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ARTICLE

The Standing of Self-Identity

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Abstract

I identify as a philosopher, as cisgender, as an American. But are these identities secured merely by my claiming them, and what is the broader significance of our self-identification? Here, I argue that self-identifying secures the standing to participate in an ongoing process of determining the membership of the group with that identity. Using resources from political philosophy, I show why groups are entitled to revise the criteria for group membership, how having a stake in the group entitles one to be a part of this process, and that self-identifying as being within the group demonstrates having the relevant stake. After showing how this follows in the case of self-identifying as being within a demos, I argue that these claims hold generally across other kinds of identities, despite important differences between identities and contexts of oppression.

I'm a Philosopher, with a capital "P." Philosophy is not merely a subject I read, or an activity in which I engage. It is a community to which I belong, a group of which I am a member. Being a Philosopher is an identity, and I so self-identify. I also identify as a fantasy nerd, a disc golfer, an American.

In life, there are many ways that we identify. For some, the stakes seem quite low. Little hangs on upholding my identity as a true disc golfer. But quite a lot may hang on my gender identity, my race, my religion. How we self-identify, and the ways in which those identities are respected or denied, can be a source of significant value or injustice in our lives. There is a vast body of work within psychology/social psychology considering our identities and how they affect us. But it is in view of the normative significance of our identities that several authors have recently tried to understand what it means to identify, or how it could wrong someone to not recognize their identity.

My concern is with the significance of our self-identifying. How much can we tell just by my identifying as a philosopher? Does it make me one? Or do I need to publish papers in philosophy journals, go to philosophy conferences, teach philosophy, hold the relevant degrees? Is self-identifying ever sufficient for having a certain identity and, when it is not, what is the relevance of one's identifying? My aim here is to articulate and defend a novel conception of what is merited through self-identification. What I will

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argue is that self-identifying involves a special kind of entitlement (though not always ultimate authority). In avowing self-identity, you not only assert a claim about how you understand your relation to a certain group, but you assert the standing to participate in an ongoing process of self-determination concerning the grounds for group membership.

In section 1, we will consider how philosophers have understood identification in the context of gender identity. While disagreements and challenges remain, one recent account provides the tools for us to characterize self-identifying as an act. Self-identifying is revealing of something deeply internal. This is what generates a difficulty, since the fact of our identities—how we are categorized into groups—can often seem externally fixed. As a second point, what is revealed through self-identification is a deep commitment to a certain kind of normative perspective (though disagreement remains about the nature of this perspective and the sense of our commitment to it). The nature of that identity is important for your ongoing practical and embodied agency.

With some conception of self-identification on hand, section 2 goes through how several scholars have judged its significance. For certain identities, the discussion has revolved around whether identifying in some way can be sufficient to "count" as having or falling within that identity. I will canvas this discussion before setting it to one side. Though I agree that self-identification *can* be sufficient in certain contexts, it will clearly not be sufficient in many others. The broader question is how to capture the significance of self-identification across all contexts.

One idea, from Burkay Ozturk (2017), is that deference to self-identification is required when there is no good reason to oppose it. He also argues that self-identifiers should be permitted to make the case for their inclusion, and where that case must be heard/respected. My view will go even further. I will argue that those who self-identify in a certain way do not merely deserve to make their case for inclusion; they deserve a say in *what it takes* to be included.

In section 3, I will show how this story goes in the context of identifying as a member of a demos (e.g., as an American). There is an ongoing debate concerning who should have input into decisions of the demos. In those discussions are the resources to articulate a view on which what is relevant is whether one has the right kind of stake in the outcome. I argue that sincerely self-identifying expresses having the relevant stake in a group. So, self-identifying as a member of a demos should give you a say in the process of determining what it is to be a member of it. That is, self-identifying in this context expresses a right to democratic inclusion.

Borrowing from this context of democratic inclusion, in section 4 I argue that this kind of role for self-identity applies across other contexts. Self-identification generally is about group membership. Even where those groups appear natural or externally defined, those groups should have the freedom to change, to determine what they are about and who should be among them. And, again, self-identifying will constitute having a stake in that group sufficient to have a right to be included at least in this decision regarding group membership.

I expand on and defend these claims by discussing several challenges in section 5. This will allow us to affirm the story given in the political case, as well as to confront seemingly problematic differences with other kinds of identities, to consider how self-identifying can sufficiently demonstrate having the relevant stake, and to acknowledge the potential role of history and oppression when confronting the issue of ongoing group membership.

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1. Self-identification

Although we have a myriad of identities in our lives, or groups with which we identify, the most recent work on the topic of identity has primarily concerned the topic of gender identity. In that literature, numerous ideas have been put forth to capture what it is to have a certain gender identity. Here, I want to focus on one recent account that I think really gets at what is happening in our *identifying*.

For Katharine Jenkins (2016, 2018), an identity involves there being a myriad of social norms that structure how individuals with that identity navigate the world. And what it is to identify is to feel that the norms for an identity are relevant for you, that it would be in some way appropriate to evaluate your conduct on the basis of your conformity with those norms (even if you disagree with the content of some/many of them). This is the "norm-relevancy account." So, for example, to identify as a man is to recognize certain norms applying to men (e.g., what "normal" men wear, where men are allowed to go or should avoid) and to experience those norms as applying to you, structuring the perception of your normative landscape. (In a similar vein, see Ásta 2018, ch. 6. Identity is understood in terms of our location on a social map, with its contours set by those practical norms according to which we can be evaluated.)

For Jenkins in these papers, our identifying as a gender is determinative of our gender. This is an ameliorative account of how our gender concepts should be construed in the larger project of social justice. For our purposes, we need not accept Jenkins's full account of gender. (See Andler 2017 and Bettcher 2017 for challenges, Jenkins 2018 for responses, and Jenkins 2023 for a more recent, pluralist approach.) What I will take on board, though, is Jenkins's picture of what it is *to have an identity*. Identifying as an X involves taking the set of norms that follow from or are partially constitutive of X as relevant for you. In particular, and significant for us below, the norms are relevant for you practically; to identify is to experience the norms as relevant for recognizing the actions available to you and how those actions would be evaluated. This is the best picture I have seen for what it is to identify in a social context,[1] and it clearly extends beyond gender. (Jenkins 2016, 409, shows how a similar account of racial identity is already present in Haslanger 2012, and see Torres 2025 for a conception of ethnic identity that is similar in terms of how practical matters are presented to one phenomenologically, inspired by Jorge Portilla.)

Applying the view to my identifying as a philosopher, it sounds plausible. Although I disagree with some of the norms governing philosophy, I feel beholden to them. I'm aware of the typical activities that philosophers perform and feel pressure to perform them. That I identify as a Philosopher structures not just my activities, but my priorities and preferences—Philosophers cherish clarity in thought and writing, revel in nuance, are drawn to the abstract. And I would judge myself criticizable were I to fail to conform to these norms or to act in line with these priorities.

This is purely a picture of what it is to have an identity, and I take it that one could identify subconsciously by conforming to the norms of an identity without reflection.

[1]In later work, Jenkins (2023, 6.2.1–3) contrasts the experiential nature of the norm-relevancy account with the more active perspective of identification taken by Appiah (1996) and Bettcher (2009), suggesting explanatory virtues of each. The differences between these accounts should not be relevant here. If one maintains that an active element is necessary, that will be captured below insofar as self-identification is an active process. What matters for us is that, on all of these accounts, one's practical identity is what is at issue. For this reason, we can also put to the side a thinner sense of "identity" that purely denotes a social category (Jenkins 2023, 6.2.1), which doesn't bear on one's reasons for action.

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However, we are concerned with the notion of *self-identification*. The difference, as I will understand it, is that self-identifying involves a reflective instance of identifying a certain way, and so of feeling the norms of that identity as relevant for you. On this view, self-identity is something deeply *internal*. It concerns how you feel about what norms apply to you, how you are essentially, or the last of you that you could be rid of.

It is this feature of self-identification—its deep internality—that is troubling, because it's not immediately obvious how this internal reality matters to the question of genuine identity. It certainly seems possible to feel like a member of a group, or to feel like the norms of some group apply to you, without it being true that you actually are a member of that group, that those norms really do apply to you. At least, that our self-identities can be denied has been widely acknowledged.

As Dembroff and Saint-Croix (2019) bring out, however, self-identities are not merely things that we have; they are items that we assert. When Ellen DeGeneres came out as gay publicly (as they discuss), she was not merely reporting how she felt about her sexual orientation; she was declaring her sexual orientation, demanding recognition of it, and calling for treatment accordingly. As Dembroff and Saint-Croix go on to show, identity can also be understood as an agential phenomenon, whereby we act so as to make our self-identities respected and reflected by our positions within society.

Since this action requires a certain kind of response from society (or certain communities therein), we can also see how we can succeed/fail in our attempts to secure our identities publicly. Suppose I self-identify as a philosopher, but it comes out that I have never read Quine, and the wider philosophical community will not accept me. Perhaps I will be openly mocked at conferences, desk rejected by editors, challenged at every occasion. So, self-identifying is no guarantee of acceptance. And, as we will see below, there are occasions on which this is just right. We are thus brought back to the question: In what way does self-identifying matter to my access to that identity?

2. Other views

Nobody claims that self-identifying in *every case* guarantees that you have that identity and ought to be treated as such. However, we might think that self-identification is relevant or even sufficient for certain kinds of identities. Considering gender identity, many people have suggested that we have the authority to determine our gender via self-identifying. (More recently, see Barnes 2022.) For Bettcher (2009), our claims of gender identity come with a special first-person authority. We *avow* our gender identity and, as discussed by Bar-On and Long, avowals are "governed by a strong *asymmetric presumption of truth*, and sincere avowers are assumed to enjoy a special *first-person privilege* regarding their present states of mind" (2001, 313; italics in original).[2]

Critical for Bettcher is that words have fixed meanings within social contexts, and it is already true that people have authority over gender self-ascriptions in the subaltern context of the trans community. She says, "In advancing [first-person authority] over gender, I am discussing an already regulated cultural interaction rather than an

[2]There is a literature within philosophy of language concerning *why* avowals are authoritative (Manson 2012; Campbell 2022; Winokur 2022). Bettcher argues that, rather than presuming privileged epistemic access concerning our identity, avowing an identity is authoritative because we take a stand regarding our identities; we commit ourselves to them and to take responsibility for them. (Though she takes this to be at odds with the typical understanding of the authority of avowals, it is in line with Parrott 2015.) Insofar as this commitment has consequences for one's practical identity as discussed below, I fully agree.

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'anything goes' or 'because I say I am' doctrine" (98–99). So, the fact of how things go in this context makes it inappropriate to challenge gender self-identities.

While plausible, we may worry that this position goes too far and yet not far enough. On the one hand, the idea that avowed self-identity is sufficient even in the case of gender continues to be challenged. Bogardus (2022, n. 14) suggests that what is avowed is a desire to be treated a certain way or feelings about what matters to the agent, not genuinely *being* a certain way—i.e., being a woman.[3] There would need to be good reasons for thinking that the membership conditions for being in this group include self-identifying as a member. In any case, as with other avowals, that they generate a presumption of truth is not to say that the agent is infallible or cannot be challenged.

This view also concedes too much for our purposes. We are concerned with self-identities broadly, and our other claims of self-identity should also carry some sort of weight. When I say, "I am a Philosopher," I say it with some kind of authority, but in what sense is it authoritative? Moreover, we may hope that our claims of self-identity will have authority in a variety of social contexts and not be contingent upon a context with amenable linguistic practices.

In contrast to Bettcher's view, Ozturk (2017) argues that all self-identities can be challenged, including gender self-identity. However, he respects that self-identifying can be important for expressing one's autonomy. So, he advocates for the view that there's a pro tanto duty to respect claims of self-identity, which can be defeated for good reasons, as long as it is done in a way that respects several constraints. In particular, respecting the dignity of individuals claiming a self-identity requires an openness on behalf of the challenger to hearing reasons for the self-identifier's appropriate inclusion in the identity and any responses to the challenge. (This is why Ozturk labels his view the "negotiative theory.")

I find much of Ozturk's proposal plausible. (In fact, the view I advance below is arguably more negotiative than Ozturk's.) It is bad to infringe on autonomy, and denying claims of self-identity seem to do this. However, what I think Ozturk's view has lost is the sense of first-person *authority* we claim with our avowed self-identities. I can claim to be a philosopher and defend that claim, and people should allow me to do so, but on his view my claim itself carries no special authority. And though I am free to defend my inclusion into the group, I'm in no *special* position to provide this defense. Others could provide it on my behalf and would appear to have the same standing. For Ozturk, claims of self-identification are powerful speech acts, but we have forfeited the sense in which they carry authority.

So, we have yet to clarify the significance of self-identifying. I accept that self-identifying can be sufficient for being in certain groups, and genders may be such groups. Accounts differ, and I cannot settle this issue here. But even settling it will not explain the significance of self-identifying generally. To address this, I want to pursue a way in which self-identifying is always relevant to one's group membership.

[3]This undersells the significance of the avowal. Even for Jenkins's account, avowing one's gender identity needn't *merely* amount to expressing a belief that certain norms apply to you. When we self-identify, we *feel the pull* of the norms of that identity. And it's not just that the norms of some identity feel relevant in some way to our deliberations. As will come out below, the norms associated with our self-identities are partially constitutive of our embodied agency. They define the contours of our acting within the social world. So, challenging one's gender identity may cut much deeper than challenging someone's avowed belief by challenging whether that belief is true.

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3. Self-identifying as a member of the demos

To introduce my view, let's walk through a case in which the view will hopefully present itself as natural, and motivated with resources from political philosophy. Consider identifying as an American. Of course, what it is to be or identify as an American can mean many different things. (E.g., are we talking about Americans as a group of people from a shared geography or with a shared culture or history?) Here, though, I just want to focus on identifying as an American purely as a political identity. Where the United States of America picks out a particular political community, identifying as an American is to identify with that community or as a member of that community. Within political philosophy, there is already a developed discussion on what it means to be a member of a political community like the US, as well as an ongoing discussion of on what basis someone *deserves* to be counted as a member of a political community.

To start, membership in a political community is closely tied to *citizenship*.[4] Although citizenship is a matter of institutional recognition by the state, the rights and obligations conferred onto citizens are arguably constitutive of membership in the political community, constitutive of being an American in this sense.[5] Given that citizenship is defined institutionally, though, we can just ask what it takes to be an American citizen. And here, there are clearly defined rules for citizenship. You can be a citizen by being born in America or by being naturalized through the legal process of gaining citizenship.

A few points are worth making immediately. First, self-identifying as an American is insufficient for citizenship, which is to say, insufficient for being an American in this sense. (One cannot self-identify into having been born in a certain jurisdiction or having gone through a certain legal process.) If self-identification matters (as I think it does), it cannot be because it guarantees identity.

Second, we can see how who counts as an American can change over time. Consider the position of African Americans after the formation of the United States but before the 14th Amendment, who were not classified as citizens but who may have self-identified as Americans. The claim was not that African Americans already met the relevant criteria for citizenship and were being inappropriately excluded. (This would be to employ Ozturk's approach.) Instead, it was that the criteria for citizenship should change to include them.[6]

Third, the criteria for citizenship are not natural; they are institutionalized. In the American context, these criteria were set deliberately by the US government, which is meant to represent the citizenry. This is a case where the group of citizens indirectly determines who is among that group, who counts as a citizen going forward.

[4]See Leydet (2023). I lack the space to thoroughly defend or discuss the connection between citizenship and membership in the political community. However, if I am mistaken and one can properly be a member of the political community even before being recognized as a citizen, this does not make it less likely that self-identifying as an American generates some kind of right of inclusion.

[5]Of course, one may self-identify as an American, not *as a US citizen*. Still, the claim will be that in identifying as an American, one does experience the norms of citizenship as relevant.

[6]Someone could argue that there has been a single animating idea behind citizenship since the founding. And, though it had a particular legal expression, that idea itself implied the inclusion of African Americans, who would be included by a felicitous legal expression of citizenship. This would preserve Ozturk's approach, and it is close to Frederick Douglass's view (Yaure 2022). I take no stand on whether this is correct. Critical is just that the animating idea behind citizenship is itself a matter of self-determination by the citizenry, and so subject to change by the citizenry.

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It seems like a good thing that the members of the political community (indirectly but democratically) determine the criteria for citizenship. There is a popular idea that a people should be free to make certain collective decisions regarding themselves—what they are all about, how they want to pursue their ends—and this is as a matter of self-determination.[7] If we accept that a people should be able to collectively determine the values they want to promote, or the way they want to live their lives or engage in self-governance, it can also seem reasonably within the purview of the group to determine for itself *who* should count as among their members, or at least to collectively determine a *basis* for group membership. And so, it can seem appropriate for who counts as an American to be up to Americans. Nevertheless, there are problems with this approach.

Some have raised concerns about the origin of the concept of self-determination (Menge forthcoming), as well as how it is used to restrict immigration (Hidalgo 2014), or how it is involved in population transfers (Lister 2016), or leads to nationalism (Miller 2016).[8] And, indeed, construing what it takes to be an American *in the future* purely on the basis of the decisions of *current* Americans can feel unduly parochial. It was surely unjust for only then-current American citizens in the early nineteenth century to determine citizenship, given that citizenship at that time required one to be white, male, and property owning. So, while there is something good about a demos determining its own fate, there can be times where the inclusion of others can be rightly demanded.

The hard question in the offing here is: Who should have a say in deciding who comprises the demos? Or even: Who should have a say in state decisions generally? Luckily there has been much work within political philosophy on precisely these questions, going under the heading of the "boundary problem" (Whelan 1983). The larger issue is one of democratic inclusion. Who should have the right to vote, or who should have a say in the democratic process, and what should having a say amount to? Many answers have been offered, and I will argue that several of the most prominent views make space for the relevance of self-identification.

On one widely discussed model, what matters for inclusion in the process of coming to a decision is whether your interests are *affected by* that decision (or possibly affected). This is the so-called "All Affected Interests Principle" (AAIP) (e.g., Goodin 2007). The thought is that we should have a say in decisions affecting us, and we have some stake in their outcome. Those drawn to this approach have argued for a more capacious understanding of democratic inclusion, thinking of ways to include the perspectives of non-traditional parties who are affected by government action, such as animals, the environment, future generations, or even the dead (Bengtson 2019).

On this view, having the relevant self-identity is clearly significant. If I self-identify as an American, then I feel that the norms of being an American apply to me. I have an interest in what those norms are. (This is tautological if we understand "interest" here in terms of "practical significance.") And so, if I self-identify as an American, I am expressing that I take it to be significant for me what the norms governing Americans will be, including the question of who counts as an American. I feel that I count, after all, and it would be alienating to be told that I am nevertheless not American. Since whether

[7]Insuring self-determination has been argued to be important on several grounds. Respecting autonomy may demand it (Stilz 2019a), or it is required for state legitimacy (Stilz 2019b), or it promotes a basic good of interpersonal harmony (Philpott 2021). More directly suggestive for us, Margalit and Raz (1990) even argue that it promotes the good of group membership and a group identity.

[8]Van der Vossen (2015) argues that, even if self-determination is of value in part because it promotes group identity, that is not to say that it can tell us who should be in the group.

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I am affirmed or alienated hangs on this decision, I will qualify on the AAIP for democratic inclusion. I am not a citizen merely by identifying as an American, but I should have a voice concerning the conditions of citizenship.

Of course, the AAIP is among the wider solutions to the boundary problem. As was indicated above, many parties end up counting as being entitled to participate in this decision-making process that we might have expected/hoped to exclude. It has the controversial result, for instance, that those foreign nations who have an interest in certain American political decisions therefore should be democratically included (at least in some way, even if not accorded the typical rights and counted among the citizens). For many, this is wrongheaded. If the view incorrectly includes too many, though, perhaps it again mistakenly includes those who self-identify.[9]

On another popular, yet narrower, solution to the boundary problem, what matters is not having an interest in the decision but being *subject* to that decision. This is captured by the "All-Subjected Principle" (ASP). On this view, what entitles you to participate in a collective decision is that the decision in some way applies to you. Perhaps it provides a new legal duty, or is somehow compelling, or you will be coerced to obey it. (See Beckman 2014 for three disambiguations of the ASP.) We might think that the coercion is legitimized or justified via your inclusion in this process; inclusion is what secures you against domination.

Although a narrower answer to the boundary problem, it is again plausible to say that those who identify merit inclusion. The laws of a nation shape what is appropriate/inappropriate for citizens to do. It directly draws in a coarse-grained normative map of what is or is not to be done. These changes apply to anyone who identifies as being a part of the demos in the sense that it impacts their own perspective on what makes for appropriate/inappropriate conduct. I will say more below, but the broader thought is that what is important for being subject to a state's decisions is a liability to being pressured/compelled in various ways, and it is at least true that self-identifiers feel this pressure to comply with the norms constitutive of the relevant identity. This entitles them to some kind of standing to participate in the collective decision-making about the grounds for that identity.

So, on these views, the case can be made that sincerely identifying as being a part of a demos should secure one the standing to contribute to the decision-making of that demos, because sincere identifiers are subject to these decisions. Moreover, insofar as a demos can go about some process of deciding the basis for membership within the demos—as a matter of self-determination—identifying as a member of the demos will also give one the standing to contribute to this decision.

There are narrower approaches to democratic inclusion,[10] but the AAIP and the ASP largely dominate the field. It may be that there are other approaches to the boundary

[9]There are narrower versions of the AAIP, such as Afsahi (2020)'s principle concerning the most *deeply* affected, which may also include those who self-identify.

[10]Miller (2009) is concerned that groups could satisfy the ASP but without identifying with each other sufficiently to foster the kind of solidarity necessary for successful continued functioning of the demos. Song (2012) also emphasizes solidarity. And Andrić (2020) shows how the ASP would admit whole groups who voluntarily subject themselves to the rules of some other society, even where the rules of that society are none of their business. If we were motivated by these authors to narrow the ASP, I think those who self-identify could still qualify. They are likely to identify *with* particular members of the demos. Even if the identification is only one-way, solidarity may be fostered, even privately practiced (Bommarito 2016), and their own interest in the continued functioning of the demos will insure that it is not undermined. Moreover, we will see below how the rules of the relevant identity really are the business of those who self-identify.

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problem that would not include those who self-identify, and perhaps one of these is ultimately the right approach. Still, it tells us something significant (either for self-identification or against these views) if the AAIP or the ASP entail standing for those that self-identify. There is more to be said below about the ASP, but I think these approaches do secure standing for those who self-identify. So, let's turn to considering how this lesson can be extended to other social categories.

4. The standing of self-identifying

My suggestion is that what we have said about self-identification and the demos can apply to self-identification across our identities generally. Key to this is recognizing that the boundary problem itself occurs generally and well outside of traditionally political contexts. There is a general question about who should be included in the decision-making process for a given group. Some working directly on the boundary problem in the political context have recognized this (e.g., Beckman 2023, 3). Bengtson (2022) considers how subjection in different contexts can also demand some form of democratic inclusion, such as within the institutions of the family or within a firm. Stehr (2023) also considers the boundary problem in the context of the workplace.

I think the general view holds. We deserve a say regarding *any group* where we face similar subjection and where there is a say to be had. While the members of that group presumptively should be a part of the decision, others may deserve a say, especially where the question of who should count as a member is what is at issue.

Our identities are a matter of group membership,[11] and self-identifying involves taking oneself to be subject to the norms of a group. We have a stake in our identities. As such, self-identifying implies one's standing to contribute to the decisions of that group, including on the question of group membership. This is a deeply significant fact about self-identification, and it suggests the following view:

> ***The Standing of Self-Identity:*** An agent *A*'s self-identifying with identity *I* grounds the standing to be included in whatever decision-making or other determinative processes there are of the group *G* with *I*. And *A*'s avowing that self-identity communicates that standing.

Let me walk through some of the elements of this account and clarify its commitments.

The account itself obviously says little about the kind of groups at issue. We are certainly talking about collectives, rather than something like organized group agents. (One self-identifies as a member of this collective, not with the group as a whole.) And, as we will see below, what matters is that self-identifying in certain ways entitles one to participate in the processes of self-determination used by these groups, whenever these processes exist.

The language of "standing" is also critical and non-accidental. Traditionally, the literature on democratic inclusion concerns whether individuals have certain rights,

[11]One may worry that publicly self-identifying is really about revealing something about oneself, not claiming affiliation with a group. For example, when Ellen DeGeneres came out as gay, we could think that she was merely expressing her sexual orientation. That is surely possible. Even if that were true, Andler (2021) argues for a distinction between sexual *orientation* and sexual *identity*. So, even when nearby things can be expressed that are not about group membership, it becomes less clear that what is expressed is one's identity. And when one is clear that one is expressing an identity, this seems to be about group affiliation.

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typically the right to vote. And ultimately, as we will see, I think that the inclusion of those that self-identify should also be cashed out in terms of the having of certain rights. However, I have chosen to put the above view in terms of *standing* for a few reasons.

First, it fits intuitively. While talk of standing is more common in the context of the law and recent discussions of blame, I think those writing about democratic inclusion should see the issue in these terms. What is at issue is fundamentally positional; it is about who is situated appropriately to contribute to a democratic process (much as one with standing is correctly situated to sue or blame) or who is so entitled.

Moreover, much like the literature on democratic inclusion, conversations around standing in other contexts perennially involve who has it, who doesn't, and how each are to be responded to.[12] Legal claims with standing are adjudicated, those without are dismissed. In the context of blame, standing determines whether one is criticizable for blaming. Plausibly, if someone has the standing to participate in a decision-making process, then it is inappropriate for anyone who should be in a position to know that they have this standing to criticize them (merely for participating).

Finally, talking in terms of standing opens up how we might understand the rights involved in democratic inclusion. While the question of enfranchisement garners the most discussion, the rights of political inclusion may go beyond this and take a variety of forms, especially if this is what is at issue in the context of inclusion within deliberating groups more broadly. Standing is a good notion to rely on, then, both because standing is often spoken of as closely associated with or requiring certain rights (e.g., Fritz and Miller 2015; Todd 2019), and because it may be that standing involves several types of rights. For Edwards (2019) and Fritz and Miller (2022: sec. II), having the standing to blame involves both a *privilege* and a *power* (in the Hohfeldian sense). One with standing does not have a duty to not blame the blameworthy individual (the privilege), and one is in a position to place the blameworthy individual under a duty to respond to the blame (the power).

The literature on precisely which rights follow from having standing is ongoing. However, we can quickly see how standing in the context of democratic inclusion suggests similar associate rights. Inclusion means not only being able to make a contribution to the relevant decision-procedure (the privilege), but it also may mean that others can be placed under a duty to respect, respond to, or act in view of your participation should you choose to participate (the power).[13] Both of these kinds of rights are worth recognizing in the context of the standing of self-identity.

[12]One of the regularly discussed conditions for having standing in the context of blame is the so-called "business condition" (Radzik 2011; McKiernan 2016; Dadlez 2016). The thought is that, even if someone is blameworthy, it may be inappropriate for you to blame them if *it's none of your business*. Reflecting on democratic inclusion, a corresponding condition seems justified. What is important is whether the decisions of the demos are one's business. And, as a proponent of the ASP will say, if you are subject to these decisions, then it *is* your business.

[13]This point about the multiple rights of standing may be hard to see focusing on political inclusion in the demos and thinking just about enfranchisement. It still holds in this context: If I have a right to vote, then I don't have a duty not to vote, and that vote must be counted if I exercise it. Still, this point jumps out even when we just think about Americans as a kind of identity. There is a collective conversation or dialogue in many arenas and across multiple platforms about what it means to be an American. It occurs online, in newspapers, in bars (the interesting ones). Identifying as an American should entitle one to participate in these conversations across these fora. Shockley (2006) suggests that engaging in these mutual discursive practices is critical for group membership.

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Those who sincerely avow an identity should not be criticized for trying to participate in discussions about the relevant group. They have a privilege right to participate in these discussions in that there is no duty not to participate. The implications of this are clear. Even those who think the group 'women' is currently comprised of individuals with the biological sex of female at birth ought to grant that those who self-identify as women would nevertheless have standing to contribute to the ongoing discussion of what it means to be a woman in the sense that it would be inappropriate to criticize them for this. There is thus a right to contribute to this conversation in some way held by trans women that is not held by cisgender men.[14]

This point alone is significant. While it may not be the worst thing for men to opine privately amongst friends about what they think it means to be a woman, it would be criticizable. Women may justifiably resent this un-asked-for opinion, and other men may feel vicarious shame.

Still, those who self-identify are owed more. If one contributes, then this changes the dialogical landscape and should in certain ways be recognized/respected. How depends on what form the contribution takes, and it also depends on how much a typical member of the group could expect their contributions to be acknowledged. Presumably, a right to contribute does not entitle one to any *platform* or vehicles for amplifying one's contributions. I also doubt that this right obligates everyone else in the group to *hear* what you have to say.

When it comes to an identity like being American, perhaps very little on this score is owed or expected. We typically think that the only time others must listen to what we say politically is at the ballot box. For smaller social groups, however, this power may manifest more clearly. Where there is ongoing discussion over some matter within the group, it may be viewed as impolite to ignore contributions from those with standing. So, hearing someone sincerely self-identify as a group member would obligate others to regard them as a participant in the discussion and acknowledge their contribution.[15]

Of course, one does not have to self-identify publicly to have this standing. Self-identifying at all (even privately) is sufficient to deserve to contribute to this process of collective decision-making. But avowing one's self-identity may be necessary to *assert* one's standing. This is unnecessary when others can be reasonably expected to know how you self-identify. (It may be that in most cases we are presumed to be what we self-identify as without having to say anything, and others may wrong us by failing to act in

[14]That contribution might take many forms. Kirkland (2018), for instance, argues for a trans-inclusive definition of "woman" on a number of grounds, some of which speak directly to the interests of cisgender women. Jenkins (2023, ch. 8) also discusses how a pluralistic conception of womanhood mitigates certain harms/injustices. These could be viewed as contributions in the discussion meant to move society collectively toward an understanding of "woman" that is trans-inclusive. I should admit that it does seem to follow from this view that were cisgender men to have made these points in print, then they would be criticizable. Here, I think we should bite the bullet. It would have been criticizable, although it might still have been justified to make a substantive theoretical point in a prominent place. Less likely to be justified is men ganging up on people online to reiterate these points. For a discussion of the nuance of this balance of appropriately minding one's business, see Radzik (2012).

[15]Beyond privileges and powers, we may also be justified in thinking that certain claim-rights are attached to the standing had in the context of democratic inclusion, where inclusion generates duties that others have to those included. For instance, there may be a standing duty that individuals have to facilitate or respect the inclusion of others who deserve it. One with the right to contribute should at least be regarded as having legitimate contributions to make even before any are made. A duty of civility may even require me to in principle be able to justify my political positions to you as a matter of public reason.

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line with this presumption.) The significance of avowing self-identity, however, comes to the fore in situations where our identity cannot be presumed or where we self-identify in some way that may not be expected. In these cases, avowing self-identity plays the role of communicating the standing one has. Correspondingly, it binds all who can reasonably be expected to have heard the avowal (or testimony of it) and to regard it as sincere.

This point about sincerity will be critical below. Much of the time, the hard part is not avowing a certain self-identity, but doing so in a way that communicates sincerity. That is, doing so in a way that successfully communicates that you take the norms of the given identity to apply to you.[16] Of course, it may be easier or harder to get others to believe that you believe that the norms of the given identity really do apply to you, depending on the circumstances and the identity claimed.

When an identity isn't all that socially important, there may be a presumption that speakers are sincere in so self-identifying. (If I identify publicly as a disc golfer, few would bother to challenge it.) Still, if I am sufficiently akratic, unable to act in line with the norms of the identity I take to apply to me, then my sincerity might be challenged. (Do I really believe the norms are relevant for me if I continuously fail to abide by them?) In cases like this, any rights to inclusion I may genuinely deserve might not be respected. Similarly, the more important some identity is socially, or the more benefits to be gained, the harder it might be to satisfyingly demonstrate that one's claim is sincere, that one is not simply lying to achieve those benefits.[17]

Finally, it is worth saying that the claim here is that communicating this standing is of critical normative significance for self-identifying. This is not to say that self-identifying is not otherwise significant, even normatively. Personally, it can be revelatory as a matter of self-understanding. And self-identifying publicly may perform other functions, like setting normative expectations for our conduct in others. It may even be that the significance of having this right varies, being perhaps more significant for certain identities than others. (Just as expressing one's identities may be more common or significant for different identities.) Regardless, those who sincerely self-identify deserve inclusion into the conversation around the grounds for group membership, and this can be quite significant.

5. Concerns

I take the view sketched above to offer a novel conception of what is secured through self-identification. If I self-identify as a philosopher, then I have the standing to be included in conversations about what it takes to be a philosopher. I should not be criticized for trying to participate in these conversations, and others should regard what I say as contributions. Still, there are many pieces to this view that require clarification and defense. In this section, I want to address a myriad of such questions and challenges.

[16]Many scholars going back to Searle (1969) have endorsed some version of the view that the sincerity of an assertion is to be cashed out in terms of believing the content of what is asserted. See Unnsteinsson (2023).

[17]It may be that costly signaling can be employed to demonstrate the sincerity of the avowal. (Someone getting a degree in Philosophy who avows such an identity is likely to mean it.) One point to make is that there are times where the identity itself can be quite costly to make publicly. For instance, given the substantive risk of future harm that comes from publicly identifying as trans, this may well be sufficient reason to treat the claim as sincere.

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I take each of them to be interesting but none to be decisive against the view on offer. Instead, they allow us to see how filling out this view involves connecting it to a number of important current conversations in philosophy.

5.1. Are self-identifiers actually subject to group decisions?

Above, I argued that the AAIP and the ASP seem to extend to include those who self-identify. Though this may be true for the AAIP, and this is significant insofar as this is an important view in the field, proponents of the ASP are less likely to immediately accept this. Critical to this view would be that self-identifiers are *subject to* or suitably at the whims of that group and the decisions it makes. But is it even true that mere self-identifiers are subjected in this way? Even in the paradigm case of self-identifying as an American, this can seem odd.

The opponent will say that if someone is not actually in the demos, then they are not *actually* subject to its decisions. Self-identifiers may *feel* subject to them, but they are deluded. If a person born and raised in Ireland to Irish parents identifies as American, she is not literally subject to US laws. If she does something that would be illegal if done in the US, she is not subject to punishment by the US.[18] This puts pressure on the idea that self-identifiers are genuinely subject to the relevant decisions.

This is an important concern, and there is much to say in response. First, those outside the demos *as it is currently constituted* can clearly be subjected to the decisions of that demos (e.g., Abizadeh 2008; Goodin 2016). As we saw, African Americans before the 14th Amendment may certainly have identified as Americans and were subject to the laws of the US, though they were not enfranchised.

It may be true that certain legal duties following from the decisions of the demos will not apply to those who merely self-identify. Nevertheless, we may think that, for someone who authentically self-identifies, these legal duties may have purchase on them anyway. If I genuinely self-identify as American, and the US government were to institute a draft for all citizens my age, then I may feel guilty for not being drafted, as if I had dodged it. This attitude would be fitting.

As we saw above, self-identifying involves being oriented a certain way with regard to a landscape of social normativity. In this context, that landscape is shaped by these obligations. And the whole point is that I take them to be relevant to me. At the very least, if I self-identify as American, then I have a duty to myself to act in line with the duties that follow from being American, or to advocate for the expanding of the duties that follow. So, the state's decisions will generate some kind of duty.

The more typical reading of the ASP, however, is not to do simply with a state's decision as generating duties, but rather with state *coercion*. One is subject to the decisions in the sense that one is coerced by the state to comply. And while the state can enforce its laws over a certain jurisdiction via its institutions (e.g., law enforcement), we may think that these institutions are not actually capable of coercing individuals outside of the state's territory (Beckman 2014). This may lead us to worry that self-identifiers outside of the state's territory are not genuinely coerced.

One point here is that, while the state's *institutions* are not capable of coercing us when outside of the state, the state has *non-institutional* means of coercion abroad. The state has cultural or ideological mechanisms with more reach to coerce us wherever we

[18]We should not say that she has technically satisfied or fulfilled US legal obligations by not committing these crimes in the US (Abizadeh 2022).

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are, as anyone who felt like they should celebrate Thanksgiving while abroad could attest. So, it's not obvious that the decisions of the demos could not (extra-legally) coerce someone who identifies as being among them.

Still, "coercion" might seem like too strong of a word. If someone self-identifies as being American, and most Americans have never thought about individuals like them as compatriots, then it can sound odd to say that they are being coerced by a group of people that don't even consider them. Instead, we could say that those who self-identify actually coerce *themselves* on the basis of the norms of that identity (or they are *self-compelled*, if that sounds better). If an individual is authentically self-compelled to follow the norms of a jurisdiction, then I can see some claim on having a say about the content of those norms.

A few points are critical to appreciate this. First, it's not actually relevant who is compelling the individual in question to comply with the norms. What matters, why you deserve inclusion, is purely that you are subject to certain norms/decisions, *not* who is doing the job of subjecting you. You don't deserve a say about a certain group because they are subjecting you to certain norms in the sense that they are enforcing the norms personally; you deserve a say about that group because they are subjecting you in the sense of determining the norms (to which you will be forcibly subjected one way or another). Suppose the United States fired all of its internal law enforcement officers and instead paid foreign firms staffed by non-citizens to police the US. If one is subject to that policing, then one deserves a say in the rules being policed.

It's also worth dwelling on just how compelling self-compulsion can be. A skeptic will understandably be suspicious of someone claiming to be internally compelled to abide by norms (not designed for them).[19] And, as we will discuss more below, the burden may be on the self-identifying agent to demonstrate their sincerity on this score. Nevertheless, internalized norms can of course be incredibly forceful, even if they are ultimately enforced via self-policing. One subject to internalized oppression, for instance, is still subject to oppression even if it has been internalized to such a degree that one polices their own conduct.

Moreover, the kind of self-compulsion at issue in the context of our identities is not of a superficial sort, merely consciously regulating our own behavior. If I identify as a philosopher, it's not just that I have some kind of standing resolution to abide by the norms collectively decided by philosophers, where I am happy to compel myself into compliance even when no one is watching, like I'm on a diet. It is much deeper than that. The norms are separate and proscribed to me, and my agency is in negotiating them.[20] They are partially constitutive of my agency—my agency is understood in terms of the norms set out by my identities. That is why they are *practical* identities. Perhaps I must comply with the norms in order to be rational based on my avowed identities, but I will be alienated from instances of agency not in conformity with these norms.[21]

[19]This skepticism may be related to another outstanding puzzle in normative ethics around the possibility of self-binding, of whether one can really ever be under an obligation to oneself given the possibility of self-release. It is unclear how these issues are intertwined, but I am inclined to say that true self-binding is possible. See Schaab (forthcoming).

[20]For further discussion of how agency could be socially embedded, see Webster (2021).

[21]This puts things dramatically. Will we really say that someone who identifies as an American is alienated agentially when they willfully break the law for personal gain? Perhaps law-breakers do not strongly identify as American. (They may have that identity put on them, which may be understood as involving constraints.) Or perhaps they do not take the laws to be the true norms governing the kind "American." Or perhaps they are so disenfranchised as Americans that they are alienated from the kind generally.

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So, I do think we are in a very real sense subject to the decisions involving our identities. Whatever we say about coercion or compulsion, these decisions do not merely lay out what we can do permissibly, they determine what we can do *authentically*.[22]

5.2. What if there is no deliberation?

The US government sets the rules for citizenship.[23] But perhaps this is a special case. The government makes explicit decisions, and so we can ask who should have a say in them and consider how those contributions can manifest. But what about philosophers? What about women? These are identities, and there are groups of people associated. But these groups do not seem to have the kind of institutionalized mechanisms for collective decision-making that we see for states. Does it even make sense to think of them as capable of making decisions, let alone decisions about group membership?

In some cases, groups can work together to form institutions with explicit decision-making procedures. (American philosophers have the APA, for instance.) But much of the time this is infeasible or even undesirable. Even without institutions with explicit procedures, however, groups can make decisions. Groups can engage in distributed decision-making. While much more commonly discussed in the biological sciences, disorganized groups can reach an equilibrium about how to treat some situation, perhaps including the norms that should govern the group as well as concerning the grounds for group membership.[24] And we may well think that certain discursive practices are essential for this process. So, even when there is no vote to be had or even an explicit time of decision, it can make sense to talk about the right to be included in the deliberation leading to a distributed decision.[25]

Still, it would be controversial to say that all groups that form the bases of identities count as making decisions. Thinking about groups like "women," it may seem that no group decisions are made collectively or in a distributed manner. The case of being a woman is animating in this literature on identity, and yet how can we think about the critical significance of self-identity as boiling down to a right to inclusion in the decision-making process about the question of what it is to be a woman when there *is no such decision* to be made?

This is an interesting puzzle, but I think it is one that transcends this project, and where the presumption should be that there is an answer. The real question is how we should think about conceptual change, because we are ultimately thinking about what it takes to count as being a member of a kind like "woman," and under what conditions that kind can change. There is a well-established tradition of thinking about the amelioration of concepts, especially in feminist philosophy and concerning gender concepts (e.g., Haslanger 2000). Though some are skeptical of the possibility of

[22]See Bell (2024) for an exploration of authenticity and its relation to social norms.

[23]This is not to say that it is easy to determine how these decisions should be made. Many have worried that a demos cannot legitimately use democratic procedures to determine its own grounds for membership. See Beckman (2019).

[24]See Conradt and List (2009) for an overview of work on group decisions in the context of humans and animals, which distinguishes interactive/combined decisions as "those in which there need not be a single collectively binding decision, but in which individuals decide interdependently with one another" (720).

[25]Even if this discussion does not conclude, it may still lead to an equilibrium. This process may seem disastrous as a mechanisms for collective decisions of groups like a demos, which may require fixed decisions explicitly communicated across the population. Miller (2020, 2) raises this concern. But it may work for other kinds of groups.

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conceptual engineering (Cappelen 2018), many others take there to be processes for conceptual change, processes that we can instigate and drive.

We cannot enter this quite large debate here (Burgess et al. 2019), but this is what's relevant. Luckily, all that we need is the plausible idea that, if we can drive conceptual change, then discursive/dialogical engagement can be a part of this process. And this just seems imminently plausible. Perhaps kinds like "woman" could change without any discussion whatsoever, just via our habits and practices. But surely discussion can be a vehicle for change, if we take it to be possible at all. (Hänel 2020 endorses engaging in democratic processes as a means of conceptual amelioration.) So, it will be significant if one can have a right to participate in these discussions.

We might worry, though, about kinds that seem less amenable to being changed through discussion. We would not think that biological kinds can change via discussion—we can't talk ourselves out of being *homo sapiens*. And there are certain identity kinds that are argued to be biological. Some accept a biological theory of race, for instance.[26] If such a theory were true, what would this mean for racial self-identification?

I'm skeptical that biological kinds and other natural/scientific kinds aren't amenable to amelioration, that science itself in no way heeds considerations of justice. Even without going this far, though, it is not clear that the kinds at issue are genuinely biological, as opposed to social. Even if there are biological kinds corresponding to race/gender, there may *also* be social kinds, and it seems clear that the kinds at issue when we are talking about practical identification are social.[27] (Even Spencer, a defender of biological racial realism, more recently accepts a pluralist conception of race: 2019.)

It is fundamental to an identity that it concerns the identity of a social group, where the group is understood in terms of the relationship between the members and to society at large. And social groups like this seem subject to change via dialectical processes. So, while there may be groups that have consolidated on a biological basis for group membership, this could change, and this process can involve deliberation.

Of course, it may be that there are certain social kinds that seem defined in a way unalterable by discussion. If we consider the group "alumni of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill," this will pick out a collection of individuals, and we may think it constitutes a particular social kind with certain norms. (E.g., We must continue to follow and discuss UNC's basketball team in perpetuity.) Imagine that individuals who never went to UNC self-identify as alumni of UNC, attesting to finding the norms of the alumni relevant for them. It would be odd to say that such individuals are entitled to contribute to ongoing discussions of what it means to be an alumnus of UNC.

Part of the problem is not that what it is to be an alumnus is not subject to amelioration; it's that it's odd to think of ameliorating the concept "alumnus of UNC" while the concept "alumnus" remains fixed. Nevertheless, there are workarounds. It's actually quite common for universities to issue honorary degrees, and so for them to admit honorary alumni. So, social categories like these are subject to contestation and change even when they fall under a category that appears fixed.

Any time there are norms partially constitutive of a social kind, that kind will be subject to deliberative processes of amelioration. If there genuinely were social identities

[26]Here, I'm thinking of the account of Spencer (2014) in particular, as opposed to more vulgar or regressive pictures.

[27]Within social metaphysics, this question of the mark of the social is recognized as underdeveloped. See Payton (2023) for one explicit view.

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that could not be changed, though, then we should just say that self-identifying does not come with the usual entitlement, because there is nothing to which one can be entitled. But the view remains the same. Self-identification grounds the standing to participate in whatever processes exist or could exist for determining the norms of that identity.

5.3. What if one is deeply mistaken about the norms?

Imagine someone, Hank, who reads from the "Philosophy" section of the popular bookstore, which we will suppose is full of mysticism and self-help, and styles himself a philosopher. He may purport to identify as a philosopher, but there's a real sense in which he doesn't know the first thing about it. Hank's a crank. Suppose Hank has never heard of any of the works debatably in the canon, nor the traditions they have led to, let alone the institutions and organizations with which they are affiliated. Suppose the situation is also tragic, because Hank has had no opportunity to know better. He never went to college and only has access to this local bookstore. Having read the section in full, Hank seems sincere in his avowed self-identity. Are we going to say that Hank has a right to inclusion in the conversation about what it is to be a philosopher?

Being so far away from the field, one could argue that Hank is not genuinely subject to the decisions of philosophers. As such, he would not merit the right to inclusion in discussions around what it is to be a philosopher. On the other hand, though, there is still a sense in which he is subject to these decisions. Hank may be confused about what the norms of philosophy are, but he takes himself to be criticizable on the basis of them. If he knew better, he may well evaluate his current state as tragic. So, maybe he does deserve to have a say.

Important to realize is that Hank's having a say would not amount to him simply being given a platform within philosophy from which we must listen. It would involve his proper introduction into the field as it actually exists. In order to communicate the sincerity of his avowal, he would need to come into community with philosophers and himself be open to their understanding of philosophy. If he feels this strongly about philosophy, then I think he should be allowed to do this.[28] But he could not come into this community and participate in this ongoing conversation about its nature without learning about the norms as they actually are. If Hank were to come into philosophical spaces and not learn the norms despite having the opportunity to do so, then we would question whether his self-identification is really made in good faith. However, if he were to learn of the norms of philosophy and vehemently disagree, well, he wouldn't be the first.

5.4. How does oppression complicate standing?

If a member of an oppressed group identifies as a member of a group that is not oppressed, how should their oppression affect their ability to assert their standing and our corresponding duties? Alternatively, if a member of a privileged group identifies as a member of a group that *is* oppressed, then this may be something that we in principle want to respect, but which can feel suspicious. Let's take on these situations in turn.

[28]Might groups have intra-community norms that cannot be accessed by non-members? I take it that if something is a social kind that can be identified with, and not a private group, then it will have publicly accessible norms.

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Consider the situation where a member of an oppressed group identifies as a member of a non-oppressed or even privileged group. There need not be anything additionally difficult about this case. If an Indigenous American identifies as a philosopher, for instance, this need not suggest problems with my proposal. They will be entitled to be included in discussions around what it takes to be a philosopher. There may be challenges to their inclusion stemming from their separate membership in an oppressed group. Their engagement in discussions around philosophy might be insufficiently acknowledged or engaged with; their experiences may be downplayed in a variety of ways. They will be subject to all of the testimonial injustice to be expected in this context. This is a challenge to be recognized and addressed, but it does not undermine my account.

Consider the harder case, however, of when a member of an oppressed group identifies *not* with that group, but with the group that is not oppressed or is oppressing along that same axis of oppression. So, consider trans men, who are assigned the sex of female at birth, and identify as men. We can expect trans men who are not consistently perceived or treated as men by others to be subject to all of the testimonial injustice mentioned above. But here, we may think there is a further problem. The issue is that we might think that the gender categories themselves are oppressive in how they have been construed. What it is to be a man/woman has been largely formed by dominant, transphobic groups that take gender to be determined by one's genitalia at birth. And so, it has been argued that even being subject to gender categories conferred in this way is to be subject to what has been called *ontic* injustice (Jenkins 2020, 2023).[29] Given this history, why should the current oppressive group be respected at all, or engaged with as dialectical equals when determining the future of membership into the group "men"?

Recognizing this kind of issue, Dembroff (2018) suggests those in the marginalized group (e.g., trans men) should in fact be deferred to for setting the kind membership facts. Given that many who self-identify as men are not marginalized, this would amount to denying their right to participate in the discussion of the identity moving forward. We may well think that this right exists but nevertheless maintain that it has been forfeited in this context given previous collective, oppressive action. In this case, accepting Dembroff's approach need not amount to a denial of my own. I would likely accept something less extreme in this context, perhaps a pro tanto duty to defer to marginalized groups as a part of a strategy of remediation.[30] We need not settle this here. Even if certain group members entirely forfeit these rights in cases where the oppression is heinous and deliberate, and where there is little expectation of productive discussion in good faith, these rights are otherwise shared by all who self-identify.

In contrast, consider the situation of someone who is conferred a privileged identity within society yet self-identifies with a group that is oppressed. There is in principle no difference in terms of the implications of the view at hand. It holds for transgender women as well as transgender men. However, several factors complicate appropriately applying the view.

While we might generally expect those in a marginalized group (e.g., trans women) to be at least potentially deferred to setting the kind membership facts (in line with Dembroff 2018) for some broader group, this is perhaps harder to negotiate in a context

[29]More generally, social categories can restrict our agency (Bernstein forthcoming).

[30]There will also be epistemic reasons for such privileging, as oppressed individuals may have better access into how the norms are harmful. However, we should be careful about privileging on the basis of epistemic position within democratic processes.

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where the group members of the relevant broader group (e.g., women in general) are themselves marginalized. This again does not constitute an objection to the current proposal. Self-identifying still comes with a kind of standing to inclusion in a process of determining membership in the relevant group. It's just less straightforward how to think about who should lead this process or the kind of role those who self-identify should play.

Part of an additional challenge in this context is the concern of appropriation. There is a long history of privileged peoples appropriating facets of the lives of the oppressed, and there is a real worry that claiming the identity of a marginalize group is an extreme form of appropriation. Especially if we understand appropriation in terms of a forced intimacy with group members (Nguyen and Strohl 2019), it will be hard to distinguish this from cases of individuals who are simply living with the practical reality of the fact that they understand themselves in relation to the norms relevant for this group.

Of course, there is nothing about my view that suggests individuals cannot self-identify as members of an oppressed group and deserve something on this basis. Instead, my concern is that the fact of oppression complicates what is required to convincingly communicate that one sincerely self-identifies in a certain way (and is not engaging in appropriation).[31] But this is no surprise. Unfortunately, we should expect and be open to the many ways in which contexts of oppression may obscure what is involved in appropriately respecting one's rights.

6. The inclusion of the political

Self-identifying in some way is personally significant. But should others respect it? In thinking about this question, it is hard to land on a view that both respects the authority we each take ourselves to have in avowing our identities while also respecting the autonomy of individuals already taken to have certain identities publicly (especially where those individuals are oppressed). I want to allow that someone who is not a professional philosopher can meaningfully contribute to philosophy and what it means to even be a philosopher, but I want to gatekeep against cranks who think they know better.

As such, I have tried to chart a middle course. It may well be that, for some specific categories, self-identifying as a member of the category is sufficient to be a member of the category, but this is not a general implication of self-identification. By contrast, a sincere self-identification does, as such, entitle one to a certain kind of political right with respect to that identity. One should be able to have a say regarding it, especially about what it takes to merit that identity, although how much of a say and what this involves is highly dependent on the identity being claimed.

To step back, the proposal shows that there should be greater engagement between those thinking about identification and those thinking about political inclusion. Whereas much good work has gone into thinking about the metaphysics of gender in particular, views about how to think about the boundaries of gender and the significance of self-identification are still incredibly recent. In contrast, there is already a wealth of work on the question of the boundary problem and political inclusion. So, while I have attempted to show how even a conservative view of political inclusion could

[31]That said, it may not be complicated in practice. As noted above, the very willingness to identify publicly as a trans woman may well be sufficient to establish sincerity, given the risks involved in doing so.

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countenance rights for those who self-identify, it will be interesting to see what those willing to abandon all conservativism and the status quo will say.

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