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MORAL PROBLEMS FOR SCHECHTMAN'S NARRATIVE SELF-CONSTITUTION VIEW
OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

by

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ABSTRACT

MORAL PROBLEMS FOR SCHECHTMAN'S NARRATIVE SELF-CONSTITUTION VIEW
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by

Yasmin Aydemir

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Under the Supervision of Professor Joshua Spencer

Marya Schechtman explicates her account of personal identity, the narrative self-constitution view, from the point of the view of a question about defining characteristics. Ultimately, she argues that personal identity is self-authored, narrative in form, and thus linear, articulable, and realistic. In this paper I argue that two big problems with the narrative self-constitution view demonstrate its incoherence and tension with the actual experience of personal existence: its morally suspect implications for moral desert and moral responsibility through its narrowness in conditions for self-narrative. By running into these issues, Schechtman's view of personal identity faces difficulties of ableism, disempowerment of abuse victims, and marginalization of alternative cultural conceptions of personhood. Specifically, groups of people who conceive of identity otherwise, in terms of articulability, matching reality, or linearity are excluded and their accounts with them. Though there may be a traditional appeal towards Schechtman's narrative form as she defines it, the drawbacks cast doubt on such an account.

I'd like to dedicate this work to my loving parents, Aida and Oz Aydemir, who have been a constant source of support and encouragement during the challenges of graduate school and life.

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Introduction

In her book *The Constitution of Selves*, Marya Schechtman outlines her account of personal identity. In particular, she argues for the narrative self-constitution view, which says that a person's identity is self-created, linearly narrative in form, articulable, and realistic. Therefore, while nearly all people are human beings, not all human beings are people. For example, because children do not have a reflective consciousness or self-narrative, they do not count as persons. Similarly, an individual with dementia or who is traumatized from an abusive relationship and loses their personal identity, thus to that extent loses their personhood as well. On the other hand, it's plausible that there is a non-human alien species which qualify as people.

In this paper I will argue that the narrative self-constitution view, being both descriptive and normative, faces problems in its implications for moral desert and moral responsibility through its requirements of linearity, articulability, and reality. Specifically, with these constraints on personal identity, Schechtman's view is an incomplete account of personal identity for those who conceive of their identity otherwise, perhaps as non-linear, inarticulable, atypical, and/or polylithic. These individuals are excluded and marginalized as non-person, as *other*. Moreover, her account implies a one-dimensional, unnuanced, and potentially harmful notion of moral responsibility. Ultimately, Schechtman privileges her own preconceptions and explores their implications as though they are universal, objective, and knowledge conducive, thus mistaking how we as humans conceive of personal identity and ultimately ourselves.

The paper will proceed as follows. In section 2, I lay out Schechtman's narrative self-constitution view of personal identity. Then, in Section 3, I pose two problems with her view, namely that of moral desert and that of moral responsibility.

Narrative Self-Constitution

Unlike reidentification theories which seek to explain the circumstances under which two people at different times are identical, Schechtman's narrative self-constitution view intends to answer a characterization question about what features define a person at one specific time. By approaching the problem of personal identity from this angle, Schechtman ultimately sets out to formulate a theory of "true identity" (2007, p. 74); that is, which characteristics can be genuinely attributed to a person?

Thus, although Schechtman's approach at first glance seems to be synchronic, it also has important diachronic implications. In particular, the narrative self-constitution view says that to have a personal identity is to have an autobiography or self-anecdote. This assumption of a self-narrative serves multiple purposes, one of the most important being that Schechtman intends her theory of personal identity to account for common intuitions about moral responsibility and survival. Specifically, we would want to say that a person persists as long as their self-conception persists. So, if Schechtman's view categorizes someone as a person at one time but not at a later time, then those two human beings cannot be the same person. Moreover, we would only want to hold a person morally responsible for actions or behaviors to the extent that they truly express the person's intentions which can change over time. Thus, although Schechtman's theory is synchronic there are important ramifications for personal identity persisting through time.

In addition, before getting into the view itself, it is important to note that Schechtman's view is both descriptive and normative. With her account, she intends to accurately capture how we conceive of ourselves and others. At the same time, she presents narrative self-constitution as ideal, or as how we *should* conceive of ourselves and others. In his article "Against Narrativity", Galen Strawson distinguishes between the "psychological narrativity thesis" which says that people experience their lives as a narrative and the "ethical narrativity thesis" which says that it is essential for one have a narrative outlook on their life in order to live well and to be a full person (428). He goes

on to argue that Schechtman ties the two theses together so tightly that they are inseparable (435). Throughout her arguments, she claims that narrativity is necessary for personhood, both descriptively and normatively (2007; pp. 111, 119, 126).

Fundamentally, Schechtman bases her notion of self-conception on Locke's idea of sameness of consciousness (115). For Locke, this meant that one "consider[s] itself as itself, the same thinking thing at different times and places" (115). Similarly, Schechtman describes consciousness as a way of knowing oneself and one's own thoughts and actions. Whereas non-human animals do not have a self-consciousness, in the sense of a means of deliberation and authoring one's own life, humans (and some people) do. Thus, as a "conventional" narrative, Schechtman poses life stories as linear or continuous with the protagonist as narrating their "script" (2007, p. 111). Formally, linearity can be understood as:

> **Linearity:** One's self-narrative is linear if it is a continuous sequence (of events, mental states, and other experiences).[1]

Importantly, consciousness also has an affective dimension in that people experience sensations such as pleasure and pain. It is through the causal interaction of a past experience and our emotions, "by *feeling* its effects", that the experience is integrated into and governs present consciousness (2007, p. 109). Emotional and intellectual causal interactions are the means by which we understand the effects of our past experiences on our present one and future ones, and so, are able to form a self-narrative. As such, within a human being's self-conception, they "must not only be able to know *which* characteristics are part of [their] history, but also their role in that history" (2007, p. 77). One constitutes themselves by having a self-conception in terms of their life story meaning that no

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[1] Although linearity is not a formal constraint, Schechtman assumes it is inherently part of a conventional narrative, and so personal identity (96). I take linearity as her initial constraint given that narratives are not ubiquitously linear, thus making room for later discussion about other forms of narratives.

moment in a person's life is intelligible apart from the context of that life. In other words, only within the context of one's grander life story do any specific events or characteristics make sense.

Moreover, a person must be able to articulate these characteristics and events to other people who could view such features as realistic and intelligibly aligned with the character of the person. Even if people don't actually articulate their narratives, what matters is the ability to do so. So, for example, while an artist may be able to articulate their choices in expression, medium, and inspiration, a child presumably cannot coherently articulate their emotions, beliefs, or experiences. Thus, to the extent that children can't articulate realistic self-narratives, they are less-so people, if even. Coherence of an event or personal feature with one's narrative comes in degrees so insofar as the feature is in character and contributes to the overall intelligibility of their narrative, it is attributable to them. In this way, ideally, personal identity is consistent or stable across time. As Schechtman puts it, "to be a person one must realize that one's beliefs, desires, values, and traits are *supposed* to support one another" (2007, p. 98). The idea is that if a person acts, for this act to genuinely be part of their narrative, they must be able to provide some background information or explanation for why they acted; and this information or explanation must fit in with the rest of their narrative and others' ideas of their identity. So, ultimately, the most articulable features of one's narrative will be highly intelligible and coherent.

Further, in Schechtman's view, in order to be a person, one must be able to engage in certain activities and to live in the same world as others. To be a person is to engage with *people* in *people-y* activity such as conversation, politics, buying and selling, etc. Importantly, this happens within cultural contexts so that the form and content of one's self-narrative is, and should be, very much so intertwined with those of others' self-concept (2007, p. 104). In addition, people must be able to hold themselves and each other morally responsible; this is one of the critical ways we differ from non-human animals. Hence, in articulating one's self-narrative, it must be accepted by others as realistic. As Schechtman writes, "fundamental agreement on the most basic features of reality is required for

the kinds of interactions that take place between persons to be possible" (2007, p. 119). For instance, according to her view, someone with severe paranoia would have a self-narrative that is so departed from reality that it would be reasonable to say they are living a less person-constituting life than someone who is healthy (2007, pp. 101, 121, 122, 127, 132, 135). So, ultimately, individuals living in fundamental disagreement with others are to the extent of the severity, lesser degree people.

Formally, Schechtman's articulability (including coherence and intelligibility) and reality constraints can be stated as:

> **Articulability:** One's self-narrative is articulable if they are able to place their actions and/or characteristics within a larger life story in a way that is coherent and intelligible.
> A feature of one's narrative is **coherent** if it is consistent with the rest of their narrative.
> A feature of one's narrative is **intelligible** if it is consistent with others' ideas of the individual.
>
> **Reality:** One's self-narrative is realistic if (i) it fits with their culture's concept of a person, (ii) it fits with the narrative that others would tell of their life, (iii) it is free from widespread factual errors (or, insofar as there are widespread factual errors, those errors fit with one's actual behavior patterns or with how people tend to see them, and (iv) the interpretation of events in the narrative are comprehensible.[2]

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[2] These conditions should be taken as jointly sufficient. Also, thank you to Joshua Spencer for providing me with this formulation from class notes and personal correspondence (2021).

Moral Problems

I have two worries about Schechtman's view of personal identity. Specifically, her account, as simultaneously descriptive and normative, has implications about moral desert and moral responsibility which make the notions unnuanced and potentially harmful. Because narrative self-constitution strictly requires personal identity to be linear, articulable, and realistic, it faces unsurmountable problems with how we conceive of people and moral responsibility.

Moral Desert

We use "people" to refer to human individuals. This language matters for social, political, economic, and moral discourse. But, according to Schechtman, personhood is not the superior or exclusive mode of existence for human beings. Thus, other conceptions are permitted, but we must recognize the difference in personal capabilities, subjectivities, and social life. In this way, Schechtman says that her view need not be taken as sub-personalizing those with different notions of personal identity – since she is claiming they are non-persons, not sub-persons (2007, p. 100). All the same, non-personalization *is* sub-personalization. Distinguishing between *us* (people) and *them* (non-people humans) is a way of quite violently and arbitrarily privileging her own conception. Narrative self-constitution has such a narrow applicability that it deems a large portion of human beings as non-people.

In other words, due to the normativity of narrative self-constitution, Schechtman cannot claim personhood is not normative. It *is* insofar as who is considered a person enters into questions of moral desert. Although Schechtman could say that non-people humans are still owed respect and basic decency, this move is inadequate in accounting for her view's sub-personalization, especially given the later described problems with the narrowness of her conditions on personal identity. To be more

specific, Schechtman's account of personal identity causes tension between its narrow notion of personhood and moral desert through the three constraints of linearity, articulability, and reality.

First of all, for Schechtman, the linearity constraint means that personal identity can neither switch drastically from moment to moment nor discontinue such as in the cases of dissociative identity disorder and dementia. Minimally, personal identity also has to persist through time unlike Buddhist conceptions of self. This is motivated by cultural standards. As Schechtman writes:

> "Differences in narrative style usually produce differences in subjectivity and in the capacity to engage in the kinds of activities and practices definitive of personhood" so "the degree to which an individual's sense of the four features [responsibility, survival, concern, and compensation] is nonstandard in our culture corresponds to the degree to which the form of her self-narrative is nonstandard" (2007, pp. 102-103).

In other words, if one's narrative is non-linear, it is markedly different in subjectivity and self-understanding and thus, personhood. For example, the deviation from standard self-narrative of an "extreme psychotic" corresponds to the deviation from "standard" senses of the four features (2007, p. 103). Similarly, as children grow up, most of them develop into people. But, if they instead develop diseases or disorders which impair their continuity of personality, memory, and/or other psychological features such as beliefs and mental states too drastically, then their personal identity as well as personhood diminish (2007, pp. 124-127).

Surely, this one-dimensional structure does not represent all or nearly most people's life paths. Simply put, it's unclear how a traditional plot structure would encompass all self-conceptions. Indeed, Schechtman's attempt to address the concern of repressing alternative conceptions of narrative, by saying the conventional form is required for typical subjectivity and the activities of people, is

misguided. It's even plausible that there is more variance in subjectivity and practice within a culture rather than across cultures due to different but common power structures such as those built on ability and age (Hanel et al.). By basing the cluster of acceptable narrative forms on tradition and convention, Schechtman is deferring to the mainstream, the "standard", and the privileged.

Schechtman gives two explanations for how the Buddhist notion of self can fit into her picture, but neither of them is satisfactory. First, she says, the scope of "traditional" and "linear" could be broadened to encompass the Buddhist noncontinuous and unfixed self; but we will have to accept that to the extent that their conception strays from the "ideal", they experience personhood differently. Specifically, she writes, "Narrative styles outside of this family group [of mostly overlapping narrative forms] which retain certain of its most basic features also constitute persons, but persons unlike us" (2007, pp. 104- 105). But this accounting for "extreme cultural difference" only exacerbates the problem of understanding personal identity (2007, p. 104). When we are trying to understand what makes human beings people, we aren't merely talking about *our* kinds of people versus *other* kinds of people. We are talking about personhood more broadly. We are talking about people as they are subject to international law and considerations of moral desert and responsibility.

Schechtman's second option is to bite the bullet and say that Buddhists simply aren't people due to their unconventional subjectivities, intuitions about the four features, and narratives. As she writes, "The differences between the kind of life led by an individual with a. totally nonnarrative self-conception and the kind of life led by the rest of us are so pronounced and important that it does not seem like an exaggeration to say the individuals who live such lives are not persons" (2007, p. 101). Though it might make sense to think human beings of vastly different cultures as living different kinds of lives, this need not imply that they are living as different kinds of human beings. As said previously, non-personalization *is* sub-personalization; arbitrarily distinguishing between *us* (people) and *them*

(non-people humans) is a way of quite violently dismissing and invalidating other forms of personal existence and self-conceptions.

Moreover, in viewing personal identity as linear, Schechtman assumes progression of characteristics and personality to be continuous rather than spontaneous. Thus, her account claims that personal identity can be threatened by deep brain simulation (DBS). Specifically, as a quite invasive brain treatment, DBS can have major effects on the body and mind of the patient. Further, the mechanism of personality change is due to manual intervention by implanted electrodes which produce electrical impulses that control abnormal brain activity (Pilitsis et al.). This is a problem for Schechtman's view since it only allows for natural personal development; thus, according to Schechtman, DBS discontinues one's personal identity (2004, p. 101).

Nevertheless, it is unclear why DBS violates linearity. Françoise Baylis agrees and criticizes Schechtman's idea that DBS is a threat to personal identity. Baylis relays several patients' experiences with DBS and their subsequent self-narratives. For example, there have been cases of individuals who received DBS after being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and experiencing difficulties writing, speaking, and connecting to others. After receiving DBS, their tremors and dyskinesias disappeared, yet speech became severely impaired and sense of alienation grew immensely; essentially, they felt as though the treatment merely replaced one set of symptoms with another (521). Baylis argues that the transformations undergone by patients of DBS are not violations of maintaining personal identity; rather, they are part of the narrative.[3] Choosing to undergo DBS isn't the threat to personal continuity; stigmatization and oppression of disabled people is.

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[3] To be clear, Baylis is not arguing that Schechtman's theory is inaccurate; rather, Schechtman is wrong in thinking that her view could not accommodate such cases. I, on the other hand, am arguing that Schechtman's theory is inaccurate since its linearity constraint requires continuity of characteristic development and/or change in such a strict way that it excludes individuals who receive DBS from personhood.

Schechtman's articulability and reality constraints also pose problems for her theory of personal identity. For Schechtman, to the extent that a feature is unintelligible or incoherent, that feature inhibits articulation and thus 'normal' social interactions and personhood. Specifically, she gives the example of a violation of the articulability and reality constraints by a paranoid individual. Since they presumably cannot intelligibly or coherently situate their beliefs and experiences within their life story and since their narratives are unrealistic to everyone else, these beliefs and experiences are far less identity-constituting than others; thus, their authors are living incomplete lives as people, if at all (2007, pp. 101, 121, 122, 127, 132, 135).

It's unclear why anyone must conceive of themselves in a way that is articulable to others. Acknowledgement of or validation by others of one's own experiences is neither necessary nor sufficient for identity-constitution. For instance, someone could have an unnoticed characteristic which nevertheless plays a role in who that person is. Similarly, someone could have a characteristic which is widely acknowledged but misunderstood and thus plays a different role than is assumed by others; this would create discord between one's own narrative and the identity others take them to have. In living with others, it's unrealistic to assume we can achieve approximately perfect information and accurate conceptual understanding of one another, let alone assume that there even is a correct way to understand oneself, or one's own features and experiences.

Moreover, in response to the reality constraint, which features and facts about the world are fundamental is subjective and nearly impossible to ultimately discern. Though there may be a few determinable facts which we presumably all share such as the laws of nature and mathematics, Schechtman has in mind something deeper when she discusses "basic observational facts" and "interpretive facts" with violations including delusions and phobias (2007, p. 120). Further, Schechtman fails to determine exactly where acceptable discrepancy ends and answer the question of how far off from reality someone has to be in order to be considered too far off. For example, she

says that someone can misremember some events of their lives and still constitute people but once the errors are unjustified, personhood is threatened (2007, p. 126). Rather than viewing severely mentally ill people's delusions or fundamental misunderstanding of the world as indicative of diminished personhood, it's plausible (and I think, better) to view their predicament as quite similar to – though still importantly different from – less clinical, less severe departures from reality.[4]

In fact, it's quite unsettling to imagine that we'd consider human beings with mental diseases to not be people. By introducing a kind of probability or likelihood with measures of agreement, we limit the scope of identity and self-conception to that which is likely or apparently possible, excluding the unlikely and 'absurd' and thus a large part of existence and self-understanding. For example, if someone is only mildly anxious but has insecurities about their self-esteem and the way they're viewed by others, is this already unpractical enough? Or how about a usually upbeat and vivacious person experiencing a midlife crisis and feeling unfulfilled or despaired? Ultimately, everyone has their own ideas about which parts of the world are fundamental, so widespread or unanimous agreement about which departures are fundamentally non-identity-constituting is nearly impossible.

While Schechtman focuses her ideas about linearity, articulability, and reality on the "more extreme" examples of paranoia, schizophrenia, and dementia, she also claims that her theory works well to explain the changes of behavior, attitudes, and memory in the "less extreme" example of a traumatized victim of a domestically violent relationship. Specifically, the victim may not identify with her past self and so according to Schechtman, we may be right to consider her no longer the same person as she was before the relationship[5]. As she puts it, the person with dementia or paranoia and

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[4] What I mean by this is that conceiving of one's own experiences realistically or not falls on a spectrum of severity, frequency, and interference with everyday living. An account of personhood shouldn't say only one half of the spectrum is allowed within personhood since it is in virtue of being people who reflect and rationalize that human beings can stray so far from reality.

[5] This is an example of where the synchronicity of narrative self-constitution has implications for diachronic identity. Specifically, if at some point in time, the survivor looks at an old photo of herself and doesn't identify with the person in the picture, and if we follow Schechtman in taking this as an indication of discontinuity, then the linearity constraint of personal identity is violated and the survivor at this time is not the same person as the one in the picture. It's as if, at

the victim of an abusive relationship are on a continuum where they are "robbed of…, in a very real sense, [their] life" (2007, p. 88). So, somewhere along the progression of the victim's life and relationship, as she loses her personal identity, she also loses her life as that person.

While Schechtman would be right to say that a victim of domestic violence is being robbed of something such as livelihood or quality of life, it is a mistake to conflate these with personhood and personal identity. This conflation mystifies the violence and trauma inflicted upon those who experience abuse, thereby leaving them helpless, hopeless, and subject to further abuse by stripping them of their identity and personhood. Specifically, by deeming survivors of abuse non-persons, Schechtman's view is disempowering and obscures the intensity and the prevalence of domestic violence.

For example, as Kate Manne writes in *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, oftentimes survivors of abuse who report their experience later recant their accounts, apologize for lying, and attempt to reinstate the integrity of their past abusers (9). These instances are typical examples of gaslighting, where an individual is manipulated by another person controlling and warping the narrative, ultimately leaving them in a state of self-doubt and deep inner conflict.[6] Thus, a survivor's inability to identify with their younger self does not necessitate that their personhood itself has changed. Rather, it is that same person whose life is at stake; it isn't the case that because some parts of them have changed that they are no longer there.

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some mysterious and vague point of time during the relationship, the younger person died and a new person was born. As I will explain soon, this is unsettling insofar as it is obviously the same person throughout a domestically violent relationship whose life is at stake, and not some new unrelated person.

[6] It is important to note here that Schechtman's theoretical abstraction away from environment (2004, p. 105) exacerbates the concern raised here, namely that self-constitution as a person is not as simple and one-dimensional as she portrays it. In other words, it is a mistake to try to theorize about personal identity as separate from environment and society since individuals only exist within mutually causal grander schemes; individuals impact one another on micro and macro levels and similarly to a great extent, our environments and communities mold us. I note this here because the relationship between gaslighting in situations of domestic violence and survivors' personal identities is situated within this mutual causation between individual and environment. I also talk about this issue of abstraction when investigating the implications of Schechtman's view on moral responsibility.

In fact, it is by being people that human beings can be traumatized by violent relationships or have personality disorders and severe mental illnesses. It is because people self-consciously reflect, rationalize, and resist inner conflict that daily pains are turned into lifelong suffering, for some more than others. These individuals aren't outsiders to personhood; rather, they exhibit exactly what makes us people. To deprive certain human beings of personhood does nothing to elucidate personal identity – it only makes those disqualifying characteristics unintelligible as genuinely intimate aspects of personal life. If a victim of abuse loses their personal identity and thus personhood, then the sense in which they are actively being "robbed" of personhood doesn't make sense. Instead of depersonalizing someone due to trauma or disorder, a more holistic account of personal identity would allow for nuance and incorporate deeper features than are noticed by a glance at behavior or cognition through a lens of compassion, reflection, and empowerment.

Ultimately, by privileging her own ideas of forms and contents of self-conception, Schechtman is committing epistemicide[7]. By arbitrarily distinguishing between *us* (people) and *them* (non-people human beings) and privileging conceptions of self-understanding and subjectivity which align with her view of personal identity, she is marginalizing and dehumanizing other conceptions. To say that mentally ill humans or survivors of abuse don't have personal identities and thus personhood and to present the normative view of narrative self-constitution is to see *our* view, or her view, as superior or right. But there are plenty of cultures and communities such as Buddhism which understand personal identity differently; it's unclear why she thinks she is right to hold "*our*" view and retain it in light of other, possibly better, views. Even though Schechtman acknowledges that the articulability and reality

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[7] Epistemicide is the destruction of knowledge, often through colonialism and genocide. For example, "the destruction of Indigenous spirituality, the loss of native languages, the disuse of certain productive or food processes and the replacement of Indigenous forms of governance and natural resource tenure" are all instances of epistemicide (Elías). For more information, see Boaventura de Sousa Santos' *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide.*

constraints are merely ideals rather than absolute demands, by placing these normative demands on self-conception, she places arbitrary boundaries around personal identity which exclude communities of *people*.

Moral Responsibility

As said previously, one main motivation for Schechtman's account is her idea of personal identity as intricately tied to moral responsibility. Central to Schechtman's narrative self-constitution view is personal identity as self-authored. She argues that human beings are people in virtue of organizing their experiences and themselves according to a specific narrative form. In minimal terms, a person must understand themselves to be persisting through time and with their temporal parts mutually related. Unlike a biography which finds characterization in an external source, people characterize themselves through their self-conscious creation of an articulable and realistic character.

Schechtman pulls from Frankfurt's psychological theories the idea that only particular events and characteristics in a human being's history contribute to their personal identity. Specifically, according to Frankfurt, wholly externally caused actions – those with respect to which a human is passive – are not to be attributed to their personal identity (242). This is in order to distinguish between true features and merely coincidental or accidental characteristics which are not as identity-constituting as those which express one's identity. So, for Schechtman, a person is morally responsible for an action to the extent that they are able to articulate and acknowledge it as truly coming from within themselves rather than externally motivated or forced. The more that a certain internally motivated act coheres with the rest of a person's narrative, the more it is attributable to them. Thus, there is a continuum from the ideal fully formed person, to the more realistic nebulous person, to the much less-formed person with dementia or paranoid-schizophrenia, to children. In other words, Schechtman places genuine characteristics and non-identity-implicating features along a spectrum, allowing for degrees of attribution of moral responsibility.

The worry I have here is about the extent of responsibility being put on each person's shoulders. Specifically, while Schechtman does put attribution of moral responsibility on a spectrum, the requirements of linearity, articulability, and reality restrict moral responsibility to intentional, coherent, and intelligible action. In this way her view of moral responsibility and its connection to personal identity is one-dimensional and unnuanced. There isn't much room for responsibility to make its way into discussions about domestic violence, mental illness and trauma, and implicit bias.

For example, if the logic of coherence and intelligibility were applied to the perpetrator of violence, as almost every case of abuse consists of defenses such as "he could never" or "he's not like that", then Schechtman's view dismisses these events as non-identity-constituting and thus, the abuser as not morally responsible for any injustice. What I mean by this is that with personal identity being a negotiation between others' and one's own conception, it is possible and frequently occurring for perpetrators of domestic violence to be absolved of any guilt or responsibility due to others' testimony and associations. This happens through witnesses defending perpetrators on the grounds of allegations being unreasonable or unrealistic; oftentimes, even the perpetrator themselves will dismiss the reports as unreliable and dishonest. As Manne writes, although evidence and multiple disclosures increase the likelihood of prosecution, the nature of the patriarchy makes it arduous, exhausting, and retraumatizing in multiple ways for survivors to pursue and receive legal justice. Specifically, misogyny treats accounts of abuse as irrationally hostile assertions of entitlement (11). It is especially expected that women and gender-non-conforming individuals tolerate second-class treatment; if and when they point out abuse, they are merely forgetting that they aren't entitled to the same level of respect and consideration as their cisgender male counterparts. In fact, the value placed on young perpetrators' futures often outweighs the depth of trauma incurred by their victims.

Moreover, Schechtman distinguishes between events and characteristics which are internally motivated and externally imposed. Though she recognizes that these lie on two ends of a spectrum,

she dismisses the question of where the line can or should be drawn between the two. To motivate the distinction, she juxtaposes two cases from Parfit's story of a Russian socialist who is about to inherit a large fortune and so signs a contract with his wife concerning his future behaviors (2004, p. 91). In the first case, his ideals change so vastly to the extent that he greedily hoards his fortune, and the contract is enforced so that the fortune is donated, and she considers him dead. In response, Schechtman asserts that the hyperbole need not be taken as so since this radical change violates the continuity of central parts of his current identity and thus himself as a person. In the second case, the Russian socialist only moderately changes his stance so that he still values community and social welfare but does not use his fortune for socialist ideals – perhaps he concludes that socialism is naïve yet still well-intentioned. Here, Schechtman says that the contract is void and his identity is intact since his values are continuous with those of his past self.

Schechtman views the two examples as indicative of fundamental differences in the shifting of personhood. Since the first case displays drastic externally motivated changes in values, beliefs, and personality, the Russian socialist is not as morally responsible for the subsequent characteristics; he cannot intelligibly explain to others why he has changed. On the other hand, in the second case, on account of his internal motivation towards socialist ideals, some of his previous characteristics persist and his personality is continuous such that he can articulate and be held more responsible for his subsequent beliefs and actions. Ultimately, whereas in the second case, the future Russian man can empathize and relate to his past self, in the first case he cannot, thus his personhood is diminished.

Nevertheless, I believe that the distinction between internally motivated and externally imposed actions and changes is so fine that it is basically illusory. Almost no personal change is wholly one or the other. As people are entrenched in their circumstances and their environment, there is always an interplay of forces. Parfit's example is fictitious, so he is able to abstract away from the placement of the situation. Yet, by leaving out the details of the circumstances under which the Russian

socialist becomes a capitalist, he hastily concludes non-continuity and non-self-authorship. This isn't clear though. Obviously, the unknown details and events of character development would personally warrant the change from the Russian man's perspective; otherwise, he wouldn't have changed. It's not as if the inheritance of fortune could possibly immediately, discontinuously, change his disposition or self-identity. There must be a thought process, some events, which catalyze a gradual change – thus, retaining continuity and moral responsibility. Ultimately, the two cases do not come apart as easily as Schechtman would like to think.

Moreover, I am worried that by requiring a hefty notion of responsibility for our internally motivated identity-constituting experiences, we dismiss the significance other individuals and our environments have in determining our lives and selves. As we impact our larger communities, they also impact us in intimate and even subconscious ways. This goes unaccounted for by Schechtman. For example, she writes, "the angry person is an angry person because her narrative is constructed through the lens of an angry eye" (2007, p. 128). So, it seems like we would be justified by this view to attribute irrational rage to marginalized individuals since as people define themselves, we choose who we are. If others conceive of someone as unnecessarily and willfully angry and combative, and they conceive of the events of that person's life through that characterization, then by Schechtman's view, the responsibility falls on that person's shoulders to lighten up and be less aggressive with others. This is implausibly unnuanced though, considering emotions are often reactions to external circumstances and often call for expression and non-judgmental communication with others.

In fact, the reason Schechtman has difficulty accounting for a traumatized victim's personal identity is because it is so externally molded and manipulated. Of course, a survivor is not responsible for their own abuse; but this lack of moral responsibility does not entail a lack of personhood. Non-personalizing survivors dismisses their (albeit difficult) ability to leave violent relationships and re-

empower themselves – importantly, as themselves and not some other identity.[8] While I agree that in some sense, we do choose to be who we are, I think there must be space for nuance insofar as others' actions and our circumstances affect us *and* do not define us by themselves. By that I mean we can choose how to respond to external circumstances, but this sense of freedom is not ubiquitous or always active and pressing.

Lastly, articulability creates problems for Schechtman's view insofar as it poses a practical difficulty for all people, especially those with trauma or mental disorders or diseases. Specifically, I mean that most individuals, let alone those with mental health disabilities or intellectual disabilities, might not be able to articulate where or how some features or behaviors arose and/or how they affect current experiences. Nevertheless, it's unclear as to why these characteristics should be deemed less identity-constituting or non-effective.

One of the most common examples of inarticulable characteristics is implicit bias; we all have implicit biases, yet we may not be able to understand or explain where they arose or whether/how they affect our personal identities currently. Surely, implicit biases still play a role in defining our characters though, and surely, we are still held responsible and accountable for them and their effects on our behaviors. Given that articulability requires coherence and intelligibility, one's own understanding of their implicit beliefs and attitudes would have to be so strong that they could situate them coherently and intelligibly in their own life story. Yet, it's doubtful that we always remember the roots of these subconscious biases and are able to rationalize or reason through their propagation in our internal and external lives. Defining memories could simply be inaccurate so articulability of both

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[8] This is yet another example of where self-authorship is too fragile to serve Schechtman's purpose of moral responsibility. Victims leave abusive relationships when they feel empowered to do so, perhaps for a child or family or simply themselves. But in order to empower victims, the people around them need to support them emotionally, physically, financially, mentally, etc. They need to give them resources and often remind them of their true values in life. It isn't the case that once somebody changes (even drastically) there is no way for them to regain a sense of self-determination.

one's own experiences and others' is extremely vulnerable to misrepresentation. For example, one may be implicitly biased and commit microaggressions with no idea of the harmful impacts and sources of such behavior; nevertheless, these features still play a role in defining who one is. And again, surely, we are still held responsible and accountable for them and their effects on our behaviors. In other words, reason and rationality like memory are not arbiters of personal identity, especially if they themselves are fallible and undesirable at times, often unbeknownst to us.

Ultimately, Schechtman's theoretical move in extracting people from their environments – both of which are mutually related – her view of personal identity is severely limited in understanding, accessibility, and application. Her account deems a human being exhibiting mental illness as non-person because their narrative is largely incoherent, inarticulable, unrealistic, and not self-authored. But this glosses over the causal external forces such as trauma, genetics, and environment. It isn't the case that people with psychosis or schizophrenia are less-so people because of their unchosen mental illness(es). Moreover, Schechtman's dismissal of other notions of personhood such as that of Buddhism leaves communities of *people* in a state of alienation and *otherness*. In fact, it is in virtue of being people that human beings can have such a wide variety of self-conceptions, can suffer deeply and unwillingly, and can be in symbiotic relationships with their environments and communities.

Conclusion

Marya Schechtman explicates her account of personal identity, the narrative self-constitution view, from the point of the view of a question about defining characteristics. Ultimately, she argues that personal identity is self-authored, narrative in form, and thus linear, articulable, and realistic. In this paper I argued that two big problems with the narrative self-constitution view demonstrate its incoherence and tension with the actual experience of personal existence: its morally suspect implications for moral desert and moral responsibility through its narrowness in conditions for self-narrative. By running into these issues, Schechtman's view of personal identity faces difficulties of ableism, disempowerment of abuse victims, and marginalization of alternative cultural conceptions of personhood. Specifically, groups of people who conceive of identity otherwise, in terms of articulability, matching reality, or linearity are excluded and their accounts with them. Though there may be a traditional appeal towards Schechtman's narrative form as she defines it, the drawbacks cast doubt on such an account.

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