

DISCHARGING IRIS MARION YOUNG'S CONCEPTION OF POLITICAL
RESPONSIBILITY

TACKLING THE PROBLEM OF INABILITY – A BARRIER TO DISCHARGING
IRIS MARION YOUNG’S CONCEPTION OF POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY

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LAY ABSTRACT

Iris Marion Young’s social connection model (SCM) explains a forward-looking conception of political responsibility for structural injustice. This political responsibility is generated by an agent’s participation in the social processes and systems that produce this form of injustice. Despite the unique benefits that I argue the SCM makes towards tackling structural injustice, I also suggest that there is a present and pressing problem of inability. I argue that despite most contributing agents *having* responsibility to participate in collective solutions to address injustice, most do not presently have the *necessary abilities to discharge* this responsibility. My thesis outlines some of the important causes of this inability, and I suggest that providing citizens with a form of preparation can equip them to discharge their political responsibilities most effectively. I argue that this preparation should occur in public education, with curriculum that prioritizes cultivating democratically engaged and justice-oriented citizens.

ABSTRACT

Iris Marion Young defines structural injustice as a moral wrong, distinct from traditional conceptions of moral wrongs that are traceable to or can be attributed to specific actions, individuals, or policies. This kind of injustice is generated and maintained by the ongoing, collective participation of millions of people acting together in shared systems and processes, often in ways that are not obviously morally (or legally) wrong. As such, Young argues for a new conception of responsibility to explain when we have political responsibility for injustice and how we should act to change these unjust outcomes, to which end she proposes the Social Connection Model (SCM). The SCM explains a forward-looking conception of political responsibility, generated by an agent's social connection to injustice. Young claims that this responsibility should be discharged through collective action with others who share this responsibility.

Building on Young's account, I argue the SCM provides important benefits towards collective approaches for addressing injustice. However, I suggest there is a present and pressing problem of inability: despite *having* this political responsibility, I argue that most agents do not presently have the *ability to discharge* this responsibility. To address this problem of inability, I suggest we ought to provide agents with a form of preparation to develop the required knowledge base and critical thinking skills to be able to recognize their political responsibility and take part in collective action to address injustice. I suggest that an important part of this preparation should take place in public

education, grounded by both a citizen's right and duty to be educated, as well as a democratic government's responsibility to educate its citizens. I evaluate why education is the right place for this preparation to take place, examine what kind of education can produce this preparation, and question whether it is already underway.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCING STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE AND THE SOCIAL CONNECTION MODEL (SCM) – AN OVERVIEW OF COLLECTIVELY PRODUCED HARM AND (NECESSARILY) COLLECTIVE SOLUTIONS

INTRODUCTION

Iris Marion Young defines structural injustice as a kind of moral wrong, distinct from traditional conceptions of moral wrongs that are traceable to or can be attributed to specific actions, individuals, or policies.¹ Young suggests this kind of injustice occurs “when social processes put large groups of persons under systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities, at the same time that these processes enable others to dominate or to have a wide range of opportunities for developing and exercising capacities available to them.”² This kind of injustice is produced by ongoing, collective participation within social processes. These processes produce advantage for certain persons and disadvantage for others. This relative treatment traces along the lines of (perceived) identity. Persons of both privileged identities³ and non-privileged identities⁴ have participated in and continue to participate within these social processes.

These acts of participation are not equal, nor do they all look the same. None the less, all persons who act together in shared systems are participants within the processes that produce this disparity in advantage. The treatment that each person receives due to structural processes is produced by collective contributions, their own included. These

¹ Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press, 44.

² Ibid. 52.

³ Those who have historically and presently hold power, influence, or admiration.

⁴ Those who have historically and continue to be discriminated against, dominated, or oppressed.

contributions are often not overtly immoral or illegal but are instead consistent with conventionally accepted norms and behaviours. What ensues is an intricate entanglement of actions, intentions, and experiences. Young contends that traditional models of responsibility, such as moral or legal liability, are not capable of fully explaining the responsibility we have for this kind of injustice. Rather, to understand how structural injustice occurs, who is responsible for it, and how we might collectively address it, Young provides a new model of responsibility. The kind of responsibility she has in mind accounts for outcomes that arise when there are no clear links to trace causation of particular instances of harm to particular agents who caused them.

In her final work, *Responsibility for Justice*, Young produces a guide for understanding our individual, political, responsibility for structural injustice as contributors to the systems and/or processes that produce it. She calls this the social connection model (SCM).⁵ It is a forward-looking conception of political responsibility that instructs actors to work with others through collective action to undermine the structures (i.e., systems, processes, norms, etc.) that continuously reproduce unjust outcomes. This first chapter of this thesis discusses the nature of structural injustice and explains Young's proposed response to it. The aim of this thesis as a whole is to (i) identify a present and pressing barrier to acting on the political responsibility Young argues we all share; and (ii) propose a feasible solution to address this barrier. Importantly, structural injustice produces a set of challenges that Young believes we each

⁵ For the sake of brevity, the Social Connection Model will be abbreviated to SCM from here on out.

hold political responsibility to resolve. However, I argue that discharging this political responsibility requires certain skills that need to be intentionally cultivated. For some individuals this cultivation may already be underway, but at the societal level, I argue that preparation to develop and utilize these skills is *not* presently underway. This lack of ability to act on the political responsibility that Young argues we all have (thanks to a lack of preparation) is the barrier my thesis aims to discuss. In response to this barrier, I offer an attainable method of delivering structural support for citizens as they attempt to make the changes that Young encourages us all to strive for. Detailing what this structural support to discharge political responsibility looks like, and where I argue it should take place, is the focus of chapter three. The aim of this first chapter is to present the problem of structural injustice and discuss a valuable theory to address it, namely, the SCM.

To understand how structural injustice occurs, I explicate one of Young's detailed illustrations of global injustice: sweatshops. Through her discussion of this example, Young makes clear that harms produced by structural processes, while unjust in their own right, simultaneously position victims to become more vulnerable to moral or legal harms as well. As such, resolving harms explained by the SCM can have a ripple effect on reducing the production of harms captured by moral or legal models of responsibility as well.

Notably, my discussion of Young's SCM adds a second theoretical lens, namely, intersectionality. I make this inclusion because Young suggests that social positionality

impacts an agent's relative treatment by different structural processes. Consequently, this relative treatment has an impact on the agent's resulting responsibility to address structural injustice. As such, this relativity requires an analysis of any given agent's social position in order to assess where they stand relative to the operation of injustice. I suggest that assessing the SCM through the perspective of Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality nicely illustrates what I see as Young's conceptual intention with the SCM. Intersectionality showcases the way that intersecting aspects of our identities are treated by different social and political processes. As such, I propose that viewing the SCM through an intersectional lens allows us to fully capture the intention of Young's model of responsibility.

SECTION 1.1: SWEATSHOPS: AN INSTANCE OF GLOBAL AND STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE

To reiterate, Young proposes that structural injustice occurs, “when social processes put large groups of persons under systematic threat of domination or deprivation of the means to develop and exercise their capacities, at the same time that these processes enable others to dominate or to have a wide range of opportunities for developing and exercising capacities available to them.”⁶ To do this, she considers Anthony Giddens' discussion of the ‘duality of structure’. Giddens suggests that the contributions of all participating agents, acting together within shared systems, produce the existing rules and norms of social processes.⁷ Therefore, the results produced by

⁶ Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press, 52.

⁷ Ibid. 60.

systems that organize society are maintained through the consistent reproduction of certain patterns of behaviour. These patterns are what produce both advantage for some and disadvantage for others.

According to Young, an individual's social positionality⁸ is the result of making choices within the constrained circumstances of an unjust organization of society. Moreover, structural injustice does not operate in a way that points to any clear culprits that can be held liable for this injustice because it is produced, and continuously reproduced, thanks to the contributions of thousands and sometimes millions of people who are more often than not acting in socially and morally acceptable ways.⁹ A liability model of responsibility is exceptionally useful to capture moral or legal harms, particularly when the goal is to hold a specific party responsible. Liability models of responsibility are backward-looking: they seek to identify a party at fault and hold them responsible for the harm in question. However, the harms that occur due to structural injustice result from collective contributions rather than the specific actions of isolated parties. As such, Young's model of responsibility contrasts with these traditional liability models of responsibility in the sense that it is forward-looking: it does not seek to assign blame or fault. The SCM is only backward-looking in a very limited sense: it looks backward to understand the nature of a harm (for instance, how the harm is generated, maintained, etc.) but not to assign liability for it. Instead, the SCM explains a shared

⁸ For the purposes of this project, social positionality is defined as an individual's social position, particularly their level of advantage or disadvantage, relative to their neighbors and peers. It is influenced by social structures, institutions, social norms, expectations, personal actions, etc.

⁹ Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press, 96.

responsibility that agents have to address the harms of structural injustice. There are also actions captured by a liability model of responsibility that contribute to the continuous reproduction of structural injustice, such as certain actions that contribute to producing harms in sweatshops. Addressing actions that are captured by a liability model must be part of the overall approach, but many contributions that generate harms in sweatshops operate “indirectly, collectively, and cumulatively through the production of structural constraints on the actions of many and privileged opportunities for some.”¹⁰ Contributions (i.e., actions) that aid in the reproduction of structural injustice that cannot be captured by a liability model are what Young seeks to address with the SCM.

This differentiation of contributions (i.e., actions that can be explained by either a liability model or the SCM) are illustrated when examining behaviours that contribute to the existence of sweatshop labor. Young acknowledges that conditions within a sweatshop vary, but the following are fairly typical.

The vast majority of workers are often female, and often as young as thirteen or fourteen. They are often treated in dominative and abusive ways by bosses, and sexual harassment is common. Typically, they work ten- to sixteen-hour days in peak seasons; if the manufacturer is behind on an order, the workers may be forced to work through the night. They have few bathroom breaks or other opportunities for rest during their long working day ... violations of the most basic health and safety standard are normal ... Workers who complain and try to organize are typically threatened, fired, backlisted, beaten, and even killed. Local governments often actively or passively support such anti-union activity.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid. 127.

Initially, it appears reasonable to suggest that it is the owners and operators of sweat shops that bear responsibility for the conditions under which these employees work, for they have a direct impact on initiating and maintaining these inhumane conditions.¹² And while these individuals surely hold some measure of legal or moral responsibility, the widespread structural practices and processes that feed the utilization of sweatshops suggest that numerous parties share responsibility for improving the conditions that these workers labor in.¹³ For instance, “there is a complex chain of production and distribution involving dozens or thousands of contractually distinct entities that bring the clothes manufactured in multiple places to the stores in which people buy them.”¹⁴ There is also a highly competitive market that drives retailers and wholesalers to look for the best deal, which ensures that the *demand* for sweatshop labor remains consistent.¹⁵ As such, parties who share in this responsibility to improve working conditions include not only the owners and operators of sweatshops, but also those who participate in this chain of contractual work that results in their employment, including those who purchase the clothing produced.¹⁶ Other responsible parties include the states within which these facilities operate. Often times, local authorities are aware of the ongoing violations of human rights but choose to either turn a blind eye or, even worse, partake in the profits.¹⁷ Those whose actions are further removed from the immediacy of what takes place in sweatshops may not be blameworthy or hold moral or legal responsibility for the harms

¹² Ibid. 126.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid. 129.

¹⁵ Ibid. 131.

¹⁶ Ibid. 130.

¹⁷ Ibid. 132.

suffered, but their actions still contribute to the ongoing patterns of behaviour that make these harms possible.

Notably, those who participate in the perpetuation of sweatshop labor are often also acting within constrained circumstances. For example, there is a persistent pressure to maximize profit which serves to maintain constant demand for labor under these conditions.¹⁸ While the conditions of capitalist economies no doubt encourage this form of progression, these conditions do not absolve actors from responsibility for the actions they take in participation of the processes that enable labor to persist under these conditions. Young suggests it is clear that,

Sweatshop conditions are a case of structural injustice insofar as they are relatively common, follow a similar pattern, seem to further the interests of so many diverse actors ... and are produced by a large number of individuals and organizations acting on those interests. These structural economic and political processes ... both enable and provide incentives for some actions at the same time that they block or constrain alternatives.¹⁹

The pertinent observation is that behaviours of people all around the world compound with one another to result in the domination of those who work in sweatshops. According to Young, if collective contributions (including non-blameworthy contributions) produce these harms, then our political responsibility to address injustice should prompt collective action to change the nature and outcomes of these contributions.

SECTION 1.2: THE SOCIAL CONNECTION MODEL (SCM)

¹⁸ Ibid. 132-3.

¹⁹ Ibid. 133.

At the onset of Young's description of the SCM, she aptly observes that "the very judgment that there is injustice implies some kind of responsibility. To judge a circumstance unjust implies that we understand it at least partly as humanly caused and entails the claim that something should be done to rectify it."²⁰ In other words, recognizing a harm that you are in some way complicit in producing as unjust, morally necessitates a response intended to ameliorate it. However, the nature of structural injustice is that there are no clear culprits that can be held liable for the harms incurred.

So, how do we address these harms that don't have a clear party at fault? The harms in question occur due to unjust background conditions and intertwined processes that disadvantage some while simultaneously privileging others. These are the harms that Young seeks to address with the SCM. Her model is meant to address actions that "do not contribute to injustice for other persons directly ... but rather indirectly, collectively, and cumulatively through the production of structural constraints on the actions of many and privileged opportunities for some."²¹ As such, this model of responsibility suggests that all those whose actions contribute to a system or structure that produces injustice hold some measure of responsibility for rectifying the resulting harms.²² As noted, this model differs from traditional models of responsibility in that it is primarily forward-looking; it is not interested in making agents feel guilty or assigning blame. Rather, its aim is to assign responsibility in an effort to motivate collective action to address the injustice

²⁰ Ibid. 95.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

produced. According to Young, “[b]eing responsible in relation to structural injustice means that one has an obligation to join with others who share that responsibility in order to transform the structural processes to make their outcomes less unjust.”²³ Rather than assigning fault, this type of responsibility suggests there is an obligation or duty to partake in certain activities in “a morally appropriate way” to ensure that more just outcomes come about.²⁴

In contrast to a liability model, this approach to responsibility doesn’t isolate perpetrators. It does not attempt to trace the causal patterns of each individual harm. Instead, the responsibility to address structural injustice is shared. The harms in question are produced through collectively engaging in systems, and Young argues that the most productive way to rectify this injustice is therefore through collective action.²⁵ Another distinct characteristic of this responsibility is that it is political in nature, rather than moral or legal. The purpose of attributing this type of responsibility is to signal to those who contribute to each system in question that their responsibility is generated in virtue of them participating within that system.

Young’s conception of political responsibility is influenced by Hannah Arendt’s.²⁶ However, as Maeve McKeown shows, Young’s conception of political responsibility

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. 104.

²⁵ Ibid. 105.

²⁶ Young spends Chapter three of *Responsibility for Justice* detailing the nuances of Hannah Arendt’s conception of political responsibility. She primarily looks at three of Arendt’s works: “Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility” (1994), “Collective Responsibility” (1987), and *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963). She closes this chapter by suggesting that the idea of political

differs from Arendt's in a subtle, but distinctive way. While Arendt claims that the catalyst for political responsibility stems from membership within a political community, Young argues that political responsibility originates from the actions and interactions of individuals within a shared system. In other words, for Young, it is not merely the fact that one is a *member* of the political community that generates their corresponding responsibility. Rather, on Young's view, responsibility is formed by agents' relative *contributions* to the systems that make up that political community.²⁷

If political responsibility originates in this way, there can be different degrees of responsibility for different individuals who operate within these systems. If the catalyst for responsibility was mere membership in a political community, as it is on Arendt's view, then it reasonably follows that every member of the community has the same level of responsibility. On Young's account, however, the level of responsibility that an individual has is determined by two factors: (i) their relative contributions to the system in question; and (ii) their relative treatment by that system, which influences their social positionality. In this way, individuals whose actions contribute more heavily to the harms being produced and whose own treatment(s) are more privileged have a greater responsibility to take collective action to correct the system in question. Individuals

responsibility that she has interpreted and developed out of Arendt's work is useful for establishing her own conception of political responsibility, illustrated by the social connection model.

²⁷ McKeown, M. (2018) Iris Marion Young's "Social Connection Model" of Responsibility: Clarifying the Meaning of Connection. *Journal of Social Philosophy*. 49(3), 485.

whose treatment is less privileged, and whose actions do not contribute as significantly to the harms produced, will still hold some responsibility, but to a lesser extent.²⁸

This variance in degree of responsibility is due to Young's recognition that privilege and power influence an agent's ability to correct injustice.²⁹ It is important to note that these different degrees of responsibility do not absolve anyone from their duty to partake in collective action to undermine injustice. Rather, these different degrees of responsibility simply mean that different individuals will have different duties resulting from their particular position in the system. This recognition that privilege and disadvantage influence power and ability safeguards against compounding harm(s). Young builds this awareness into her model in an effort to ensure that those who carry the brunt of harms produced do not have the same level of responsibility to rebalance the scales of privilege as those who are not (as) harmed by the systems in question. This ensures that individuals who are navigating injustice from a disadvantaged position do not have the same responsibility – and resulting duties – as those with more power, influence, and privilege.³⁰ However, this raises an important question. If duties vary based on relative treatment by (and contributions towards) different systems, how does one determine what their contributions to collective action should be? I propose that viewing the SCM through the lens of Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality can help us

²⁸ Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press., 146.

²⁹ More will be said about this intersection of contributions, power, positionality, and responsibility in section 1.3.

³⁰ This particular aspect of Young's model is what I take to be one of its strongest features and is more thoroughly explored in chapter two.

understand (i) our own social position in relation to different systems producing structural injustice; and (ii) what our duties to address this injustice are.

SECTION 1.3: INTERSECTIONALITY – RECOGNIZING THAT INJUSTICE OPERATES ALONG THE LINES OF IDENTITY

In “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color” Kimberlé Crenshaw explores the reality of what it means to live as a Black woman in America. She demonstrates how the intersecting aspects of these women’s identities has historically placed (and continues to place) them under multiple systems of domination. Furthermore, when antiracist or feminist movements seek to address particular harms on the basis of one identity but fail to recognize that (and how) these identities intersect, the benefits from these movements only serve the dominant identity and fail to account for the marginalized identities that suffer from these same systems of oppression.

For example, Crenshaw emphasizes how antiracist pursuits often center the plight of Black *men* and feminist pursuits center the experience of *white* women.³¹ This shows how individuals can be advantaged on the basis of one characteristic of their identity while simultaneously being disadvantaged on the basis of another. Black men are disadvantaged on the basis of race while simultaneously receiving certain benefits thanks to their gender. The same can be said for white women – they receive preferential

³¹ Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1244.

treatment for their race, while facing certain obstacles due to existing in a sexist society. The result, however, is the further subordination of Black women because neither initiative recognizes how the intersecting identities of race and gender produce a specific reality that is distinct from those of either Black men or white women.

The result, according to Crenshaw, is not only that Black women are suffering from both racist and sexist systems of subordination, but also that initiatives which are designed to address these oppressive systems are failing to capture the way in which these particular women are being harmed, which serves to further entrench the injustice they suffer from.³² As we can see, the same individual can be disadvantaged due to possessing more than one identity marker simultaneously. For instance, Black trans women suffer injustice along the lines of their race and gender but to a different extent within the confines of gender identity because, in virtue of living in a transphobic society, the validity of a trans person's gender identification is consistently undermined and devalued by conservative and outdated dichotomies of what it means to be a 'man' or 'woman'. The more aspects of an individual's identity that fall outside rigidly prescribed roles that social structures dictate, the more susceptible these individuals are to structural harm and subordination.

Importantly, this discussion of intersectionality relates to the SCM insofar as an agent's social position affects their responsibility to address structural injustice. For

³² The term for this specific intersectional injustice is misogynoir. See: Moya Bailey, 2014, as cited in Manne, Kate (2017). *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. Oxford University Press., 64.

instance, Young suggests that despite sharing in the collective responsibility to address structural injustice, individual agents have varying degrees of responsibility that prompt their resulting duties thanks to the relative advantage or disadvantage they receive in these systems. As such, I propose that intersectionality is a useful tool for analyzing social positionality. This analysis provides a more detailed understanding of an agent's lived experience, and sheds light on how they can feasibly participate in contributions towards collective action. Moreover, this analysis is what I believe Young intends when she recognizes the role of social positionality and how it influences responsibility to address structural injustice. As such, I believe that applying the theoretical lens of intersectionality to the SCM can facilitate the analysis that is needed in order to grasp an accurate understanding of each individual agent's social position, and how this impacts their engagement with the political responsibility the SCM shows them they have.

Thus far, this chapter has detailed the nature of structural injustice, the aims of the SCM, as well as providing a suggestion for how to utilize the SCM more effectively. The final section of this chapter suggests that citizens are not presently receiving adequate preparation to discharge their political duties, which includes their ability to act on the responsibility the SCM shows them they have. As such, my project proposes that the SCM provides significant benefits for addressing structural injustice, but that there are certain forms of structural preparation that must take place before these benefits can be realized.

SECTION 1.4: WHAT'S MISSING? – PREPARATION TO DEVELOP ABILITIES TO FUFILL RESPONSIBILITY

The SCM constitutes an original and valuable contribution to the broader discussion of injustice and provides an instructive model for how participating actors can understand their political responsibility and take steps to address unjust outcomes. Its strength lies in what sets it apart from other, more traditional theories of responsibility, namely, (i) it respects the agency of all participating actors; (ii) it recognizes social positionality and resulting capability; and (iii) it outlines a role for responsibility that abstains from the use of blame or guilt. These strengths of Young's model are more thoroughly explored in chapter two where I explain how the SCM provides a unique contribution to the overall approach of addressing injustice. However, there is a practical challenge that arises when agents are faced with the task of recognizing their political responsibility and taking part in collective action. The SCM assumes that citizens have the *ability* to recognize the responsibility the SCM explains they have. But the nature of structural injustice and of our resulting political responsibility are not common knowledge. Understanding these things requires a fairly sophisticated level of analysis and critical engagement by the agents involved. This means that most (if not all) citizens require some measure of preparation to be able to understand and hence discharge their responsibility.

In order to recognize how different social processes, systems, behaviours, norms, etc. produce injustice, there must be a willingness to question the version of reality that is depicted by powerful actors who dominate positions of power and authority within

society. For instance, the reality of colonization within Canada is vastly different from the ‘version’ of this account that is most often espoused in history books, political discourse, social opinions, etc. Injustice is often concealed by those who hold power and benefit from the perpetuation of imbalanced power structures. To comprehend that injustice operates in almost every facet of human life requires questioning the ‘truths’ they are continuously led to believe. Some individuals are wired to innately question everything; but in order for this awareness (that we must question these ‘truths’) to gain traction, the *majority* of citizens must be willing (and able) to critically engage with the world around them and to question whether the reality they consider to be true is correct. Moreover, these skills of critical analysis are necessary not only to understand injustice, but also to recognize the political responsibility the SCM shows us we have. In order for agents to recognize their own social positionality and to develop an understanding of how they might join with others through collective action, they first need the ability to analyze the dynamics of power and privilege that operate within the social spheres they inhabit. All of this requires *preparation*. For many (if not most) individuals, these are not skills that can be developed independently of guidance and support. This raises an important question: how and where might this preparation take place?

In what follows, I propose that public education is an important area in which this type of preparation can and should occur. Education alone cannot produce justice-motivated citizens. However, it is a valuable structural tool that reaches most (if not all) citizens and can also work in tandem with other initiatives that strive for establishing

equity within society. Incorporating this type of preparation within public education ensures that all citizens have the opportunity to develop their ability to undertake the necessary analysis to recognize their political responsibility and hence to take part in collective action.

CONCLUSION

This first chapter has provided an overview of Young's account of political responsibility, as exemplified by the SCM. I have discussed the nature of structural injustice as well as Young's argument for how we should understand this form of injustice and our responsibility to address it. In discussing her example of structural harms within the context of sweatshop labour, I've shown how various actors are connected to the perpetuation of these structural harms in virtue of their contributions to the systems and processes that produce these harms. I've also argued that viewing the SCM through the lens of Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality can prompt the kind of understanding of our political responsibility that Young has in mind. As such, this discussion lays the groundwork for pursuing this project's main aim, which is to (i) identify a challenge for actors to recognize and act on the political responsibility the SCM shows them they have and (ii) propose a strategy to resolve this challenge. Chapter two explores three significant strengths of Young's theory to illustrate the unique contribution the SCM makes to our overall approach to addressing injustice, which supports my argument that we should be concerned with addressing practical challenges to acting on the political responsibility the SCM shows us we have.

CHAPTER TWO: EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF EMPLOYING THE SCM IN THE PURSUIT OF SOCIAL EQUITY

INTRODUCTION

In chapter one, I demonstrated the benefits of understanding responsibility according to the SCM and of viewing the SCM through the lens of Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. I argued that recognizing the intersectional nature of structural injustice helps inform our approach for addressing it and to pursuing the broader goal of achieving social equity. In this chapter, I discuss further benefits of the SCM, highlighting three specifically: (i) The SCM respects every actor's agency, particularly those whose agency is regularly dismissed within traditional models of responsibility; (ii) it reconciles political responsibility with social positionality; and (iii) it explains a type of responsibility without blame, shame, or guilt. Each of these benefits is explored thoroughly in its own right and each is applied to instances of collective action within the MeToo movement. This application explains why I see these three features of the SCM as benefits, as well as how these benefits arise when agents participate in collective action to address structural injustice in the manner Young prescribes.

SECTION 2.1: THE SCM RESPECTS EVERYONE'S AGENCY, INCLUDING PERSONS WHO SUFFER STRUCTURAL HARMS

Young's SCM does something that most other models of responsibility do not – she holds everyone who participates within systems that produce injustice responsible for the resulting harms ... *including those who suffer from these harms*.³³ Initially, this might

³³ Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press., 146. Holding agents who suffer from a harm partially responsible for correcting the patterns of behaviour that allow the

seem counterintuitive. If someone is suffering an injustice or harm that is perpetrated against them, how can they possibly be held responsible for it, even partially or as part of a broader collective?³⁴ Wouldn't this simply compound the harm(s) that they are already suffering? Even Young admits that if we viewed structural injustice solely through the lens of a liability model, this line of thinking would be 'perverse'.³⁵ I propose, however, that a closer reading of Young (keeping the intentions of this model in mind) provides a different impression altogether. On my reading, the specific kind of responsibility Young argues everyone has (both perpetrators and victims of injustice alike) does not actually compound injustice. Rather, by centering the experience of the persons who have been harmed, this approach is more productive than any other approach that stems from the perspective of those external to the experience of harm itself.

Young's model of political responsibility is unlike traditional models that often seek to remediate injustice by producing a dichotomy of saviour and victim.³⁶ Makau Mutua, in her paper "Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights", outlines what she refers to as the Savages-Victims-Saviors prism, a three-dimensional

harm to perpetuate is unique to a forward-looking model of responsibility. Common ways of understanding responsibility are models of attributability (backward-looking) such as: a liability model of responsibility, liberal responsibility, blame-responsibility, and outcome responsibility. See Zheng, R. "What is My Role in Changing the System? A New Model of Responsibility for Structural Injustice". *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 21, 872.

³⁴ Sally Haslanger is a proponent of moving away from individual responsibility and towards looking at structures as responsible for injustice. Her argument aligns with the notion espoused here, that constrained choices allude to an inability to hold someone responsible for the actions they take as a result of these constraints. See: Zheng, R. 2018. "Bias, Structure, and Injustice: A Reply to Haslanger". *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 4 (1), p. 4.

³⁵ Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press., 145-46.

³⁶ Mutua, Makau. "Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights." *Harvard International Law Journal*, vol. 42, no. 1, Winter 2001, pp. 2

metaphor for a common response to human rights violations. While the human rights violations that she details would certainly rely on a liability model of responsibility, the occurrence of (i) someone perpetrating a harm, (ii) someone else suffering from this harm, and (iii) someone other than the victim being part of the solution (savior), exemplifies a routine response to injustice. This customary reaction to both human rights violations and structural injustice produces the same result, which is a narrative that those who suffer injustice need to be ‘saved’ from the harms brought against them. This implies a sense of helplessness or inability to exercise agency by those suffering from injustice,³⁷ rather than an acknowledgement that these individuals have been systematically dominated and their individual power and agency has been compromised as a result.

Failure to recognize the agency of those who suffer injustice is a moral oversight that further compounds the existing constraints on their freedom and right to fair treatment. It perpetuates an ongoing impression of inferiority that serves to aid in the reproduction of injustice, not the eradication of it. I propose that when Young argues that the victims of injustice share in the collective responsibility to undermine systems that produce that injustice, she recognizes their agency, something which has, up until this point, been systematically compromised. These individuals are admittedly acting within constrained circumstances. But to suggest that this absolves them from all responsibility

³⁷ Ibid. 203. Mutua suggests this same characterization of ‘victims’ in her explanation of the second dimension of her SVS (Savages-Victims-Saviors) prism.

for their choices and actions further undermines the agency that is harmed by the initial constraints.³⁸

It is important to remember here that, on Young's account of political responsibility, responsibility does not equal fault. So, Young is not saying that victims are to *blame* for the choices they make within constrained circumstances. Rather, Young proposes that when victims of injustice make choices, they hold responsibility for how these choices contribute to the system that produces harm. This responsibility is a by-product of the agency that is involved in making one's own decisions. Consequently, it is inaccurate to suggest that victims of injustice need to be saved because they have less ability or agency than those who haven't received this unjust treatment. Instead, Young suggests that they need the support of their peers to join them in collective action to reshape the patterns of behaviour that are producing harm through structural processes, so that these systems cease to restrain and restrict their agency. Through taking part in collective action, targets of injustice reclaim the agency that has been compromised by injustice. Suffering unjust harms compromises their agency, but taking part in collective action is an expression of this agency and it aids in changing the systemic processes that attempt to *restrain* their agency. Through acting on their responsibility to undermine the source of their own harm, the goal of respect for agency becomes part of the *process* of reshaping structures, not merely an end *result*.

³⁸ Monique Deveaux argues for a similar position regarding agency of the global poor in relation to efforts taken to address poverty. See: Deveaux, M. (2015). "The Global Poor as Agents of Justice." *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 12(2), 125–150.

I argue that ascribing some responsibility to persons with harmed identities³⁹ establishes a sense of empowerment, which is a distinct strength of Young's account. By taking action to change their situation, victims of injustice come to see themselves as agents of their own transformation. Their liberation comes from themselves, at least in part. Empowerment is not something that can be given from a dominant group to a subjugated class; it must come from the individual or groups own actions.⁴⁰ I use the term "empowerment" here to denote "a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action".⁴¹ Building on this notion of empowerment, I propose that the reclamation of agency and the empowerment that occurs as a result is a catalyst for greater social change. By exercising agency *in spite of structural constraints*, the markers of our identities that are targets for injustice are reclaimed. The result is that these harmed identities are now a source for acting against unjust circumstances. Monique Deveaux makes a similar argument in relation to poverty, suggesting that there is an empowered role that poor communities can play in the process of addressing global poverty.⁴² These communities are not *only* capable of being beneficiaries of these initiatives. Rather, approaches that

³⁹ Harmed identities are understood within the context of this paper as characteristics of our identities that are targets of systemic harm. In other words, they are identity markers that are on the receiving end of harm and/or disadvantage.

⁴⁰ Drury, Evripidou, Zomerén. In: Sindic, D., Barreto, M., & Costa-Lopes, R. (Eds.). (2014). *Power and Identity* (1st ed.). Psychology Press. p. 95-6

⁴¹ Karl (1995), in Drury, Evripidou, Zomerén. In: Sindic, D., Barreto, M., & Costa-Lopes, R. (Eds.). (2014). *Power and Identity* (1st ed.). Psychology Press. p. 95

⁴² Deveaux, M. (2015). "The Global Poor as Agents of Justice." *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 12(2), 128.

recognize their agency acknowledge that the poor are also “sources of knowledge, decision-making, and action”.⁴³

Furthermore, centering the experience of persons with harmed identities allows for the best possible understanding of harm to be included in the reshaping process. In order to devise effective measures that counteract harmful patterns of behaviour, those included in the reshaping process must *understand* the experience of harm. This is not feasible without incorporating the lived experience of those who suffer the consequences of unjust structures. For instance, many western feminist perspectives posit that women who choose to wear head scarves must be ‘saved’ from the oppressive regimes that ‘force’ them to be worn. In reality, failing to recognize that many women make a choice to wear their scarves with pride only serves to police their bodies and disrespect their agency.⁴⁴ It is only when we center the experience of women who are harassed on the basis of this choice, that we can begin to understand what it means to live as they do. These women surely face forms of systemic injustice (because all women do). But failing to incorporate their lived experience in approaches to alleviate *their specific forms of injustice* will only serve to reinforce their subordination,⁴⁵ not relieve it. As such, not only

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Haq, M. (2022, January 17). *The War on Muslim Women's Bodies: A Critique of Western Feminism*. Georgetown Law. Retrieved from <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/immigration-law-journal/blog/the-war-on-muslim-womens-bodies-a-critique-of-western-feminism/>

⁴⁵ Serene Khader explores similar themes in her paper “The Feminist Case Against Relational Autonomy”. She discusses how requiring certain ideal conditions to be in place in order to recognize autonomy or as a ‘requirement’ of autonomy can cause further, paternalistic harm. See: Khader, S. J. (2020). “The Feminist Case Against Relational Autonomy.” *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 17(5), 499-526. <https://doi-org.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/10.1163/17455243-20203085>

does this role for harmed identities within the SCM aid in restoring respect for compromised agency, but it also ensures that this process will be informed with the necessary knowledge to strive for *appropriate* structural changes.

SECTION 2.2: THE SCM RECONCILES PERSONAL POSITIONALITY WITH COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

In this section, I build on section 2.1 to argue that while the SCM promotes individual agency through holding every contributing member responsible, it also manages to reconcile personal positionality with collective responsibility.⁴⁶ As previously noted, Young's model maintains that every participating actor within a system holds some measure of responsibility for the harms produced by that system, as well as a shared responsibility for rectifying the resulting injustice.⁴⁷ However, Young makes it very clear that the duties that result from this shared political responsibility do not look the same for every participating member. Instead, she proposes that while we are all accountable for taking part in collective action, each member's responsibility and resulting duties will look different based on a number of factors. These factors are the same considerations that make up an individual's social positionality. They include, but are certainly not limited to, race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, citizenship status, religious beliefs, generational trauma, etc. An individual's social position as well as their subsequent treatment based on this social position, have an impact on both their lived experience as well as their resulting responsibility to respond to injustice. This is why I

⁴⁶ See footnote (9) for the definition of social positionality used in the context of this project.

⁴⁷ Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press., 146.

suggest that Crenshaw's intersectionality should play an important role in the evaluative process that agents undertake in order to recognize their contributions towards injustice and determine how to participate in collective action to address it.⁴⁸

Crenshaw's initial research on intersectionality focused on the intersection of race and gender as it pertains to women of color, but she suggests that the notion of intersectionality can and should be expanded to include all characteristics of identity.⁴⁹ These characteristics can be understood as identity markers which are aspects of our identities that systems attach a certain value to. This measure of value subsequently determines whether that individual will be advantaged or disadvantaged by that system. An example of this is a female athlete being paid less than her male peers merely because her identity as a woman has been treated by the system in question (the regulatory bodies of professional sports) as inferior to the male gender identity.⁵⁰ In the world of professional sports, men are privileged and prioritized over women, and as a result, many female athletes receive unequal and unfair treatment simply on the basis of their gender.⁵¹

In a situation such as this, there would certainly be individuals guilty of gender discrimination who can be held responsible on a liability model. But the question at hand

⁴⁸ Crenshaw, Kimberlé. (1991). "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color". *Stanford Law Review*, (Vol. 43, No. 6, pp. 1241-1299).

⁴⁹ Ibid. 1245, footnote 9.

⁵⁰ In March of 2019, 28 members of the U.S. Women's soccer team filed a lawsuit against their own federation, citing unfair treatment on the basis of their gender.

⁵¹ Li, D. K. (2019, March 8). *U.S. women's soccer team files gender discrimination suit against its own Federation*. NBCNews.com, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/u-s-women-s-soccer-team-files-gender-discrimination-suit-n980981>

remains: what background conditions does everyone else contribute to creating that *allow* this type of gender discrimination to continually reproduce? These background conditions are what the SCM seeks to highlight. In this particular instance, female athletes that suffer discrimination hold different responsibilities for rectifying this issue than those who are *privileged* by the unequal power dynamic between genders in professional sports.

Therefore, the caveat that Young builds into her theory is that while victims of injustice have a responsibility to partake in collective action with others to address the harms they suffer,⁵² their duties will not be the same as those who benefit from this unjust order of things. This example highlights that the SCM manages to reconcile personal, social positionality with collective responsibility because it accounts for the way in which different identity markers receive different assignments of value by the systems that organize society. The value that different identity markers are assigned by systems *directly influence how an individual will be treated by that system.*

As discussed, female athletes are disadvantaged compared to male athletes when it comes to pay and institutionalized treatment within the sports industry. However, female athletes hold numerous advantages in other systems that they participate in and have different levels of responsibility (and different resulting duties) to correct injustice produced within those other systems. One instance is the clothing apparel industry. Many

⁵² When asked questions by the media following the filing of the lawsuit in 2019, players are quoted as saying that they were proud to wear the United States jersey, and with that privilege comes responsibility. They believe that fighting for gender equality is part of that responsibility. See: Li, D. K. (2019, March 8). *U.S. women's soccer team files gender discrimination suit against its own Federation*. NBCNews.com., <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/u-s-women-s-soccer-team-files-gender-discrimination-suit-n980981>

athletes are offered contracts with sporting goods companies which entail being paid to endorse their product(s). Thanks to the advantages that come with financial wealth, social status, and fame, female athletes have more responsibility to ensure that they do not contribute to fast fashion or companies that employ sweatshop labor than individuals who do not have the same financial access to be as selective with how they secure their clothing.⁵³ As we can see, a female athlete's relative advantage/disadvantage is different depending on the system in question. This is the same for each member of political society. We are all treated differently by different systems, and this treatment is determined by the relative privilege that each system attaches to different identity markers. As such, our shared responsibility to take collective action results in different duties for different individuals in every system that produces injustice.

SECTION 2.3: THE SCM EXPLAINS RESPONSIBILITY WITHOUT BLAME

The last strength of the SCM that I want to discuss in this chapter is the distinction that Young makes between responsibility and blame. By introducing the idea of responsibility without blame, Young's theory simultaneously removes the temptation to employ the use of shame. It is rare for attributions of responsibility to not encourage feelings of guilt, utilize blame, or seek to generate a sense of shame, particularly when discussing matters where significant harm has occurred. It is this aspect of the SCM that makes it such a powerful resource for generating support for taking part in collective

⁵³ Young discusses this specific example of sweatshop labor and the different responsibilities that actors would have to remediate a harm such as this. See: Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press., 125-34.

action, particularly in a social and political climate where no one wants to engage with opposing views or take the time to exercise compassion rather than judgement. One initial hurdle when tackling an issue as complex and wide-reaching as structural injustice is getting enough political members involved in the process of taking collective action, and avoiding blame can help with this.

Young acknowledges that recognizing your own role and complicity in producing injustice can feel overwhelming.⁵⁴ When this overwhelming realization is compounded with messaging that encourages you to feel shame over your involvement in producing injustice, it is a sure way to isolate people.⁵⁵ This is troublesome because isolation is the opposite of what is needed when striving to generate collective action. When people feel shamed and isolated alongside the realization that they contribute towards producing structural injustice, it undermines their ability to take practical steps to address the injustice they are now aware exists. Their ability becomes compromised because this is a perfect recipe for a shame spiral, as individuals now realize they are not only contributing to injustice but also feel entirely unable (and unworthy) of being part of the solution.⁵⁶

Additionally, blame language is unproductive for generating a sense of responsibility for this type of injustice because it seeks to divide people into ‘powerful

⁵⁴ Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press., 167.

⁵⁵ Brown, B. (2013). *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead*. London, England: Portfolio Penguin, 79.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 72.

wrongdoers’ and innocents, ‘whether as victims or as bystanders.’⁵⁷ As established in section 2.1, the dichotomy of savior and victim is not helpful when addressing structural injustice because it is not helpful to try to isolate liable actors. Instead, the goal is to establish shared accountability, where everyone can participate in their own feasible and appropriate way. Young notes that the use of blame usually produces both defensiveness and instinctual ‘blame-switching’.⁵⁸ When individuals feel shamed, the instinctual response is to defend themselves, which often takes the form of finding another target for the blame you currently feel is being assigned to you.

When it comes to structural injustice, we are all responsible for the harms produced in the systems we contribute to, which means there will always be someone else to place the blame on. This makes it difficult to ascribe blame to particular parties for the harms. Young notes that, “It is difficult to make blame “stick” to anyone in particular, because almost everyone is involved. The round-robin discourse then paralyzes efforts to address the problems in a forward-looking way, because we are waiting to isolate the parties who should pay for a remedy.”⁵⁹ As such, not only can the use of blame isolate others in their feelings of shame, but it also creates a division that obstructs our ability to work together in collective action. Instead of generating accountability, the use of blame (and seeking to shame others) actually serves as a barrier to achieving the goals that Young sets for the SCM. For this reason, traditional models of responsibility that are

⁵⁷ Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press., 116.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 117.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

backward-looking and focus on blaming liable parties are not well-suited to achieve the productive collective action that is necessary for reshaping social structures and background conditions of society.

In the preceding three sections, I have highlighted three strengths of the SCM. When these strengths of the SCM work in tandem, they produce incredible results. The next section looks at an example that exemplifies the kind of action that can take place when agents are able to recognize the political responsibility the SCM shows them they have and hence take part in collective action. It discusses instances of collective action taken by survivors of sexual violence, paying particular attention to the MeToo movement and highlights how certain background societal conditions aid in the perpetuation of sexual violence. While a liability model can capture the criminal acts of this abuse, the SCM directs agents to address the features of society that enable this violence to persist at alarming rates.

SECTION 2.4: APPLYING THE SCM TO THE METOO MOVEMENT

As I have argued, the SCM holds space for persons who have suffered structural harms to play a central part in reshaping the structures that lead to these harms. This feature of the SCM is exemplified by the MeToo movement within the broader context of addressing systemic sexual violence. We live in a culture of rampant sexual harassment,

abuse, and violence.⁶⁰ This is not a secret, and yet, it is a feature of our society that we have been unable to substantially diminish. My discussions in this section of sexual violence mostly focus on women as the victims of injustice. This does not intend to undermine the experience of persons of other gender identities that experience sexual violence. Rather, I aim to show that this abuse takes place within the context of a patriarchal society in which women endure systemic violence *in virtue of their identity* as women.

The MeToo movement was spearheaded by American activist Tarana Burke in 2006. However, it wasn't until 2017, mere weeks after the ground-breaking exposure of sexual violence by Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein, that it exploded onto the world stage.⁶¹ It was a call for women (and every person, no matter their identity) to share their experiences of sexual violence in an effort to denounce the systemic perpetuation of this form of subordination. When viewed through the lens of the SCM, the MeToo movement is seen as an expression of collective action that stems from centering the experience of harmed identities. By joining with others to generate awareness and accountability, survivors reclaim a part of themselves that was diminished and disrespected by this abuse. Moreover, they exercise the agency that this abuse attempted to strip away, and in doing so, they reshape the structures that are accountable for their subordination. In providing

⁶⁰ Joint News Release. (2021, March 9). *Devastatingly pervasive: 1 in 3 women globally experience violence*. World Health Organization. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-03-2021-devastatingly-pervasive-1-in-3-women-globally-experience-violence>

⁶¹ Burke, T. (2020, July 16). *Get to know us: History & inception*. Me Too Movement. Retrieved from <https://metoomvmt.org/get-to-know-us/history-inception/>

an account of their assault, survivors infuse initiatives to combat sexual violence with the knowledge of their lived experience. This knowledge ensures that strategies to address sexual assault, and gender inequity more broadly, are able to account for the harms experienced by those targeted.

A liability model of responsibility is certainly necessary to address egregious crimes of sexual violence and predation. But it is not the only way to make lasting change to a society whose systems do not do enough to prevent this type of abuse.⁶² Sexual violence is systemic because it is allowed to run rampant due to background conditions *that we all play a part in producing*. When we brush off ‘inappropriate jokes’ that are thinly veiled expressions of sexual harassment and dismiss it as ‘boys being boys’, we help to maintain a culture of misogynistic behaviour.⁶³ Every time a woman is overtly sexualized but simultaneously condemned for owning her sensuality, we’ve reinforced the double standard of female sexuality that aims to control and subordinate her. And every time a woman has been asked ‘what were you wearing’ in response to an allegation of assault, we have blamed her for her own abuse. These are but a few examples; we are

⁶² Young doesn’t suggest that a liability model of responsibility isn’t useful. Rather, she sees the SCM as complementing the efforts of employing a liability model. Often, changing the background conditions of unjust social structures through acting on the responsibility the SCM shows us we have can aid in effectively using a liability model in instances where it is needed. In other words, using the SCM and a liability model in tandem can help us achieve our goals more efficiently than if we used each independently of the other.

⁶³ Katz, Jackson. (2006) *The Macho Paradox: Why some Men Hurt Women and how All Men can Help*. Sourcebooks, Inc., 25.

all capable of employing or enforcing misogynistic practices and beliefs that serve to uphold a patriarchal culture.⁶⁴

A society that devalues women is one where their sexual exploitation more readily reproduces. As systemic processes work to undermine the agency of a particular identity, it becomes harder for a liability model to gain traction. Consequently, the systemic subordination of an identity compromises the efficiency of a liability model of responsibility even in instances where it would be useful. Because of this, Young would argue that both a liability model and the SCM are necessary to address a culture of sexual violence. Holding individual predators morally and legally accountable for their crimes is key to reducing the reproduction of this type of violence. However, employing the SCM can help transform background conditions to make it more difficult for sexual violence to continue at the rate that it does. In doing so, a by-product of the SCM is that it facilitates the use of a liability model when necessary/appropriate.

Recent exhibits and fashion shows that display clothing worn by survivors of sexual assault highlight this interaction between the two models.⁶⁵ The point of these displays is to promote awareness of both sexual assault and the victim-blaming that frequently follows. The question ‘what were you wearing’ further victimizes those who have suffered an assault by suggesting that they are somehow morally responsible. In

⁶⁴ Manne, Kate (2017). *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. Oxford University Press., 77.

⁶⁵ Vagianos, A. (2017). *Art exhibit powerfully answers the question 'what were you wearing?'*. HuffPost. Retrieved from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/powerful-art-exhibit-powerfully-answers-the-question-what-were-you-wearing_n_59badd2e4b02da0e1405d2a

creating these exhibits, survivors reclaim the power stripped from them when they were assaulted.⁶⁶ By bringing awareness to this propensity to blame victims, survivors are helping to remove this background condition that makes it harder to hold predators responsible on a liability model. This particular background condition of victim blaming can be viewed as a by-product of living in a patriarchal society. It is only one effect of gendered, systemic injustice. Through fostering collective action and centering the experience of harm, the goal of the SCM is to address all effects of gendered systemic injustice. Not only would this alleviate how structural processes support the subordination of women, but also, removing them from this vulnerable position of domination would allow for the liability model to work more effectively when needed. This translates to women being less susceptible to harms that are captured with a liability model as well. This means that employing the SCM effectively not only reduces structural injustice but can also reduce how susceptible women are to violence. This in turn strengthens the efficiency of a liability model when violence does occur.

The SCM encourages all contributing actors to address all effects of systemic injustice, along all lines of identity. As discussed, this would result in different contributions being made by different actors. What might prove to be a productive or empowering contribution for one survivor might prove to be traumatic for another. The flexibility to choose *how* to contribute to collective action speaks to the second strength of

⁶⁶ Gupta, A. H. (2021). *A fashion show with an unexpected focus: Sexual assault survivors*. The New York Times. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/12/us/sexual-violence-fashion-show-amanda-nguyen-rise.html>

the SCM outlined in section 2.2. Recognizing that lived experience and social positionality play a role in how individuals *can or should* show up in collective efforts to address injustice is paramount to rectifying harm, rather than compounding it. For instance, when it comes to addressing background conditions of gender-based injustice, the responsibility and resulting duties of a cis-man will vary significantly from those of other more marginalized gender identities. Employing intersectionality aids in understanding what this responsibility looks like and what kind of contribution to collective action it should prompt.

Speaking to the last strength of the SCM detailed in section 2.3, the role of blame in this particular example is especially nuanced. We can imagine that there are numerous instances involving sexual violence where blame (and even shame) would prove both morally reasonable and particularly useful. When it comes to sexual violence, and gender-based discrimination more broadly, there are clear instances of moral wrongdoing – wrongdoing that goes beyond what can be captured by a political model of responsibility such as the SCM. While there are some aspects of background conditions that can be addressed by the SCM that would also be blameworthy, there are also instances where generating political responsibility can be compromised by the use of blame, which is why Young removes its employment from her model.

While the two models of responsibility – liability [moral or legal] and the SCM – overlap in some instances to capture the same social feature, it is important to distinguish

them as distinct and separate models. Take for instance, the societal background condition of victim-blaming. We can clearly determine that survivors of assault do not have a moral responsibility to address this unjust practice. At the same time, when we evaluate victim-blaming on a political model of responsibility (i.e., the SCM), we can see that the exhibits that survivors are creating to bring awareness to victim-blaming contributes to shifting the way that society responds to sexual violence, and as such, are considered an expression of political responsibility. However, this expression of political responsibility by survivors is entirely separate from the moral responsibility that those who *participate* in victim-blaming have. Using a liability model of responsibility, we can see that those who victim-blame are morally responsible for the harm they create by taking part in this reprehensible practice and as such, these individuals can be considered blameworthy. When looking at victim-blaming on a liability model of responsibility, the use of blame would not raise an issue for Young. As we can see, the same feature (victim-blaming) can be addressed differently within the two different models, and Young admits that complex instances of structural injustice *require* this tandem deployment. The SCM abstains from using blame as a tool where political responsibility is present but employing blame would compromise discharging that responsibility.

For instance, individuals who partake in socially accepted norms that uphold patriarchal conventions have political responsibility to address the injustice resulting from the contributions they make. But to say that they are morally blameworthy could very well produce a defensiveness that leads to an unwillingness to engage in productive

solutions.⁶⁷ Doing so would force them to see themselves as morally complicit in the problem, which may be threatening to how they see themselves. This is not to say that certain individuals would *not* have any moral responsibility. However, determining this is beyond the scope of concern for the SCM. By excluding the use of blame, Young's model encourages participation in collective action in instances where the threat of blame (and shame) would deter voluntary involvement. There may be cases where individuals who partake in socially accepted norms that uphold patriarchal conventions have political responsibility (SCM) *and* moral responsibility (liability model). For instance, let us revisit the example of brushing off inappropriate jokes (i.e., thinly veiled forms of sexual harassment) as 'boys being boys.' It can be argued that the individual who makes the inappropriate joke is both politically and morally responsible, whereas the bystanders who brush it off are only politically responsible. They did not commit the moral harm of sexually harassing someone, but they did, through their lack of appropriate reaction, reinforce background conditions where sexual harassment is allowed, if not encouraged.⁶⁸ So, there can (and will) be instances where the same behaviour, norm, practice, etc. generates different kinds of responsibility depending on what model(s) are used to capture the injustice occurring. An important observation here is that employing the SCM does not preclude the use of a liability model when needed or appropriate – it simply produces a different (but still beneficial) outcome.

CONCLUSION

⁶⁷ Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press., 117.

⁶⁸ Depending on their level of complicity, encouragement, and relative privilege, we might say that some of these bystanders also share some measure of moral responsibility, rather than only political responsibility.

This chapter has highlighted several strengths of Young’s SCM. I paid particular attention to the ways that Young’s model of political responsibility is distinct from traditional “liability” models of responsibility, looking at the example of the MeToo Movement within a culture of sexual violence and gender inequity. This discussion provides support for my argument that the SCM is beneficial for addressing social inequity. However, despite the benefits of the SCM, I suggest that certain practical challenges arise when agents strive to recognize their political responsibility and take part in collective action to address structural injustice.

Turning to these practical challenges, chapter three investigates what I refer to as “the problem of inability”. I understand this problem to be an agent’s inability to recognize their political responsibility and to subsequently take steps to participate in collective action to address it. I also discuss the interconnected nature of the political responsibility of democratic government(s) and their citizens. I argue that a democratic government has a duty to adequately prepare its citizens to discharge their civic duties, and that, as part of fulfilling this duty, a government can provide agents with the necessary tools to act on the political responsibility the SCM shows them they have.

CHAPTER THREE: TRANSITIONING FROM CAPACITY TO ABILITY VIA EDUCATION – ADDRESSING THE BARRIER OF INABILITY

INTRODUCTION

Young's account of political responsibility, exemplified by her SCM, provides us with helpful instruction on how we should understand our responsibility to address structural injustice. Having this kind of political responsibility requires action because it places demands on us. Young suggests that these demands require a type of *collective* action, and that each agent determines how they should participate within this collective action by understanding how they are socially connected to the injustice in question.⁶⁹ Chapter one provided an account of Young's theory of political responsibility. It also outlined the SCM, which illustrates how Young understands political responsibility, and what discharging responsibility on her account requires. Chapter two outlined what I take to be three significant strengths of Young's theory: (i) the SCM respects the agency of all actors, particularly the agency of individuals that traditional models of responsibility often restrict or dismiss; (ii) the SCM positions political responsibility within the background context of social positionality; and (iii) the SCM allows for a useful distinction of responsibility without blame, guilt, or shame.

This discussion of the strengths I see with the SCM supports my agreement with Young that her account of political responsibility provides useful guidance for engaging

⁶⁹ Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press., 105.

with aspects of structural injustice that traditional models of responsibility do not account for. However, because the SCM is a conceptual model, when it comes time for agents to act on the responsibility the SCM shows them they have, challenges are likely to arise. The main goal of this chapter is to identify a significant challenge that everyday people who participate in social processes producing injustice face, which is understanding their political responsibility and subsequently taking part in the kind of collective action that Young has in mind. I aim to identify how this challenge arises and in subsequent chapters, I propose initial steps for how we might address this challenge.

The challenge I see arising for applying Young's SCM in practice is that many people lack the *ability* to understand their political responsibility, and hence will never act to discharge it. Remember, according to Young, having political responsibility requires action because responsibility places demands on us. But this means that *acting* on the political responsibility the SCM shows us we have requires the *ability* to understand what our responsibility is. Ability – specifically in regard to acting on the political responsibility the SCM shows us we have – is the central focus of this chapter. The kind of ability I have in mind involves being able to understand the connection between ourselves, our contributions, and the resulting injustice the SCM explains. This understanding, in addition to recognizing the kind of action we should take as part of this broader process of collective action that Young prescribes, creates a foundation for being able to *act* on our responsibility. As such, when I discuss having an ability in relation to political responsibility, this entails having the knowledge and skills necessary to (i)

understand our political responsibility; (ii) recognize which actions contribute to injustice and which contribute to producing more just outcomes; and (iii) participate in the kind of collective action that Young has in mind.

With this notion of ability in mind, this chapter has three main goals: (i) to introduce an important distinction between having a mere *capacity* to act and having an *ability* to act, and to apply this distinction to Young's account of forward-looking, political responsibility; (ii) to argue that the cultivation of knowledge and skills is required to transition from having a mere *capacity* to act on our political responsibility to having an *ability* to act on this responsibility; and (iii) to argue that public education is a suitable place for this cultivation of knowledge and skills to occur. The following section briefly sketches some valuable context for these three goals and provides a detailed breakdown of the specific aims of each section to follow.

SECTION 3.1: SKETCHING SOME USEFUL CONTEXT

Most people are unable to understand and to discharge their political responsibility, as the SCM would have us understand this responsibility. To put it simply, the majority of citizens do not currently possess the ability to critically assess the systems and processes within which they live, to evaluate their own contributions to these systems or processes, and/or to understand their resulting responsibility and corresponding duties. However, despite not having these abilities, most citizens certainly have the *capacity* to accomplish these aims. In everyday use, the words 'capacity' and 'ability' can be used as

rough synonyms. However, in what follows I use these terms in a technical way to mark a distinction. Specifically, I will use capacity and ability to denote separate stages in the development of skills.⁷⁰ For instance, having the capacity to ‘x’ means you have met certain conditions to potentially ‘x’. To be able to ‘x’ means you have met another set of conditions which means you do not merely hold a *potential* to ‘x’, but you actually *can* ‘x’. Within my project, I understand capacity as the mere potential to develop an ability. For instance, most human beings have the *capacity* to swim, but it is not until we cultivate this potential through developing or learning certain skills that we develop the *ability* to swim. This distinction is helpful for my project because it demonstrates that while Young can attribute political responsibility to individuals participating in the production of structural injustice, this responsibility cannot be properly discharged until there is a corresponding ability to *act on it*. Much more will be said about this distinction in section 3.2 of this chapter.

For now, the relevant concern is that if I am right that most citizens have not yet developed their ability to act on their responsibility, but merely possess a capacity to act, then this gap must be bridged in order for citizens to transition from having a mere ‘capacity’ to actually being ‘able’ to act on their political responsibility. Bridging this gap requires a baseline of knowledge and the cultivation of certain skills. The particular

⁷⁰ This distinction between capacity and ability is reminiscent of Aristotle’s first and second potentiality, where he makes a distinction between potential and actual. See: Cohen, S. Marc and C. D. C. Reeve, "Aristotle’s Metaphysics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2025 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2025/entries/aristotle-metaphysics/>>.

details of these (knowledge and skills) are expanded on later in this chapter, and in further detail within chapter four. For the time being, it is important to note that the kind of knowledge and skills I have in mind are those I consider to be necessary in order for an agent to both understand their responsibility and subsequently to act on it.

Young suggests that the SCM can show us the political responsibility we each have due to our social connection to one another. Young's intention in creating this model is to motivate collective action that seeks to protect basic principles of fairness, such as equality, opportunity, justice, and freedom. For this reason, I discuss the SCM within the context of a democracy. I spend some time in this chapter discussing democratic responsibilities, particularly in relation to public education. This discussion aids in sketching the reasons why I believe public education is a valuable place to develop the necessary skills for agents to act on their political responsibility. Education is recognized as a human right by the UDHR and democratically protected within countries such as Canada, where preliminary education is mandatory for all citizens, stipulated by provincial, territorial, and federal education laws. When occurring in public education, this process of preparation (cultivating skills) for understanding and acting on one's responsibility is supported by the duty that a government has to educate its citizens and the corresponding duty that citizens have to participate in their education.

As I will argue, inadequate training to fulfill civic duties is a barrier to a properly functioning democracy. Systemic inequity is another barrier to a thriving democracy, one that can be mitigated to some degree via educational aims that pursue learning for

democracy.⁷¹ Consequently, section 3.4 of this chapter aims to show that these barriers to democracy – inadequate education and systemic inequity – are intertwined. The persistence of one barrier aids in the persistence of the other because they are mutually reinforcing. However, I propose that this cyclical relationship can also allow for progress, since reducing one barrier can aid in achieving progress in reducing the other. As such, addressing both barriers to a properly functioning democracy simultaneously can result in each effort lending support to the other. In this chapter, I argue that it is within public education that we can develop the type of knowledge, awareness, and skills that citizens require to become part of the process of addressing barriers to democracy.

To achieve the three goals I've set, this chapter is organized into three sections. The first lays out some initial considerations and context, illustrates the technical distinction between capacity and ability that I apply to political responsibility, and details how this distinction takes shape within the context of acting on this responsibility in the manner the SCM prescribes. The second section discusses education as a point of preparation, illustrating how the development of particular skills can cultivate the transformation of capacity into ability. I look at education not only as a right, but also as implying correlative duties for both the government and its citizens. I then discuss three reasons education best prepares citizens to be able to act on their political responsibility. Finally, in section 3.4, I argue that discussing the transition from capacity to ability lays

⁷¹ Learning for democracy is a term I use throughout this project to denote educational aims that reflect the intention of producing citizens capable of actively participating within a democracy and fulfilling their civic duties.

groundwork for a tiered conception of political responsibility, which recognizes the responsibility of both individuals/citizens and states/governments. With this tiered conception in mind, I aim to highlight how producing a public education program that equips citizens with the skills to engage with their democratic society, in addition to acting on their political responsibility explained by the SCM, allows for each initiative to support the other.

SECTION 3.2: FROM CAPACITY TO ABILITY – WHY POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY DOES NOT STAND ON ITS OWN

(i) *Initial Considerations*

Before I turn to the distinction between capacity and ability, a few initial considerations are worth discussing. First and foremost, the type of analysis that is required to recognize the responsibility the SCM explains, and to take part in the kind of collective action it prescribes, goes well beyond everyday understandings of right and wrong. Remember that when Young discusses structural injustice, she is not examining instances of blatant wrongdoing by particular actors. There are certainly cases where transgressions by particular actors are morally or legally wrong. But the majority of transgressions that the SCM aims to capture are those that are not commonly or overtly understood as ‘bad’.⁷² They result from the reproduction of behaviours, beliefs, and norms that serve in aggregate to advantage some and disadvantage others.⁷³ Because

⁷² Wrong/bad can be understood in a moral, legal, or even socially acceptable sense. These are behaviours, norms, or beliefs that are commonly accepted and often times not thought about twice.

⁷³ Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press, 52.

these individual behaviours, beliefs, and norms are not considered ‘wrong’, evaluating whether the contribution(s)⁷⁴ in question contribute to ongoing processes of injustice requires more nuance than simply understanding common occurrences of right and wrong. In many instances, an individual cannot rely on external ‘cues’⁷⁵ to check their behaviour – they must be capable of evaluating it on their own, or at the very least be an active participant in the evaluative process. This requires a level of knowledge, awareness, reflection, and critical thinking that goes beyond ordinary ways of understanding common instances of moral wrongdoing.⁷⁶ Because this evaluation requires particular abilities, we must ensure individuals have an opportunity to develop these abilities in order to effectively act on their political responsibility.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that agents do not already possess abilities or are not presently able to act on various responsibilities they hold. Rather, I mean to suggest that agents often do not yet possess the required abilities to discharge the particular political responsibility that Young has in mind. Because agents do not commonly possess the necessary abilities, I suggest that we cannot act on the responsibility the SCM shows us we have without first meeting certain preconditions. This suggests that it is more fitting to view discharging political responsibility as part of a broader process. This

⁷⁴ Young refers to actions, behaviours, beliefs, etc. as ‘contributions’ to ongoing processes. These contributions are what we evaluate within the broader processes that they take place in to understand whether we are contributing to the maintenance of injustice.

⁷⁵ Often times when a moral or legal transgression occurs, there are external responses/reactions that can serve as cues to the doer regarding whether they have done something wrong.

⁷⁶ A more thorough understanding of what abilities (skills) employing the SCM requires is explored in chapter four.

chapter advances my argument that *preparation* is part of this process, and that preparation is best suited to occur in public education. Before outlining my position on this, it is useful to examine the distinction between capacity and ability in more detail and to apply this distinction to the political responsibility exemplified by the SCM.

(ii) *Sketching the Difference Between Capacity and Ability.*

As previously mentioned, I understand capacity as having the potential to develop an ability. If we apply this distinction to the context of acting on responsibility, then having capacity means that we possess the potential to develop the necessary abilities to act upon or respond to that responsibility.⁷⁷ This observation follows a very familiar

⁷⁷ My discussion pertaining to the development of ability has enough similar considerations to Sen's Capability approach that it is worth saying a few words about how the Capability approach is situated relative to this discussion of ability. Nussbaum clearly identifies what Sen intends when he uses the term "capabilities", saying that they (capabilities) "are not just abilities residing inside a person but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social, and economic environment." (1) Capabilities consist of the freedom a person has to choose a life that holds value to them. To have these choices, people must have the opportunity to develop the necessary abilities to *make* these choices. Interestingly, there is some literature on the intersection of the capability approach and education. See, for example: Walker, M. (2006). "Towards a capability-based theory of social justice for education policy-making." *Journal of Education Policy*, 21(2), pp. 163-185 and Nussbaum, M. (2006) "Education and Democratic Citizenship: Capabilities and Quality Education." *Journal of Human Development*, 7(3), pp. 385-395, DOI: 10.1080/14649880600815974. Despite the valuable contribution these papers and others make to the discussion of democratic education, I've decided to leave aside any formal engagement with the capability approach because of the focus it places on connecting capabilities with choice and well-being. The central aim of the capability approach is to provide a measurement for well-being and justice. This moves beyond measurements pertaining to income or goods, and instead, focuses on having choices. These choices come as a result of the opportunity to develop abilities (capabilities). My focus on ability is narrower, with my only concern being the ability to fulfill responsibility. As such, while I make arguments that are certainly adjacent to the capability approach (in terms of discussing the development of abilities and who is responsible to facilitate the development of these abilities) my focus on ability leaves the intersection of well-being and capabilities aside. As such, the clearest distinction between the capability approach and my discussion of ability, is that the capability approach is concerned with a person's capabilities to make choices, regardless of what choices they end up choosing (functioning's) whereas my project is concerned with the opportunity to develop ability to be able to discharge political responsibility, as explained by the SCM. A helpful distinction can arise by looking at the ability to vote. Nussbaum would argue that we should prioritize equipping citizens with the necessary

principle, which is that ‘ought implies can’. This principle (that ‘ought implies can’ or OIC) suggests that “*S* ought to ϕ only if *S* can ϕ .”⁷⁸ Peter Graham speaks about this principle in his paper “‘Ought’ and Ability” (2011)⁷⁹, clarifying that the ‘can’ in this principle denotes an ‘ability to’.⁸⁰ More specifically, this ability must also be paired with opportunity to fully realize the ‘can’ in ‘ought implies can’.

To have the capacity to develop an ability requires certain conditions are met (i.e., conditions of capacity) just as there are conditions to be met for someone to cultivate this capacity into an ability (i.e., conditions of ability).⁸¹ For instance, those of us who are able-bodied have a capacity to swim. We do not have this capacity as infants but as we grow and develop our motor skills, as well as those of communicating and receiving/implementing instruction, we gain the capacity to swim. These skills can be understood as conditions of capacity, but even when these conditions are met, in order to

capabilities to ensure that they are able to vote, regardless of whether they cast a vote (2) (this outcome would be referred to as a functioning on the capability approach). For my project, I too am concerned with equipping citizens with the necessary capabilities to ensure they can vote, but this is because voting is directly related to their ability to discharge their political responsibility. As such, this concern with capability (choice) over functioning (outcome) does not align with the priority I place on a person’s ability to discharge responsibility. I am concerned with cultivating abilities for the explicit purpose of discharging political responsibility to address injustice.

(1) Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press. p. 20. <https://doi-org.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/10.4159/harvard.9780674061200>

(2) Ibid. p. 22-3.

⁷⁸ Graham, P.A. (2011) “‘Ought’ and Ability” *The Philosophical Review*, 120(3), 337.

⁷⁹ Graham himself remains unconvinced of the moral thrust behind the OIC, but he does a good job of clearly articulating the semantics of the principle. That is, before he attempts to dismantle it. I don’t go into the details of his argument, in part because I remain unconvinced by his position but mostly because questioning whether the OIC is accurate is not within the scope of my project.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 341.

⁸¹ Progression through stages of capacity and ability are follows: if certain conditions are met, an agent can be said to have the *capacity* to do something (such as being *capable* of taking part in collective action). Once an agent is determined to have capacity, further conditions must be met in order to consider this agent *able* to do something (such as being *able* to take part in collective action).

say someone is ‘able’ to swim, the conditions of ability must be met as well. This means that the skills that make up the conditions of capacity must be used while learning different skills, such as being able to remain afloat or tread water, in order to develop the ability to swim.

This distinction I highlight between capacity and ability leads me to believe that common descriptions of the OIC principle mask a complexity, at least in the context of forward-looking, political responsibility. As I understand it, this principle suggests that an individual should only be considered responsible for something they can do. And as Graham shows, the ‘can’ in this principle suggests both an ability and an opportunity to exercise this ability.⁸² But in the case of forward-looking, political responsibility, such as the kind exemplified by the SCM, the ‘can’ actually represents what I’ve described as capacity rather than ability. On my view, this would look like ‘ought (responsibility to) implies can (capacity – not ability – to do)’. Remember, because the mere fact that one has a capacity to act (whatever ‘act’ might entail) does not mean they actually *can* act, for one can have a capacity they never develop. The mere fact that we grow up and develop the capacity to swim does not mean we know how to swim or have even had the opportunity to learn. If we were to apply this to the aims of my project, we would say that an individual is responsible for taking part in collective action to address structural injustice when they have the capacity to do so, even if they have not yet developed the ability(s) to do so. Whether they have yet cultivated the corresponding abilities does not

⁸² Graham, P.A. (2011) “‘Ought’ and Ability.” *The Philosophical Review*, 120(3), 341.

impact their responsibility on this forward-looking account of political responsibility. This is because, on the SCM, it is an agent's social connection to injustice that creates their responsibility to address it. Now, we would not say that someone who does not have a capacity for political responsibility (such as a child or someone with diminished or compromised mental capacity) shares in the political responsibility to address structural injustice. However, we also wouldn't say that someone must possess the specific, acquired knowledge and skills (i.e., the ability) to participate in collective action in order to have the *responsibility* to take part in collective action. Once again, this is because, on this model, responsibility is generated via social connection to injustice. This suggests that it is both capacity for responsibility, as well as a social connection to injustice, that produces political responsibility on Young's account.

Importantly, while I've argued that an inability to act on one's political responsibility does not stop one from *having* a responsibility, it does stop this responsibility from prompting the type of response we'd deem appropriate. This is why the distinction between capacity and ability is important in this context. In order for someone to *have* political responsibility, as exemplified by the SCM, they must have the mere capacity to be responsible and be socially connected to the injustice. But in order for someone to *act* on this responsibility, they also need the knowledge and skills required to recognize their responsibility, understand it, and subsequently take part in collective action. The next subsection (iii) discusses this distinction between capacity and ability as it specifically pertains to the SCM.

(iii) Applying the Capacity/Ability Distinction to the SCM

In the previous section, I introduced an important distinction between capacity and ability, one that provides context for why we might say someone has responsibility for addressing structural injustice even if they have not yet developed the necessary abilities to respond to or act upon this responsibility. I believe this distinction can (and should) be applied to Young's notion of political responsibility. The question then becomes: do agents who, according to the SCM, have political responsibility, have both a capacity *and* an ability to discharge this responsibility, or just a capacity? In order to discharge political responsibility, members of a community have to critically assess the contributions they make to ongoing social and political systems, processes, norms, etc. and subsequently determine whether they are contributing to just or unjust outcomes. If they are contributing to unjust outcomes, then they must act on their responsibility (generated by their contributions to processes producing the unjust outcomes) by joining with others in collective action to change their conduct and move towards producing just outcomes.⁸³

It is fair to say that most of the population has the capacity to develop these skills. Save for instances of diminished capacity (such as severe cognitive impairment or insufficient maturity i.e., children) most people *can* develop critical reasoning skills and gain sufficient knowledge to navigate social and political power structures. But in order for agents to comprehend and act on the demands that this responsibility places on them, they need to actually develop these abilities— simply having a capacity to develop them is

⁸³ Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press, 95.

not enough. More specifically, in order for agents to be responsible for injustice and discharge this responsibility in the manner Young prescribes, I suggest two conditions need to be met: (i) responsibility is generated via participation in the process(es) producing injustice; and (ii) our capacity to discharge this responsibility is cultivated into an ability to act on this responsibility. In order for condition (ii) to be met, we must possess the necessary skills to perform collective action. The important takeaway is that further preparation is needed for agents to understand their political responsibility and to be able to act on it. While it may be both accurate and fair to assert that they have this responsibility regardless of whether they've developed their abilities, it is also accurate to suggest that agents cannot act on this responsibility until their capacity is cultivated.

This means that fulfilling the moral requirements of the SCM requires preparation, which occurs prior to and external to engagement with the model itself.⁸⁴ Chapter five investigates whether Ontario citizens are presently receiving the caliber of preparation and training they need to develop the necessary knowledge and skills. I argue that the answer is a resounding no, which lends support to my argument that the widespread inability of most people to act on their political responsibility is a present and pressing

⁸⁴ Ability to engage with the SCM and subsequently take part in collective action is not something that Young directly addresses. There is also little to no discussion of this in scholarship focusing on Young and her social connection model. This might explain why there are no prominent examples of scholarship discussing education as an avenue to prepare agents to engage with the SCM. There is some work on Young, the SCM, and education broadly speaking, such as Robertson, S. L., and Roger, D. (2013) "The Social Justice Implications of Privatisation in Education Governance Frameworks" A Relational Account", *Oxford Review of Education*, 39(4), 426-445. But this work discusses the implications of the SCM and education governance frameworks rather than education as a vehicle to equip individuals to *act* on the responsibilities explained by the SCM.

concern. Broadly speaking, there appear to be two options for how this preparation might take place: as either a publicly organized endeavor, or as a privately pursued one. For a project as important and complex as the one Young sketches, it is unrealistic (and perhaps even irresponsible) to assume that most people are either able to or motivated to privately pursue the kind of preparation they need to engage with the SCM.⁸⁵ Therefore, it seems this preparation would need to be a publicly shared endeavor, one that can reach as many members as possible to ensure their capacity transitions to ability.⁸⁶ I propose the best place for this preparation to occur is within public education, which is the focus of the following section.

SECTION 3.3: PUBLIC EDUCATION – CULTIVATING ABILITIES

In this section, I propose three reasons for focusing on public education as a point of preparation to discharge our political responsibilities. Before discussing these reasons, it is important to ask how ordinary people should understand education. Is it a right, a duty, or is it both? Most generally accepted views of education see it as a right, but I believe viewing it *only* as a right conceals a complexity. This section aims to discuss an overlooked aspect of the right to education, namely, the duties that must be fulfilled in order for this right to be protected. When we understand the right to education as having corresponding duties, we capture the full scope of the right to education. And when we understand education in this more robust way, my reasons for centering it as a point of preparation to discharge political responsibilities become clear. I begin by sketching the

⁸⁵ What this preparation entails is discussed in detail within chapter four.

⁸⁶ Reasons for this are explored in the proceeding sections.

notion of education as a right, an understanding that most individuals are familiar with. Less familiar is a discussion of the duties that arise from this right to education. After discussing education as a right with correlative duties, I examine three reasons for centering education as a point of preparation to discharge our political responsibilities. They are: (i) education is an existing institution i.e., education is democratically protected and legally enforced in countries such as Canada; (ii) education has maximal reach, meaning that it can provide as many agents as possible with the opportunity to develop their abilities; and (iii) this preparation builds on pre-existing rights and duties of both the government and citizens.

(iv) *Education as a Right*

It is widely accepted that there is a right to education. This idea is enshrined in an extensive range of documents, from the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights to a plethora of international conventions and treaties, as well as the constitutions of nations around the world. As it stands, 155 countries have legally guaranteed 9 years or more of compulsory education for their citizens, while 99 have guaranteed at least 12 years of free education.⁸⁷ Significantly, every single country has ratified "at least one treaty covering certain aspects of the right to education."⁸⁸ This produces a legal foothold for countries to be held legally accountable when they fail to uphold these treaties. Perhaps the most

⁸⁷ *What you need to know about the right to education*. UNESCO.org. (n.d.).

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/what-you-need-know-about-right-education#:~:text=education%20to%20all->

,155%20countries%20legally%20guarantee%209%20years%20or%20more%20of%20compulsory,12%20years%20of%20free%20education.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

widely known articulation of education as a right is Article 26 of the United Nation's Declaration of Human rights, which states:

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.⁸⁹

A foundational aim in viewing education as it is viewed in Article 26 is to ensure that every individual has the opportunity to develop into a 'fully rounded human being'.⁹⁰ It is also understood as a stepping stone for securing other rights. For instance, when the right to education is fulfilled, it helps to lift communities out of poverty and helps to narrow the gender gap for girls and women.⁹¹ Fulfilling the right to education has a ripple effect that empowers individuals to become capable of securing additional rights, such as a life free of poverty and systemic domination, as well as gender inequity and discrimination.

⁸⁹ United Nations. (n.d.). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. United Nations.

⁹⁰ *What you need to know about the right to education*. UNESCO.org. (n.d.).

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/what-you-need-know-about-right-education#:~:text=education%20to%20all->

[,155%20countries%20legally%20guarantee%209%20years%20or%20more%20of%20compulsory,12%20years%20of%20free%20education.](https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/what-you-need-know-about-right-education#:~:text=education%20to%20all-)

⁹¹ Ibid.

Although it is common to view education as a right, there are different views about the *nature* of the right as well as different ideas of what exactly it is we have a right *to*. We can view the nature of the right to education as a human, moral, or political right. But, as Alex Guilherme highlights, there are also different aspects of what the focus of the right should be.⁹² He suggests that “understanding education as a right implies an interconnection between this right and other rights – that is, ‘the requirement for there to be a right *to* education (relating to access), rights *in* education (the protection of and respect for learners) and rights *through* education (development of capacities for exercising human rights).”⁹³ While this project maintains that all three aspects of the right to education are necessary (and ought to be protected as such), it mainly focuses on the third conception, i.e., rights through education, which entails the development of abilities for exercising human rights, as well as discharging our political responsibilities. When I discuss the right to education or its corresponding duties, I refer to the opportunity to develop our basic capacities into specific abilities and hence to become ‘fully rounded human being[s]’. This of course presupposes that the first two conceptions of a right to education, relating to access and respect for learners, are secured. As such, this project recognizes the right to education as a *democratically protected, moral right*.

(v) *Education and Duty*

⁹² Guilherme, A. (2016) “Do we have a right to education or a duty to educate ourselves? An enquiry based on Fichte’s views on education”. *Power and Education*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 3-18.

⁹³ Ibid. 4.

On a less widely known conception of education, education is viewed not simply as a right, but also as a duty. There are some views that suggest education should not be viewed as a right at all, but as a duty individuals have to educate themselves.⁹⁴ While there is certainly value in viewing education as having related duties and obligations, I suggest these duties are only one part of the equation. As we have discussed, education is quite commonly understood as a right. To learn and become empowered with knowledge is a necessary requirement to securing additional rights. But to view education *only* as a right doesn't quite capture the nature of education either. It is when education is understood as a right with corresponding duties that we arrive at a more robust and accurate conception. This section aims to discuss two duties and their respective duty-holders: the duty of a democratic government to educate, and the duty of its citizens to participate. Both duties are required in order for the right to education to be fulfilled.

This connection between rights and duties is reminiscent of what Onora O'Neil has in mind when she suggests that rights often entail duties to fulfill these rights. She argues that it is incoherent to suggest that one has a right to something without there being corresponding duties.⁹⁵ For if one has a right, the fulfillment or protection of this right rests on certain obligations, whether these obligations are held by the right-holder or those who are tasked with protecting or fulfilling the right in question. This same connection between rights and duties can be understood in relation to the right to

⁹⁴ Alex Guilherme is a proponent of this view. See: Guilherme, A. (2016) "Do we have a right to education or a duty to educate ourselves? An enquiry based on Fichte's views on education". *Power and Education*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 3-18.

⁹⁵ O'Neill, O. (1993). Duties and Virtues. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 35, 110.

education. In a democratic nation, citizens have a democratically protected right to education. But this right is fulfilled by those who act on their duties. The first duty is held by the government. In Canada, this would be the provincial or territorial governments, since education is their responsibility. Because education is democratically protected, the government has a responsibility to provide adequate educational opportunities for its citizens. This is needed not only in order for citizens to develop into ‘fully rounded human beings’, but also for them to become capable, democratic citizens. Civic engagement is the ‘check’ on power that maintains an appropriate balance of this power to reflect a democratic, political framework. Without adequate engagement, and without the preparation that is required to be able to engage adequately, a democracy does not have the right balance of power. A democratic government therefore has an obligation to provide its citizens with the opportunity to be educated, so as to produce ‘fully rounded human beings’ who are also democratically engaged citizens.

However, the key word here is ‘opportunity’. Citizens are required by law to be given an education, but this legal requirement entails a kind of passive participation, i.e., students must simply attend to ‘be educated’. It does not stipulate a baseline of participation that is necessary to produce the aims outlined above. However, this type of learning requires more than to be physically present at school. Instead, it requires a duty held by students to actively participate in their education to cultivate the abilities necessary to become ‘fully rounded human beings’ and democratically engaged. As previously mentioned, Guilherme advocates for a duty to be educated. And while the

isolation with which he treats this duty is not compatible with my view, his argument does still provide some valuable insight into why we might say individuals have a duty to learn.

Guilhereme looks at Fichte's writings on education, suggesting that being educated is a duty we each have to ourselves and our community.⁹⁶ He sees this duty as stemming from the human tendency to pursue improvement and 'perfection'. Guilhereme says, "Fichte concludes that human beings do not only aim at their personal and constant self-improvement towards perfection, but they also, as social beings, aim at the constant improvement of their societies. In this respect, it is arguable that self-improvement is something inescapable – a *duty* – and that it is also a *duty* to improve one's society."⁹⁷ For Guilhereme, Fichte's focus on the human pursuit of improvement explains how it can and should be viewed as a duty. He believes it is something that we *want*, for both personal and communal goals; something that we pursue for personal fulfillment in addition to advancing the improvement of society. This focus on community can be seen when we keep in mind the role Fichte believes education plays within democracy. Referencing Turnbull, he writes "education is to be democratic in nature and universal and compulsory in application ... [it] is the very life-blood of the state [because] ... [t]he individual is not only an individual; he is at the same time a member of a community and as such must be

⁹⁶ Ibid. 4.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 11.

educated to take his place in it; otherwise the future of that community is doomed.”⁹⁸ As we can see, Fichte and Guilhaume view education as integral to the success of a democratic society. Thanks to the protections a citizen receives from being a member of a democracy, they have a vested interest in securing a properly functioning democracy which requires their civic engagement.

As Guilhaume notes, according to Fichte, members of a community have good reasons to desire not only their own success but also the success of their community, in large part due to the impact it has on them. It is our desire for self-improvement – and how this can be secured through both personal and communal pursuits – that explains Fichte’s reasoning for viewing education as a duty. It is something we owe to ourselves and by extension, our communities. Moreover, viewing education as a duty acknowledges that only so much can be achieved merely by making education compulsory. Robert D. Heslep admits that “as every observer of schooling knows, officials can deliver students to the well of learning but cannot make them drink.”⁹⁹ Education requires participation of the learner in order for it to achieve its aims. If education is regarded only as a right and not a duty, then students are not required to make use of the opportunity to learn that this right provides them with. They are required to attend school due to it being compulsory, but they are not required to participate to the extent that the aims of education are

⁹⁸ Turnbull G.H. (1923) “Fichte on Education.” *The Monist* 33(2): 198 in Guilhaume, Alex. (2016) “Do we have a right to education or a duty to educate ourselves? An enquiry based on Fichte’s views on education”. *Power and Education*, (Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 3-18).

⁹⁹ Heslep. R. D. (1992) ‘Both the Moral Right and the Moral Duty to be Educated’. *Educational Theory*, 42(4), 426.

secured. It is when they have a corresponding *duty to learn* (and more importantly, when they fulfill this duty) that the right to education is fulfilled. As such, the focus of the following section is to detail why education is best understood as a right with corresponding duties for the government *and* for citizens.

(vi) *Education: A Right with Correlative Duties*

Robert D. Heslep produces a convincing account of why we should understand education as both a right and a duty in his paper ‘Both the Moral Right and the Moral Duty to be Educated’ (1992). He defines the moral right to be educated as a claim to be taught¹⁰⁰ whatever it is that is important to be able to function as a moral agent.¹⁰¹ He suggests that it is a right

to being informed of one’s moral rights and duties; to being prepared to make moral decision; to being competent in exercising one’s moral rights and performing one’s moral duties; to being prepared to maintain one’s physical and mental health, economic well-being, and other personal conditions necessary for the possession and exercise of one’s moral rights; and to being capable of contributing, through the performance of social roles, to the general conditions of moral agency.¹⁰²

He suggests that this moral right to be educated is compatible with various educational duties, such as the duty to fulfill this right (governments) as well as the duty to participate in its fulfillment (citizens).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 418. Because he suggests that the moral right to education is a claim, Heslep considers this claim to consist of an ‘entitlement’, in this case, to education. This means that the claim to education will have a corresponding duty by others of non-interference, and in some instances, a duty of assistance by others as well.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

For Heslep, these rights and duties associated with education stem from a core intention of protecting and advancing moral agency. He sees this agency as ‘a major public good’, one that is significantly important for every moral agent in both a collective and individualistic sense.¹⁰³ Because moral agency is so essential, he believes fulfillment of this right should not be left to the discretion of individual moral agents because we often do not make decisions that lead to exercising our right to learn, therefore putting our moral agency at risk.¹⁰⁴ This is where he suggests moral duty kicks in. He defines the moral duty to be educated as a duty “to learn what we need to learn so that we can support each other as moral agents.”¹⁰⁵ Even when participation within education is a duty, there is no guarantee that everyone will act on this duty. However, it still “logically provides a public basis for compelling moral agents to obtain a highly valuable education that they, despite their right to it, might not decide to pursue.”¹⁰⁶ As Heslep states, not everyone will choose to fulfill their role in the equation of rights and duties that make up education. But the protection of moral agency and the fulfillment of other rights rest on people receiving an education because it equips those people with the skillset to become moral agents and to participate within their communities.

Because both individual and communal well-being rests on the development of moral agency, and it is through education that this agency is cultivated, Heslep argues that duties of education work in tandem with the right to education. It is when education is

¹⁰³ Ibid. 426.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 422.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 426.

understood as a right grounded by correlative duties that education can persist in circumstances where a right or duty alone cannot provide sufficient support for education to occur. For instance, there are times where a duty to be educated as Guilherme outlines is not sufficient for ensuring that learning takes place. Heslep argues that “without the moral right to be educated, morally immature children, who have no duty to be educated, have no necessary and sufficient moral ground of their own for receiving non-interference and assistance in their learning to be moral agents.”¹⁰⁷ There are instances where one can be said to have a right to education but cannot be said to also have a duty, such as children who are not yet morally mature, or adults who do not possess the intellectual capacity to be duty bound. These individuals still deserve an opportunity to develop their moral agency to the fullest extent possible, regardless of whether they can be said to be duty bound.

In these circumstances, it is important that education be regarded as a right that people can claim (or can be claimed on their behalf), rather than solely a duty that they must act upon.¹⁰⁸ Conversely, there are also instances where individuals do not wish to claim their right to education; they show up and learn passively as is required of them but hold no interest in actively learning. In this case, their duty to be educated can motivate active participation. When education consists of both rights and duties, it is no longer a question of whether students *want* to make the most of a right they have, but instead, a

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 425.

¹⁰⁸ There would still be a duty to educate (held by the government) in this instance.

duty to do their part in guaranteeing this right is fulfilled. As Heslep mentions, if we leave the fulfillment of education to the whims of each individual, we pose a significant risk to the development of moral agency.¹⁰⁹ Co-operation is necessary in the production of education, and it necessitates the commitment of both those who provide (government) and those who receive (citizen). As such, understanding education as a right with correlative duties gives society a grounding to establish “what education a moral agent should pursue even when that agent does not decide to exercise his or her right to that education.”¹¹⁰ Now that a more robust account of education has been explored, I turn to introducing three reasons to focus on public education as an avenue for preparation to discharge one’s political responsibilities.

(vii) *Three Reasons to Focus on Public Education as a Point of Preparation*

One of the central aims of public education in a democracy is to equip and prepare its citizens to become active members of their society. As we know, civic participation is a necessary cornerstone for democracy to function because it provides a necessary check on political power. An educational framework that acknowledges this will maintain a focus on fostering democratic engagement through equipping students with the necessary skills. These skills can be fostered by learning *for* democracy, rather than learning *about* democracy.¹¹¹ Instead of learning facts *about* democracy, students learn the reasoning and

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 426.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Smith, H. (1995) ‘It’s Education For, Not About, Democracy’. *Educational Horizons*, 73(2), 66.

critical thinking skills required to *participate in* their democracy.¹¹² When a democratic government fails to fulfill this right for its citizen, it falls short of fulfilling its democratic role, which triggers a ripple effect that hinders a citizen's ability to fulfill their role as well.

The skills of reasoning and critical thinking that are needed to participate actively within democracy are the same foundational skills that are needed for citizens to discharge the political responsibilities highlighted by the SCM. Thus, education is well-suited to provide this preparation because the intention to cultivate these skills *is already included within democratic, educational aims*.¹¹³ Whether present educational frameworks are achieving these aims is a question I engage with in chapter five. For now, the pertinent observation is that the same skills necessary for persons to engage with the SCM are also necessary to be active members of a democracy, which means a democratic government is responsible for creating the opportunity for these skills to be cultivated within its citizens. This suggests that there should be a system in place to ensure preparation occurs, as there are already educational institutions in place. The fact that we can claim this preparation is part of a democratically protected right provides some assurance that citizens have the opportunity to develop abilities to act on their political responsibilities. Recall that the responsibility the SCM shows us we have is political,

¹¹² This distinction between learning for rather than about democracy will be explored in depth within the following chapters.

¹¹³ The Ontario Ministry of Education. (2018) 'Canadian and World Studies: Geography, History, Civics (politics)'. The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10, 149.

forward-looking, and does not generate accountability in a liability sense.¹¹⁴ As such, there is no ‘enforcement mechanism’ to ensure that this responsibility is discharged. It relies solely on the willingness of everyday people to recognize their own responsibility and to act on it. This requires that individuals are *able* to recognize their responsibility and subsequently to act on it.

I’ve argued that the right to education, and the skills we are meant to develop as a result of this education, provide individuals with the opportunity to develop abilities required to discharge their political responsibility. Universal education offers assurance that citizens have a chance to develop their skills, and this security¹¹⁵ makes it clear why regarding education as a right complements the aims of Young’s model. But as mentioned earlier, it is when education is understood as both a right *and* a duty that the aims of education can best be achieved, which is what generates this security. This caliber of learning requires active participation by the individual. When individuals also hold a duty to be educated, they have a responsibility to participate, which ensures that their learning is active rather than passive. If a society recognizes education as a right, it ensures that everyone has the opportunity to be educated but it does not ensure that citizens have an education that produces the desired outcome i.e., development of abilities to discharge civic duties and by extension, act on political responsibility highlighted by the SCM. It is

¹¹⁴ Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press, 95.

¹¹⁵ Importantly, this security only comes about if the right to education is fulfilled. And as I’ve argued, it is when this right is complemented by duties that education as a right can be fulfilled.

when we understand education as a right with duties that it can be seen as a beneficial framework to produce the kind of preparation I have in mind.

The second reason to focus on education as a place of preparation is that a system of universal education reaches everyone. For example, in Canada, not only is education considered a democratically protected right, but it is also compulsory. Citizens residing within a democratic state such as Canada are legally required to receive an education; failing to do so is against the law. There are no other social or political processes that citizens are required by law to participate in that are structurally set up to cultivate knowledge and skills, both of which are the foundation of the kind of preparation I refer to. This means that education has maximal reach to ensure as many people as possible are given the opportunity to cultivate their capacity into ability. Admittedly, it is unrealistic to assume that there are any political or social endeavors that can reach every single person, even education. But the point remains that education is the best avenue to strive for maximum participation.

Importantly, when this right to education is understood as having correlative duties, it enhances the benefit of maximum participation. This is because we want the *right kind* of learning to occur. If students are not developing adequate skills to engage with democracy, or to discharge their political responsibility, then high levels of attendance are not helpful for achieving the aims set out for my project. But when education is understood as a right with duties, it can motivate high levels of participation

in the kind of active learning that helps to transform capacity into ability. Heslep points to this himself, discussing how conceiving of education as a right with duties is what ensures as many people as possible pursue an education. For him, this provides a sense of security that individuals are going to develop their moral agency, something he takes to be a major public good.¹¹⁶ Part of developing this moral agency includes the kind of skills I attribute to learning for democracy, because civic engagement is a significant part of protecting and exercising moral agency. As such, viewing education as a right with duties encourages maximum participation within the type of learning that supports both civic participation and discharging the political responsibility the SCM shows us we have.

By now, it is clear that it is when education is understood as a right with correlative duties by both the government and citizens that education becomes capable of producing the kind of learning I've argued is necessary. The third reason to focus on education as our point of preparation is that it *builds on pre-existing duties*. As mentioned, these pre-existing duties are the duty a government has to educate, and the duty citizens have to be active participants throughout their education. These duties derive from a responsibility to cultivate and participate in democracy, but it is the same abilities that are required to participate in democracy that are necessary to discharge political responsibility for injustice. And so, when education is viewed as a right with duties, it produces *access* to be educated (a right, grounded by the duty a government has

¹¹⁶ Heslep. R. D. (1992) 'Both the Moral Right and the Moral Duty to be Educated'. *Educational Theory*, 42(4), 426.

to fulfill it) but it also produces the *type* of learning that we need (a duty citizens have to learn, producing active learning). When we understand education as both, it grounds preparation¹¹⁷ to discharge political responsibility within a pre-established duty that both democratic governments and citizens hold. These pre-existing duties provide a more effective framework to achieve our educational aims. Young is right to suggest that agents have political responsibility for injustice, but, as I have argued, the kind of responsibility described by the SCM cannot be discharged unless it is held by someone with the ability to act on it. Providing preparation within a system that is upheld by pre-existing rights and duties ensures that citizens have an opportunity to develop the abilities they need to act on the political responsibility the SCM shows them they have.

To summarize, I have argued that education, when understood as a right with correlative duties, is the right locus of preparation to discharge political responsibility highlighted by the SCM. The main reasons for focusing on education are: (i) we have a system already in place to provide the kind of preparation we need to cultivate our capacity into abilities. There are changes and improvements that need to be made, but the basic structure is already in place, which mitigates significant organizational and financial challenges; (ii) education holds potential for maximal reach because it is the only legally required process for citizens to participate in that focuses on building knowledge and skills; and (iii) this opportunity to cultivate our capacity into abilities builds on existing

¹¹⁷ otherwise known as the process by which capacity is cultivated into ability.

duties and responsibilities the government and citizens already have, and is complimentary to them.

SECTION 3.4: DEMOCRACY, EDUCATION, AND STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE

The first two sections of this chapter laid the groundwork to arrive at the following claim: the ability to discharge one's political responsibility as understood by Young, requires preparation. Importantly, it is not the responsibility itself that relies on preparation, but rather the ability to discharge it. As such, I've argued there is a gap between capacity and ability when it comes to discharging political responsibility to address structural injustice. Young rightly suggests that individuals who are socially connected to injustice have political responsibility to correct it. She does not, however, examine whether citizens presently have the *ability* to correct this injustice. That is, she does not examine what actual skills people must possess if they are to understand their political responsibilities on the SCM and act to discharge them. I understand these skills to be the knowledge and critical thinking skills that are necessary to be a democratically engaged citizen. Moreover, being democratically engaged also requires knowledge of the social and political landscape, which includes knowledge of issues of injustice (including structural injustice). As such, I understand the skills required to act on responsibility to include (i) a knowledge base that consists of understanding the social and political landscape of their society (including an understanding of structural injustice) and (ii) critical thinking skills to be able to understand, reflect on, and engage with, issues of importance.

This chapter has not engaged directly with the question of whether preparation of the required knowledge and skills is presently underway. For now, it assumes that it is not. In chapter five, I examine an example of a current educational framework struggling to provide this preparation when I conduct an analysis of the Ontario Secondary School System curriculum. For the moment, working with the assumption that this preparation is not presently being provided, I've argued that we should ask where it *should* occur. While public education is an institution that already exists, holds aims regarding civic education, and does make some headway towards developing certain abilities, I believe that it does not provide *nearly enough* preparation to reasonably expect the development of abilities required for people to engage with the SCM or participate within their democracy as active and informed citizens. How we conceive of education – whether it is a right, duty, or both – has implications for what we can expect of an education system in terms of its educational aims and how citizens come to engage and participate in it. Importantly, when education is conceived as a right with duties, it grounds the process of preparing people to discharge their political responsibility within an external and prior commitment by both governments and citizens. This provides a sense of security that citizens have the opportunity to transform their capacity into ability. I propose that understanding the role ability has in enabling us to act on our responsibility, and the process by which we cultivate these abilities, produces a tiered conception of political responsibility. Outlining this tiered conception is the focus of the following section.

(viii) *A Tiered Conception of Political Responsibility*

A frequent refrain in this chapter has been that if we want agents to effectively discharge their political responsibilities, then these agents must have an ability to do so. I have argued that in order for one to possess an ability to discharge their responsibility, as recognized by the SCM, one must possess a certain set of knowledge and skills. The phrase ‘learning for democracy’ has been used to denote the type of learning that can produce these required skills. I gesture broadly and quite generally to these skills within this chapter, but what they entail is explored in depth in chapter four. Most importantly, I will argue that these are skills that require preparation to develop. In other words, assurance that individuals are able to discharge responsibility is not built into the SCM itself. Discharging one’s political responsibility requires a prior and external sort of training. Because of this, I argue that we cannot say the kind of responsibility highlighted by the SCM is freestanding. If we allocate this prior and external training to public education, we ground political responsibility in pre-existing responsibilities and duties.

In short, an individual’s ability to act on their responsibility and to engage in collective action rests on the assumption that a prior right/duty has been fulfilled, i.e., that their time in public education has trained them sufficiently so that their capacity has transitioned to ability. This produces a tiered conception of political responsibility. This consists of two different political responsibilities¹¹⁸, the second of which can only be

¹¹⁸ I’ve specified that I view education as a democratically protected, but moral right. Because it is democratically protected, I view the responsibility that governments have to educate and the responsibility that citizens have to participate in the fulfillment of this right, as political responsibilities despite the fact that the right itself is a moral right.

acted upon when the first has been fulfilled. The first responsibility consists of adequate training, which I have suggested occurs when education is treated as a right with duties, and, importantly, when these rights and duties are fulfilled. This means that the first kind of political responsibility is dual, in the sense that it is only fulfilled when both parties (the government and the student) act on their corresponding responsibility. Education is a right held by citizens, which means providing it is a responsibility that governments have to fulfill, and it is a duty that citizens have, which means they hold responsibility to act so as to become educated. As such, the first of these two political responsibilities is only fulfilled when both halves of the equation (governments and citizens) fulfill their roles to bring it to fruition. When this occurs, citizens are then able to act on their political responsibility by engaging with the SCM and addressing structural injustice. Hence, my view proposes that while the kind of political responsibility highlighted by the SCM exists on its own, we become capable of acting on it when we view it as a tiered conception of political responsibility.

(ix) *Education – Two Birds, One Stone*

The connection I've sketched between education and the impact it has on both democracy and our ability to respond to structural injustice holds significant implications. I've made it clear what benefits I see unfolding by centering public education as a place to prepare citizens in a democracy to discharge their political responsibility. This political responsibility consists of both the responsibility that each citizen has to participate in civic duties and the responsibility recognized by the SCM, to undermine structural

injustice and partake in collective action. Significantly, this shows us the connection between democracy and structural injustice. Engaging with each requires the same skillset. This skillset can be developed from training that centers learning for democracy within educational aims. This highlights another benefit of making education our point of preparation – cultivating this skillset in youth produces a ripple effect in efforts for both (i) supporting the proper functioning of democracy; and (ii) undermining structural injustice via collective action. Lack of adequate training to discharge civic duties is a barrier to democracy, which is partly why it is a democratically protected right. Structural injustice is also a barrier to a properly functioning democracy because it restricts certain citizens from having their share of political power and influence.

When our social processes, norms, beliefs, and practices are riddled with inequity, this hinders respect for rights and skews the balance of power, both of which are meant to be protected by democratic procedure. The result is accumulated power, garnered through undeserved and unregulated access to advantage. This accumulated power is what ends up steering social and political matters of importance. Structural injustice is a hinderance to democracy because it compromises the efficacy of democratic processes. In other words, it is a barrier to a democracy functioning as it is intended to. For instance, within the United States, historical and ongoing processes of structural racism are a significant hinderance for the voting rights of people of color.¹¹⁹ Analysis conducted in 2016 showed

¹¹⁹ Maxwell, C., & Castro, A. (2023, February 14). *Systematic Inequality and American Democracy*. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/systematic-inequality-american-democracy/>

that 9.5 million Americans did not have full voting rights¹²⁰, most of whom were people of color.¹²¹ On the flip side, when democracy does not function as it should, i.e., when accumulated power runs social and political discourse, it is a barrier to addressing issues of structural injustice.

Within a democracy, democratically regulated processes are the backdrop against which we often navigate social and political issues. When certain groups of individuals have diminished access to political power, their toolbox for engaging with structural injustice is also diminished. Structural racism can explain the diminished voting rights of people of color within America. Having political leaders who take this injustice seriously is an important part of the broader approach to addressing structural racism. But if the voting rights of people of color are consistently under attack, this restricts their ability to use the democratic process to alleviate the structural racism they face. This highlights how democratic and structural inequities are reciprocal – they often, if not always, reinforce one another. But that is precisely why an approach that aims to address one manner of injustice, whether it be democratic or structural, can help to reinforce efforts to address the other. This is another key reason why education is a valuable place to prioritize preparation to discharge one’s political responsibilities, as described by the SCM, because doing so produces ripple effects that aid in addressing structural injustice from multiple avenues.

¹²⁰ The author understands ‘full voting rights’ as the ability to vote in elections pertaining to the House, the Senate, the Presidency.

¹²¹ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter has been to establish that there is a need for a process of preparation to equip agents with the ability to discharge the kind of political responsibility Young understands them to have. I began by introducing a technical distinction between capacity and ability and by applying this distinction to forward-looking political responsibility, showing that while most agents have a general *capacity* to discharge their responsibilities, further development of particular *abilities* is required to engage with the SCM and to participate in collective action in the way Young has in mind. Next, I proposed that public education is the right place for this process of preparation to occur because education: (i) is an already established system with similar (if presently unfulfilled) aims that complement the kind of preparation I have in mind; (ii) cultivates maximum participation, being both a democratically protected right and compulsory by law; (iii) has pre-existing duties, held by both the government and citizens to participate, which my proposed process of preparation builds on. Importantly, I've suggested these reasons become clear when we recognize the often-overlooked duties of education that are required to fulfill the right to education. So, when we recognize education as a right with correlative duties it becomes clear why public education is the right avenue to provide this preparation.

Given the pressing need for preparation if people are to discharge their political responsibilities under the SCM, I've suggested that applying the SCM should be regarded as part of a broader process of addressing structural injustice, one that also includes

preparation to discharge our political responsibilities. As such, I've offered a tiered conception of political responsibility, one that reflects the interconnected nature of duties to: (i) be democratically engaged citizens; and (ii) discharge our political responsibilities exemplified by the SCM. I've suggested that when we recognize the interconnected nature of these two duties, initiatives to remove one barrier to democracy can lend support for removing the other, given their mutually reinforcing nature. I've therefore argued that we should align the aims of producing citizens capable of (i) being democratically involved; and (ii) discharging their political responsibility highlighted by the SCM. In the following chapter, I evaluate what kind of learning is capable of achieving these two aims and propose this is what I will call 'learning for democracy'.

CHAPTER FOUR: LEARNING FOR DEMOCRACY – SHIFTING CURRICULAR
FOCUS TO PRODUCE DEMOCRATICALLY ENGAGED AND JUSTICE-
ORIENTED CITIZENS

INTRODUCTION

Young's social connection model (SCM) places a demand on agents, suggesting that we each have responsibility to take part in collective action and to address the way we contribute to the injustice produced by the systems we participate in.¹²² In chapter three, I argued that when we attempt to act on the responsibility the SCM shows us we have, many if not most of us are going to run into a roadblock, which is an inability to actually *act* on our responsibility. This is because most of us have not yet developed the necessary knowledge and skills to do so, namely, the kind of awareness and critical thinking that an individual needs to understand structural injustice and to participate in collective action. The knowledge and skills I have in mind are reminiscent of what equips a citizen to participate in democracy. To highlight this disconnect, I've suggested that recognizing a distinction between an agent's capacity and their ability can explain how we might say an agent *is* responsible for something, such as addressing structural injustice, without having a corresponding ability to act on that responsibility. To reiterate, my project understands capacity as the *potential* to develop an ability, such as a human's capacity to acquire the ability to swim. By analogy, I claim most agents have the *capacity* to act on the responsibility the SCM shows them they have, but until this capacity is cultivated, they won't actually be *able* to do this. This is why I've argued that, to address

¹²² Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press., 105.

this tension, we need a process of preparation to provide citizens with an opportunity to develop the necessary skills to act on their political responsibility.

Chapter three detailed my reasons for proposing public education as the right place for this preparation to occur. A democratic government has a duty to educate its citizens and its citizens have a duty to participate in the fulfillment of their own education, as well as in democratic life more generally. I've argued that when viewed as a right with correlative duties, public education is an advantageous place to prepare citizens to discharge the political responsibility the SCM shows them they have. The focus of this fourth chapter is to articulate what kind of learning should take place within public education in order to cultivate the kind of knowledge and skills that can empower agents to act on their political responsibility. The first section explicates an education model guided by the use of scripted curriculum that results in the regurgitation of facts. I provide an overview of what this education style looks like, what the proposed benefits are, as well as why these benefits never quite come to fruition. In section two I discuss learning for democracy, an education style that aims to cultivate a sense of knowledge, awareness, and critical engagement. I discuss why I believe this style of learning is well-suited for the aims of my project. I close this chapter by discussing the specific educational aims that ought to be included within this general theme of learning for democracy if the goal is to cultivate the necessary knowledge and skills in youth to produce democratically capable and justice-oriented citizens.

SECTION 4.1: SCRIPTED CURRICULUM

In their paper ‘A Democratic Critique of Scripted Curriculum’ (2020). Fitz and Nikolaidis ask whether scripted curriculum holds damaging implications for the role that education should have in maintaining democratic engagement over generations within the United States.¹²³ In this section, I engage with the reasons they provide for why someone may advocate for scripted curriculum before discussing why these reasons fall short in practice. My aim is to review a teaching/learning style that remains prevalent in curriculum, despite its many noted drawbacks. In doing so, I highlight a distinction between the outcomes we can expect when employing scripted curriculum versus the outcomes we can expect if we pursue the kind of teaching/learning style I argue for, namely, learning for democracy. Moreover, I show how these different outcomes hold significant implications for the aims of my project i.e., how/whether these different teaching/learning styles equip citizens with the knowledge and skills to understand their responsibility to address injustice and participate in collective action. Fitz and Nikolaidis accept the premise that “public education in the United States serves to develop students into citizens with the necessary competencies to participate in a democratic form of life.”¹²⁴ They then ask whether this uptick in scripted curriculum is capable of contributing to this aim. They suggest that, “it is increasingly the norm in the United

¹²³ While their discussion focuses primarily on the role of scripted curriculum within the context of public education in the United States, they acknowledge that the critique they flesh out can (and perhaps, should) be applied within any democratic context that relies on scripted curriculum in public education systems.

¹²⁴ Fitz, J. A., & Nikolaidis, A. C. (2020) ‘A Democratic Critique of Scripted Curriculum.’ *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 52(2), 196.

States that teachers are required to use ‘scripted curricula’¹²⁵, a term which refers to a wide variety of curricular materials or pre-packaged lesson plans that explicitly script out exactly what the teacher will say, show, and do – and often even how students are expected to respond – so that the teacher only need read from a manual in order to deliver the lesson.”¹²⁶ Employing this kind of strategy to manage or retain consistency in content delivery goes back nearly 200 years, but it wasn’t until the last few decades that this evolved into something more than merely providing reading instruction and lesson plans associated with some helpful suggestions for teachers.¹²⁷

This progressed into an ‘actual script’ in the late 1800s, with the publication of textbook series that included not only suggestions, but often entire and complete scripts of what to teach, how to teach it, and what to say when doing so, moving away from suggestions and more towards prescriptions.¹²⁸ As Fitz and Nikolaidis observe, “Contemporary models of scripted curriculum such as Direct Instruction and Success for All were created between the 1960s and 1980s specifically to address the needs of ‘at risk’ or ‘disadvantaged’ students and were often implemented as part of plans for comprehensive school reform.”¹²⁹ But scripted curriculum quickly expanded beyond being applied to ‘at risk’ youth once adherence with certain prescribed criteria became the

¹²⁵ This example focuses on the American context (as most of Fitz and Nikolaidis’ discussion does) but the focus of this chapter is to contrast prominent learning and teaching styles broadly speaking, and not to review the Canadian education landscape specifically.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 195.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 196.

¹²⁸ Ibid. 196-97.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 197.

benchmark to ensure federal funding.¹³⁰ Curriculum publishers were quick to provide new materials, developing programs that met the requirement of “explicitness and systematicity ... scripting out precisely what reading teachers would say at each point in their lesson.”¹³¹ With an increased focus on standardization and accountability, schools became progressively inclined to implement scripts in most if not all subject areas. Theoretically, there are some potential benefits that could arise from standardizing curriculum, benefits that Levinson explains in their book *No citizen left behind* (2012).

I briefly cover the purported benefits of scripted curriculum that Levinson articulates here, before explaining why these benefits don’t carry much weight once we move beyond theory and take scripted curriculum into practice. First and foremost, the most significant proposed benefit of scripted curriculum is equity. Given that curriculum is ‘pre-packaged’, all students receiving an education via scripted curriculum can expect to receive the same quality of education, which (in theory) would enable them to meet state standards, thus ensuring ‘equality of access’.¹³² In addition to securing equity in regard to access, scripted curriculum can also increase efficiency, given that it encourages ‘maximum educational output’ with as few resources as possible thanks to the lack of any divergence within curriculum. This economic efficiency allows for maximal efficiency in allocating constrained resources, which is admittedly a very relevant democratic value.¹³³ The third benefit that Levinson discusses is transparency, suggesting that a pre-

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid. 201.

¹³³ Ibid.

determined curriculum can provide full transparency for any interested party, which also feeds into the fourth benefit, which is ‘democratic dialogue and deliberation’. Access facilitates engagement, which means parents can know exactly what it is that their children are learning, and how it is, exactly, that they are learning it. Fitz and Nikolaidis describe this fourth benefit, saying, “[it] has the potential to open up community dialogue about academic topics, but also might encourage communities to consider precisely what kind of future citizens they believe should be formed through the process of education.”¹³⁴ Moreover, a pre-set curriculum allows for the regulation of individual teachers who are bound to exercise their own judgement about what to teach and how they wish to teach it.¹³⁵ Ideally, this variance is replaced by a scripted curriculum that enables a more robust government (fifth benefit), making use of “the collective expertise of curriculum producers, independent researchers, and governing and regulating agencies.”¹³⁶ The sixth benefit that Levinson mentions is freedom and diversity. Levinson seems to believe that standardization can allow for diversity ‘along other dimensions’, suggesting that “If all schools are held accountable for achieving certain educational outcomes, they can be left alone to determine their own means of achieving those outcomes.”¹³⁷ It appears that Levinson is discussing freedom in regard to a school’s ability to choose how they pursue pre-determined outcomes, and diversity, as a wide range of options for these various methods of pursuit. This perspective diverges from how

¹³⁴ Ibid. 202.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Levinson, M. (2012). *No Citizen Left Behind*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press. p. 267. <https://doi-org.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/10.4159/harvard.9780674065291>

Fitz and Nikolaidis, or I, would view freedom and diversity, as these are values that our projects are interested in promoting for the student, not the school. As such, freedom and diversity for the individual does not appear to come to fruition even in the most ideal of circumstances, given that a pre-set curriculum with no opportunity for divergence or growth has very little to do with incorporating or fostering freedom or diversity.¹³⁸

Despite the initial good intention of instituting scripted curriculum – to provide all students with a quality education – Fitz and Nikolaidis suggest that instituting scripted curriculum has in practice only served to compromise the quality of education, not to increase it. Levinson’s discussion of benefits tells us, in theory, what can arise when it comes to implementing a scripted curriculum within an ideal setting. But Fitz and Nikolaidis are quick to demonstrate that these benefits don’t actually come to fruition when we move beyond theory and actually implement curriculum in this manner. They define equity “not as simple equality of access to resources but instead as equality of opportunity, which requires compensatory allocation of resources in proportion to students’ social disadvantages.”¹³⁹ This understanding of ‘equality’ as equality of opportunity is reminiscent of the emphasis on opportunity in Sen’s capability approach. It is not equal access to resources that make individuals equal, but an equal access to opportunity. While scripted curriculum certainly has the potential to produce equity in the sense of providing equal access to resources for all students, it does not take into account

¹³⁸ Fitz, J. A., & Nikolaidis, A. C. (2020) ‘A Democratic Critique of Scripted Curriculum.’ *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 52(2), 202.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

that we live in a society with numerous pre-existing inequalities that act as barriers to opportunity.¹⁴⁰ This suggests that simply because the same curriculum is used across the board for every student, it does not mean that all students have the same opportunity to make use of this access or are beginning from the same starting point.¹⁴¹

Moreover, in practice, scripted curriculum is disproportionately used in schools that have a large population of students of colour, living in low-income communities. This should not come as a shock, considering scripted curriculum was initially generated to address needs within these communities. Nevertheless, it is ironic that the very communities it was created for and which are most often encouraged to rely on its use, are the same communities that are benefited *the least* by its use.¹⁴² The result is that, “instead of providing equality of access, scripted curriculum facilitates the creation of a stratified curricular system: on the lower tier we have scripted curricula, purportedly suited to the needs of low-income children, while on the upper tier are student-centred, enquiry-based, and flexible curricula, which address the needs of their more affluent peers.”¹⁴³ Further complicating this issue, Timberlake et al. have observed that using scripted curriculum can actually compromise a teacher’s understanding of equity in the classroom, because this approach perpetuates the belief that equity merely involves

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 203.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 202.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 203.

treating all students the same by holding them to the same standards and providing them all with the same access to the same content.¹⁴⁴

Rather than equity, this approach appears to prioritize efficiency. And although improving efficiency can be a benefit, as Levinson explains, it is not the kind of efficiency we want. It is not democratic efficiency, something like a Deweyan conception of social efficiency, but rather, a machine-like efficiency, “placing teachers in an ‘assembly-line’ type teaching regime.”¹⁴⁵ In other words, this process of taking decision-making entirely out of the classroom serves to make the management of teachers more efficient, but certainly not the strategies for teaching and learning. Fitz and Nikolaidis critique this trade-off, stating that “social efficiency – which according to Dewey is essential for democracy to flourish – was sacrificed on the altar of managerial efficiency, to the benefit of corporate interest, such as curriculum publishing companies and others within educational administration, that stood to profit from it.”¹⁴⁶

Issues with transparency, in addition to democratic dialogue and deliberation, stem from pre-existing inequalities as well. Transparency¹⁴⁷ can only be achieved if all parents have equal access to the curriculum (i.e., meet a similar threshold of educational background, establishing an ability to decipher and understand content). When this is not

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 204.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 205.

¹⁴⁷ Transparency in this instance refers to the access that parents have to be aware and informed about what their children are learning in school.

the case, which – given pre-existing barriers that have prevented generations of parents from equal access and equal opportunity of education – we can see it is not, this lack of transparency snowballs into an inability to engage with democratic dialogue and deliberation.¹⁴⁸ But further, even if transparency was achievable, there is very little chance for meaningful democratic dialogue and deliberation because the public does not receive the opportunity to provide input on the curriculum or to engage in any way with its development or implementation. This lack of engagement and diverse perspective also undermines the benefit of a more robust government. As Fitz and Nikolaidis argue, “Decisions regarding appropriate curriculum have been moved out of the hands of local teachers, schools, and communities and are instead centralized at the level of experts and curriculum manufacturers. This concentration of power is particularly undemocratic since profit incentives and top-down mandates are guiding this curriculum design, rather than the focus being the benefit of the students.”¹⁴⁹ These insights provide further support for the notion that scripted education is not well suited for addressing existing inequalities because the only way a static, uniform, education will further equity is in a society that already *exists* in a state of equity. But even in a society such as this, one that operates from a baseline of equity, there are still meaningful reasons to doubt that scripted education can ever truly promote equity. This is because democracy requires diversity, growth, and development through engagement, none of which are something that scripted curriculum is capable of achieving.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 206.

Fitz and Nikolaidis engage with Amy Gutmann's *Democratic Education* (1999), where she argues that there are two distinct conditions that an education must meet for it to be considered democratic: "it must not repress any opinions or discriminate against any student or student group."¹⁵⁰ Importantly, Fritz and Nikolaidis note that scripted curriculum manages to violate both these conditions. It represses opinions by leaving no opportunity for growth or adaptation, prohibiting democratic deliberation for both teachers and students, and it discriminates against groups by being disproportionately used for communities of low-income students, which only serves to further compromise their [low-income students] ability to cultivate their own sense of 'democratic commitment and participation'.¹⁵¹ The implications that scripted curriculum have for the relationship between education and democracy cannot be overstated. Wahlström, in their paper 'Democracy and curriculum – the task still before us' (2020) sums this vital relationship up nicely, saying, "Education and democracy are intertwined and constitute each other. This is because education presupposes free communication and thinking between different groups and democracy presupposes that everyone is intellectually educated to promote thinking, knowledge, and understanding."¹⁵² When the opportunity for complexity or reflection within education is stunted, this relationship becomes compromised. Democracy cannot function on the back of 'fixed ideals' or 'stuck

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 208.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Wahlström, N. (2020) 'Democracy and curriculum – the task still before us.' *European Educational Research Journal*, 19(4), 355.

procedures’ with little to no critical engagement.¹⁵³ Gutmann reinforces this notion, suggesting that a teacher’s most valuable contribution to education is taking on the role of “cultivating the capacity for critical reflection, particularly on topics and norms worthy of democratic deliberation.”¹⁵⁴ Cultivating this capacity for critical reflection within the process of learning establishes an opportunity for students to learn by *doing* rather than passively ingesting. This encourages the development of future citizens that are able to make their own decisions because they have been taught *how* to think rather than simply *what* to think.¹⁵⁵ It is on this point that I turn to a discussion of the type of learning that I argue is capable of producing these results, which I refer to as learning for democracy.

SECTION 4.2: LEARNING FOR DEMOCRACY

I first learned the concept ‘learning for democracy’ in Hilton Smith’s paper ‘It’s Education For, Not About, Democracy’.¹⁵⁶ The label denotes an increasingly common sentiment within philosophical discourse at the intersection of education and democracy. It proposes that we must learn *how* to think and *how* to participate in democracy, rather than solely learn *about* democracy and its prescribed positions and behaviours. Smith criticizes merely learning about democracy:

On the whole, public education has tried to serve its democratic obligations by developing curricula about democracy, loaded with patriotic sentiments and based on a rigid presentation of the nation’s governmental institutions that is detached from social, historical, and economic patterns. Then schools have sought to inculcate those curricula in factory-metaphor schooling via textbooks and teacher-

¹⁵³ Ibid. 354.

¹⁵⁴ Fitz, J. A., & Nikolaidis, A. C. (2020) ‘A Democratic Critique of Scripted Curriculum.’ *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 52(2), 208.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Smith, H. (1995) ‘It’s Education For, Not About, Democracy’. *Educational Horizons*, 73(2).

selected activities, reinforced by tests and graduation requirements. Most students find it repetitious, boring, and irrelevant.¹⁵⁷

For Smith, as for Fitz and Nikolaidis, schooling focused on producing fixed answers and passive regurgitation is not capable of fostering active democratic deliberation or participation.¹⁵⁸ If a curriculum that relies on scripts and aims to treat every student the same is not capable of fostering democracy, the question becomes what kind of learning can achieve this. What does learning *for* democracy actually look like?

Fitz and Nikolaidis suggest that educating for democracy¹⁵⁹ has a ‘dual aim’. One is to educate students about what civic engagement entails and what it requires, which includes learning ‘the mechanics of a democracy’ and empowering students with the necessary skills to become capable of participating in their democracy.¹⁶⁰ The second aim is to take steps to actually ‘foster democratic communities in schools.’¹⁶¹ As Nel Noddings put it, “We need to have not only the knowledge and skills for public participation but also those for how to “get about” in an environment of political freedom.”¹⁶² Ultimately, these authors are each suggesting that students ought to be equipped with the skills to think for themselves and to navigate their social and political communities through critical engagement, as capable citizens. This sentiment echoes

¹⁵⁷ Smith, H. (1995) ‘It’s Education For, Not About, Democracy’. *Educational Horizons*, 73(2), 63.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 65

¹⁵⁹ Educating for democracy is used here to denote the same practice as learning for democracy, perhaps better understood as its counterpart. Educating for democracy is phrased as what we hope the curriculum can provide, and learning for democracy describes what we hope the students receive/develop as a result of being educated for democracy.

¹⁶⁰ Fitz, J. A., & Nikolaidis, A. C. (2020) ‘A Democratic Critique of Scripted Curriculum.’ *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 52(2), 199.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 199.

¹⁶² Noddings, N. (1999) ‘Renewing Democracy in Schools’. *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 80, (8), 2.

Dewey's line of reasoning in *Democracy and Education*, where he makes it clear that it is not control or domination that we ought to exercise over youth throughout their learning journey, but *guidance*.¹⁶³

According to Dewey, educating for democracy should consist of “assisting through cooperation the natural capacities of the individuals guided.”¹⁶⁴ Dewey wants us to maintain a sense of creativity and individuality within our educational curriculum and to foster this in students precisely because it mirrors the spirit of democracy. He suggests that “[a]ctive habits involve thought, invention, and initiative in applying capacities to new aims. They are opposed to routine which marks an arrest of growth. Since growth is the characteristic of life, education is all one with growing; it has no end beyond itself.”¹⁶⁵ Democracy is intended to be a collective pursuit, informed by diverse perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds.¹⁶⁶ It relies on a collective willingness to critically engage with one another, *despite* our difference in perspective, experience, and background, and to work to publicly deliberate about choices in pursuit of outcomes that satisfy the collective to the greatest extent possible.¹⁶⁷

Wahlström acknowledges this significant role in education for experience, saying, “[Dewey] placed the concept of experience at the centre of the meaning of both

¹⁶³ Dewey, J. (2001) *Democracy and Education*. Penn State Electronic Classics Series, 28.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 57.

¹⁶⁶ Garrison, J. (1994) ‘Dewey, Eros, and Education.’ *Education and Culture*, 11(2), 3.

¹⁶⁷ Fitz, J. A., & Nikolaidis, A. C. (2020) ‘A Democratic Critique of Scripted Curriculum.’ *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 52(2), 198.

democracy and education. Thus, democracy itself must be understood as educative in terms of people's experiences."¹⁶⁸ When experience is placed at the center, as Wahlström recognizes, it necessitates the sense of creativity and individuality that Dewey seeks because our experiences are informed by our imagination, perception, and individuality. Garrison builds on this, saying, "Wisdom desires the best, has the aesthetic power to imagine the possible in the actual situation, and has the discipline to achieve it in action. Such wisdom lies beyond knowledge of actual facts."¹⁶⁹ What Dewey, Wahlström, and Garrison all emphasize here is a sense of freedom of thought and expression. When students are told what to think and how to think about it, the opportunity for experience¹⁷⁰ to inform the development of knowledge and understanding is diminished, if not altogether removed.

Recognizing the relevance and importance of our own lived experience and perspective is integral to being able to engage with *other* perspectives. Gutmann points to this by highlighting "two 'preconditions of democratic deliberation' which must be cultivated in schools, namely: 'the recognition of common interests among citizens, and the related commitment to reconsider our individual interests in light of understanding the interests of others'."¹⁷¹ According to these conditions, our diversity of perspective, lived experience, and background are requirements for making democratic deliberation

¹⁶⁸ Wahlström, N. (2020) 'Democracy and curriculum – the task still before us.' *European Educational Research Journal*, 19(4), 353.

¹⁶⁹ Garrison, J. (1994) 'Dewey, Eros, and Education.' *Education and Culture*, 11(2), 1.

¹⁷⁰ As well as the senses of creativity and individuality that are part of these experiences.

¹⁷¹ Fitz, J. A., & Nikolaidis, A. C. (2020) 'A Democratic Critique of Scripted Curriculum.' *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 52(2), 199.

possible. This sentiment is perhaps best summarized by Dewey when he says, “To subject mind to an outside and ready-made material is a denial of the ideal of democracy, which roots itself ultimately in the principle of moral, self-directing individuality.

Misunderstanding regarding the nature of the freedom that is demanded for the child is so common that it may be necessary to emphasize the fact that it is primarily intellectual freedom, free play of mental attitude, and operation which are sought.”¹⁷² Curriculum that does not hold space for growth, diversity, or freedom of thought is bound to restrain us rather than foster the kind of the freedom that democracy is interested in preserving. Inculcating rigid facts and fixed answers is a barrier to democracy and by extension, to establishing a free and just society.

Garrison exemplifies this sentiment, saying, “Without an expansive imagination, one willing to go beyond approved limits, it is impossible to be free. More than that, without imagination, it is impossible to be moral. Morality means the capacity to choose and to be responsible for what is chosen. Tyranny always wants us to have the responsibility without the capacity.”¹⁷³ We want youth to mature into capable citizens who make moral choices, but that will not come to fruition if we insist on *telling* them what to do rather than *guiding* them through the process of making their own choices. Garrison touches on an important observation here, that we must cultivate students’ capacities to make moral choices if we want to attribute responsibility to them. We cannot

¹⁷² Dewey, J. (2001) *Democracy and Education*. Penn State Electronic Classics Series, 235.

¹⁷³ Garrison, J. (1994) ‘Dewey, Eros, and Education.’ *Education and Culture*, 11(2), 3. The meaning that capacity holds in this quote is the same meaning that I attribute to ability in chapter three.

expect students to become active, moral, citizens if they are never provided with the opportunity to cultivate the skills that will empower them to become this kind of citizen. This insight is crucial to my discussion of capacity and ability. I've argued that while people may have responsibility, we cannot reasonably expect them to act on this responsibility if they've never had the opportunity to cultivate their capacity into ability.

This section has laid out what a curriculum geared towards learning for democracy should be focused on. This curriculum seeks to guide students through the development of certain skills as they cultivate their imagination and individuality. It also strives to center experiences and encourages critical engagement with different perspectives, so students learn and grow in the pursuit of satisfying competing interests. In the following section, I aim to build on the foundation of learning for democracy established here by investigating the kind of educational aims that can address structural injustice. Ensuring that students have the opportunity to cultivate their capacity into ability and act on the responsibility the SCM shows them they have is one part of the overall approach of gearing curriculum towards learning for democracy.

SECTION 4.3: EDUCATIONAL AIMS FOR ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE

The beginning of this chapter sought to highlight the differences between scripted curriculum and what I have referred to as learning for democracy. The latter kind of learning focuses on critical inquiry and the development of certain capacities that are required to be justice-oriented and democratically involved citizens. But it is not

sufficient to merely identify learning for democracy as the type of education that is best suited for promoting democratic citizenship in general. We must build on this, narrowing the focus further to discuss the kind of educational aims that we want to include within this overall approach, so as to also cultivate our capacity into ability and address structural injustice. In their paper ‘What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy’, Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne highlight that there are numerous ways in which we can pursue educating for democracy. This wide range of options therefore pushes us to be intentional and specific with the goals we wish to secure when building curriculum focused on learning for democracy. For example, do we want students to be focused on personal responsibility, community-based civic participation, or structural injustice? This section discusses Westheimer and Kahne’s contribution to the discussion. In doing so, I highlight their observation that different guiding aims will produce different results, despite each approach focusing on educating for democracy.¹⁷⁴ Through my explication of their discussion of three conceptions of citizenship (and how these conceptions influence educational aims), I show that a combined approach of educating students to be participatory and justice-oriented citizens can steer educational curriculum in the direction my project seeks.

Westheimer and Kahne set out to understand the ways in which our understanding of ‘what good citizenship *is* and what good citizens *do*’ influence our political choices. In

¹⁷⁴ Kahne, J. and Westheimer, J. (2004) ‘What kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy’. *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(2), 263.

other words, they recognize that the political choices we make, as a result of what we believe a good citizen is or does, have a ripple effect on the state of our politics, and on our democracy more generally.¹⁷⁵ Westheimer and Kahne suggest that “it is not enough to argue that democratic values are as important as traditional academic priorities. We must also ask what kind of democratic values. What political and ideological interests are embedded in or easily attached to varied conceptions of citizenship?”¹⁷⁶ Holding different priorities in regard to what we understand citizenship to be and what knowledge and skills we want students to be equipped with alters the kind of beliefs, capacities, and commitments that these students hold, which has a ripple effect on democracy itself.¹⁷⁷ Westheimer and Kahne outline three different conceptions of citizenship that can guide a curriculum aimed at educating for democracy: personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented. Notably, their data shows that the way in which these programs are structured (i.e., the conception of citizenship the program is based on) has the ability to influence political outcomes. This is because programs such as these affect the view students have of society, such as its strengths and weaknesses, and the role that they (the students) come to believe they should take on as members of a democracy.¹⁷⁸ A curriculum designed with one of these conceptions of citizenship in mind does not need to be focused on *only* one; these conceptions are not mutually exclusive, but they are different. This means that an approach focused on one conception of citizenship is capable of advancing the goals of a second conception. However, in order for this

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 237.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 263.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 238.

advancement to be significant, the goal of furthering the second conception must be an ingrained part of the guiding intention.

The first conception of citizenship Westheimer and Kahne discuss is the personally responsible citizen. A personally responsible citizen is one who acts responsibly within their own community, participating in initiatives such as “picking up litter, giving blood, recycling, obeying laws, and staying out of debt.”¹⁷⁹ This idea of citizenship encourages the development of character and personal responsibility via values such as ‘honesty, integrity, self-discipline, and hard work.’¹⁸⁰ While there are certainly merits to possessing values such as these, there are limits to a personally responsible view of citizenship, which Westheimer and Kahne are swift to point out. “Critics [of personally responsible citizenship] note that the emphasis placed on individual character and behavior obscures the need for collective and public sector initiatives; that this emphasis distracts attention from analysis of the causes of social problems and from systemic solutions; that volunteerism and kindness are put forward as ways of avoiding politics and policy.”¹⁸¹ This critique is not meant to dissuade the development of values and traits that personally responsible citizenship seeks to cultivate. Instead, it highlights that these traits *alone* are not sufficient to cultivate a flourishing democracy, despite making valuable contributions such as ‘fostering social trust and willingness to commit to collective efforts.’¹⁸² The focal points of this conception –

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 241.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 243.

¹⁸² Ibid. 243-44.

honesty, goodness, volunteerism – while fantastic for nurturing good people living in community with one another, are not necessarily democratically-focused. Westheimer and Kahne pose the concern that if we focus too heavily on developing these traits and do not prioritize other democratically focused initiatives, we could actually hinder the flourishing of democracy, rather than aid it. They also mention that “a focus on loyalty or obedience ... works against the kind of critical reflection and action that many assume are essential in a democratic society.”¹⁸³ What can result from overemphasis on the personally responsible citizen is youth believing that citizenship does not entail or require a sense of democratic governance, collective social action, or politics more generally.

The second conception of citizenship discussed by Westheimer and Kahne is the participatory citizen, understood as an individual who “actively participate[s] in the civic affairs and the social life of the community at the local, state, or national level.”¹⁸⁴ A main objective of this kind of educational curriculum is to teach students how governments and community-based organizations operate in addition to how they (students) can participate within these organizational efforts to help those in need.¹⁸⁵ Westheimer and Kahne evaluated the output of employing a participatory citizenship program by focusing on data collected from two of the ten programs developed as part of the Surdna Foundation’s Democratic Values Initiative.¹⁸⁶ Westheimer and Kahne’s study employed a mixed-methods approach, which “combines qualitative data from

¹⁸³ Ibid. 244.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. 241.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. 242.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 246.

observations and interviews with quantitative analysis of pre/post survey data.”¹⁸⁷ This research showed them that The Madison program, which was developed to cultivate a participatory conception of citizenship, was able to accomplish exactly what it set out to do: “promote civic participation consistent with a vision of participatory citizenship, to link service to academic content, and to provide a meaningful research experience.”¹⁸⁸ This program did not, however, make any strides in cultivating an understanding of structural injustice, or of the ‘root causes’ of problems that students engaged with. For instance, the students in this program covered meaningful and sometimes controversial topics, such as prisoners being forced to work for little or no earnings, but they did not question the structural influence or intersectional features that perpetuate issues like these,¹⁸⁹ such as race, social class, sentencing, etc.¹⁹⁰ Westheimer and Kahne write, “we did not find evidence in student interviews, in our observations, or in our analysis of survey data that the students examined ideological or political issues related to interest groups or the political process, the causes of poverty, various groups’ access to health care, or the fairness of various systems of taxation ... [instead] students focused on particular programs and policies and aimed for technocratic, value neutral analysis.”¹⁹¹ If we want educating for democracy to cultivate a sense of awareness and empowerment within youth to tackle ingrained, systemic, issues and to question the root causes of these

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. For a detailed overview of how they conducted their study and compiled data, please refer to pages 246-48.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. 253.

¹⁸⁹ This is one example of the issues this group of students covered, but did not engage with from a critical, structural standpoint. For additional examples, refer to pages 253-54.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 254.

issues, then it appears that a participatory conception of citizenship *alone* cannot provide us with these results.

The final conception of citizenship that Westheimer and Kahne cover, the justice-oriented citizen, appears to be the best-equipped to provide the kind of results my discussion of learning for democracy seeks. As Westheimer and Kahne describe it,

Justice-oriented educators argue that effective democratic citizens need opportunities to analyze and understand the interplay of social, economic, and political forces ... advocates of these priorities use rhetoric and analysis that calls explicit attention to matters of injustice and to the importance of pursuing social justice.¹⁹²

Similar to a participatory conception of citizenship, the justice-oriented citizen focuses on collectively navigating issues within their communities. Where a justice-oriented citizen differs, however, is in *how* they engage with these collective issues. A justice-oriented citizen seeks to understand the root causes of these problems, critically engaging with the structural components of the social problems impacting their communities.¹⁹³ Westheimer and Kahne sum up this distinction between the three conceptions nicely, saying, “if participatory citizens are organizing the food drive and personally responsible citizens are donating food, justice-oriented citizens are asking why people are hungry and acting on what they discover.”¹⁹⁴ Importantly, while justice-oriented curriculum may be more explicit in its coverage of political issues and of the social and political injustices that inform them, it does not “imply an emphasis on particular political perspectives,

¹⁹² Ibid. 242.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

conclusions, or priorities.”¹⁹⁵ In fact, the entire intention behind a justice-oriented curriculum is not to present a fixed opinion to students for them to accept as fact and regurgitate at a later date. Instead, the goal of such a curriculum is to work with students to develop their ability to engage with informed analysis and discussion, questioning the social, political, and economic structures at play.¹⁹⁶ Westheimer and Kahne acknowledge that “it is fundamentally important that the process respect the varied voices and priorities of citizens while considering the evidence of experts, the analysis of government leaders, or the particular preferences of a given group or of an individual leader.”¹⁹⁷ The ability to engage with different voices and perspectives is foundational to a justice-oriented conception of citizenship. To be capable of navigating different conceptions of ‘good’ or ‘right’ and allow it to inform our own understanding of complex social and political issues is necessary in order to form collective solutions for collective problems.

When conducting their study, Westheimer and Kahne took note of the success of The Bayside program, which sought to implement a justice-oriented conception of citizenship. One of the teachers involved in structuring and implementing the program described their goal as turning “students into activists [who are] empowered to focus on things that they care about in their own lives and to ... show them avenues that they can use to achieve real social change, profound social change.”¹⁹⁸ The key word here is

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. 243. An example of this that Westheimer and Kahne discuss is the variety of different structural approaches to addressing poverty, all of which span across the board of different political parties and agendas.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. 254.

‘empowered’. The goal is not to insist upon a certain viewpoint for the students to adopt, no matter how justice-oriented that perspective might be. Instead, the objective is to ensure that students become capable of *acting*, that the progress they contribute to comes from them – their intellect and their actions – rather than something they are explicitly instructed to do. As Westheimer and Kahne put it, “[a]t the center of Bayside’s approach were commitments to critical and structural social analysis, to making the personal political, and to collective responsibility for action.”¹⁹⁹ Perhaps the biggest difference between a justice-oriented approach to educating for democracy and others is that it does not insist on students adopting a certain set of values, behaviours, or characteristics. Instead, it seeks to enhance understanding and to illustrate to students that social analysis and critical engagement can bring us much closer to our goal than merely ‘behaving’ in a way that corresponds with a particular list of values.²⁰⁰

Importantly, the benefits of a justice-oriented approach should not undermine the contribution that adopting certain values and behaviours can play in the overall approach we take to educating for democracy. I argue that the values and behaviours that an approach such as participatory citizenship endorses can help to facilitate the type of analysis and engagement that a justice-oriented approach undertakes. The personally responsible conception of citizenship also endorses useful and important values, such as honesty, integrity, and hard work, but as Westheimer and Kahne point out, these are not

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. 257.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 258.

especially *democratic* values. As such, the cultivation of these values is likely better allocated to other aspects of a well-rounded educational curriculum. Conversely, encouraging students to value community and take civic participation seriously (both of which are concepts centered in a participatory conception of citizenship) can help foster democratic engagement because these values serve as a launching pad to conduct the kind of critical social analysis that a justice-oriented conception cultivates. This is why I argue that incorporating both conceptions into an approach for educating for democracy is beneficial for producing the kind of learning I've described as learning for democracy. We want to cultivate within youth the awareness, knowledge, and skills to develop their own opinions, to be capable of engaging with different perspectives that help to stretch their own, and to act on these insights, all in service of developing more just modes of conduct within their communities as well as in society more broadly.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has investigated and discussed the implications of different education models. Particularly, it has illustrated the contrast between an approach that relies on scripted curriculum versus approaches that prioritize learning for democracy. This analysis has focused not only on the difference in their approaches to structuring and delivering curriculum, but also on the implications that these differences have on democratic life. I have argued that static, scripted curriculum that produces passive learning and focuses on the regurgitation of facts is too complacent to do anything other than hinder the success of democracy, let alone advance it. Rather, I've advocated for a

different style of educating, one that prioritizes the cultivation of certain skills that empower students to become active, democratic citizens. I've referred to this style as learning for democracy, an educational approach that pursues the development of skills rather than the memorization of established facts. This style of learning and educating prioritizes guidance over prescription, skill-building over memorization, and the celebration of diversity over surface-level 'equity' (which too often, as we've seen, is really just economic efficiency).

The views discussed in this chapter provide a landscape within which we can navigate the transformation of our capacity into ability to act on the political responsibility the SCM shows us we each have. Importantly, the substance of this chapter consists of my understanding of this landscape and explaining the importance of including the goal of advancing democracy within our educational aims. My goal is to build on this existing work and to apply it to the aims of my project. Throughout this chapter, I have highlighted the benefits of moving away from scripted curriculum and towards a more dynamic, diverse, and engaged learning model. Moreover, the role of this discussion within my project is to highlight the educational aims we must incorporate within our education systems and our curriculums in order to cultivate democratically capable and justice-oriented citizens. The following chapter examines a current secondary curriculum as an example with these aims in view,²⁰¹ and evaluates whether the current

²⁰¹ Ontario Secondary School Curriculum.

curriculum is capable of producing outcomes for students that are consistent with learning for democracy.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUPPORTING PARTICIPATION IN COLLECTIVE ACTION:
ASSESSING THE PROBLEM OF INABILITY WITHIN THE ONTARIO
SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

INTRODUCTION

The aims of this dissertation are (i) to identify and examine what I understand to be a practical challenge for agents to act on their political responsibility; and (ii) to propose a solution for how we might empower agents to overcome this challenge. Chapter one provided an overview of political responsibility as exemplified by Young's Social Connection Model (SCM) and explored the benefits of viewing the SCM through the lens of Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. Chapter two explored three advantages of understanding our responsibility to address structural injustice as Young conceives it, establishing support for my agreement with Young that the SCM is a useful model for recognizing our responsibility for structural injustice. Chapter three introduced the challenge I see for agents to act on their political responsibility, which is that most people lack the ability to understand this responsibility and subsequently to take action to discharge it, despite having the capacity to do so. To develop this point, I introduced a distinction between capacity and ability in regard to forward-looking responsibility, which I claim can help us understand how we might hold agents responsible for an injustice that they are not yet able to address. To transform an agent's *capacity to act* into an *ability* to take collective action, I proposed that public education is a strategic place to provide citizens with an opportunity to take part in the preparation they need to discharge political responsibility, as conceived by Young.

Chapter four then detailed different teaching and learning styles, with the aim of discerning which best facilitates the goals I outlined in chapter three. I suggested that ‘learning for democracy’ is the educational approach that can best accomplish these goals, producing democratically capable and justice-oriented citizens. A justice-oriented curriculum will not present students with static opinions, rigid perceptions, or try to develop fixed perspectives. Rather, it will strive to cultivate within students the ability to critically engage with the information they consume and to become capable of discussing and questioning the social, political, and economic landscapes of their society.²⁰² This discussion of learning as a method to foster an agent’s ability to discharge their political responsibility raises an important question: is this type of learning already underway? If it is, then it can be argued that the concern I’ve outlined about an agent’s inability to act on their political responsibility is not as serious as I’ve taken it to be. If this is the case, then it can be said that a lack of participation in efforts to address structural injustice is due to an agent’s unwillingness, not their inability. While unwillingness may remain a problem, my project takes up the issue of inability. To question whether the kind of learning for democracy I highlighted in the preceding chapter is presently underway, this fifth chapter engages with an example of a current curriculum, namely that of the Ontario Secondary School (OSS) System.

²⁰² Kahne, J. and Westheimer, J. (2004) ‘What kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy’. *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(2), 243.

Primarily, this chapter questions whether present curriculum requirements are capable of achieving the aims that the Ministry of Education (MoE) has set for itself, as well as the aims I've outlined for my project. Specifically, I look at the curriculum breakdown for two required courses – grade 10 History and grade 10 Civics – to investigate whether they cultivate the kind of knowledge my project is interested in. Importantly, when I discuss preparation to transform capacity into ability, I refer to this as developing the necessary knowledge and skills. But when I evaluate the curriculum breakdown for these courses, I chiefly question whether they are producing adequate knowledge, rather than knowledge *and* skills.²⁰³ This is for two reasons: (i) a curriculum breakdown focuses more on what students are being taught/learning and is less focused on *how* this teaching/learning is taking place, which makes it challenging to determine via a curriculum breakdown what *kind* of teaching/learning is occurring; and (ii) the skills of critical inquiry require a baseline of being informed with sufficient knowledge. If my analysis of the curriculum shows that these courses are not building a sufficient knowledge base for students, we can reasonably assume the development of critical inquiry skills is compromised as well.

First, I provide an overview of the MoE's stated aims more generally, as well as the specific aims they've set for grade 10 History and grade 10 Civics.²⁰⁴ To investigate

²⁰³ While most of my discussion focuses on content rather than skills, I do engage with some questions regarding skills, such as the way the content is delivered, the kind of critical questions included in the curriculum, and what kind of critical analysis we can expect this to prompt.

²⁰⁴ While a review of the entire OSS curriculum would certainly be beneficial, it is not feasible within the scope of my project. Moreover, it is not necessary in order to accomplish the aims I've set for this

whether this curriculum is producing a sufficient knowledge base for responding to structural injustice, I assess the curriculum with regard to specific topics for each course. For History, I evaluate coverage in relation to: (i) representation of women's history in Canada; (ii) representation of colonization in Canada; and (iii) representation of systemic racism in Canada. For Civics, I evaluate the curriculum breakdown in relation to: (i) the coverage on democracy and rights; and (ii) the representation of government and citizenship roles and responsibilities. Chapter six then outlines two suggestions for how we might begin to bridge the disconnect between the MoE's stated learning objectives and the outcomes I outline in this chapter. These suggestions will focus on (i) how much time is allocated to certain topics/aims; and (ii) what topics are prioritized as 'required' versus which are recommended as 'supplemental.'

SECTION 5.1: AN OVERVIEW OF OSS EDUCATIONAL AIMS

In this chapter, I argue there is a disconnect between what the MoE states as both their general educational aims as well as their curriculum-specific aims, and the practical execution of how they set out to secure these outcomes. I suggest that the curriculum structure for both the grade 10 History and grade 10 Civics courses in Ontario are not set up to produce the aims they are purported to produce, nor the aims I've set for my project. Moreover, as explained in chapter three, if Ontarians are not provided with the opportunity to be adequately informed, then the Ontario provincial government, and by extension the Canadian federal government, are not fulfilling their democratic

dissertation. I seek to (i) identify the existing barrier to discharging civic responsibilities and acting on political responsibilities exemplified by the SCM and (ii) propose a solution.

responsibility to adequately educate citizens for democratic life in Canadian society. As a result, Ontario citizens are not given the opportunity to fulfill their corresponding duty to participate in their education and to cultivate their ability to become active and informed democratic citizens.

This section details some of the roles (such as teachers, principals, parents, etc.) that the MoE suggests are integral to a student's education and the responsibilities that they consider these roles to have, as well as the general educational commitments that they make.²⁰⁵ The MoE acknowledges that a student's responsibility to participate in their own learning and development grows with them²⁰⁶. As they mature through their education, their experience can help to facilitate further learning. The MoE's hope is that students will be able to "(i) look for and act on new ideas and opportunities for learning, communicating with teachers and peers, expressing their voice, and developing their agency to become lifelong learners; (ii) reflect on their learning, then receive, provide, and respond to meaningful feedback, and set their own goals; (iii) take responsibility and organize themselves so that they can engage in learning both collaboratively with peers and independently."²⁰⁷ The role of teachers is to help guide and facilitate the development

²⁰⁵ It is worth noting that as a Ministry of the provincial government, the MoE carries out these education commitments on behalf of the Ontario government.

²⁰⁶ It's worth noting that this perspective – that a students' responsibility to participate in their education grows with them – is aligned with my argument that education should be viewed as a right grounded by correlative duties by both the government and citizens. It affirms my suggestion that citizens have a duty/responsibility to participate in their education.

²⁰⁷ Ontario Ministry of Education. *Curriculum and Resources*. Government of Ontario. <https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/program-planning/considerations-for-program-planning/roles-responsibilities>

of these skills. They are responsible for planning, organizing, and executing the activities that enable students to achieve the learning goals stated above, using “appropriate, high-impact instructional strategies, including culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy, to support students in achieving the curriculum expectations.”²⁰⁸ These activities should be both ‘relevant and authentic’ for students in an effort to support students in applying what they learn in school to their life outside it. The MoE suggests that “equitable opportunities to relate lived experiences, knowledge, and skills to wider contexts motivate students to learn in meaningful ways and to become lifelong learners.”²⁰⁹ To facilitate equitable opportunities, the MoE suggests that it is a teacher’s responsibility to reflect on their own internalized biases and values and to seek out relevant content, mentors, and learning opportunities in an effort to increase their effectiveness of delivering content that upholds this intention of advancing equity.²¹⁰ Interestingly, this is the kind of initiative that Young has in mind when she suggests we each have a responsibility to become aware of how we contribute to injustice and to take action to address background conditions of injustice. At first glance, it is promising that the MoE is encouraging the same kind of knowledge and awareness the SCM prescribes. Lastly, the role of principals is “to support student learning ... [by] ensure[ing] that the Ontario curriculum is being effectively implemented in every classroom using a variety of instructional approaches, and that appropriate resources are made available for teachers and students.”²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

The two courses that I review in this chapter – grade 10 History and grade 10 Civics – fall under the umbrella of Canadian and World Studies. The MoE claims that the Canadian and World Studies courses strive to “enable students to become responsible, active citizens within the diverse communities to which they belong. As well as becoming critically thoughtful and informed citizens who value an inclusive society, students will have the skills they need to solve problems and communicate ideas and decisions about significant developments, events, and issues.”²¹² Regarding the grade 10 History course specifically, one of the guiding aims is to develop a sense of time. This involves developing a working understanding of history, such as past societies, events, and developments.²¹³ The MoE wants students to be able to “interpret and analyse historical, as well as current, issues”²¹⁴ and to be capable of “developing historical literacy skills by analyzing and interpreting evidence from primary and secondary sources.”²¹⁵ In addition, one of the main goals of the Civics course is to develop a sense of responsibility. The MoE aims to empower students to develop a good understanding of how to contribute to change within the various communities to which they belong and understand how to participate within different modes of action that can produce change.²¹⁶ The MoE also wants students to be capable of “analysing current political issues, and assessing methods and processes that can be used to influence relevant political systems to act for the common good; assessing the power and influence of different people involved in civic

²¹² Introduction, ‘The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10’ [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)] p. 6.

²¹³ Ibid. 7.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

issues, using political perspective; developing a respect and appreciation for different points of view on various political issues.”²¹⁷

At first glance, these educational aims are aligned with the goals I’ve set for my project. Moreover, these goals appear to fulfill an important political commitment made by the Ontario government to educate their citizens and to equip them to participate in democratic life. And as I outlined in chapter three, the right kind of education and the cultivation of skills to participate in democracy are the same knowledge and skills required to engage with the SCM and to work to address structural injustice.

The MoE claims that they want to cultivate informed, engaged, and responsible citizens who are actively involved in their democracy. However, the objective of this chapter is to review the curriculum for both grade 10 History and grade 10 Civics to assess whether the MoE’s aims – and by extension, the aims of my project – are advanced by the curriculum breakdown. In light of this analysis, I argue that neither the learning objectives stated by the MoE nor the objectives I’ve set for my project, are supported by the current curriculum utilized by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

SECTION 5.2: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE HISTORY AND CIVICS CURRICULUM

²¹⁷ Ibid.

Before engaging directly with the curriculum, it is worth quickly explaining that in Ontario, the curriculum breakdown is organized by a system of what the MoE refers to as ‘strands’, with each strand further broken down into subsections. The method behind this is as follows: each strand can be identified by a specific aim. For instance, for the History curriculum, all but the first strand corresponds with a time period. Strand A focuses on particular skills related to historical literacy, but all proceeding strands focus on a specific time period. So, Strand B focuses on important events, persons, etc. from 1914 – 1929, and so on, until the final Strand E, which is 1982 to the present.²¹⁸ For the Civics course, these three strands are broken down by broad aims or topics. So, Strand A focuses on political inquiry and skill development, Strand B on civic awareness, and Strand C on civic engagement and action.

Importantly, each strand is broken down into subsections and each subsection explains a particular aim or topic that the curriculum strives to engage with. These aims are then supplemented by optional examples for further discussion, as well as sample questions. For instance, Strand B1 of the History curriculum focuses on Social, Economic, and Political Context; Strand B2 focuses on Communities, Conflict, and Cooperation; and Strand B3 focuses on Identity, Citizenship, and Heritage. These topics each serve as an ‘umbrella’, and it is within this umbrella that topics are further broken down into smaller, achievable aims. So, for example, within the context of 1914-1929,

²¹⁸ The History strands can be identified as follows: A: Historical Inquiry and Skill Development; B: Canada, 1914-1929; C: Canada, 1929-1945; D: Canada, 1945-1982; E: Canada, 1982 to the Present.

B1.1 asks students to ‘identify major demographic trends in Canada between 1914 and 1929 ... and assess the significance of these trends for different groups and communities in Canada.’²¹⁹ This topic is then supplemented by optional talking points and sample questions for further discussion. To put it simply, the curriculum is continuously broken down into increasingly specific categories. It is first categorized by time period (for instance, Strand B), then broad aims (Strand B.1), and then finally, topics covered within these aims (Strand B1.1, B1.2, etc.).

Lastly, it is worth noting that the latest version of this curriculum was published in 2018, which is the version that I focus my analysis on. Some of the secondary literature incorporated in the following sections focuses on the 2013 version. Any commentary included here that correlates with the 2013 version focuses on components of the curriculum that have remained the same between both versions, or makes observations that have remained relevant despite the changes made in the 2018 version.

SECTION 5.3: THE HISTORY CURRICULUM – REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

This first section assessing the History curriculum breakdown seeks to evaluate the representation of women within grade 10 History coverage. Titled ‘Canadian History since World War I, Grade 10 (Academic)’,²²⁰ this course is the only required History course in all four years of high school, and it covers the period from 1914 to the present.

²¹⁹ ‘The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10’ [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)]. 112.

²²⁰ There are both Applied and Academic streams of courses within the Ontario High School curriculum; my project engages with the Academic course curriculum breakdowns.

Given the enduring and ongoing prevalence of gender-based injustice, as well as structural and systemic restraints that exist for those who are not heterosexual, cis-gendered men, having a working understanding of how individuals have been treated on the basis of gender throughout history is an important part of a student's knowledge base. As Young notes, having an informed understanding of how a structural or systemic harm has come into existence and subsequently been maintained is a valuable part of our strategy for taking collective action to address any form of injustice. Ultimately, Young's note here highlights that an agent's ability to navigate structural barriers to gender equity requires an awareness that these barriers exist, how they operate, as well as how they have been perpetuated throughout our history.

Fine-Meyer and Llewellyn discuss the need for informed and critical coverage on gender in curriculum in their paper 'Women Rarely Worthy of Study: A History of Curriculum Reform in Ontario Education'. Fine-Meyer and Llewellyn rightly assert that "general references [to women and/or gender-based issues] assume that teachers have the time and resources to broaden traditional narratives. This is challenging since timelines in current textbooks remain fairly consistent with earlier texts in which women are considered in terms of their support for men and families, within a clear division of labour."²²¹ They further detail this 'supporting role' attributed to women within history

²²¹ Fine-Meyer, R., and Llewellyn, K. (2018). 'Women Rarely Worthy of Study: A History of Curriculum Reform in Ontario Education'. *Historical Studies in Education / Revue d'histoire De l'éducation* 30 (1) p. 62. <https://doi.org/10.32316/hse/rhe.v30i1.4541>. While this observation that Fine-Meyer and Llewellyn make is based on the 2013 version of the curriculum, the issues they point to remain consistent in the 2018 version, despite revisions.

coverage, making note of the language that is often used to describe the role or impact that women have had. They mention that “while the grade 10 mandatory history course includes a wide range of women’s historical experiences, the focus on women’s “contributions,” “changing roles,” and “turning points” continues to place women’s historical narratives as adjunct to the main text.”²²² Fine-Meyer and Llewellyn’s point remains relevant, despite the updated curriculum that came into effect in September of 2018. The language – and, sadly, the importance – associated with the coverage of women in the Canadian History grade 10 course has not changed with this updated curriculum. Discussions pertaining to women and their experiences are still reduced to mentions such as “the number of women in the labour force and the type of work they performed”;²²³ “an increase in the number of women in the workforce”;²²⁴ “why were Indigenous women excluded from these acts [Military Voters Act and the Wartime Elections Act].”²²⁵ There is also mention of ‘women’s suffrage organizations’²²⁶, a ‘suggestion’ for how teachers might choose to fulfill the requirement of students “[e]xplain[ing] the goals and accomplishments of some groups, organizations, and/or movements in Canada, including First Nations, Metis, and Inuit organizations and/or movements, that contributed to social and/or political cooperation during this period.”²²⁷ Lastly, ‘the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union’ is mentioned when the curriculum asks students to “explain how some individuals, groups, and/or organizations contributed

²²² Ibid.

²²³ ‘The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10’ [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)]. 112.

²²⁴ Ibid. 113.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid. 114.

²²⁷ Ibid.

to Canadian society and politics during this period and to the development of identities, citizenship, and/or heritage in Canada.”²²⁸ There is one sample question²²⁹ included within this strand that relates to women, which asks “[i]n what ways did the work of Nellie McClung and other women’s rights activists challenge notions of citizenship in Canada?”²³⁰ You’ll notice not only that this is a very reductive coverage of women, but also that, as Fine-Meyer and Llewellyn suggest, it also almost always fails to *center* them. Discussions about women are almost always in relation to other themes or topics that are the focus of attention (such as the ‘labour force’, ‘workforce’ ‘Military Voters Act’ and the ‘Wartime Elections Act’). Even the brief mention of ‘women’s suffrage organizations’ is slotted into the periphery, included as a mere suggestion for one way in which a teacher could choose to illustrate ‘the goals and accomplishments of some groups, organizations, and/or movements in Canada’. Women as individuals, and the impact these notable occurrences (like the changing work force or certain wartime acts) have had on them, their experiences, and their collective well-being, is not clearly included within the mandatory coverage in any of the examples mentioned here.²³¹

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Throughout my analysis of the curriculum, I refer to topics being allocated to ‘sample questions’ or ‘examples for further discussion’. The significance of a topic being allocated to these areas of the curriculum breakdown is that these are examples and/or suggestions, meaning that the topic is not required to be discussed, but rather, is merely an option.

²³⁰ ‘The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10’ [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)]. 114.

²³¹ This section (5.3) aims to highlight the value I see in discussing and evaluating the lived experience of women throughout the time period of 1914 to the present. I suggest that doing so helps to develop students’ awareness and understanding of gender inequity. However, one might argue that discussing women as members of a larger civic body or society in general is sufficient coverage of their lived experience. But Fine-Meyer and Llewellyn show that women are not even discussed in this minimal way (i.e., as part of a society). Rather, women are merely discussed in a peripheral context, allocated to the sidelines rather than recognizing them in the content coverage as equal and full members throughout this time period.

There is only one subsection included within the coverage of this time period (1914-1929) that directly and specifically engages with the topic of women. This subsection is laid out as follows:

B3.3 describe some significant developments in the rights and lives of women in Canada, including First Nations, Metis, and Inuit women, during this period (*e.g., women's contribution to the war effort, their expanding role in the workplace, and the impact of these on their role in the family and in society*²³²; *the role of Inuit women in the whaling and sealskin industry; women's role in suffrage, temperance, and other social movements; repercussions of the loss of status for First Nations women whose husbands were enfranchised because of wartime service; new political rights for some women; changing social mores in the 1920s and their impact on women; the participation of women in organized sports*), and explain the impact of these developments on Canadian citizenship and/or heritage. *Sample questions:* "What role did World War I play in changing the lives of some Canadian women? How did the war affect the lives of First Nations, Metis, and/or Inuit women?" "Do you think the Persons Case was a turning point for women in Canada? Why or why not? What impact did the final decision in that case have on Canadian citizenship?"²³³

As is clearly stated in this excerpt from the curriculum, most of this subsection focuses on the 'role' of women,²³⁴ once again positioning them in relation to other topics rather than making their experience the topic itself. Examples for further discussion in this section mention 'new political rights for some women', which is a casual way to not-quite acknowledge that this time period saw monumental gains in the women's suffrage

²³² Notably, despite Fine-Meyer and Llewellyn referencing the 2013 version of the curriculum documents, this 2018 version has the exact same phrasing ('women's contribution to the war effort, their expanding role in the workplace, and the impact of these on their role in the family and in society') that Fine-Meyer and Llewellyn evaluate to highlight the context within which women are discussed – almost always in relation to other topics that remain the central focus; in this case, the military and WWI.

²³³ 'The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10' [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)]. 115.

²³⁴ While discussing the different 'roles' of women does, in a way, affirm their agency, it also positions them as adjacent to the point of focus, rather than making *them* the point of focus. While History at this level is more often than not about big social, economic, and political movements than it is about individual experience, women as an identity – and how this identity was treated and/or impacted by these big social, economic, political movements – is relevant to the Historical coverage happening at this level, in this course.

movement.²³⁵ These gains were admittedly sporadic and involved a host of intersecting biases i.e., race played a major factor in which women received the right to vote and when (hence, the ‘some’ in ‘new political rights for some women’). None the less, there were significant strides made in regard to a woman’s right to be a politically active citizen within Canada during this time period, none of which are explicitly engaged with in this section. For instance, on January 28th in 1916, “Women in Manitoba who [were] of British descent or citizenship, 21 or older, and not otherwise disqualified [were] given the right to vote provincially and to hold provincial office. Other provinces soon follow[ed] and grant[ed] women the right to vote in provincial elections.”²³⁶ Louise McKinney and Roberta MacAdams were the first women in Canada to be elected to a provincial legislature on June 7th, 1917, in Alberta.²³⁷ Many Canadian women were granted the right to vote federally on May 24th, 1918 – this right unjustly excluded First Nations women who did not give up their status and treaty rights.²³⁸ The year 1919 saw women become eligible to hold office in the House of Commons, and on March 23rd, 1921, Mary Ellen Smith became the first female Cabinet member in the entire British Empire.²³⁹ And on October 18th, 1929, “The Imperial Privy Council ruled that women were legally ‘persons’ and therefore could hold seats in the Canadian Senate.”²⁴⁰ Notably, while women’s

²³⁵ *Women’s suffrage*. The Canadian Encyclopedia.

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/timeline/womens-suffrage>

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

suffrage is included in the examples for discussion, and the Person's case is mentioned in the sample questions, the importance that is placed on these topics is very telling.

Both the women's suffrage movement and the Person's case are included as examples or suggestions meant to extend or exemplify the stated aims of the subsection, but they are *not* given their own mandatory coverage. This, once again, relegates the discussion of women throughout our history to the sidelines, relying solely on the inclination of individual teachers to provide students with useful (and arguably, necessary) context for the treatment and rights of women, both historically and present-day. As I stated at the outset of this section, if citizens today do not have an informed perspective on the historical and ongoing oppression of women, their ability to act on the responsibility the SCM shows them they have to participate in collective action and correct barriers to gender equity is compromised. The kind of engaging and dynamic learning that I discuss in chapter four requires the foundation of an informed knowledge base. Without this awareness and knowledge, the skills of critical thinking and democratic engagement cannot propel agents towards the kind of collective action that addresses barriers to gender equity. Importantly, throughout the curriculum breakdown women are discussed infrequently, and when they are mentioned, it is often in a peripheral context. Women and their experiences are relegated to being topic-adjacent and more often than not, are allocated to 'suggestions for discussion'. Strand D (1944 – 1982) sees more discussion of women, with D2.3 seeking to "analyse key aspects of life for women in Canada, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women, with a focus on what changed

during this period and what remained the same.”²⁴¹ But similar to the treatment in section B3.3, the suggestions for discussion and sample questions included here still position women in relation to other broader topics, such as the labour force, the family structure, the domestic worker scheme, etc.²⁴² There are some brief mentions of other implications pertaining to the female experience, such as their ‘political participation and representation’, ‘the challenges facing Indigenous and other racialized women’, etc. but again, there is no attention paid to the particular experiences of women, or to the milestones achieved pertaining to their lived experience during this time period. For instance, it was in 1964 that women were granted the right to open a bank account without their husband’s signature.²⁴³ In 1972, Sylvia Ostry was appointed as Chief Statistician of Canada – the first and only woman to hold this role.²⁴⁴ 1972 also saw the first Black woman, Rosemary Brown, elected as a Member of Parliament. These notable events that center the experiences of women are omitted, and the opportunities that do exist to engage with women’s experiences within the curriculum breakdown are assigned to optional suggestions for how broader topic aims might be achieved. This, once again, relies on individual teachers to, as Fine-Meyer and Llewellyn point out, “have the time and resources to broaden traditional narratives.”²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ Ibid. 122.

²⁴² Chengh. (2020). *Canadian Women’s History*. PSAC NCR. <https://psac-ncr.com/canadian-womens-history/>

²⁴³ Government of Canada, S. C. (2022). *Women’s History Month: The Remarkable Life of Sylvia Ostry*. <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/1980-womens-history-month-remarkable-life-sylvia-ostry>

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Fine-Meyer, R., and Llewellyn, K. (2018). ‘Women Rarely Worthy of Study: A History of Curriculum Reform in Ontario Education’. *Historical Studies in Education / Revue d’histoire De l’éducation* 30 (1) p. 62. <https://doi.org/10.32316/hse/rhe.v30i1.4541>.

The final section in the grade 10 History curriculum overview, Strand E (1982 – present) mentions the word “women” only three times, sending a very clear message that reflecting on the evolving role of women throughout our history is not something that needs to be connected to our present reality. This is the only section that focuses on the time period of the present, which means that while some teachers might encourage students to make connections to the present when touching on instances of the past, this once again relies on the teacher’s intentions, rather than providing explicit and mandatory opportunities for students to draw connections and develop understandings about how the progression of our history has led us to the present. Significant milestones in relation to the experience and treatment of women have occurred since 1982, and without an exploration of some of these key moments, it is unlikely that students will be able to develop an accurate and informed understanding of gender inequity. Once again, this accurate and informed understanding of gender inequity is *necessary* in order for students to develop their ability to recognize the responsibility they have to correct structural injustice and to participate in collective solutions. We cannot expect this knowledge base to be developed when vital events pertaining to women’s rights and women’s treatment throughout Canadian history are left out of mandatory coverage within the only required History course in all of secondary education. For instance, Kim Campbell is the only female Prime Minister in Canada’s history,²⁴⁶ serving six months, from June to November

²⁴⁶ Guppy, N. and Luongo, N. (2015), The Rise and Stall of Canada's Gender-Equity Revolution. Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie, 52: 250. <https://doi-org.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/10.1111/cars.12076>

of 1993. When the federal election was called in November of 1993, her government was voted out of office, and she lost her seat. And yet, her name is not mentioned once within the History curriculum documents. Nor is it mentioned that Canada has yet to *vote in* a female Prime Minister, nor that a person of color has never served as Prime Minister. The only individuals to be elected to the highest political office in Canada are white men – a fact that is quite obviously worth acknowledging.

It wasn't until 1983 that it became a crime in Canada for a man to rape his wife. Before Bill C -127 was enacted, marital rape was not recognized as a crime, which means husbands could not be prosecuted for raping their wives.²⁴⁷ There is little to no recognition of the ways that women, and frankly any gender identity other than straight, cis- men, have been systematically persecuted within Canadian history. Same sex marriage, or moreover same-sex love, is barely acknowledged within the curriculum, with its only mention being a fleeting example for possible discussion, referred to simply as “the Civil Marriage Act of 2005.”²⁴⁸ It certainly isn't acknowledged that intolerance for any kind of love or partnership other than that which conforms to traditional, heteronormative standards, persisted throughout most of Canada's history. The systemic effects are still very much present today.²⁴⁹ For instance, it wasn't until 1970 that The Canadian Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from their list of mental

²⁴⁷ Koshan, J. (2010) ‘The Legal Treatment of Marital Rape and Women's Equality: An Analysis of the Canadian Experience’. p. 3.

²⁴⁸ ‘The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10’ [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)]. 126.

²⁴⁹ Lapointe, A. A. (2015) ‘Queering the Social Studies: Lessons to be learned from Canadian secondary school Gay-Straight Alliances.’ *The Journal of Social Studies*. 40 (205-215)

disorders.²⁵⁰ It is reasonable to assume that considering someone's sexuality to be a 'mental disorder' up until fifty-five years ago holds relevant implications for the way these individuals are treated today. Additionally, there is not a single mention of transgender individuals, gender non-conforming folk, or any gender or sexual-orientation identity that 'deviates' from what has traditionally reigned as 'normal'. This encourages students to think that these identities do not warrant recognition, and do not have a place in our history or our present. Their existence is simply deemed not worthy of acknowledgement. This lack of recognition is a direct harm that these individuals suffer. Consequently, not only does lack of adequate historical coverage serve as a barrier to equipping youth with sufficient knowledge and awareness, but this lack of coverage also produces structural harms to those whose identity and lived experience are not acknowledged.²⁵¹ These structural harms consist not only of a lack of recognition, but also a *silencing*. Failing to acknowledge different identities or lived experiences within content coverage covers up their existence and produces a false narrative of our history. This false narrative conveniently aids in maintaining the imbalance of power already in place and serves as a direct barrier to addressing injustice.

SECTION 5.4: THE HISTORY CURRICULUM – REPRESENTATION OF COLONIZATION

²⁵⁰ Chengh. (2020). *Canadian Women's History*. PSAC NCR. <https://psac-ncr.com/canadian-womens-history/>

²⁵¹ The nature of this harm can be further explained by discussions expanding on different forms of epistemic injustice. Miranda Fricker does this nicely. See: Fricker, M. (2013) 'Epistemic justice as a condition of political freedom?' *Synthese*, 190, 1317–1332. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-012-0227-3>

There is significantly more coverage and acknowledgment of Indigenous peoples within the updated curriculum (2018) than there is of women, other gender expressions, or gender inequity more broadly. The issue with this coverage lies not in its infrequency, but in the way Indigenous history is discussed and represented within the curriculum. Serothy Ramachandran illustrates this distinction nicely with her discussion of multiculturalism and the representation of indigenous and ethnic minorities within the grade 10 Canadian History curriculum in her chapter ‘The Persistence of Multicultural Rhetoric in Curriculum: An Analysis of the Changes to the Grade 10 History Curriculum from 1973 to 2018’ in *Critical Perspectives on White Supremacy and Racism in Canadian Education*. She says, “in discussing various issues faced by minority ethnic groups in Canadian history, there is often a narrative of progress, relegating issues faced by racialized peoples to the past and constructing issues of racism as differences of opinion.”²⁵² Positioning these issues as ‘differences of opinion’ is a frequently deployed tool within the official curriculum. She points to the discussion of Africville as a prime example. Africville was a small community in Halifax, consisting of mostly African residents who relocated to Nova Scotia after fleeing enslavement. The community faced decades of neglect and racial prejudice, coming to a head in the 1960s when Africville residents were forced to relocate out of Africville after the Halifax city council decided to demolish the community and to use it as an industrial site. Not mentioned in earlier iterations of the curriculum, Africville is phrased as a ‘difference of opinion’ in the 2013

²⁵² Ramachandran, S., Kempf, A., & Watts, H. (2024). The Persistence of Multicultural Rhetoric in Curriculum: An Analysis of the Changes to the Grade 10 History Curriculum From 1973 to 2018. In *Critical Perspectives on White Supremacy and Racism in Canadian Education* (1st ed., pp. 124). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003399360-9>

and 2018 editions. The question is phrased as follows: “What were the positions of Africville residents, municipal politicians in Halifax, and other groups on the expropriation of Africville? How might you explain differences in these points of view?”²⁵³ Ramachandran suggests that “Although the term expropriation helps illuminate some sense of a power dynamic, the positioning of these various perspectives as equal but different allows for a dismissal of white supremacist hierarchies at play and allows the Grade 10 Canadian History course to propagate colonial narratives that dismiss racism.”²⁵⁴ This particular example focuses on the treatment of a Black community in Halifax, but it also perfectly illustrates the way in which colonialism and the treatment of Indigenous peoples in Canada is represented within the curriculum documents.

In chapter four, I acknowledged that reflection and critical inquiry are vital to the process of students learning to think for themselves. But once again, it is important to recognize that this process of learning critical inquiry should be informed by an accurate knowledge base. Debating the truth of established facts is not the appropriate place to practice skills of critical reflection. There is an important difference between reflecting on the occurrence of something and, for example, reflecting on the ethics of something. For a discussion of Africville, an appropriate area to explore critical engagement might be to ask students to reflect on how the residents of Africville were treated, and to discuss how

²⁵³ ‘The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10’ [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)]. 121.

²⁵⁴ Ramachandran, S., Kempf, A., & Watts, H. (2024). The Persistence of Multicultural Rhetoric in Curriculum: An Analysis of the Changes to the Grade 10 History Curriculum From 1973 to 2018. In *Critical Perspectives on White Supremacy and Racism in Canadian Education* (1st ed., pp. 124). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003399360-9>

elements of race influenced this treatment. Importantly, the appropriate point to critically reflect on is not the ‘differences of opinion’ between the oppressor and the oppressed. When critical inquiry is positioned in this way, it reduces the acceptance of reality to a student’s opinion, which aids in producing a skewed perception of our history. This is a perception that almost always leans in favor of the oppressor, which is exemplified by how the grade 10 History curriculum is structured. There is no clear, objective, recognition of the violence and inhumanity that has shaped our colonial history. In fact, nowhere in the curriculum is it acknowledged that colonialism in Canada is an instance of ‘cultural genocide’. Coverage of residential schools within the curriculum exemplifies this unwillingness to acknowledge the severity of colonial rule. It, too, is discussed in terms of ‘different opinions’ and ‘experiences.’ Strand B2.5 focuses specifically on the residential school system, its goals being to:

describe how the residential school system and other government policies and legislation, as well as the attitudes that underpinned them, affected First Nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals and communities during this period (*e.g., with reference to mandatory attendance at residential schools; provincial day schools, training schools; amendments to the Indian Act to prohibit First Nations from hiring legal counsel to pursue land claims; limitations on voting rights; the pass system; racist attitudes underlying government policies*) and explain some of their long-term consequences. *Sample questions:* “What were the educational experiences of First Nations Métis children during this period? How did the experiences of children in residential schools differ from the experiences of children in training schools and in public schools?”²⁵⁵

Similar to the discussion of Africville that Ramachandran highlights, this excerpt from the curriculum does not come close to articulating the severity of residential schooling. It does not convey the impact it had on Indigenous children who were forced to endure it or

²⁵⁵ ‘The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10’ [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)]. 114.

the lasting implications that it has had, and continues to have, for generations of Indigenous communities. As mentioned, this curriculum document is the latest published edition for grade 10 History curriculum in Ontario public schools and “beginning in September 2018, all Canadian and world studies courses for Grades 9 and 10 will be based on the expectations outlined in this document.”²⁵⁶ Importantly, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) published a report in 2015 which “concluded that residential schools were “a systematic, government-sponsored attempt to destroy Aboriginal cultures and languages and to assimilate Aboriginal peoples so that they no longer existed as distinct peoples.” The TRC characterized this intent as “cultural genocide.””²⁵⁷ In 2006, a legal settlement was reached between ‘Survivors, the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Representatives and the defendants, the federal government and the churches responsible for the operation of the school.’²⁵⁸ This settlement produced The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement.

Broadly speaking, this agreement consisted of a public apology by the Canadian government, financial compensation for victims, and the creation of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which aimed to “inform all Canadians about what happened in the Residential Schools by witnessing and documenting the truth of Survivors, families, communities and anyone personally affected by the Schools.”²⁵⁹ Specifically,

²⁵⁶ Ibid. 3.

²⁵⁷ *Residential School History*. NCTR. (2025). <https://nctr.ca/education/teaching-resources/residential-school-history/>

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

Schedule N of the agreement, titled ‘Mandate for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’ stipulated that one of the goals of the commission was to “(d) Promote awareness and public education of Canadians about the system and its impacts”²⁶⁰ However, it is disingenuous to suggest that Canadian youth are sufficiently educated ‘about the system and its impacts’ if the curriculum documents structuring their education do not include an accurate representation of what this system consisted of. Asking students to compare how “the experiences of children in residential schools differ[ed] from the experiences of children in training schools and in public schools”²⁶¹ entirely misrepresents the severity of residential schooling. The residential school system is not remotely comparable to public schooling. To even hint at this suggestion not only misrepresents the truth of colonialism, but also serves as a compounding, structural harm towards Indigenous communities. Not only have these individuals suffered the initial harm of enduring the residential school system and the ongoing ripple effects of its existence, but now they suffer a new wave of harms by our continual denial of their experience, and our nation’s responsibility for it.²⁶²

The sample questions that are included within the curriculum overview to emphasise inquiries into the impact of residential schools in Canada highlight something

²⁶⁰ The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement: Schedule N, ‘Mandate for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’ p.2. Accessed via Indian Residential Schools Class Action Settlement-Settlement Agreement. (n.d.). <https://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/settlement.html>

²⁶¹ ‘The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10’ [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)]. 114.

²⁶² The nature of this harm can be further explained by discussions expanding on different forms of epistemic injustice. As mentioned in an earlier footnote, Miranda Fricker does this nicely. See: Fricker, M. (2013) ‘Epistemic justice as a condition of political freedom?’ *Synthese*, 190, 1317–1332. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-012-0227-3>

different. Instead of showing the government's commitment to educating students on Canadian history, these questions underscore what I understand to be 'performative' intentions. Acknowledgements of Indigenous reality have very clearly been slotted into a predetermined curriculum structure. In other words, instead of revising the curriculum to account for the TRC report, it appears as though the curriculum has been supplemented by including Indigenous persons as a 'group' for students to consider in relation to the concepts and events that already made up the curriculum. The curriculum itself has not been meaningfully updated. I would argue that this has been done in an effort to superficially account for the TRC's recommendations. It's clear that most sections throughout the history curriculum overview state the aims of the section and then at the end, slot in "including First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Communities".²⁶³ In fact, Butler and Milley, in their paper 'Reframing Citizenship Education: The Shifting Portrayal of Citizenship in Curriculum Policy in the Province of Ontario, 1999-2018' say, "[the 2018 curriculum revision] incorporated the perspectives of Indigenous peoples throughout the history courses, in response to Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (OME, 2017). However, the revisions to the documents have not altered the original structure (strands, overall expectations, specifics, expectations, etc.) established by the PC government in 1999."²⁶⁴

²⁶³ 'The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10' [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)]. 112.

²⁶⁴ Butler, J. K., & Milley, P. (2020). Reframing citizenship education: The shifting portrayal of citizenship in curriculum policy in the province of Ontario, 1999-2018. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 28(83). p. 7. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.28.5162>

Admittedly, the curriculum overview does mention some important considerations, such as “reference to mandatory attendance at residential schools; provincial day schools, training schools; amendments to the Indian Act to prohibit First Nations from hiring legal counsel to pursue land claims; limitations on voting rights; the pass system; racist attitudes underlying government policies.”²⁶⁵ There is no doubt that these are important events to reflect on, but they are not nearly sufficient to recognize the relationship – both past and present – between the Canadian government and Indigenous populations of Canada. Moreover, the critical inquiry questions included for this topic (“what were the educational experiences of First Nations and Metis children during this period? How did the experiences of children in residential schools differ from the experiences of children in training school and in public schools?”)²⁶⁶ lack a sufficient acknowledgement of what residential schools were, as previously stated.

These questions are phrased to compare and contrast public and residential schools, implying that residential schools were merely a poorly executed education system that was unsuccessful in providing Indigenous children with a fair or adequate education. It fails to acknowledge that residential schools were, in reality, a governmentally funded instrument of genocide. And while content and subsequent analysis should always be structured with age-appropriate considerations in mind, it is worth pointing out that if we are capable of discussing genocide in other instances,²⁶⁷ and

²⁶⁵ ‘The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10’ [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)]. 114.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid. 128.

even go so far as to define it within the curriculum documents,²⁶⁸ then we are certainly capable of discussing the treatment of Indigenous populations within Canada in the same, *accurate* light. Failing to do so is not only a clear violation of the agreed terms of The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, but it is also an instance of blatant hypocrisy. If the MoE deems other instances of genocide and human rights violations as necessary to include within Canadian History, than Canada's own hand in the violation of human rights should be included as well.

Another significant issue that appears to be under- and mis- represented is that of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada. There are only three mentions of it within the Academic curriculum overview, all of which are clear instances of it being included within the peripheral focus. It's first mentioned as an example for discussion in section E1.4, where students are asked to "describe some key political developments and/or government policies that have affected Indigenous peoples in Canada since 1982."²⁶⁹ The other two mentions are in section E2.1, which focuses on describing "some significant ways in which Canadians have cooperated and/or come into conflict with each other since 1982 ."²⁷⁰ It is mentioned first as an example for discussion as 'the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls'²⁷¹ and also, as a sample question: "Do you think that the establishment of the National Inquiry

²⁶⁸ Ibid. 184. Genocide is defined as "The planned, systematic destruction of a national, political, religious, or ethnic group."

²⁶⁹ Ibid. 126.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid. 127.

into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls reflected a change in government attitudes towards First Nations, Métis, and Inuit issues? Why, or why not?”²⁷² This characterization, once again, undermines the lived experience of Indigenous women and girls, and Indigenous communities more generally. This depiction, as well as the space dedicated to its discussion within the curriculum (which you’ll notice is not mandatory, but merely slotted into examples for discussion or sample discussion questions) is not remotely sufficient to acknowledge the severity of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls within Canada. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) recognized gender-based violence, particularly against Indigenous women and girls, as well as transgender and two-spirit persons, as ‘one of the most pressing issues in Canada.’²⁷³ I’ll reiterate that the TRC report was published in 2015, which left ample time to include these valuable insights within the updated curriculum published in 2018. From what we can see here, the MoE does not consider Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls within Canada to be worthy of mandatory coverage, despite the commitment made within the TRC report to inform Canadians on these issues.

Elizabeth Brulé writes in her paper ‘The REDress Project: Casting an Indigenous Feminist Worldview on Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Programs in Ontario’s Universities’ that “In the past three decades, there have been more than 1,000 unresolved

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Brulé, Elizabeth. (2018) “The REDress Project: Casting an Indigenous Feminist Worldview on Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Programs in Ontario’s Universities.” In *Studies in Social Science*. Vol 12. Issue 2, p. 338.

cases of murdered or missing Indigenous women, girls, transgender and two-spirit persons in this country ... [and] According to the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC, 2009), Indigenous women are three times more likely to be killed by a stranger than non-Indigenous women, and five times more likely to be killed by someone they know.”²⁷⁴ In 2010, Winnipeg based artist Jamie Black developed the REDress project, created to be a physical representation of the unsolved cases of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.²⁷⁵ Despite its inception eight years prior to the publication of the latest version of curriculum, the REDress Project is not mentioned once within this document. Conversely, the Canadian government has claimed that it is committed to fulfilling the aims of the TRC. The Ministry of Education has suggested that “Ontario’s education system, at all levels, must respect diversity, promote inclusive education, and work towards identifying and eliminating barriers to equal treatment in education that limit the ability of students to learn, grow, and contribute to society.”²⁷⁶ I argue that these commitments are undermined by the MoE’s decision to leave initiatives such as this, as well as the discussion of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls more broadly, out of mandatory curriculum coverage. Acting on our political responsibility requires that agents first *understand* how an injustice operates, as well as how it is produced. It is unrealistic to assume that agents can take part in collective action to reshape processes that produce injustice when they are not exposed to the truth of how

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ontario Ministry of Education. *Curriculum and Resources*. Government of Ontario. <https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/program-planning/considerations-for-program-planning/human-rights-equity-and-inclusive-education>

injustice is produced or maintained. In the context of colonialism, we cannot address barriers to inequity and injustice until we recognize how they have existed and continue to exist. Failing to engage with the historical and ongoing lived experience of Indigenous populations of Canada is a barrier “to equal treatment in education that limit[s] the ability of students to learn, grow, and contribute to society.”²⁷⁷ Based on the insights discussed here, the MoE clearly has some barriers to address within its own curriculum coverage.

SECTION 5.5: THE HISTORY CURRICULUM – REPRESENTATION OF SYSTEMIC RACISM

This section assesses how the grade 10 History curriculum represents and discusses the history of systemic racism within Canada. In line with the two previous discussions on gender equity and colonialism within Canadian history, an acknowledgement of the role of systemic racism throughout Canada’s history is integral to understanding how racism persists structurally today. If this knowledge base is not established, agents are faced with the challenge of fulfilling their responsibility to participate in collective action without the knowledge or awareness necessary to inform their participation.

In her paper ‘Ghosts and Shadows: A History of Racism in Canada’, Maureen Kihika provides a succinct description of what the term ‘racism’ can convey. She explains that the term racism feels ‘meaningful’ because it explains “the systemic and structural

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

processes through which certain populations are marginalized, excluded, and disadvantaged based on physical categorizations and socially constructed ideologies”.²⁷⁸ As such, she says that “Race and racism therefore provide a coherent and institutionally supported systemization of who is imagined as part of a collective citizenry and who is excluded.”²⁷⁹ One of the MoE’s stated goals is to provide antidiscrimination education because they believe that it “promotes equity, healthy relationships, and active, responsible citizenship.”²⁸⁰ It would reasonably follow then, that discussions about racism, and in particular, highlighting its historic and systemic implications, is necessary to achieving these goals.

The word “racism” appears only twice in the academic grade 10 History curriculum overview. One of these times is an example for further discussion²⁸¹ where students are asked to “describe some significant ways in which Canadians have cooperated and/or come into conflict with each other since 1982.”²⁸² ‘Racism and hate crimes’ is not an accurate way to describe instances of Canadians ‘coming into conflict with each other’. Racist treatment and hate crimes are instruments of systemic domination. They are tools deployed to maintain white supremacy and colonial power structures. Yet, it is a far stretch to assume that students are able to deduce this understanding from the way this topic is presented in the curriculum. The only other

²⁷⁸ Kihika, Maureen. (2013) ‘Ghosts and Shadows: A History of Racism in Canada.’ *Canadian Graduate Journal of Sociology and Criminology*. Vol 2, No. 1. 38.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ ‘The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10’ [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)]. 48.

²⁸¹ This occurs in section E2.1.

²⁸² ‘The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10’ [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)]. 126.

instance where the word ‘racism’ is used occurs within the only section dedicated to engaging with injustice on the basis of race. Strand B2.6 reads:

describe attitudes towards as well as discrimination against and other significant actions affecting non-Indigenous ethnocultural groups in Canada during this period (*e.g., with reference to racism and antisemitism, segregation, discrimination in jobs and housing, restrictions imposed by the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923, groups helping new immigrants*), and explain their impact. *Sample questions:* “What attitudes are reflected in the treatment of British Home Children in Canada during this period? Why did former Home Children later seek an apology from the Canadian government?” “In what ways was the No. 2 Construction Battalion a reflection of attitudes towards African Canadians?”²⁸³

While this subsection clearly highlights instances of discrimination against ethnic minorities, it is worth restating that this is the *only* section in the entire History curriculum where the focus is on the unjust treatment of minorities other than Indigenous peoples. Given that the time coverage within this curriculum spans from 1914 to the present, this lack of engagement is very alarming. Canada’s history is riddled with racist attitudes, policies, and prejudice. Failing to account for this history within the curriculum results in a lack of transparency regarding not only how systemic racism has impacted generations of Canadians, but also how it continues to impact us today. As mentioned, the word “racism” is used only twice within the academic curriculum overview, which spans over 100 years of Canadian history. The word “discrimination” is used only three times. And while notable events regarding racist attitudes and policies are sometimes noted throughout the curriculum, I argue that the importance placed on these topics as well as the emphasis with which they are conveyed is not appropriate. For instance, during WWII Canada utilized the *War Measures Act* to systematically persecute Japanese Canadians –

²⁸³ Ibid. 114.

many of whom were Canadian citizens – in light of Pearl Harbour.²⁸⁴ The Canadian federal government allowed fear to morph into hatred and used the *War Measures Act* to suspend the basic rights and freedoms of its citizens to relocate them to internment camps, labour fields, and war camps.²⁸⁵ The coverage of this racist treatment is simply referred to as ‘the decision to intern Japanese Canadians’,²⁸⁶ slotted in as an example for further discussion when students are asked to “describe the main causes of some key political developments and/or government policies in Canada during this period.”²⁸⁷ This is the manner in which the curriculum ‘recognizes’ the occurrence of Canada persecuting its citizens. The federal government blatantly violated Japanese Canadian’s human rights, but according to the MoE this brief line representing an optional discussion topic is the recognition that it deserves. But let’s not forget that “The Ontario equity and inclusive education strategy focuses on respecting diversity, promoting inclusive education, and identifying and eliminating discriminatory biases, systemic barriers, and power dynamics that limit the ability of students to learn, grow, and contribute to society.

*Antidiscrimination education continues to be an important and integral component of the strategy.”*²⁸⁸ There is a clear inconsistency here. This shows us that, on one hand, the MoE claims it is committed to an equitable and inclusive education strategy while on the other hand, it blatantly fails to provide students with any real opportunity to explore or

²⁸⁴ McRae, Matthew. *Japanese Canadian Internment and the Struggle for Redress*. CMHR. <https://humanrights.ca/story/japanese-canadian-internment-and-struggle-redress#:~:text=They%20were%20first%20sent%20to,then%20harvesting%20the%20sugar%20beets.>

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ ‘The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10’ [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)]. 117.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ (emphasis added). Ibid. 48.

engage with the parts of our history that most impact the state of equity and inclusivity today, both within our schools and our communities more broadly. This is a clear and unapologetic instance of performative action. It indicates that the steps the MoE is willing to take do not result in any clear effort to promote antidiscrimination initiatives within Ontario public education systems.

It is not enough for the MoE to simply articulate that they have the intention to cultivate equity and inclusivity. The curriculum, and moreover the mandatory coverage of certain topics, events, and concepts, must *align* with this intention. When we fail to engage with marginalized perspectives, we maintain a nationalist perspective of history,²⁸⁹ which only serves to uphold the status quo of white supremacy, not dismantle it. Timothy Stanley argues in his paper ‘The Struggle for History: Historical Narratives and Anti-racist Pedagogy’ that we must engage with the narratives and experiences that have long been marginalized in order to peel back our white-washed perception of Canadian history. He says, “In order to be successful in fostering new meanings and possible ways of being, anti-racist pedagogy needs to create conditions that allow for the telling of these other stories and the exploration of non-nationalist historical frameworks.”²⁹⁰ Moreover, “nationalist narratives need to be seen relationally; the construction of the nation needs to be placed in relation to the experiences of many

²⁸⁹ Timothy Stanley explains a nationalist perspective of history in his paper ‘The Struggle for History: historical narratives and anti-racist pedagogy’. He suggests that nationalist perspectives provide a whitewashed perception of history, one that leaves marginalized identities and their lived experiences to the margins and does not account for their experiences in the telling of our history.

²⁹⁰ Stanley, T. (1998) ‘The Struggle for History: historical narratives and anti-racist pedagogy’, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 19:1, 43, DOI: 10.1080/0159630980190103

groups ... this in turn requires recognising racisms as constitutive of the nation and its categories, central to its imagining and actively involved in its construction.”²⁹¹

The chosen time period is also important. For instance, because the grade 10 History coverage begins in 1914, there is no discussion of Canada’s involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Canada has made a concerted effort to glaze over their own involvement in slavery, instead choosing to highlight their role in aiding enslaved Africans via the Underground Railroad.²⁹² Kihika notes that this “has given Canada a proud but nonetheless disingenuous reputation as a nation whose origin and early history is consistent with the modern philosophical ideals of inclusivity and multiculturalism.”²⁹³ This is an example of what Stanley refers to as a nationalist narrative, when in reality, “Slavery was ... a legal and acceptable institution in both French and English Canada and was practiced extensively from 1628 to 1833.”²⁹⁴ While Canada’s history of legalized slavery occurred before 1914, that does not mean that the lasting implications of slavery have not continued into the present. This means that while direct engagement with slavery during 1628 to 1833 may not ‘fit’ within the curriculum timeline, an acknowledgment of the systemic impact on Black people in Canada throughout each of these different periods of our history certainly does. For instance, B2.6 asks the sample question “In what ways was the No. 2 Construction Battalion a reflection of attitudes towards African

²⁹¹ Ibid. 48.

²⁹² Kihika, M. (2013) ‘Ghosts and Shadows: A History of Racism in Canada.’ *Canadian Graduate Journal of Sociology and Criminology*. Vol 2, No. 1. 39.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid. 36.

Canadians?”²⁹⁵ This question notes that during WWII there existed within Canadian society an ‘attitude’ towards African Canadians. It would be beneficial to engage with what might have precipitated this attitude. And yet, the word “African” appears only twice in the curriculum overview, and this is the only instance in which it is used to refer to African Canadians and their experience within Canada. This lack of recognition certainly has an impact on Black students today. They are forced to engage with a racist perception of history that does not acknowledge the lived experience of their ancestors, or the treatment they receive today as a *continuation* of this history.

Hippolite-Smith, in their chapter ‘School as a Raceless Institution: The Operations of Multiculturalism on the Invisibilizing of Black Youth’, suggests that Black students experience harm simply by existing within public education systems. In other words, moving through a public education system, in and of itself, is not a safe experience for Black students. They say, “[t]he education system has become one of the most important institutions used to promote and reinforce the continuations of white supremacy behind the veil of multiculturalism. By virtue of their experiences and outcomes in school, most Black students are faced with their first form of systemic racism, where they are coded and fixed with negative tropes that weaponize their bodies and deny them opportunities, rendering them invisible to society.”²⁹⁶ This means that not only are Black and ethnic minority children enduring systemic racism within the education system itself, but they

²⁹⁵ ‘The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10’ [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)]. 114.

²⁹⁶ Hippolyte-Smith, V., Kempf, A., & Watts, H. (2024). School as a Raceless Institution: The Operations of Multiculturalism on the Invisibilizing of Black Youth. In *Critical Perspectives on White Supremacy and Racism in Canadian Education* (1st ed., pp. 182). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003399360-14>

also are not exposed to the kind of curriculum or teaching and learning strategies that can equip them to reflect, process, and convey their experiences. This lack of adequate coverage in the curriculum serves as a barrier to developing the knowledge and skills needed to empower not only students who experience racialized harm, but *all students*, so they can understand racism as a social and political power structure. This knowledge is required for them to become capable of taking steps to stop the reproduction of race-based harm and to reduce their own contributions to this reproduction.

As a result, I argue, performative coverage within the curriculum serves as a separate, structural harm. It compounds the systemic harms these youth already face as racialized bodies moving through a racist system. This is why teaching and learning strategies such as critical race theory (CRT) can be (and frankly, should be) an integral part of our approach to navigating systemic racism. George et al. capture the contribution of CRT nicely, saying “In this way, [critical race theory] CRT captures and problematizes how inequality functions within formal schooling, while unpacking how social structures and institutions, like provincial Ministries of Education, perpetuate structural inequity by inadequately recognizing race as a substantial and systemic oppressive feature.”²⁹⁷ The MoE’s insistence on teaching students a nationalist perspective on history acts as a barrier to addressing the ongoing impact of racialized harms that have occurred throughout our history. By failing to include an exploration of these harms within the curriculum, we are

²⁹⁷ Rhonda C. George, Reana Maier & Karen Robson (2020) Ignoring race: a comparative analysis of education policy in British Columbia and Ontario, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 23:2, 160, DOI: 10.1080/13613324.2019.1679754

collectively refusing to acknowledge their existence. I argue that the MoE cannot claim to pursue equitable and inclusive educational goals while simultaneously teaching students that instances of inequity throughout our history do not exist or do not warrant our attention.

SECTION 5.6: THE CIVICS CURRICULUM – DEMOCRACY AND RIGHTS

I turn now from History to Civics. The grade 10 Civics course in Ontario focuses on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, the role of different governments, as well as the various ways that citizens can get involved in political processes.²⁹⁸ The MoE states that, “[t]he study of civics supports students in becoming informed, engaged, and active citizens in the various communities to which they belong, whether at the local, national, or global level.”²⁹⁹ Civics is divided into three strands. Similar to History, the first strand focuses on the development of skills and what it refers to as ‘political inquiry’. From the curriculum overview, it appears that political inquiry entails students learning how to: engage with different source materials and assess their significance, develop a variety of questions to guide their inquiry, assess the credibility of sources, and communicate their findings.³⁰⁰ There are some mentions of notable political concepts, events, or documents, but this discussion is allocated to optional examples for further discussion or sample questions (i.e., this is optional coverage, not mandatory). For instance, section A1.5 asks students to “use the concepts of political thinking (*i.e.*,

²⁹⁸ ‘The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10’ [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)]. 149.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid. 157-8.

political significance, objectives and results, stability and change, political perspective) when analyzing and evaluating evidence, data, and information, and formulating conclusion and/or judgements about issues, events, and/or developments of civic importance.”³⁰¹ As an example for further discussion, it is suggested that students could “use the concept of political significance when analyzing the impact of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms on Canadian society.”³⁰² This is a very casual way to position discussions or engagement with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms – it does not adequately reflect the Charter’s importance. In fact, all mentions of the Charter but one are allocated to optional coverage. The only mandatory engagement with the Charter occurs when students are asked to “demonstrate an understanding that Canada’s constitution includes different elements, and analyse key rights of citizenship in the constitution, with particular reference to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.”³⁰³ While this acknowledges the significance of the Charter as a key document of the Canadian Constitution, it is concerning that this is the only instance in which the Charter is directly engaged with in the mandatory curriculum. One section in a half-credit course does not seem like enough time or space to fully grasp the significance of the Charter. Moreover, there does not appear to be any direct engagement with the Charter beyond what is stipulated as ‘key rights of citizenship’. And while evaluating the Charter in light of the key rights of citizenship is certainly important, it is not the *only* context within which we should consider the Charter.

³⁰¹ Ibid. 158.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid. 162.

For instance, I would argue, Canada's history leading up to the implementation of the Charter, specifically the parts of our history that pertain to fighting for recognition of the rights that are now included within the Charter, as well as the process of implementing the Charter and what democratic function it serves, are all important topics about which students should learn. However, these considerations require viewing the Charter within the broader context of Canadian democracy. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms plays a pivotal role in the ongoing legal and political functioning of Canada's democracy. The significance of this role is not adequately conveyed within the curriculum overview. The required engagement within the Civics curriculum warrants more coverage than one section focusing only on the Charter's articulation of citizenship rights. Moreover, this evaluation of the Charter that students are encouraged to undertake is significantly more prescriptive than it is critical or reflective. Students are simply asked to analyse the key rights of citizenship in reference to the Charter. This reads as a very understated way to engage with what is arguably one of the most important legal documents in our country.

To add to this concern, there does not appear to be any significant acknowledgement in the Civics course of the role that democratic engagement plays in *obtaining* rights. The curriculum appears to completely overlook teaching students what is at stake if they choose not to participate in the democratic processes of their communities. There are some peripheral comments made regarding the protection of

rights, such as asking students to “explain why it is important for people to engage in civic action and identify various reasons why individuals and groups engage in such action.”³⁰⁴ The examples for further discussion point to important considerations, such as “to protect their rights or rights of others, to advocate for change, to protect existing programs, to protect the environment, to achieve greater power or autonomy, out of a sense of social justice or social responsibility, for ethical reasons, to protect their own interests.”³⁰⁵ But again, these are all optional topics to engage with as a way to extend or exemplify the main aim, which is to explain why civic engagement is important. From the mandatory coverage within the curriculum structure, it isn’t clear what students should be understanding in regard to the importance of civic engagement. Is it only the ongoing or future protection of rights that are influenced by civic action? What about how these rights were secured in the first place?

There is also no clear acknowledgement of why rights would *need* to be protected. Who might be infringing on these rights – individual citizens, corporations, the government, etc.? The curriculum doesn’t say. This points to a bigger issue, which is that while rights are acknowledged as things that are valued and protected within Canada (namely, by the Charter) the curriculum does not make any clear effort to identify the ways in which our rights might come under attack. This points to what I understand to be one of the biggest concerns with the Civics curriculum, which is that our rights as

³⁰⁴ Ibid. 160.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. 160-1.

Canadian citizens are not fully or clearly acknowledged as something that individuals have had to *fight* for via democratic action. It is only because generations of citizens fought for our rights by participating in Canadian democracy that we now have these same rights outlined within the Charter. It is occasionally acknowledged within options for further discussion that rights are something to be protected via civic engagement, but the role of struggle in securing rights and the need to protect them is never explicitly stated as a mandatory topic within the curriculum.

This presents a disingenuous perception that rights have always been valued and/or protected within Canada. For instance, there isn't anything within the mandatory Civics curriculum coverage that would suggest that not all Canadian citizens have always had the right to vote since Canada's date of origin. However, when the British North America Act was signed in 1867, the only citizens who had the right to vote federally were male property owners over the age of 21.³⁰⁶ The Women's Suffrage Movement was discussed earlier in section 5.3. Its history clearly showed that women had to be politically active for decades before they secured the right to vote, first municipally, and eventually, provincially, and federally. Moreover, this right was withheld not only along the lines of gender, but also along the lines of race. Indigenous peoples did not receive the right to vote federally until 1876, but at that time this also required them to forfeit their Indian status.³⁰⁷ It wasn't until 1960 that the right to vote did not require them to give up

³⁰⁶ Elections Canada. *A Brief History of Federal Voting Rights in Canada*. A Brief History of Federal Voting Rights in Canada | Elections Canada's Civic Education. <https://electionsanddemocracy.ca/voting-rights-through-time-0/brief-history-federal-voting-rights-canada>

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

their status. Japanese Canadians had their right to vote provincially stripped from them in BC in 1895, and it wasn't until 1948 that their right to vote federally was restored, unreservedly.³⁰⁸ Moreover, it wasn't until the signing of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 that the right of every Canadian citizen to both vote and stand as a candidate was affirmed.³⁰⁹

As mentioned, there is a brief acknowledgement that rights should be protected when infringed. However, failing to appreciate that certain rights have not always been recognized, but instead took generations to secure, produces a skewed perspective on how important democratic participation is. The result is that present and future generations are encouraged to take their rights for granted. The irony is that many individuals likely don't even *realize* they are taking their rights for granted, because they aren't aware of the ways in which they can or will be infringed. Painting a picture for students that their rights have never been, and likely never will be, under real threat, produces a false sense of security. This in turn makes their rights more susceptible to infringement or, in extreme cases, removal entirely. Outside the Canadian context, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States highlights this risk of infringement. On June 24th, 2022, the constitutional

³⁰⁸ Elections Canada. *Japanese Canadians and the Right to Vote Case Study*. Japanese Canadians and the Right to Vote Case Study | Elections Canada's Civic Education. <https://electionsanddemocracy.ca/voting-rights-through-time-0/case-study-1-japanese-canadians-and-democratic-rights>

³⁰⁹ Elections Canada. *A Brief History of Federal Voting Rights in Canada*. A Brief History of Federal Voting Rights in Canada | Elections Canada's Civic Education. <https://electionsanddemocracy.ca/voting-rights-through-time-0/brief-history-federal-voting-rights-canada>

right to seek an abortion was overturned by the US Supreme Court.³¹⁰ While the implications of this decision are both sobering and widespread, the relevant takeaway for this discussion is that American women today have fewer rights than their grandmothers did. Women in the United States no longer hold a constitutionally protected right to autonomy over their own body.³¹¹ While the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* was the result of many intersecting issues, including political and legal processes, we would be remiss to not acknowledge that a decline in support of women's issues within the American political landscape played a part in making this reversal possible. This decline in support is undoubtedly influenced by the narratives taught in schools. For instance, when students are not taught that women had to fight for generations to secure constitutionally protected autonomy over their own bodies, it produces a false sense of security. This sense of security is informed by the misunderstanding that a women's right to bodily autonomy is commonly respected. It overlooks that there are many groups of individuals who would like to see this right restricted. When similar concerns are discussed within the Canadian context, a frequent response is that 'it will never happen *here*', despite increasing support for anti-abortion movements within Canada.³¹²

³¹⁰ Coen-Sanchez, K., Ebenso, B., El-Mowafi, I.M. *et al.* (2022) Repercussions of overturning *Roe v. Wade* for women across systems and beyond borders. *Reprod Health* 19(184), 1. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-022-01490-y>

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Kingston, A. (2018). *How Canada's Growing Anti-Abortion Movement Plans to Swing the Next Federal Election*. Macleans. <https://macleans.ca/politics/how-canadas-growing-anti-abortion-movement-plans-to-swing-the-next-federal-election/>

The tension, therefore, is this: it is fair to assert that a free and democratic country should be invested in protecting every citizen's right to bodily autonomy. This is not a controversial opinion, in the sense that it is broadly acknowledged that autonomy over one's body is a prerequisite to the fulfillment of other rights and freedoms.³¹³ And yet, a women's right to bodily autonomy via access to reproductive healthcare *is* a controversial opinion, exemplified by the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and increasing support within Canada for the pro-life movement.³¹⁴ This affirms my earlier claim: recognizing that the protection of rights is not something freely given, but hard-won, provides the necessary context for understanding how and why someone's rights might be infringed, or entirely removed, today. Failing to provide even a hint of this context within the Civics curriculum is a blatant barrier to recognizing the importance of civic participation and moreover, what is at stake if you choose *not* to participate.

SECTION 5.7: THE CIVICS CURRICULUM – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The second way in which the Civics curriculum is not structured to achieve the MoE's goals, as well as the goals I've outlined for this project, is in its coverage of the functions and roles of a democratic government and its citizens, particularly within the Canadian context. Unlike the curriculum's lack of discussion of rights and democratic engagement, the civics overview does present a number of different opportunities to

³¹³ Raday, F. (2017) 'Women's Autonomy, Equality and Reproductive Health in International Human Rights: Between Recognition, Backlash and Regressive Trends' *United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures*. p. 1.

³¹⁴ Kingston, A. (2018). *How Canada's Growing Anti-Abortion Movement Plans to Swing the Next Federal Election*. Macleans. <https://macleans.ca/politics/how-canadas-growing-anti-abortion-movement-plans-to-swing-the-next-federal-election/>

engage with the framework of Canada's government and its roles and responsibilities, as well as the role and responsibilities of citizens. The issue lies not in *whether* the topic is covered, but in the *way* it is covered. Strand B of the Civics curriculum focuses on discussing different aspects of government function, as well as roles and responsibilities. Subsection B.1 raises the topic of political parties within Canada and asks students to explain how different values underpin different parties' politics and policies.³¹⁵ Subsection B2.2 encourages students to discuss "the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government in Canada" and to do so with reference to issues of civic importance.³¹⁶ B2.3 sees students describing the functions of the three branches of government, both provincially and federally, as well as the roles and responsibilities of key positions within these governments. Finally, subsections B2.4 and B2.5 focus on the ways in which various groups can influence government policy, and Canada's form of government and the process of elections, respectively.³¹⁷ While these subsection topics appear to be quite promising when you consider them in a general sense, the promise ends once we take a closer look.

In line with the criticisms I've raised of the curriculum thus far, the mandatory coverage in this part of the Civics curriculum, i.e., the aims outlined in each subsection, are vague and open-ended. And while an open-ended curriculum can sometimes be good in terms of the flexibility it affords teachers to make the most of the time they have to

³¹⁵ 'The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10' [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)]. 161.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

engage with certain topics, it can also be a hinderance. In this instance, I consider it a hinderance because there are very specific elements of what a functioning government entails that are important for students to learn in order to understand the context within which their civic participation takes place. Leaving the details of this coverage to case-by-case discretion seems counterproductive. It also seems unnecessary. For instance, the roles and responsibilities of key positions in the government (such as the Governor General, Premiers, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, etc.) are not fluid concepts. These roles and the corresponding responsibilities are fixed and regulated by Canadian law. As such, discussing these roles and responsibilities ought to be included in the mandatory curriculum, rather than relegated to optional coverage. They are important parts of Canadian democracy and provide valuable context for students to understand the political landscape within which their civic participation takes place.

While I am certainly not advocating for a fixed, scripted curriculum, I do recognize that there are some topics within the curriculum that are ‘fixed’ i.e., roles (and corresponding responsibilities) such as the Premiers, the Governor General, the Prime Minister, etc. These roles are all regulated by law, and knowing the facts pertaining to these roles and responsibilities provides a knowledge base that allows for informed critical engagement, which is the style of teaching and learning I advocate for in chapter four. In order for students to critically engage with their own role as a citizen and to consider how they might take steps to act on their responsibilities, a working knowledge of their government, as well as of the different functions, positions, and roles that make

up this government, is needed. Consequently, when the specifics are not included within the curriculum overview in instances such as this, the result is that some students are likely to receive a more thorough overview of the functions of their governments than others. For instance, students are asked to “explain, with reference to issues of civic importance, the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government in Canada ... and of key figures at each level.”³¹⁸ While examples are included for both the levels of government and what constitutes ‘key figures’, these are once again, *examples* for discussion, not *mandatory topics* for discussion. This means that even though the topic of different levels of government and key figures are mandatory discussion points, what is discussed in relation to these mandatory discussion points is not regulated. When mandatory discussion points are supplemented by optional coverage, rather than specific topics that are sure to fulfill the goals of mandatory discussion points, it leaves the door wide open for less intentional and impactful engagement to take place (or none at all). Ensuring that this doesn’t happen, and that all the relevant and important topics pertaining to this very general section aim are covered, is a burden that once again falls on the individual teacher.

In addition to this lack of specificity when it comes to the section aims in the Civics curriculum, the focus that is placed on citizenship responsibility and in particular, what civic participation looks like, also appears to miss the mark. The curriculum prioritizes explaining the responsibilities of citizenship via volunteering and community-

³¹⁸ Ibid.

focused modes of participation. When responsibilities are discussed in a civic-focused light, discussion doesn't move beyond the very basic fundamentals of civic participation such as voting or paying taxes. For instance, students are asked to "analyse key responsibilities associated with Canadian citizenship (*e.g., voting, obeying the law, paying taxes, jury duty, protecting Canada's cultural heritage and natural environment, helping others in the community*)."³¹⁹ As mentioned, the only civic-focused responsibilities listed here are the basics: vote, pay taxes, and don't ignore jury duty. This discussion fails to account for other civic-focused modes of participation or political responsibilities that comes with citizenship. This can involve familiarizing yourself with different party politics; getting involved in local organizing efforts; seeking out opportunities to learn about different social justice initiatives; not only voting, but *informed* voting, etc. Also worth mentioning is that the examples outlined above are optional topics to expand on the section aim, which means the key responsibilities associated with citizenship are not actually stipulated within the curriculum. It is, once again, left to the discretion of each teacher which of the responsibilities associated with citizenship they plan to discuss and which they plan to leave out.

My point here is not that community-focused modes of participation are not valuable or shouldn't be prioritized. They absolutely are and should be. In fact, they are part of the overall approach that Young argues for. Rather, my point is that community-focused participation should be guided by informed and critical engagement with the

³¹⁹ Ibid. 162.

social, political, and economic conditions that shape the environment within which this community-focused participation takes place. In other words, community-focused participation is not the *only* mode of responsibility that citizenship entails. Representing civic participation as community involvement alone, rather than as also involving active or critical political engagement, sends the message that this latter type of participation isn't necessary. If it were necessary, it would make sense for it to be emphasized in the only required course in the entire secondary school curriculum to focus on politics and citizenship. This raises the same concern I outlined with the curriculum's coverage of rights, which is that this lack of coverage sends the message that 'all is well'. It tells students that politics and getting involved in political discourse is something that you should choose to participate in if you're interested but is not a necessary part of citizenship.

The more politically inclined responsibilities seem to be absent from almost all curriculum discussions. There is only one section that discusses actions that are more politically inclined. Section C1.3 asks students to "explain how various actions can contribute to the common good at the local, national, and/or global level."³²⁰ The examples for further discussion include politically focused actions, such as "engaging in a non-violent protest can heighten awareness of an issue and pressure for change; ... the organized boycotting of products can pressure corporations to change irresponsible practices ... canvassing or fundraising for an organization that works for social justice

³²⁰ Ibid. 164.

can raise people’s awareness of issues related to inequity or human rights abuse.”³²¹

You’ll notice that the curriculum doesn’t recognize these as civic contributions, but rather, as ‘various actions [that] can contribute to the common good’.³²² Conversely, section C1.2 refers to civic contributions when it asks students to “describe a variety of ways in which they could make a civic contribution at the local, national, and/or global level.”³²³ Notably, most of the examples for discussion here once again focus on community-oriented participation such as “reducing the amount of solid waste they generate and by properly disposing of hazardous waste; by volunteering at a food bank, retirement home, hospital, humane society, or recreational facility in the local community; donating blood.”³²⁴

In this way, the curriculum is presenting a narrative that citizenship responsibilities and civic contributions are focused on participating within the community in ways that advance the collective good. Conversely, actions that focus on broader, more systemic issues or that have a more political connotation to them, are characterized as ‘various actions’ that can contribute to the ‘common good’.³²⁵ The curriculum document reads as though the MoE is more interested in conveying a role of the citizen that prioritizes showing up in community with one another, and not one that involves actually engaging politically with one another. Leaving politics to politicians is one sure way to

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid.

end up with an inactive and unengaged citizenry. Interestingly, this is reminiscent of the participatory conception of citizenship that I discussed in chapter four, outlined by Westheimer and Kahne. But as I discussed in chapter four, both a participatory and justice-oriented conception of citizenship should inform our educational aims in order to achieve learning for democracy.

My final concern with the existing Ontario Civics curriculum is that the number of sections and topics it aims to cover within the timeframe of only a half-semester seems ambitious. More will be said about this concern in chapter six. For now, I note only that there doesn't appear to be nearly enough time dedicated to engaging with the aims or functions attributed to the Civics course, particularly in light of the fact that it is the only mandatory course to be directly focused on cultivating political knowledge and skills. There is also a lack of emphasis on critically engaging with these topics, and in particular, on engaging with how politics relates to the protection of rights within the broader context of Canadian society.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued there is a disconnect between the MoE's stated educational aims and the curriculum they have developed to achieve their goals. At the outset, I acknowledged that the aims the MoE claims to hold appear to be complimentary to the goals I've set for my project. I've argued that these goals, if fulfilled, are capable of empowering agents to cultivate their ability to participate in collective action and to act

on the political responsibility the SCM shows them they have. However, through assessing the curriculum breakdown for two required grade 10 courses – History and Civics – I’ve shown that the curriculum developed by the MoE is not achieving the aims they’ve set, and by extension, my aims as well. In this analysis, I’ve focused on highlighting how the curriculum fails to establish a sufficient knowledge base, which impacts a student’s ability to develop and refine their critical inquiry skills. In the context of these courses, I’ve argued that this knowledge base includes: (i) an informed and accurate understanding of our Canadian history; (ii) the connection between our civic participation and the protection of our rights; as well as (iii) the roles and responsibilities of citizens and governments. This failure to produce knowledge compromises a student’s ability to practice their critical inquiry skills in the manner my project calls for, which shows that the problem of inability exists within the context of the OSS curriculum.

In the next chapter, I consider how it might be possible to address this problem of inability within the context of the OSS curriculum. I provide two suggestions for how to refine the grade 10 History and grade 10 Civics courses to account for the issues I’ve raised here. I also discuss how learning for democracy can occur throughout other areas of OSS curriculum more broadly, and briefly discuss other ways that this kind of learning can be supported throughout the education system. I close chapter six by positioning my project as one contribution towards the collective effort of addressing issues of structural injustice. I suggest that while this dissertation does not provide a solution for every issue it engages with, it does contribute towards building a valuable foundation from which we

can continue to build our approach to addressing structural injustice in the manner Young has in mind.

CHAPTER SIX: TAKING STEPS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF INABILITY – A CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS COLLECTIVE ACTION TO ADDRESS STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE

INTRODUCTION

By discussing the example of the OSS curriculum, I've provided support for my argument that lack of adequate preparation is a barrier to cultivating an agent's mere *capacity* to act responsibly into an *ability* to participate in collective action. This inability exists when an agent is unable to recognize, and subsequently act on, the political responsibility the SCM shows they have, and to participate in collective action. I've argued that this inability stops Young's theory of political responsibility from prompting the kind of response she hopes for (i.e., for agents to take part in collective action in response to structural injustice). Chapter three outlined the problem of inability. I demonstrated how I see it arising as well as how I propose we can begin to solve it, namely, through cultivating an agent's capacity into an ability via education. I expanded on what this kind of education should look like in chapter four, where I suggested that educational goals that reflect 'learning for democracy' can cultivate agents' ability by producing democratically engaged and justice-oriented citizens. Chapter five assessed the OSS curriculum to show how present curriculum standards, at least in Ontario, are failing to produce conditions where learning for democracy can take place. As such, my discussion of both the grade 10 History and grade 10 Civics courses provides support for my argument that the problem of inability exists.

This sixth and final chapter adds to this discussion by articulating some possible initial steps we might take towards addressing the problem of inability within the context of the OSS curriculum. I make two suggestions for how we can begin to address the curriculum flaws I highlighted in chapter five with the grade 10 History and Civics courses. These suggestions focus on prioritizing certain topics for mandatory versus supplemental coverage, as well as time management and curriculum coverage. Section 6.3 considers another course that is already part of the required curriculum and also has the potential to help cultivate a student's knowledge base and critical inquiry skills, namely, Sex and Physical Health education. I close chapter six by positioning my suggestions for curriculum changes as one contribution towards an overall approach to transforming the education system. I argue this transformation can make significant headway in solving the problem of inability by equipping students with the knowledge base and critical inquiry skills to become agents who are able to act on their political responsibility and to take part in collective action to address structural injustice. I also position my project as itself an act of collective action in the manner Young prescribes. Namely, I suggest that taking steps to solve the problem of inability is an expression of collective action towards addressing structural injustice.

SECTION 6.1: TWO SUGGESTIONS TO ADDRESS CURRICULUM FLAWS

In the first two sections of this chapter, I discuss two strategies for addressing the criticisms I've raised of the History and Civics curriculum in chapter five. I suggest: (i) revising time management and curriculum coverage; as well as (ii) revising the mandatory versus supplemental curriculum topics. The goal of my discussion here is not

to address each issue I've raised in this project relating to acting on political responsibility or democratic education more broadly. Rather, these strategies are intended to address issues I've raised with these two courses specifically.

SECTION 6.2: TIME MANAGEMENT AND CURRICULUM COVERAGE

There are two factors I want to consider when addressing issues of time management within the curriculum. The first pertains to the timeframe included within the History curriculum and the second has to do with time allocation, which holds relevance for both courses, but especially Civics.

The three topics I centered in my analysis of the History curriculum highlight a lack of representation/focus on systemic issues throughout our history. Sexism, racism, and colonialism are all clear structural issues that persist today and are continuations of historical, systemic, injustice. The origins of the power structures that have maintained these injustices throughout our history predate the beginning of the curriculum coverage, which begins in 1914. I propose that failing to acknowledge the pre-existing power structures that have produced and maintained these forms of injustice undermines students' ability to conceptualize not only how the harm is generated, but also how to navigate addressing it. There are certainly practical considerations to acknowledge when it comes to structuring a timeframe for historical coverage within a course. I recognize that not all relevant and important historical events/persons can be engaged with in a single course.

In an ideal world, we could simply include more mandatory history coverage in secondary school, perhaps including a required course that has a particular emphasis on ongoing systemic issues that have originated and been maintained throughout different periods of our history. But in this non-ideal world, there are still some strategies for improving the representation of and focus on these systemic issues, even within the constraints of this one required history course. One solution would be to include an initial strand that highlights topics which predate the 1914 starting point that remain relevant throughout the coverage timeframe (1914 – present), such as the three forms of structural inequity I engage with. This would allow students to move through the succeeding strands of B through E (that cover 1914 – present) with a more informed perspective on how these issues continuously evolve throughout history. This informed perspective could also facilitate more critical engagement by students on how these issues persist into our present, and how they [the students] might begin engaging with them.

Alternatively, another solution might be to include critical analysis prompts throughout each strand that encourage students to make connections to the origin of different injustices and the historical power structures that have produced and maintained them. So, instead of including an initial strand that provides an overview of these issues throughout the parts of Canadian history that predate 1914, perhaps different subsections within each time period could include mandatory discussion prompts that highlight the enduring, systemic nature of the issues that they engage with throughout each timeframe

covered. For example, this might look like linking observations about women's voting rights in strand B to themes of historical gender inequity. These discussions could help highlight the enduring gender oppression that stalled the progress of women's political rights. In strand E, students might be encouraged to look at women's suffrage and the gradual progression of women obtaining political rights in order to question how this has influenced Canada's failure to ever vote a female Prime Minister into office.

Clearly, neither of these suggestions fully solves the lack of representation or of focus on systemic issues within the required curriculum. In all likelihood, an entire overhaul of the curriculum breakdown would be required to solve the issues I've pointed to. This is because the curriculum structure was not drafted with the intention to engage with systemic issues. Acknowledgment of these issues has been incorporated gradually, almost entirely in a peripheral sense. Slotting these issues into a pre-existing structure that was not developed with them in mind does not set the curriculum up to successfully cover these topics.³²⁶ But changes such as the two proposed here would be a *start*. They would be a way to begin the process of acknowledging historical and ongoing injustice. This kind of knowledge is necessary in order to be adequately informed when we participate within our political communities and to act on the kind of political responsibility the SCM says we have. Despite the fact that this kind of political responsibility is forward-looking, we must sometimes look backwards in order to understand how we got to where we are.

³²⁶ Butler, J. K., & Milley, P. (2020). Reframing citizenship education: The shifting portrayal of citizenship in curriculum policy in the province of Ontario, 1999-2018. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 28(83). p. 7. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.28.5162>

As Young says, “This project [the SCM] does need to look backward in one respect. Understanding how structural processes produce and reproduce injustice requires having an account of how they have come about and operated in the past coming up to the present. Having such a backward-looking account also helps those of us who participate in those processes understand our role in them.”³²⁷ While changes as minor as the ones I’ve suggested might not get us exactly where we hope to go, they can get us started and begin the process of cultivating the kind of knowledge base that is required to produce the kind of learning opportunities I argue for in chapter four, and that I suggest are currently absent in the History and Civics curriculum.

The second factor I wish to consider is the amount of time allocated to certain topics. This concern very clearly plays out in relation to the Civics course. The Civics course is the only required course within the entire secondary school curriculum to be a half-credit; it is paired with Careers to constitute one full-credit course. Roughly speaking, this means that the only mandatory coverage of political discourse within the four years of a student’s high school education occurs for approximately eight weeks, five days a week, for just over one hour. This hardly seems like enough time to fulfill the aims outlined for Civics by the MoE. It certainly isn’t enough time to fulfill the aims I’ve set for my project. Remember, the MoE wants students to be capable of “analysing current political issues, and assessing methods and processes that can be used to influence relevant political systems to act for the common good; assessing the power and influence

³²⁷ Young, I., & Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Responsibility for Justice*. Oxford University Press, 109.

of different people involved in civic issues, using political perspective; developing a respect and appreciation for different points of view on various political issues.”³²⁸ They also want students to develop a sense of responsibility and to have a good understanding of the different roles and functions involved in different levels of government.³²⁹

Moreover, this doesn’t leave enough time for coverage within the Civics curriculum to be nearly critical enough in its analysis, nor does it allow students to make the kind of connections between democracy and rights, or citizenship and responsibility, that would be necessary to achieve the MoE’s aims or my own. This brings us to my second suggestion, which concerns determining which topics should be allocated to mandatory versus supplemental coverage. Students need the opportunity to develop an informed knowledge base and to cultivate critical inquiry skills in order to become agents that can act on their political responsibility. I argue that this requires including certain topics and objectives within mandatory curriculum coverage.

SECTION 6.3: MANDATORY VERSUS SUPPLEMENTAL CURRICULUM COVERAGE

One of the main concerns I’ve raised throughout my analysis of the curriculum breakdown, particularly in relation to the History course, is the determination of which topics are mandatory and which are supplemental. Given that the main focus of the grade 10 History course is World Wars I and II, it isn’t entirely shocking that topics such as systemic discrimination and inequity are almost always slotted into optional coverage

³²⁸ Introduction, ‘The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10’ [Geography, History, Civics (Politics)] p. 7.

³²⁹ Ibid.

talking points. But that doesn't mean that they *should be*, or that it's justified. In fact, I argue that it is not feasible for the MoE to accomplish its stated aims when issues of systemic injustice are *not* included within mandatory curriculum coverage. Remember that the MoE has stated, "Ontario's education system, at all levels, must respect diversity, promote inclusive education, and work towards identifying and eliminating barriers to equal treatment in education that limit the ability of students to learn, grow, and contribute to society."³³⁰ Failure to provide mandatory coverage on issues of systemic inequity *is* a barrier to equal treatment in education, which *does* ultimately 'limit the ability of students to learn, grow, and contribute to society.' By failing to acknowledge Canada's historical and ongoing systemic injustices, the History curriculum itself serves as a barrier. This means that the MoE is not only failing to identify and eliminate barriers, but also contributing to the production and maintenance of these barriers.

As mentioned in section 5.3, Hippolyte-Smith writes that the education system has evolved into one of the most significant institutional mechanisms to promote and sustain the reproduction of white supremacy.³³¹ They suggest that, "By virtue of their experiences and outcomes in school, most Black students are faced with their first form of systemic racism, where they are coded and fixed with negative tropes that weaponize their bodies

³³⁰ Ontario Ministry of Education. *Curriculum and Resources*. Government of Ontario. <https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/program-planning/considerations-for-program-planning/human-rights-equity-and-inclusive-education>

³³¹ Hippolyte-Smith, V., Kempf, A., & Watts, H. (2024). School as a Raceless Institution: The Operations of Multiculturalism on the Invisibilizing of Black Youth. In *Critical Perspectives on White Supremacy and Racism in Canadian Education* (1st ed., pp. 182). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003399360-14>

and deny them opportunities, rendering them invisible to society.”³³² I agree with Hippolte-Smith that when we fail to provide sufficient acknowledgment of historical harms, as well as ongoing injustices, this lack of recognition is a harm itself. Moreover, this lack of acknowledgement also means that students are not given the opportunity to develop the knowledge or situational context necessary to understand how the harms they encounter today are a continuation of pre-existing power structures. As Young mentions, developing an understanding of the origin of an injustice, and of how it has evolved since, is necessary for addressing the production of harm. This means that when we don’t include mandatory coverage of systemic injustices within the curriculum, not only does this generate a harm for students in and of itself, but this also serves to help maintain the power structures that produce these harms in the first place. This serves as a barrier to addressing the source of these harms. Fine-Meyer and Llewellyn echo this sentiment in their discussion of representation of women within the course curriculum. They say that “To support a new wave of feminist consciousness among girls and boys – young people who will march against misogyny – all women’s issues, ways of knowing, historical experiences, and justice movements must be a mandatory and integral part of curricular reform.”³³³ This shows that an accurate representation of historical and ongoing treatment of various identities is important for students to be exposed to when they move through the education system because it acknowledges the history that has culminated in their lived experience. Additionally, this representation empowers students with the knowledge

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Fine-Meyer, R., and Llewellyn, K. (2018). ‘Women Rarely Worthy of Study: A History of Curriculum Reform in Ontario Education’. *Historical Studies in Education / Revue d’histoire De l’éducation* 30 (1) p. 63. <https://doi.org/10.32316/hse/rhe.v30i1.4541>.

base to understand how systemic harm has been continuously reproduced, and how they might begin to engage with the power structures that maintain it.

Interestingly, the MoE claims to be aware of the harms of systemic injustice. As mentioned, they state that they strive to become aware of and address all existing barriers to equitable treatment and opportunity within the education system.³³⁴ But much of this responsibility seems to fall on the shoulders of individual teachers. The MoE makes numerous comments pertaining to a teacher's responsibility to source appropriate learning materials and to cultivate safe spaces for students to critically engage with challenging topics.³³⁵ This makes engagement with vitally important topics contingent on a teacher's ability to secure resources, rather than providing teachers with the resources from the outset, ensuring that students have this opportunity. Teachers need curricular support in order to achieve these goals. Yes, teachers are responsible for the kind of learning environment they create for their students. But this does not mean that teachers should be left out in the cold with all of the responsibility and none of the support to make it happen. They need a curriculum that backs the execution of these goals. Presently, the MoE has seemingly placed all onus for engaging with challenging topics (such as systemic inequities) on teachers *without* providing sufficient guidance or resources within the curriculum breakdown. Suggesting that teachers alone can promote this kind of critical engagement, or source the right kind of materials to supplement the main

³³⁴ Ontario Ministry of Education. *Curriculum and Resources*. Government of Ontario.
<https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/program-planning/considerations-for-program-planning/human-rights-equity-and-inclusive-education>

³³⁵ Ibid.

subsection aims – without providing any kind of meaningful support or instruction within the official curriculum – is a blatant failure to fulfill the responsibility they claim to live up to. The MoE is acknowledging that the responsibility to educate with these aims in mind is *their* responsibility, while simultaneously placing all the onus on teachers to actually *carry out* this responsibility, with very little support from the MoE itself. This decision to not mandate engagement with these topics makes it seem as though the MoE is hoping that, if no one looks closely enough, their educational aims and the commitments stated on their website will be enough to glaze over the fact that they haven't changed their curriculum structure in over two decades,³³⁶ and that the mandatory coverage included in these breakdowns does not come close to providing sufficient opportunity to achieve the outcomes they've stated as their goal.

SECTION 6.4: OPPORTUNITIES TO CULTIVATE ABILITY THROUGHOUT THE OSS CURRICULUM

My analysis in chapter five focused on grade 10 History and grade 10 Civics, in large part because these required courses provide many opportunities to engage in the kind of learning and skill-building that I am interested in. Broadly speaking, the topics covered in these two courses are well-suited to cultivate an informed knowledge base for students and to engage with topics that develop critical inquiry, both of which are necessary to transform an agent's mere *capacity* to act into an *ability* to take part in collective action. Importantly, these are not the *only* two courses that provide opportunity

³³⁶ Butler, J. K., & Milley, P. (2020). 'Reframing citizenship education: The shifting portrayal of citizenship in curriculum policy in the province of Ontario, 1999-2018.' *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 28(83). p. 7. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.28.5162>

for students to engage in the kind of learning that can cultivate democratically engaged and justice-oriented citizens. This section expands on my earlier discussion by highlighting an additional course that presents learning opportunities to support the aims of my project, as well as the aims the MoE has claimed to hold (but, as shown in chapter five, is struggling to achieve). In this section, I don't draw on curriculum documents, but rather on the secondary literature that highlights how courses could engage with the kind of topics I've argued should be included in mandatory curriculum *if they choose*. These topics include gender inequity, systemic racism, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, acknowledgement of colonialization and Indigenous reality, etc. The purpose of this discussion is to highlight the many ways that learning for democracy can be implemented within the mandatory courses that already exist. Moreover, this discussion positions my analysis of the grade 10 History and grade 10 Civics courses as one contribution towards a broader approach of utilizing education as an avenue to prepare agents to recognize their political responsibility and to take part in collective action in response to systemic injustice.

It is important to acknowledge that my engagement with the OSS curriculum is not intended to provide a holistic solution to the problem of inability that I've sketched in chapter three. Instead, my discussion of the OSS curriculum establishes support for my argument that this inability exists. The suggestions I've sketched in sections 6.2 and 6.3 for how to address the issues I see in the grade 10 History and Civics courses show that these courses can contribute to achieving the goals I have laid out, as well as the

educational goals that the MoE has set. In other words, I do not suggest that my proposal for changes to the Ontario curriculum can solve all the concerns I've raised with inability, or democratic education more broadly. Rather, I see my project as one contribution towards the collective effort to address this issue of inability. I say more about this in section 6.5. In this section, I articulate some of the ways that education can contribute to this collective endeavor to address the problem of inability beyond the grade 10 History and grade 10 Civics courses.

(i) *Sex Education and Physical Health – Gender Equity*

At first glance, sex and physical health education does not seem like an obvious place to undertake the kind of learning I've described in this project as learning for democracy, with the intended outcome of cultivating democratically engaged and justice-oriented citizens. However, there is a lot of research from the last 10-20 years that show how impactful it can be to implement these learning goals within sex and physical health education.³³⁷ In particular, engagement on issues such as gender inequity, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender-based violence, and systemic racism can all fit under the umbrella of sex and physical health education. Including these discussions within these courses can make valuable contributions towards building a student's knowledge base and developing their critical inquiry skills. For instance, normalizing

³³⁷ See: Lapointe, A. (2014) 'Gay-straight alliance (GSA) members' engagement with sex education in Canadian high schools.' *Sex Education*. 14:6 (709), DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2014.914024, Amanda Whitten & Christabelle Sethna (2014) What's missing? Anti-racist sex education!, *Sex Education*, 14:4, 415, DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2014.919911, Catherine Vanner (2022) Education about gender-based violence: opportunities and obstacles in the Ontario secondary school curriculum, *Gender and Education*, 34:2, 135, DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2021.1884193.

heteronormative sexuality as the ‘standard’ or ‘default’ sexual orientation reinforces the marginalization of other sexual orientations, a by-product of failing to engage with different sexualities. Moreover, sex and sexuality are often considered ‘private’ and ‘too mature’ to discuss with students, which again aids in perpetuating the marginalization of identities outside the ‘norm’.³³⁸ As Alicia Lapointe argues, “[t]hese homophobic and adult-centric ideologies are used to justify negligible LGBTQ content in formal education and highlight how heteronormativity is promoted through formal education systems.”³³⁹

Lapointe argues that when we fail to have discussions that challenge dominant perceptions of heterosexuality as the ‘norm’, we remove opportunity for students to critically engage with this misinformed idea of a ‘default’ sexuality. This also helps to maintain biased perceptions of other sexual orientations. For instance, Lapointe suggests that “[a]lthough students are obliged to learn about STIs, myths and misconceptions that equate same-sex sexual behaviours with HIV are not necessarily analyzed and challenged. This is a significant absence because stereotypes and prejudice commonly equate queer sexualities/behaviours with deviance, abnormality, hyper-sexuality, and disease ... Educational curricula which fail to deconstruct these notions most usually fuel prevailing homophobic attitudes.”³⁴⁰ In other words, when we fail to engage in critical inquiry that dismantles prejudiced perspectives, we end up helping to perpetuate these perspectives.

³³⁸ Lapointe, A. (2014) ‘Gay–straight alliance (GSA) members’ engagement with sex education in Canadian high schools.’ *Sex Education*. 14:6 (709), DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2014.914024

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

When we don't acknowledge that prejudice or injustice exists, we reproduce it. The first step to stopping this reproduction of injustice is therefore to identify how it operates and subsequently impacts our communities. This is a prerequisite to critically engaging with strategies to dismantle it. Not only does this equip students to become agents with the ability to recognize their political responsibility and take part in collective action, but the mere practice of educating students on these issues helps to make individuals safer, even before students can participate in collective action. Amanda Whitten & Christabelle Sethna point to this, saying, "The Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) has drawn a direct link between school safety of LGBTQ youth and sex education, stating that the inclusion of sexual diversity issues in the sex education curriculum can help encourage understanding and respect amongst students, and contributes to a supportive and safe school environment."³⁴¹ I've argued throughout this project that knowledge and awareness make up the necessary foundation to engage in critical inquiry and by extension, to take part in collective action. But this observation by Whitten and Sethna suggests that cultivating knowledge and awareness within a student population has a meaningful impact on the safety and treatment of marginalized identities even *before* students have the opportunity to take part in collective action to address injustice. Importantly, this holds true for all different forms of injustice.

(ii) *Sex Education and Physical Health – Gender Based Violence (GBV)*

³⁴¹ Amanda Whitten & Christabelle Sethna (2014) What's missing? Anti-racist sex education!, *Sex Education*, 14:4, 415, DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2014.919911

Another form of systemic injustice that is underrepresented in OSS curriculum is the prevalence of Gender Based Violence (GBV). In her paper ‘Education about gender-based violence: opportunities and obstacles in the Ontario secondary school curriculum’, Catherine Vanner defines GBV “as the abuse of power over another person based on their gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender, [which] is prevalent in Canada ... [and] disproportionately affects women, girls, LGBTQ+, and gender-nonconforming people, and can refer to sexual, physical, emotional, and psychological assault or harassment that results in harm or suffering.”³⁴² Moreover, marginalized identities are significantly more vulnerable to experiencing GBV. For instance, “Indigenous Women and Girls are six times more likely to be killed than non-Indigenous women.”³⁴³ Girls who are disabled, impoverished, and/or racialized are also at a higher risk of experiencing GBV in their lifetime. Because of this, there is a strong case for cultivating a knowledge base for students on this issue within sexual and physical health education.

A comprehensive education on this topic also includes the opportunity to critically engage with intersecting factors such as race, gender identity/expression, socio-economic status, etc. Vanner highlights supporters of this type of engagement, saying

Bay-Cheng argues that sex education should not target sexual risk but instead tackle concepts of rights, critical literacy, ethics, anti-racism, citizenship, and collective responsibility in relation to sex and sexuality. Similarly, Bialystok and Wright observe that, to align with social justice goals, ‘critical sexuality education must go

³⁴² Catherine Vanner (2022) Education about gender-based violence: opportunities and obstacles in the Ontario secondary school curriculum, *Gender and Education*, 34:2, 135, DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2021.1884193

³⁴³ Ibid.

beyond “comprehensive” education to anti-oppressive education that is framed by intersectional approach”.³⁴⁴

Moreover, research shows that discussing GBV is most productive when it is framed within the context of gender inequity and critically evaluating broader social structures and norms that maintain this inequity because it is within this context that GBV takes place.³⁴⁵

(iii) *Sex Education and Physical Health – Anti-Racist Theory*

A third possible inclusion relevant to sex and physical health education is anti-racist theory. Numerous studies suggest that incorporating an anti-racist framework within sex education can produce favorable outcomes, particularly in light of the fact that Canada continues to become more ethnically diverse, and STI and HIV rates among youth are rising.³⁴⁶ Importantly, anti-racist theory challenges traditional conceptions of education that consider students to be ‘neutral, context-free youth’. Instead, an anti-racist framework can recognize the ways that race, class, gender, etc. all work to influence lived experience and treatment within social and political processes.³⁴⁷ Amanda Whitten and Christabelle Sethna, in their paper ‘What’s missing? Anti-racist sex education!’ argue that “anti-racist theory works to challenge society and social institutions to address persistent and pervasive effects of racism and interlocking social oppressions ... race and racialization touch all aspects of society, historically and currently shaping important

³⁴⁴ Ibid. 137.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Amanda Whitten & Christabelle Sethna (2014) What's missing? Anti-racist sex education!, *Sex Education*, 14:4, 415, DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2014.919911

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

aspects of sexuality and sexual health, including, but not limited to, issues of child care, sexual violence, contraception, and HIV.”³⁴⁸

Broadly speaking, Whitten and Sethna identify three goals of anti-racism, claiming that it: “[1] examines race and social differences as issues related to power and social equity ... [2] incorporate[s] an analysis of intersecting social oppressions to understand and expose how perceptions of race and their related effects do not occur in a vacuum, but are related to gender, class, religion, sexuality, (dis)ability, geography and other oppressions ... [3] appl[ies] this analysis to the study of individual, social and systemic practices through which these oppressions – including race and racialization – operate.”³⁴⁹ These goals can make a valuable contribution to sex and physical education, particularly in light of the fact that race has historically shaped, and continues to shape, many aspects of sexuality as well as sexual health.³⁵⁰ Whitten and Sethna rightly assert that teaching sexuality and sexual/physical health to students consists of more than presenting facts about STIs, contraceptives, and how to practice safe sex. For instance, different cultures develop different meanings and values for varying aspects of sexuality, and Whitten and Sethna argue that an understanding of these differences should be included within core curriculum. Whitten and Sethna suggest that “it is crucial to examine how race and class as well as religion or region intersect to form the cultural bonds within which individuals make meaning of their sexual and gendered selves.”³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Ibid. 418.

³⁵⁰ Ibid. 420.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

The discussions on gender inequity, GBV, and anti-racist frameworks show some of the ways that traditional approaches to teaching Sex and Physical education are missing the mark. Simultaneously, they highlight the potential that this course has to foster the kind of learning and skill building that I argue can cultivate an agent's *capacity* to act into an *ability* to take part in collective action. The following section positions the curriculum changes I've suggested as a contribution towards a collective approach to solving the problem of inability. It closes by positioning my project as an act of collective action, contributing towards the collective approach to tackling structural injustice in a way that Young prescribes.

SECTION 6.5: SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF INABILITY – A CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS COLLECTIVE ACTION TO ADDRESS STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE

(iv) *Curriculum Changes – A Contribution towards Solving the Problem of Inability*

My discussion of Sex and Physical Education demonstrates the kind of knowledge base these courses can cultivate for students, illustrating the many ways that important topics can be covered in a course that is already part of the mandatory OSS curriculum. And while Sex and Physical Education is the only course that I review in depth in this chapter, it is not the only required course where this kind of learning could take place. In addition to the courses I've already discussed (History, Civics, and Sex and Physical Education) courses such as Geography can also make a valuable contribution to building a student's knowledge base and cultivating critical inquiry skills. In their paper 'Cultivating ignorance of Aboriginal realities' Anne Godlewska, Jackie Moore and C

Drew Bednasek argue that awareness of Indigenous reality and our history of colonialism in Canada should not be relegated only to Native Studies courses. Rather, understanding this part of our history and how it impacts us today is vital knowledge that all students need, and cannot be sufficiently established if it only occurs in Native Studies courses.

Godlewska, Moore, and Bednasek argue that Geography, amongst other subjects, is a course where valuable insight can be produced when engaging with Indigenous reality and broader themes of whiteness and colonialism. They argue that

whereas a strong sense of historical process informs some of the physical geography, the separation of historical and geographical inquiry in courses focused on the social realm is pedagogically fraudulent: how can students hope to ‘analyse the causes of selected examples of regional economic disparity (e.g., in Aboriginal communities)’ without the development of an historical geographical imagination or understanding of Canada’s history of land and resource appropriation.³⁵²

They suggest that by failing to include Indigenous perspectives or considerations within Geography coverage, we create an inaccurate perception of our history as well as our present. As I noted in Chapter five, this helps to further perpetuate colonial domination and mistreatment of Indigenous peoples of Canada. Instead, they argue that “A critical and thoughtful focus on place or space in this curriculum would invite opportunities to consider the history of the places we inhabit together: from particular places of local, cultural or economic importance, to communities, regions, provinces, nations, shaped by

³⁵² Bednasek, C., Godlewska, A., & Moore, J. (2010) ‘Cultivating ignorance of Aboriginal realities’, *The Canadian Geographer*, 54(4), 435.

interactions past and present, approached in an open-minded spirit of investigation and inquiry.”³⁵³

English is another course that has the potential to make key contributions to developing the kind of learning I’ve argued for throughout this project. Critical literacy skills are an important skillset within the broader process of practicing critical inquiry. I’ve argued that critical inquiry is necessary for an agent to understand the state of equity and justice within their communities, a practice they can undertake once they’ve built a sufficient knowledge base. English courses are well positioned to cultivate these skills and, moreover, to practice these skills by engaging with the kind of topics I’ve argued are important to build a student’s knowledge base. However, it is important to acknowledge that the benefits I’ve highlighted pertaining to a student’s knowledge base and critical inquiry skills are only one component that makes up the education system. I have focused on it because it is a vitally important component. However, it is worth briefly noting how content coverage is positioned relative to the functioning of the education system as a whole.

Many practical considerations arise when we attempt to make changes to our education system, particularly in order to transform a student’s *capacity* to act into an *ability* to take collective action. While taking up the task of assessing how to make these

³⁵³ Ibid.

changes is beyond the scope of my project, it is beneficial to acknowledge how these other changes sit relative to my discussion of curriculum changes. I see my discussion of possible curriculum changes as one contribution towards a collective effort to transform public education into an avenue that is capable of addressing the problem of inability. For instance, teacher training is an important factor to consider. The preparation that a teacher receives has a trickle-down effect on the quality of teaching they can provide and consequently, the quality of education that we can expect students to receive.

The MoE stipulates that they expect teachers to seek out opportunities to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to lead their students in the area of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion education.³⁵⁴ They state on their website that they are dedicated towards advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion both in their curriculum as well as in their policies and practices within school systems. And while encouraging teachers to recognize and confront their own biases is commendable, it does not replace actual training.³⁵⁵ In light of the minimal support within their own education and training, as well as the curriculum documents they are given to structure their lesson plans, this seems likely to be an unsuccessful approach to cultivating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within classrooms and community more broadly. Class sizes and funding are

³⁵⁴ Ontario Ministry of Education. *Curriculum and Resources*. Government of Ontario. <https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/program-planning/considerations-for-program-planning/human-rights-equity-and-inclusive-education>

³⁵⁵ LeAnne Petherick (2023): 'Reading curriculum as cultural practice: interrogating colonialism and whiteness in Ontario's Health and Physical Education curriculum', *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 1-14, DOI: 10.1080/17408989.2023.2232807. On pages 4-5, Petherick discusses the need to 'decenter Eurocentric approach to education' for both students as well as the education of teachers.

also practical issues that arise – time, space, and opportunity become barriers to empowering students to develop their knowledge base and critical inquiry skills. These barriers would be a concern even if the right kind of curriculum were in place. Education is also highly politicized, in the sense that different provincial governments have different agendas regarding what they consider ‘important’ or ‘appropriate’ to teach.³⁵⁶ This is a barrier to providing updated, relevant, and critically engaged curriculum guidelines as well as educational policies.

The concerns I raise here suggest that curriculum changes alone cannot position education to resolve the problem of inability. Education remains a promising avenue through which to solve the problem of inability for all the reasons I explored in chapter three. But this discussion highlights that pursuing education as a solution to the problem of inability requires collective action from a number of different approaches. Therefore, I see curriculum changes as just one contribution towards a collective approach to solving the problem of inability and fostering learning for democracy in schools. The following, concluding section discusses how I see my project as a contribution towards collective action. This is because I see solving the problem of inability as a step towards addressing barriers to tackling injustice and structural harms.

CONCLUSION: A CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS COLLECTIVE ACTION TO ADDRESS STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE

³⁵⁶ Vanner, C. (2022) Education about gender-based violence: opportunities and obstacles in the Ontario secondary school curriculum, *Gender and Education*, 34:2, 134-150, DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2021.1884193

Young argues that in virtue of our collective contributions towards processes that produce structural injustice, our response to fixing this injustice must rely on collective contributions as well. My goal in this project has been to identify a practical barrier to preventing these collective contributions to addressing structural injustice from taking place. I've suggested that the problem is that most agents are unable to become aware of their contributions towards structural processes producing injustice, and subsequently are unable to take part in collective strategies to change the outcome of these processes. I've provided some initial instruction on how I think we can overcome this practical challenge, suggesting that when agents have the opportunity to cultivate their *capacity* to act into an *ability* to take part in collective action, this can help combat the problem of inability. Importantly, I think it is worth acknowledging that the problem of inability is not the only practical challenge that might crop up when addressing structural injustice in the manner Young prescribes. Issues of agents denying responsibility, unwillingness to participate, coordination, and more, can all present challenges to motivating collective action. And while engaging with these practical concerns is beyond the scope of my project, acknowledging they exist allows me to position my project as a contribution towards collective action.

In other words, I do not claim that solving the problem of inability will alone provide a clear, unobstructed path towards fixing structural injustice. Rather, I suggest that when we recognize that structural injustice is a collective issue we produce and subsequently share responsibility for fixing, inability is a significant challenge we face.

Due to this, the problem of inability is worth our engagement. I've suggested that taking steps to solving the problem of inability can get us one step closer to successfully engaging with issues of structural injustice and making meaningful strides to changing these unjust outcomes via collective action. Structural injustice is produced and maintained via collective contributions to vast and interconnected networks. As such, it cannot be solved by one person, one strategy, or by tackling one problem. As Young argues, it requires all of us who contribute to the reproduction of injustice to take accountability and work together to develop collective solutions. As such, I view this project as a contribution towards collective action to address structural injustice.

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