damned if you do, you're damned if you don't, and there is no structural pressure for the world to help you alleviate the choice between two bad options—instead, the structural pressure from the world is to continue restricting your options. So, when it comes to the most oppressed, our trade-off is no longer a trade-off; oppressed people are expected to satisfy both norms despite the incurable tension between those norms, thus being put in a double bind.

I have claimed that these norms are in tension for everyone. What is so special about the double bind that is faced by those who have the norms weaponized against them? It's complicated. Extremely oppressive, violent, or otherwise horrific circumstances are circumstances in which satisfying pro-warrant norms comes at a much greater cost than it does in more ideal circumstances. But the importance—for oneself and one's community—of satisfying pro-warrant norms is also greater: to fail to satisfy pro-warrant norms (e.g. to fail to be angry and sad at the countless violent deaths of your friends, neighbors, and family) is, in effect, a harm to oneself and one's community, for precisely the reasons I outlined in the last section: failing to satisfy pro-warrant norms both obscures, and disables us from resisting, our own oppression. So the pressure to satisfy each norm is

extremely strong. And failing to satisfy either norm is not just a suboptimal choice, but actively harms the oppressed and their communities. Thus, they are “damned if they do and damned if they don’t” in a way which doesn’t apply to the privileged. For the privileged, these norms are in tension with one another, but a failure to satisfy one or the other is much less often a serious harm to oneself or one’s own community. For the privileged, having a warranted, negatively-valenced directed emotional response to an oppressive situation is not often a matter of caring for or about one’s *own* community or family, or committing to furthering their interests; instead it can seem more optional, since it requires extending care to those outside of one’s own community.²¹

To sum up this section: there are two ways in which especially oppressive contexts make problems for the diagnosis I gave in the previous section. One is that our two norms often put the oppressed in a double bind, since the stakes associated with failing to satisfy either are so high, but it is impossible to satisfy both. The other is that our norms are actually actively appealed to in order to maintain and reinforce oppressive power structures, as in the high school case I gave earlier.²²

Insofar as there can be thought to be an “ideal” balance between warrant and desirability when it comes to emotional states, such balance won’t help individuals who are living in contexts in which they can’t escape serious horrors: those living in war zones (or soldiers fighting in wars), living in ghettos, subjected to inescapable domestic violence or child abuse, and so on simply shouldn’t be expected to have pro-warrant norms govern their directed emotional states in the same way that the rich white woman in Beverly Hills should.

5. SOCIAL WELL-BEING

I have argued that pro-desirability norms systematically conflict with pro-warrant norms. I have also argued that, when it comes to the more privileged, pro-desirability norms have swamped pro-

²¹ Here, I am relying on (Redacted)’s account of double binds, which I think is exactly correct, but I suspect that the point here can be adapted to other accounts. For discussion of particular double binds, see e.g. Bettcher (2014) on trans* women, Jenkins (2014) on feminist women in philosophy.

²² These two claims are related to Jennifer Morton’s argument against the idea that “the norms of ‘ideal’ rationality are necessary and universal requirements on deliberation.” (2017, p. 543.) Morton shows that an agent’s context matters when we are considering what norms of rationality they ought to follow. Agents who are reasoning under conditions of scarcity should not conform to the standard norms of ideal rationality. I am suggesting that something similar is true about the balance between pro-warrant and pro-desirability norms when it comes to directed emotional states.

warrant norms. This puts the more privileged in a situation in which oppression and other social and political wrongs are obscured and unrecognizable. And I have argued that in oppressive contexts, pro-desirability and pro-warrant norms put the oppressed in a double bind, and are also systematically used against the oppressed in order to maintain their oppression. While it is not my central goal to do so, and what I say in this section will be quite sketchy, I want to conclude by gesturing at how we might go about trying to make things better.

First, we need norms that aim at something like what pro-desirability norms aim at, in order to maintain our mental and physical health, and to be able to pursue our own projects and interests. Thus I do not at all wish to claim that letting pro-warrant norms swamp pro-desirability norms would somehow fix these problems. Should we perhaps simply to aim for more balance, socially speaking, in the way these norms are enforced and assumed? I think not. First, aiming for balance won't help in grossly non-ideal contexts. In such contexts, these norms dichotomize options in such a way that both options are bad. Trying to better balance the norms will not help with that dichotomy. But second, if both warrant and well-being are important, it seems that if we can avoid trading them off against each other, we should. This suggests that we might want to instead attempt to revise our pro-desirability norms so that they track a conception of well-being that conflicts less with pro-warrant norms.²³

Perhaps, then, a good solution might be to attempt to shift our pro-desirability norms to norms that track philosophical conceptions of well-being that have warrant built into them (that is, that suggest that positively-valenced directed emotional states are only desirable for us insofar as they are actually warranted). My concern with such solutions is that they don't fit with the reality of our severely bad situation. The vast majority of what we currently face as human beings is overwhelmingly bad, and warrants severely negatively-valenced directed emotional states. Thus it is wrong to think that our well-being depends on always being warranted in experiencing positively-

²³ One might point out that this is true, but that what will help with fixing the application of our norms to grossly non-ideal contexts is to eliminate those contexts. I agree. But I also think trying to change the shape of our norms is, itself, one way to try to fight back against oppression.

valenced directed emotional states; if the corresponding norm were successfully in place, I suspect that most of us would be, at the least, extremely depressed.

I believe the solution lies elsewhere. Earlier, I noted that our pro-desirability norms are extremely self-centered. Insofar as they are about what is “good for” us, they focus on what is good for us as though we are isolated ships sailing in the sea, centrally focused on satisfying our highly individualistic desires. This is unsurprising, particularly in the United States, given our all-in commitment to a political and social world that is founded on the rights and liberties of the individual. But understanding what is missing can help us think about how to shift our pro-desirability norms. What is missing is a commitment to our *social* (or communal) health and well-being. And such a commitment would help us avoid having to trade our norms off against each other, by embracing a different kind of pro-desirability norm, one which tracks a social conception of well-being.

If we were to embrace norms of social well-being—where individual well-being was conceived of as derivative of the health and happiness and well-being of everyone in our community—there would be less conflict between pro-warrant norms and pro-desirability norms. Pro-desirability norms would look quite different; my deep sadness when I see houseless people on the street in Los Angeles, as well as someone’s anger at the racism she experiences, might both fit in with these norms, since both are warranted and both aim at the well-being of the community.

What might pro-desirability norms that were about mental states that were desirable *for one’s community* look like? The intrinsic issue is tricky (though in the long run, it is important to flesh it out). But a norm about instrumentally desirable mental states might look something like this:

PRO-SOCIAL-DESIRABILITY: the mental state is instrumentally desirable, but not (except derivatively) for the individual who has it—instead, for some further goal, which in many cases will be the elimination of some injustice in a community that individual is a part of.

Such a norm, I submit, would conflict much less with pro-warrant norms in many of the most crucial cases than our current pro-desirability norms do. If what mattered to us was the well-being of our community (and of ourselves derivatively, as members of that community), then when I experienced deep sadness at seeing a houseless person on the streets of Los Angeles, such sadness

would both be warranted and desirable from a well-being perspective: not my own well-being, but the well-being of the community that both I and the houseless person depend on for our own well-being. If we had strong pro-social-desirability norms, such sadness would enable me to see the injustice that was present, and might motivate me to join my community in attempting to do something about it.

While here I can only gesture at this solution, one place to look in which we can look for help in shaping such a norm is to activist communities—in particular in labor rights movements—in which the concept of *solidarity* plays a crucial role. Solidarity has an emotional component, and a complex one. The labor rights slogan “an injury to one is an injury to all” is not meant to be purely theoretical. We are meant to actually feel that it is true. There is a long history of activist communities seeking to shift our norms governing directed emotional states. Moreover, and importantly, solidarity doesn’t just involve feeling negative emotions all of the time, even if there is some sense in which they are warranted. Solidarity itself is supposed to be a source of joy, love, and hope.

There is a straightforward way of understanding why solidarity is a source of joy, hope, and love. We are supposed to find warrant for these emotions in our mutual support and identification with one another. By caring about the well-being of our communities, we have more to notice, take in, and to direct our negatively-valenced emotional states at. But we also have more to be in warranted positively-valenced states about, since the same thing that provides us with more warranted negatively-valenced emotional states—caring for our fellow community members as we do ourselves—also allows us to celebrate others’ successes and happiness. As Cohen says of socialism (but this is just what I am trying to get at with social well-being more generally) we should “care about, and, where necessary and possible, care for, one another, and, too, care that (we) care about one another” (2009, p. 34).

Pro-social desirability norms will allow us to reconcile warrant with desirability, because warranted negatively-valenced mental states will often be instrumentally desirable ones as well. If our goal is the health and well-being of our community rather than primarily ourselves, then feeling sad when I see a houseless person on the street will play a role in my life that is similar to the role that

feeling sad when something bad happens to someone I am closely bonded to, like my mother. If something bad were to happen to my mother, I would enter into a warranted negatively-valenced mental state, and that mental state (because it was directly responsive to the bad circumstance) would motivate me to act and help her.²⁴

I have only gestured at how reshaping our norms might go here. My central aim in this paper was to attempt to do justice to King's and Lorde's quotes I began with, by convincing my readers that there is a real and serious issue here: that our ordinary social norms governing our directed emotional states work in ways that serve to obscure and reinforce structural oppression, and that, in particular, emphasizing pro-desirability norms over pro-warrant norms comes at a serious cost.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, Sara. (2010). *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, Sara. (2015). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge.
- Arpaly, Nomy. (2005). 'How it's not "Just Like" Diabetes: Mental Disorders and the Moral Psychologist'. *Philosophical Issues* 15(1): 282-298.
- Bell, Macalester. (2009). 'Anger, Oppression, and Virtue' in Lisa Tessman, ed., *Feminist Ethics and Social and Political Philosophy: Theorizing the Non-Ideal*. New York: Springer. 165-183.
- Bell, Macalester. (2013). *Hard Feelings: The Moral Psychology of Contempt*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bettcher, Talia Mae. (2014). 'Trapped in the Wrong Theory: Re-Thinking Trans Oppression and Resistance'. *Signs* 39(2): 383-406.
- Callard, Agnes. (2017). 'The Reason to be Angry Forever'. In Myisha Cherry and Owen Flanagan, eds., *The Moral Psychology of Anger*. London: Rowman and Littlefield. 123-138.
- Campbell, Lyle. (2013). *An Introduction to Historical Linguistics*. Third Edition. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

²⁴ Many issues remain, a crucial one being how to shape such a norm in such a way that we conceive of our communities as broadly as possible. To reconnect to King: one way of understanding his notion of *agape* love is as extending this kind of pro-social desirability norm to all people. As Cherry (2018) argues, it does not (at all) follow that we should not be angry when other people perpetuate injustices; indeed anger at others' perpetuation of injustices is precisely what this kind of norm would call for.

- Cappelan, Herman. (2018). *Fixing Language: An Essay on Conceptual Engineering*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cherry, Myisha. (2018). 'Love, Anger, and Racial Injustice'. In Adrienne Martin, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Love in Philosophy*. New York: Routledge.
- Cohen, G.A. (2009). *Why Not Socialism?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Curry, Tommy. (2018). 'Killing Boogeymen: Phallicism and the Misandric Mischaracterizations of Black Males in Theory'. *Res Philosophica* 95(2): 235-272.
- Duvarnay, Ava. (2019). *When They See Us* (television miniseries). Netflix.
- Fanon, Frantz. (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Constance Farrington, trans. Grove Press.
- Fricker, Miranda. (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Frye, Marilyn (1983). *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press.
- Haslam, N. (2016) 'Concept Creep: Psychology's Expanding Concepts of Harm and Pathology'. *Psychological Inquiry* 27(1).
- Jenkins, Katherine. (2014). "That's Not Philosophy": Feminism, Academia, and the Double Bind' *Journal of Gender Studies* 23(3): 262-274.
- King, Martin Luther, Jr. (1957) 'The Christian Way of Life in Human Relations'. St. Louis, Missouri. Speech.
- King, Martin Luther, Jr. (1986). *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* James Melvin Washington, ed., New York: Harper Collins Publishing.
- Le Duc, Julia (2019) Untitled Photograph. Published by the Associated Press.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/25/us/father-daughter-border-drowning-picture-mexico.html>.
- Lebron, Christopher. (2013). *The Color of Our Shame: Race and Justice in Our Time*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Livingstone Smith, David. (2011). *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Lorde, Audre. (1980) *The Cancer Journals*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- Lorde, Audre. (1981) 'The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism'. Keynote Address, National Women's Studies Society.
- Lorde, Audre. (1982). *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. Watertown, MA: Persephone Press.

- Lorde, Audre. (1984). *Sister Outsider*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.
- Manne, Kate. (2017). *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Manne, Kate. (2018). Brett Kavanaugh and America's 'Himpathy' Reckoning. *The New York Times*. Sept. 26.
- Medina, José (2013). *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Meek Mill (MeekMill) (2019). "Philadelphia Murder rate has been in the 300 murders plus range since I can remember and kids are growing up in that first hand and they have no choice but to carry firearms after seeing all that blood spilled and That will distort you decision making process like PTSD". February 28, 1:44 PM. Tweet.
- Miller, Chanel. (2019). *Know My Name*. Random House.
- Morton, Jennifer. (2017). 'Reasoning Under Scarcity'. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 95(3): 543-59.
- Mun, Cecilea. (2019). 'Rationality through the Eyes of Shame: Oppression and Liberation via Emotion'. *Hypatia*. Online First: <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12472>.
- Norlock, Kathryn J. (2019). 'Perpetual Struggle'. *Hypatia* 34(1): 6-19.
- Nozick, Robert. (1974). *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books.
- Nussbaum, Martha. (2016). *Anger and Forgiveness*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nussbaum, Martha. (2018). 'From Anger to Love: Self-Purification and Political Resistance'. In Tommie Shelby and Brandon Terry, eds. *To Shape a New World*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 105-126.
- Paul, Sarah. (2019). 'What Should 'Imposter Syndrome' Be?'. *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* XCIII, 227-245.
- Rankine, Claudia. (2015). 'The Condition of Black Life is One of Mourning'. In *The New York Times Magazine*, June 22, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/magazine/the-condition-of-Black-life-is-one-of-mourning.html>.
- Reuters Institute. (2017). *Digital News Report*.
- Reuters Institute. (2019). *Digital News Report*.
- Shelby, Tommie. (2016). *Dark Ghettos: Injustice, Dissent, and Reform*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Shoemaker, D. (2017) "Response-Dependent Responsibility; or, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Blame," *Philosophical Review* 126: 481-527.

Siegel, Susanna. (2017). *The Rationality of Perception*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Srinivasan, Amia (2018). "The Aptness of Anger". *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26(2): 123-144.

Wallace, R.J. (1994) *Responsibility and the Moral Sentiments*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Whippman, Ruth. (2017). *America the Anxious*. London: St. Martin's Press.